

## OUR VIEW

# AIDS Plague

Friday is World AIDS Day, and unless something drastic happens to improve the lot of people of color afflicted with this disease, there won't be much to report when the day comes around next year. The figures are sobering: African-Americans comprise 13 percent of the U.S. population but 51 percent of new HIV diagnoses; HIV-positive African Americans are seven times more likely to die than infected Whites; Black men are diagnosed at more than seven times the rate of White men, and Black females at 20 times the rate of White women.

In some places, the data is starker. In 2004, the D.C. health department reported that 90 percent of women living with AIDS were African-American; this despite the fact they comprised only 62 percent of the female population. Black women need to be more cognizant about HIV and AIDS. Blackwomenshealth.com is a good beginning resource. It answers questions that many Black women won't or don't ask, including the following:

*Can I become infected with HIV from French or open-mouth kissing?*

There is the potential for infection with blood during French kissing if either partner has gum disease or there are other conditions when blood is present.

*Can I become infected with HIV from oral sex?*

It can happen, but not as likely as infection through anal or vaginal sex.

*Can birth control pills prevent HIV infection?*

No. Birth control pills do not protect against HIV infection or other STDs.

Black women must be especially diligent in relationships with men they've just met, as well as ex-felons. The down-low syndrome of men covertly sleeping with men has raised the stakes of intercourse. A federal Bureau of Prisons study in 1982 noted that 30 percent of inmates engaged in homosexual activity while incarcerated, while in a 1984 study of Tennessee inmates, 17 percent reported homosexual activity. Researchers note that drug use in prison also causes HIV infection.

Abstinence is noble, but unrealistic. This leaves education, self-control and safer sex as the best options to fight the spread of HIV and AIDS. Unless Black America in particular and Black women in general get hip, there'll be little to celebrate on the next World AIDS Day.

## More Brutality

Shots fired. Black suspects down. It's an all-too-familiar scenario in Black neighborhoods throughout the nation. Cops shoot Blacks suspects. Some of the victims were suspected of crimes, while others were accused of behavior that precipitated officer gunfire. Several were victims of misidentification; others were thought to have weapons but, upon further investigation, were unarmed. Whatever the case, when a Black body is felled by an officer, it leaves a bad taste.

The two most recent incidents in New York and Atlanta prove just how far law enforcement and we Blacks have to go in mending a near-irreparable relationship.

In New York, officers fired 50 shots at an unarmed Sean Bell and two friends as they left a strip club the night before he was to be married. Autopsy reports show Bell was hit by four shots. All three men were unarmed. Which brings to mind 1999: Amadou Diallo was shot 41 times. He was unarmed. Try as he might, there's nothing Mayor Michael Bloomberg can do or say, no amount of big-mouth agitating activists can engage in, that will heal the hurt, repair the community friction or bring Bell back.

In Atlanta, 92-year-old Kathryn Johnston was killed when cops, suspecting she was selling drugs from her house, broke down a door. Johnston, who lived in a rough neighborhood, fired at the intruders. Cops fired back, killing her. Now comes word that cops raided the wrong house: An informant alleges that he told cops that Johnston didn't sell him two bags of crack on Nov. 21 and that they coerced him into making up a story to "cover" them.

There is no cover when cops kill an innocent person. Only sadness, a bitter, bitter aftertaste and further damage to the notion of police serving and protecting.



# A drafty draft option

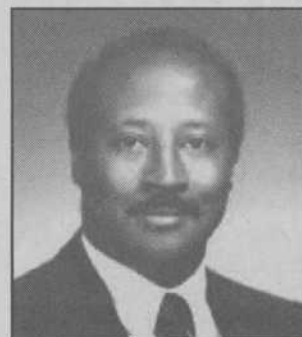
By Harry C. Alford  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Oh, how I remember the draft. It was that law that rounded up many of my friends and relatives and took them off to fight for the military industrial complex. Many came back in coffins, while others came back with physical and mental scars that would haunt them and their loved ones for a lifetime.

The draft was racist and totally unfair. Those with money and connections could finesse around it. The disadvantaged were easy prey for a system hell bent on power at any cost (someone else's cost).

Gays are not officially allowed in the military but the draft grabbed them as fast as anyone else. Communists and militants like the Black Panthers were not allowed in the military but the draft rounded them up and forced them in also.

The maximum age for the draft was 26, but I witnessed men 30 and older being forced in. The real unfortu-



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nate would find themselves being loaded onto a bus that was headed for Camp Pendleton or Parris Island for Marine Corps duty instead of the Army. It was cruel, ruthless and even murderous.

I and my group of unfortunates almost faced a very big double cross. We were college graduates with low draft numbers lured to apply for Officer Candidate School, in lieu of the normal enlisted status via the draft that was certain. Once we got in, they declared the Officer School Class cancelled and we would have to do three years of enlisted service as opposed to the two years via the normal draft.

However, we got lucky. One of us was connected to

Senator Barry Goldwater — his mother was his secretary. He called her and Barry Goldwater got on the line. He said, "They can't lie to you guys like that. I will have it turned around by tomorrow."

This was one senator you could trust. By 11 the next morning, we were back on track to Officer Candidate School. This was my first experience with political power. I never forgot or under appreciated it.

Such was the trickery of the draft that fueled the fires of the Vietnam War. We got into the war because there was a draft. It is a mechanism

that pumps the manpower and makes it easy to create enough military personnel. It is tempting to Congress to go to war when they know they have enough troops to go into battle. If there were a draft going on now, we would also be in Iran or Syria or both. The faces of battle would be Brown or Black basically, as the upper- and middle-class Whites would create deferments.

When Congressman Charles Rangel wrote a bill to restore the draft, the above flashed back into the minds of most members of the

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