

Battles must be won in AIDS war

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

TORONTO - For the moment, set aside the talk about microbicides, pre-exposure prophylaxis, post-exposure prophylaxis, combination therapy and HAART — Highly Active Antiretroviral Treatment. Throw out all of the acronyms associated with the deadly alphabets of HIV and AIDS. Once one moves past all medical jargon, the realization sets in that regardless of the scientific progress that has been made and is yet to be made, many of the obstacles associated with preventing HIV and halting the spread of AIDS are everyday issues that must be addressed as urgently as the scientific quest to develop an effective vaccine.

First, there is the simple issue of not having enough healthcare workers.

The World Health Organization, often referred to by the acronym WHO, estimates that more than 4 million global health workers — including doctors, nurses and midwives — are needed to deal with public health threats. There is a chronic shortage in sub-Saharan Africa.

"With 11 percent of the world's population and 24 percent of the global burden of disease, the region has only 3 percent of the world's health workers commanding less than 1 percent of world health expenditure," according to a recent WHO publication, "Taking Stock: Health Worker Shortages and the Response to AIDS."

It continues, "By contrast, the WHO Region of the Americas, with 10 percent of the global burden of the disease, has 37 percent of the world's health workers and spends more than 50 percent of the world's health financing."

Health workers, particularly those working in Third World countries, also say that while HIV/AIDS is an important issue, it must be placed in a larger health care context.

"Unless we start looking at the factors, the root causes that drive health disparities — in other words, why some of us get sick and some of us don't — broadly within our communities, we will be always treating one illness, while the 'patient' dies of another," Gregg Gonsalves, an AIDS activist from Cape Town, South Africa, told the delegates to this year's international convention here.

"It's no coincidence that these multiple epidemics exist among marginalized communities across the globe, among the poor, women, drug users, sex workers, gay men, prisoners, migrants — the social, economic and political policies that create this marginalization in the first place also push us into the path of oncoming epidemics," Gonsalves said.

Yet, we continue to place our hopes in



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prevention programs that narrowly construct risk around individual behavior or in some new technology that will save us.

The UN General Assembly's Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS declared there is a direct link between AIDS and agriculture and nutrition. He called for "sufficient, safe and nutritious food" as part of an overall HIV/AIDS strategy.

In many impoverished counties, the cost of life-saving drugs is prohibitive. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) has introduced a bill that would allow U.S. generic drug firms to manufacture lost-cost generic versions of patented medicines for export to needy nations if a voluntary agreement cannot be reached between the patent-owning company and the generic manufacturer.

Pharmaceutical companies are not the only culprits. In many countries, the government is responsible for thousands of deaths. Human Rights Watch, for example, noted that in Zimbabwe, "Three thousand people die each week due to governmental policies that create formidable obstacles to accessing life-saving treatment."

It's also tough, if not impossible, to get around many of the customs in male-oriented societies.

President Bush has insisted that at least

one-third of U.S. funds to fight AIDS must go to the ABC program — "Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms."

In a speech to the convention, Bill Gates noted, "Abstinence is often not an option for poor women and girls who have no choice but to marry at an early age. Being faithful will not protect a woman whose partner is not faithful. And using condoms is not a decision that a woman can make by herself; it depends on a man."

There are also the issues of stigma and discrimination. And the church, as the foremost defender of moral and social norms, has been complicit in condemning those afflicted with AIDS.

"We raise our voices to call for an end to silence about this disease — the silence of stigma, the silence of denial, the silence of fear," declares a 2002 statement from Anglican Primates on AIDS.

"We confess that the Church herself has been complicit in this silence. When we have raised our voices in the past, it has been too often a voice of condemnation. We now wish to make it clear that HIV/AIDS is not a punishment from God. Our Christian faith compels us to accept that all persons, including those who are living with HIV/AIDS, are made in the image of God and are children of God."

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

Stupid choices of Black men—and women

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Stupid Black men (and women).

Yeah, I knew that would get your attention.

We all chuckled when Michael Moore wrote his book titled, "Stupid White Men." It was cute; made some people think, and he made a ton of money from it. I wonder how many of those stupid White men have changed anything in their lives when it comes to politics, education, injustice, or their economic status. Was Moore really serious about them being stupid, or was it all said tongue-in-cheek? I don't know what his motivation was, whether it was sincere or whimsical; what I do know is that he made money and he received tremendous publicity for his rant.

Now, let's talk about stupid Black men and the rising number of stupid Black women, too, and see if we can generate some money from a change in our actions.

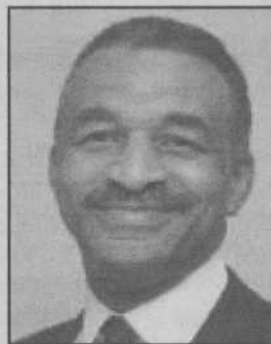
The stupid ones I am talking about are those brothers and sisters who expose themselves to the criminal "injustice" system, the ones who are out there committing crimes only to end up at the "mercy" of a system that hates them; those who think they are slick and will never get caught; and those

who literally have no understanding of this prison industrial complex and the economic role they play as prisoners or even as accused suspects.

There is one word that I think describes a Black person who knowingly puts himself in criminal jeopardy. There is one word for a Black person who complains about how he or she is treated by "the man" and then commits acts that ultimately will subject him or her to the prejudices of "the man."

There is one word that aptly describes the Black person who would volunteer to be a slave in jail, creating wealth for a slave master, while sentencing himself to a life of poverty. There is one word for the Black person who associates with folks who are doing things that may lead to contact with police officers, many of whom are just itching to do bodily harm to a Black person. One word: Stupid.

I understand that not every Black man or woman in jail should be there. Some of them did nothing to deserve being incarcerated and should be set free. I still lament William



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Mayo's situation, as he literally rots away in a Georgia prison for a crime he did not commit. I went to one of his hearings down in Georgia and watched that White racist judge dismiss the whole situation as if it was an annoyance rather than a criminal justice proceeding. I understand, as I watch brothers like Michael Austin in Baltimore, Md., walk out of prison after serving decades for crimes they did not commit.

I definitely understand, and I am not talking about those who are profiled and wrongly accused simply because they are Black. Stupid are the ones who actually commit the crimes, thus, volunteering to be fodder for a corrupt, greedy and hateful system that has profit as its only motive. Why would anyone volunteer for that?

Are material items that important to risk our lives for them? The answer is an obvious and resounding yes.

If you know the history of this country, you probably know why we commit some of the crimes we see so often, even the murder of our own brothers and sisters. If you know history, you know, as Amos Wilson says, that much of the violence we see today is "the psychodynamics of Black self-annihilation in service of White domination." However, many of our young people don't know history; they don't know who they are; they don't know about the legality of slavery in the prison system; and they don't know about the economic role they play in that system.

I still say it's stupid to do anything voluntarily that you know will result in being locked down for years under a hateful slave master.

It's time we stop citing the numbers of Black men and women in jail. It's time we start educating ourselves about this latest way to eliminate Black people or, at least, to use us economically. It's time we start to change our thinking and really get serious about the problem we face — not just the symptoms. It's time we stop being stuck on stupid. Why rail against the issue if you are unwilling to address it with action?

So, here's the deal. Let's stop being stupid. No, I don't want to hear the excuses on why you "have to do whatever it takes" to get yours. No more excuses about being poor and deprived. No more excuses about "the man" not giving you a break. (What kind of a break do you think you are going to get when you get out of jail?)

No more self-hating, self-deprecating responses to your unfortunate situation in life. This stupidity of filling up the jails and maintaining an economic windfall for White folks is, as Mike Tyson would say, ludicrous. Yeah, Mike was stupid, too.

Aren't you sick and tired of knowing that in addition to Black folks being the number one consumers of goods made by everyone else in this world, we are also volunteering in many cases to do even more to enrich other folks? I implore you; don't be stupid. Stay out of the line of fire; stay out of harm's way. It's easy enough to be picked up for not having committed a crime. Why volunteer for it? The only thing Black folks have coming from this criminal injustice system is time. Don't do anything that will cause you to be imprisoned. Get involved in the Boycott Prisons and Jails Campaign. Contact me, and I'll tell you how to do it.

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by being placed in the position to provide unlimited legitimacy and support for actions that it did not foresee, with an open political checkbook and an economic one that now must restock its allies' military supplies.

At the end, when it was clear that Israel could not achieve its stated objectives — before the world — it settled for a United Nations-negotiated peace plan as a practical

way out of the debacle.

This would appear to be a lesson for the United States as well, but then, just as Israel has not learned from the United States' difficulties, the personality of the president may not allow this practical lesson to guide its policy.

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