

OUR VIEW Child Abuse

We, as African-Americans, like to think that it doesn't happen in our community, that it can't happen in our community. It's a problem for other races, we say. We're simply too advanced, too cultured, too sophisticated, too moral to do anything of the sort. It's time for us to take the blinders off and come to grips with the facts: child pornography and the sexual abuse of minors does occur in Black America. Because the stories regarding sexual abuse of minors in the newspapers and on television generally concern some "dirty old White man," we've developed a cultural amnesia of sorts, failing to acknowledge that pedophilia isn't a racial affliction, it's a human one. Sadly, it's cases like that of 26-year-old Yolando Ferguson, recently arrested for alleged child pornography acts, that resoundingly reinforce reality.

Ferguson, a former basketball coach and martial arts instructor, is accused of filming sex acts with a 15-year-old male. Cops are looking for other students that might have been victimized during his time as an employee at Doolittle Community Center and as an assistant basketball coach at Andre Agassi Preparatory Academy. (It must be noted that the District Attorney has yet to file charges against Ferguson, who has no criminal record and passed a city background check before being hired at Doolittle.)

As the matters of Ferguson and others illustrate, clearly this is not just a concern for the Catholic Church or school districts that pass offending teachers on to other districts to rid themselves of culpability. In 2003, *Ebony* published an explosive article on the sexual abuse of Black boys. "In Woodbridge, N.J., a 3-year-old boy was sexually assaulted and beat to death by a 10-year-old boy. In Harlem, a schoolteacher sodomized a 15-year-old former student and sent sexually graphic messages to him over the Internet. In Houston, a 12-year-old boy was abused and assaulted by his cousin. In Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Atlanta, in cities across the United States, young Black boys are being abused and assaulted in foster homes, government-run prisons and detention centers in a shocking national problem that nobody talks about. The statistics are explosive. One out of six boys is abused before age 16, and the rates are dramatically higher in Black areas marred by systemic poverty, broken homes, high unemployment rates and sociological problems. Scared, alone, and sometimes imprisoned by shame, these young boys often suffer in silence, choosing to avoid public awareness of their victimization."

The article quotes Judith Adams, principal to more than 600 incarcerated students at Jefferson Alternative School, a juvenile detention center in Chicago. "There are elements of shame and powerlessness associated with male children who are victims of sexual abuse. Because African-American boys are in an environment that applauds 'macho-ism,' they feel powerless when they are violated and they feel as though they have failed themselves by allowing something like this to happen. So many young men who haven't been exposed to anything other than abuse think it is simply a part of life."

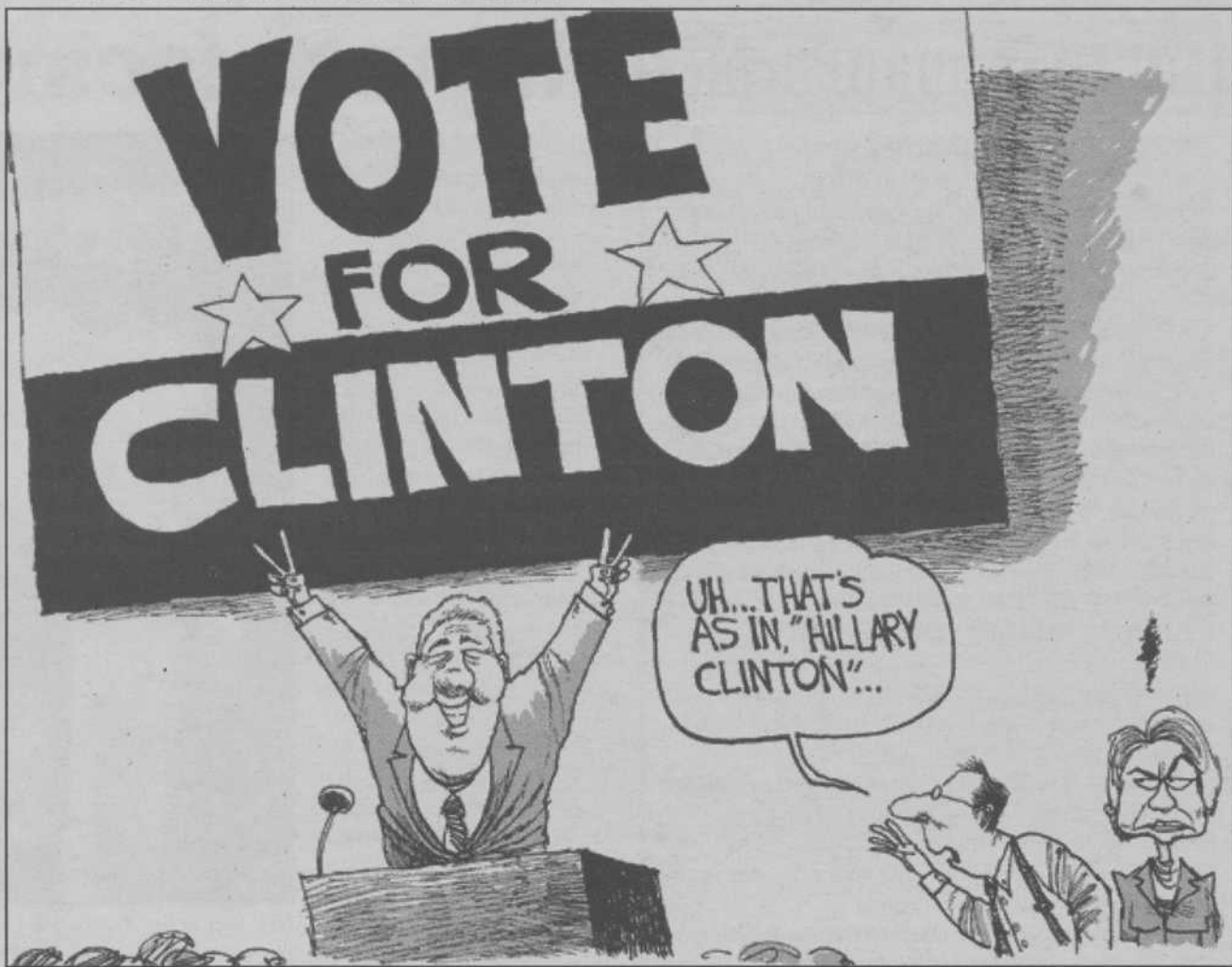
However the Ferguson matter plays out, Black America must wake up to the real issue of child sexual abuse. Our children are in danger of people who look like us.

Westside wins?

The bigger they are... the harder it is for the City Council to ignore their financial clout. That is apparently what occurred today as the Las Vegas City Council voted to give a developer clearance for a Food 4 Less anchor store on the corner of Lake Mead and MLK boulevards.

At best, this scenario is a win-lose situation. Food 4 Less beat the proprietors of Mario's Meat Market for the right to open and operate a store on that site.

The loss smarts for Mario's owners, who won't get the chance to prove they can run a large store. Their loss is tempered by the gain for West Las Vegans, who will no longer have to travel miles to shop for groceries. A best-of-both-worlds scenario would've had Food 4 Less and Mario's collaborating. But that's mute now. Let's hope Food 4 Less does right by its customers.



Time for a new Black group

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The NAACP, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, just held another annual convention. It is fitting that the venue is Detroit, a city void of viable Black economic empowerment, education and real political vision. All in a place that is 83 percent Black.

As the saying goes: "If something is wrong, someone Black did it or let it happen." Detroit is broken. Black school board, Black politicians at all levels, and nothing that amounts to a hill of beans is happening for the advancement of Black folks. It is also not surprising that the nation's largest NAACP chapter is located in Detroit. It's crazy.

I was asked — strangely, by a White person — to come and partake in a press conference that will publicly criticize the leadership of the NAACP and demand significant changes.

That would be shameful to the legacy of this institution. My father was a lifetime member of this organization, and my uncle, Fred Brown, ran the Ventura County, Calif., chapter for decades. We shouldn't do this. I have an unconditional love for this great institution. However, that does not exempt it from scrutiny or constructive criticism. Everyone seems to be anxious about doing some-



HARRY C. ALFORD
thing different in the civil rights arena — not only nationally, but globally.

Now is the time for something different.

Extreme rightists want to return to Jim Crow, and we fight it like wimps. We can't teach our children reading and math skills past the eighth-grade level. Our unemployment remains in the double digits despite the best overall levels in some time for the nation as a whole. People in our communities are being gentrified, and local Black governments seem to be encouraging it rather than preventing it. Guns and crack are more available than books or good encouraging movies. In fact, crime, especially drugs, is the biggest competitor to new entrepreneurship as a generator of economic interaction. Right now, there is no civil rights organization that is directed by the Black community actually doing progressive and productive work. Beholding to their few sponsors, they cannot delve into the arena of pure advocacy for Black

communities.

What this world needs is a new self-funded institution dedicated to the civil rights and economic vitality of Black communities everywhere. We need a major convention. An organizing convention that will be democratic and well-structured to prevent cliques or dictators from manipulating and will allow a fluid movement to address a written strategic plan and an understandable mission.

No principals from existing organizations need apply. An organizing committee needs to start in Washington, D.C., the center of the free world. This organizing committee, if it has any worth and credibility, will grow quickly. If it does not, it will be duplicated and wither away. Another will take its place until we get it right.

Funding? That's simple: 40 million African-Americans have nearly \$1 trillion

per year in disposable income. A membership fee of \$5 should produce millions in contributions if the message and plan are clear. A few million dollars, with the right structure, management and plan would be quite sufficient. The leadership, board and officers, should be few, but totally dedicated. The strategic plan, concise yet comprehensive, or shall we say succinct. The implementation is key and must be deployed in a very simplistic fashion.

Oh, how sweet was my elementary educational experience. Our kindergarten teacher was Mrs. Womack, who charmed us into wanting to learn and explore. Our first-grade through third-grade teacher was Mrs. Meyers (that's right, three straight years). She used repetition to give us the gift of reading, writing, adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing. (See Alford, Page 9)

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