

# Blacks urged to mobilize vs. HIV/AIDS

*By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — With African-Americans representing more than half of all people newly infected with HIV in the United States, AIDS has become a “Black disease” that deserves unprecedented community mobilization to halt the rapid spread of the deadly virus, experts told delegates attending the NAACP’s annual convention here.

At a panel discussion over the weekend on HIV/AIDS, Phill Wilson, executive director of the Los Angeles-based Black AIDS Institute, stated: “Today, AIDS in America is a Black disease. The tragedy is it didn’t have to be that way, but it is.”

African-Americans are 13 percent of the U.S. population and represent a disproportionate share of those with HIV or AIDS.

“More than half of all people living with AIDS and newly-infected with HIV

each year in the United States are Black,” Wilson said. “Among women, Blacks account for 62 percent of all reported AIDS cases through 2003. Two-thirds of all new infections among women are Black. AIDS is the leading cause of death among Black women between the ages of 24 and 34. And recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention studies estimate nearly half of all Black gay and bisexual men in some of America’s urban centers are already infected. These facts represent an unprecedented crisis for Black America.”

Pernesssa C. Seele, founder and CEO of The Balm in Gilead, a group that organizes Black church leaders in the U.S. and Africa, says that the church has been complicit in the failure to address this growing crisis.

“The universal church has been a destructive force on HIV because of the one message that everybody’s heard around the world, particu-

larly in our community, is that AIDS is a sin, it’s a punishment from God. Twenty-five years later [after AIDS was identified as a virus], we’re still fighting that myth, that lie.”

She explained, “I cannot tell you how many African-Americans I see everyday, especially middle-class Americans, who still believe this is a homosexual disease — AIDS is caused by homosexuals. Twenty-five years later, we’re still fighting with that noose around our neck. We have got to take the bull by the horn and stop this lie because it’s killing us.”

In addition, disproportionate high rates of infection among Black women, the rates of infection are extremely high among Black teens and men who have sex with other men. A recent CDC survey of five major U.S. cities found that 46 percent of Black males having sex with other males were infected with HIV, compared

to 21 percent of Whites and 17 percent of Hispanics.

Although African-Americans between the ages of 13 and 19 represent only 15 percent of all teens, they accounted for 66 percent of all new AIDS cases among teenagers in 2003.

Returning to her condemnation of churches that contend that AIDS is God’s punishment for sin, Seele declared, “If there is a sin, it is a sin that we, the adults, have allowed our children to have this 100 percent preventable disease.”

Seele said that ministers that were part of the problem must now become part of the solution.

“We have to engage our faith community,” she says. “There is only one institution in our community owned and operated by Black people, and that’s our church. Second, it is the only institution that has a system, an organized, sustained system that reaches Black folk around

the world.”

Dr. Kim Smith of Rush Medical Center in Chicago says the sooner people find out they have contracted HIV, the better chance they have of living relatively healthy lives. To illustrate her point, she contrasts the lives of two Black celebrities: “Magic” Johnson, the former pro basketball star, and Easy-E, a rapper.

“Magic is extremely fortunate. He got his HIV test when he was completely healthy,” Smith explains. “He had a strong immune system, he went to a doctor, he got on appropriate medications right away as part of a clinical trial. He got access to medicines right away, and we see what he looks like now.”

But Easy-E was a different case. “Easy-E died of AIDS,” Smith stated. “Like Magic Johnson, he was rich. He had access to resources. He could have gotten access to care. But he never got

tested until he had AIDS. He found out he had AIDS when he was in the hospital with pneumonia, on a breathing machine, and by that time, unfortunately, we couldn’t do anything about it. So he died. The contrast between Magic and Easy-E is when you get tested.”

Phill Wilson of the Black AIDS Institute says health statistics show that AIDS is ravaging the Black community.

“Black America must accept a new reality,” Wilson says. “We can no longer pretend AIDS is someone else’s problem or that HIV happens somewhere else. AIDS is not knocking on Black America’s door. It has let itself in, raided the refrigerator and is waiting for us in our bedrooms.”

Wilson issued eight challenges:

- 1) Established leaders, from civil rights activists to Black ministers, should help (See AIDS, Page 11)

## ‘Warrior policing’ haunts LAPD

*By Gene C. Johnson Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
LOS ANGELES (NNPA) — The Police Commission is reviewing the findings of the Blue Ribbon Rampart Review Panel, which has found that, despite extensive reforms in the past seven years, the police department is at risk of reverting to crises similar to the infamous Rampart corruption scandal.

The six-member panel was headed by civil rights attorney Connie Rice, who said the LAPD remains at risk of additional police abuse, corruption and even more unrest in minority communities unless immediate action is taken to change the course of the department.

In particular, Rice said, the South Bureau, which encompasses most of South Los Angeles and abuts Rampart, is “hanging by a thread.”

“I would not be surprised if something were to blow there this summer,” she added.

She later seemed to soften her criticism of the department, saying: “They know it’s going to be a long, hot summer. They’re putting together a stabilization program. There are too many guns, not enough jobs, not enough recreational programs. We’ve been there before.”

LAPD Deputy Chief Earl

Paysinger, a former head of the South Bureau division, called Rice’s statements about the department “tough.”

“I believe we have made significant strides in terms of community needs and the fact that the community has confidence in us, or more than they had in previous years,” Paysinger said.

“South L.A. for many years has had significant social, economic and educational challenges as well as crime. She makes a strong point and I would agree: We must pay attention to those issues that cause crime and lawlessness to spiral out of control.”

The solution, the reports reads, is abandoning what the panel labeled as “warrior policing” in favor of a more community-friendly, problem-solving alternative for a department that serves one of the most under-policed big cities in the nation.

The panel was appointed in 2003 by the Police Commission to examine the department’s response to allegations of widespread abuse by officers from the Rampart Division’s unit called CRASH or Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums formed to crack down on street gangs.

The panel set out to provide a final accounting of

what many characterized as the most serious police corruption scandals in recent American history.

Among the panel’s 28 recommendations, it said an outside group should investigate police abuse, and the size and independence of the Police Commission’s inspector general’s office should be expanded.

Although he said he had not read the 117-page report in its entirety, Police Commission Inspector General Andre Birotte Jr. applauded Rice for her “uncanny ability to distill the issues straight to the core.”

“I believe that’s what she’s done,” he said. “The challenge will be how the city and the police department react to that. I think [the report is] a positive thing. It is comprehensive and thorough.”

Councilman Bernard Parks, who was the LAPD’s chief during the Rampart scandal, criticized the report’s findings, and Rice in particular.

He said the report’s recommendations are “theories,” added that the “problem-solving” model cited as a success by the panel has been used by the LAPD for decades.

The Blue Ribbon Rampart Review Panel of legal experts interviewed 270 wit-

nesses including current and former police officers, civil rights leaders, defense attorneys and prosecutors, Rice said.

“We need a whole new paradigm for public safety,” she said.

“We need to change our entire approach to public safety. The police are beginning to do that. They need more resources, more officers.

“Officers are reporting changes in the works. But, they’ve got to dig a bit deeper, and the community has to dig deeper to change the dynamic between police [and the community] in high-crime areas.”

*Gene C. Johnson Jr.  
writes for Wave Newspapers.*

## White man gets 15 years in bat attack

NEW YORK (AP) — A White man accused of pummeling a Black man with a baseball bat was sentenced Monday to 15 years in prison in a hate-crime case that focused on the defendant’s use of a racial slur before the attack. Nicholas Minucci, 20, was convicted last month of second-degree assault as a hate crime for the 2005 attack in the Howard Beach neighborhood — the site of another notorious attack that stoked racial tensions in New York two decades ago.

The victim, 23-year-old Glenn Moore, suffered a fractured skull, and one witness testified that the clang of the bat against his head “sounded like Barry Bonds hit a home run.” Moore’s family suggested leniency at the sentencing hearing. Moore had admitted that he and two friends were in the neighborhood trying to steal a car but said they hadn’t taken anything when they crossed paths with Minucci and his companions.

The June 2005 attack was a reminder of another notorious incident in Howard Beach that inflamed racial tensions in New York 20 years ago. In that case, a Black man was killed by a car while trying to escape a group of White attackers after his own car had broken down.

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