# EDITORIALS

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THE VOICE OF BLACK AMERICA SINCE 1893

## Black suicide

The tragedy of suicide is one which, fortunately, has not plagued our community to the extent with which it has affected the white community. That is, not until recently. Although the ratio of white to black suicides is still at 2 to 1, the number of black suicides is rising steadily.

Ironically, the biggest jump in black suicides coincides with equal access and the new integration of blacks and whites in the workforce.

In some ways, this rising suicide rate is similar to the increased level of self-destruction experienced by immigrants who were confronted with the culture shock of coming to the New World at the turn of the century.

In both cases, people found themselves in a new environment, bereft of the traditional support mechanisms and forced to fend for themselves.

The down side of equal access then, apparently is more stress and strain, which in some cases leads as far as the decision to destroy onself.

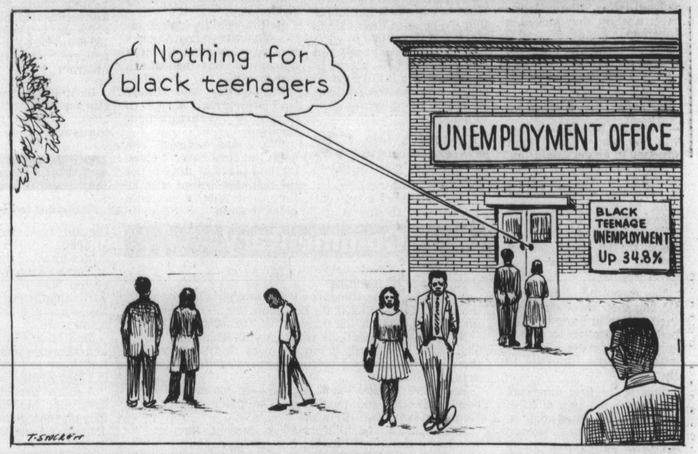
Can exposure to white people lead to suicide? Of course not. But often the soul-destroying assault of veiled racism can lead one to consider that most final of solutions — self-destruction.

Probably the only solution is time — time for blacks finding their way into the professional and managerial ranks to become acclimated to the increased pressures of an unfamiliar world.

Otherwise, we may see repetitions of tragedies such as the suicide of Steve L. Greene, the Kansas City policeman who killed himself, or mass deaths such as the horror which occurred on a PSA airliner several months ago when a depressed black employee sent a plane, with himself aboard, hurtling out of the sky to its destruction.

The scenarios may sound almost unreal.

But when the fragile human soul is subjected to unremitting strain, reactions to that strain can often plunge friends, loved ones and total strangers into the previously unreal world of self-destruction.



## Parren J. Mitchell

FORMER U.S. REP.

## Don't underestimate the brothers

"P.J., how does that man get away with it?" "What man?", I asked "Meese, that's the man I'm talking about, and you know it.

"He is a crook, he has broken all the rules, he has made sure that his buddies got all the money they wanted; he has been investigated a hundred times, yet he stays in office and to make matters worse, his buddy Reagan keeps on saying that he has faith in Ed Meese — ain't that nothing!

"Just suppose Meese was black, by now he would be sitting up in federal prison while more investigations of him were going on."

This conversation took place last week on the street with a brother whose name I do not know. He called me by my nickname, "P.J.", and claimed he knew me well.

I said to him, "There are some people who would argue that, although there have been rumors and allegations about misconduct on the part of Edwin Meese, the Attorney General, nothing so far has been proved against him; therefore, he should not resign, it would not be fair to force him to resign."

The brother exploded. "For my sake, don't start talking that fair (expletive deleted) with me. That's the trouble with us black people, we want to run around being so fair that we don't make any progress for ourselves, we don't even begin to make up for the past."

"He got a firm grip on my arm (and it hurt), moved in closer to me and said, "P.J., let me tell you, they denied us all chances to get in business and now that we have some power, we use it to keep them in business and keep us out of business, and we say that we are doing that to be fair, well it ain't fair, it's dumb, just plain dumb."

I started to walk away, and he said, "I know, I know you don't want to hear any more because you don't want to say anything about black people that is bad, but let me tell you something else.

Some black people are in charge of agencies, and committees and mess, which means they are in charge of hiring and promoting, and what do they do?" I said, "you got the platform, I'll listen and you tell me what they do."

"Man, I am really getting (expletive deleted), you know what they do, just like those other people wouldn't give us a chance for a job or a chance for a promotion, now that we are in charge, we don't give us a chance for a job or a chance for a promotion and we say that we're just being fair in selecting the best people . . . I tell you I am through with this 'fair stuff' being used against black people."

"Congressman, wait a minute," I said, "I'm no longer a Congressman." "Yes you are," he said, "and you ought to do something about the mess . . . you ought to make them try to do the right thing by us."

I explained to my friend, who was growing visibly more angry, that there are many blacks in many positions who try their level best to open up doors for other blacks, who try to get them hired on jobs and try to get them promoted on jobs, who, in effect, really try to look for black people.

There was just a moment's hesitation on his part, but then he said, "You may be right but let me make my point, I've got $2.68 in my pocket and I'll bet you that you can't name ten people who do that;

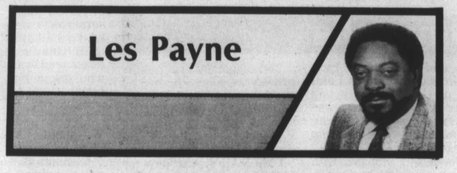
"Now don't try to play no games with me, I want you to name me ten people you really believe in your heart who do that, go ahead P.J., name me ten and you got yourself $2.68, no make that $2.18 because I need fifty cents for later on."

I started to say, "that's not fair," but quickly changed my mind. Instead, I told him to think real hard and he could probably give ten names himself.

It was 90 degrees that day, I was hot, he was adamant; I was weary of the conversation; he was just getting warmed up.

"Man, I respect you, and I'm not just getting on your case, it's just that I vote, nothing changes, I give what little money I can, and nothing changes, I talk with people who are supposed to speak for me and nothing changes . . . nothing changes."

"It's got to change and I'm going to try my best to help it change." I said, "We will talk again, I know, meanwhile, good luck to you." He said, "I believe you, but it's not good luck I need, it's good brothers and sisters in good jobs, good moves for people like me and that's not luck.



## Les Payne

## Cosby promotes blacks artists

All right, Bill Cosby is a funny man.

Few people would doubt that.

Two decades have passed since I first heard his Noah's Ark routine and thought I would I die laughing. I survived to hear the one about football at Temple University, Superman, ants, karate and on and on.

From stand-up comic, Cosby went television in his "I Spy" series, and large-screen actor in movies including "Uptown Saturday Night" and "Man and Boy." In between, there were appearances in Las Vegas, one-nighters around the country and the "Cosby Kids" cartoon series.

Cosby's current show looms like a colossus over television ratings, both here and abroad.

His road to the top, like most, was a long wind, but he seems not to have been much changed. The few magazine profiles reveal that here is one very private person.

During a late-night interview, Cosby said that long ago he purged his comedy of swear words and racial references. Some venerable white comedian, whose name escapes me, instructed Cosby to make 'em laugh without recourse to race or vulgarity. Many a young comic has rejected such advice, but it has certainly worked for Bill Cosby.

Interestingly, Cosby's approach is no less real than that of the black comics who swear every fourth word and insert "n — r" in every line. On the other hand, the popular funnyman, while omitting the racial stuff, does not submit to the social compromise that his venerable white mentor doubtless had in mind.

The next trick of a black humorist working American creations outside the boundaries of race and color without social compromise is Bill Cosby's alone. Generally critics argue — and I along with them — that such art is phony and its creator necessarily inauthentic. Somehow though, Cosby slips this noose. I'm not really sure how he does it, but I stand persuaded that his work is an exception.

Something there is about Cosby' craft, the jokes as well as the sitcoms, that separates it from other such efforts by black artists. It is devoid of the social compromise that marks what in this country is called "crossover" entertainment. Usually the corssing is one way, with black artists abandoning their culture and circumstances.

With Cosby, whites have to meet him at least halfway and often more than halfway. He neither promotes his blackness nor renounces it. He just lets it be.

Never doubting Cosby's comedic genius, I often wondered where was the man behind the laughs. Other than that he is greater than the sum total of his humor, we may never know.

I got a glimpse of Cosby the other night at a benefit for a fine arts museum, where he emceed in tuxedo and high humor. Few can match the comedian's double-take or that thing he does with the cigars. Even his introduction of a local politician was hysterical.

The night was a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Studio Museum of Harlem, a special beacon of fine arts in a city priding itself on culture. The Studio Museum specializes in arts created by African-Americans. The event gave Cosby a chance to showcase a side of him not generally known by fans of "The Cosby Show."

As perahaps the major collector of black art in America, Cosby is also its best promoter. The walls of the Huxtables' brownstone, for instance, are hug with the works of Varnette P. Honeywood.

A few years ago, Ms. Honeywood's greeting cards with black images were rejected by galleries and shops in Washington and other cities. Exposure on "The Cosby Show" has initiated a surge of sales in more than 150 shops across the nation.

The greatest impact of Cosby's decades of collection is in the marketplace for works by black masters. His involvement has singlehandedly raised not only the interest level, but also the prices. In October, 1985, Cosby bought a painting by Joshua Johnston at Sotheby's for a record $46,750.

Johnston, considered to be America's first black painter and certainly its first significant one, was a traveling portrait artist, a "face painter" working throughout Maryland in the early 1600s. At any rate, on the heels of Cosby' purchase — he has two other Johnston paintings — Sotheby's sold another Johnston work this year for $660,000.

The painting, "Little Girl in Pink With a Goblet Filled with Strawberries," drew the highest price ever paid for a painting by an African-American, Cosby, who witnessed the sale but steadfastly refused to bid, criticized the Whitney Museum for selling Johnston's work.

At the museum event the other night, Cosby praised the posthumous honoree, painter Romare Bearden, whose work he also collects. He also damned with a sharp tongue the neglect and lack of appreciation African-American artists must endure.

When galleries send "American Art" to European exhibits, Cosby said, they don't include black artists. When black artists' works are shipped abroad, he raged, they are shipped all together.

There is something worth watching about how Bill Cosby seeks to remove color as a factor in showcasing, as well as creating, art.

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COMMENTARY

## Ethiopian tragedy continues

By Norman Hill

In 1985, the Live Aid rock concert helped galvanize international public attention to the millions dying of hunger in famine-stricken Ethiopia.

The concert and subsequent record sales raised $140 million to help famine victims, and Western governments, the UN, and charitable organizations contributed millions more in supplies, transportations equipment and food.

But today, less than three years later, between 2 and 3 million Ethiopians are again threatened with starvation.

The latest calamity has been caused by a combination of drought and ongoing insurrections in the provinces of Eritrea and Tigre, but inarguably the most important factor has been the misguided and destructive economic policies of the Marxist regime headed by Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam.

Since seizing absolute power in 1977, Col. Mengistu has squelched political opposition through imprisonment and murder and mobilized the largest army in Africa (with Soviet assistant) to battle rebels in Eritrea, who have been seeking autonomy for 26 years, and insurgents in Tigre seeking to overthrow his regime.

At the height of the 1984-85 famine, the regime embarked on a brutal resettlement program to forcibly relocate some 1.8 million Ethiopians from the rebellious northern areas to the southwest.

This was a policy which Western relief agencies have reported was engineered primarily to undermine the insurgencies and which resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths from malnutrition and disease.

To further exacerbate matters, the regime launched a "villagization" plan that relocated farmers from the countryside into villages.

This attempt to collectivize agriculture along the Soviet model severely destabilized food production.

*Norman Hill is President of the A. Philip Randolph Institute.*



MEMBER NNPA UPI

# COMMENTARY & OPINIONS

## Ethel Payne

BEHIND THE SCENES

## Wanted: some 'perestroika' in U.S. foreign policy

Mikhail Gorbachev is experimenting with reform in the Soviet system. It's called Perestroika, a new word that has entered the English language now that the East and the West are seeking accommodation.

In Moscow, the bear and the eagle met, continously circling one another for propaganda advantage. Both the talons and the claws were sheathed. The two leaders of the super powers came together at the carefully measured spot on the red carpet in the Palace of the Kremlin. Americans glued to their TV sets were given a rare view of the inside of the citadel of socialism.

Ronald Reagan wasted no time in confronting the Russian on human rights, and though it was not widely reported, Gorbachev was ready with a live rebuttal of some inhuman rights in the United States.

A delegation of American Indians, our first Americans, were in Moscow at his invitation to present their side of more than 200 years of discrimination and exploitation. Outside of the Kremlin walls, dissidents, including Soviet Jews, demonstrated in protest of the lid on exit visas.

From the Soviet Embassy in Washington came a May 25 press release on Gorbachev's message of greeting to the Organization of African Unity on its 24th anniversary. It said in part;

". . . The Soviet Union is on the side of the African peoples' struggle to extirpate apartheid, racism and colonialism in South Africa and Namibia, to overcome economic underdevelopment, to win conditions of life that are worthy of human beings and to secure freedom and democracy.

"The Soviet Union supports OAU efforts to convene an international conference on the foreign debt of African countries. But the debt noose is only part of the intricate knot of Africa's socioeconomic problems. It is essential to shift international economic relations to the path of building a reliable system of economic security and a new world a economic order . . .

"Life demonstrates ever more graphically that the process of disarmament and the result and saving of large funds from being pointlessly burned in the furnace of the arms race can become a powerful factor for world development.

"The Soviet Union which stands for creating a special disarmament for development fund, believes that Africa should be allotted a special place in this project.

"It is extremely important now to get the cause of a political settlement in southern Africa out of the deadlock with a view to ensuring a peaceful and free life and prosperity for all the peoples of that region . . .

"Our socialist state has been and will continue assisting African countries in their economic and social development. On the African continent the Soviet Union does not have any selfish interests. Nor does it have any intention to impose its ideological or other views on anyone.

"We are strongly against making Africa an arena for confrontation and struggle by outside forces. In OAU efforts to ensure for Africa a worthy place in the present-day world in accordance with the historical and cultural traditions of its peoples you can count on our complete solidarity and support." Mikhail Gorbachev said in conclusion.

Neither South Africa nor southern Africa were on the Reagan agenda for discussion at the Moscow summit; but their exclusion from the human rights lecture by Ronald Reagan to Mikhail Gorbachev was taken note of during the 11th annual Transafrica Forum and and Dinner in Washington.

Eight national organizations issued a proposal for a new relationship, United States Foreign Policy and the Black World.

The four sets of recommendations were formed on (1) The United States role in the Economic Development of Africa, including an increase from the current level of aid of $739 million for the entire contient to between $2 billion and $3 billion annually.

(2)The U.S. Role in Caribbean Economic Development — providing more access and financing for Caribbean products into the U.S. through the Caribbean Basin Initiative.

(3) U.S. Policy to End Apartheid and Destabilization in Southern Africa — Stringent and comprehensive sanctions against South Africa, U.S. assistance for countries in the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference to help them defend against South Africa's destabilization campaign.

(4) United States Development Assistance and Human Rights. The U.S. should make the defense of human rights a central consideration in providing foreign development assistance. The rights of women and their role in economic development should be promoted in United States development programs.

The signators to the document were the Congressional Black Caucus, the Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Social Change, the NAACP (a footnote states that at the time of publication the NAACP had endorsed only those recommendations dealing with U.S. policy to end apartheid and destabilization in Southern Africa.)

Other signers were the National Black Leadership Round Table, the National Council of Negro Women, the National Urban League, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Transafrica.

Randall Robinson, the executive director of Transafrica, said that the proposal has been given to the three candidates for U.S. President, Democrats Michael Dukakis, Jesse Jackson and Republican George Bush.

The stipulation was that the recommendations must be inserted into the platforms to be adopted at both political conventions and the nominees will be pressed to carry out those provisions whoever is elected in November.

Dame Nita Barrow, Ambassador from Barbados to the United Nations, was the dinner keynote speaker. She is a front runner for the post of President of the United Nations General Assembly when it meets this fall.

## Walter E. Williams

MINORITY VIEWPOINT

## AIDS and common sense

Common sense in some public policy debates is so rare that the person using it appears to be a genius. Dr. David Pence offers us some common sense in his pamphlet, "AIDS: A War We Can Win" (P.O. Box 10517, Minneapolis, Minn. 55458, $2.00).

Dr. Pence lists some paradoxes of the AIDS debate: "Communities with the highest incidence of the disease have been the most reluctant to apply stringent public health measures to prevent the transmission of the disease."

No surprise, it's precisely those communities which have the strongest homosexual lobbies which are the most subject to political pressure.

Another paradox is the labelling of legitimate concerns of health care workers, parents, physicians and the public in general as AIDS hysteria. Therefore, individuals who might advocate traditional public health measures are silenced, lest they be portrayed by the media as fascists, homophobes, or rightwingers.

Several years ago nurses who treated AIDS patients only after donning gloves and masks were disciplined.

The authorities told us AIDS could not be transmitted through casual contact and the nurses were contributing to AIDS hysteria. Of course, after several nurses contracted AIDS, the authorities changed their tune advising health care practitioners to wear gloves.

Dr. Pence's final paradox is that, while the major beneficiaries of good public health policy are homosexuals, the homosexual lobby is most opposed to it.

Traditional public health policy has been virtually abandoned in the AIDS epidemic. In the cases of infections diseases like syphilis, typhoid, and tuberculosis, the first component of public health strategy was built on identifying individuals who are infectious.

In the case of AIDS the homosexual lobby insists on anonymous testing, wherein neither the public health officials, nor anyone else, is notified.

It's simply left up to the AIDS carrier to decide whether he will inform his sex partners of his disease and take other measures to protect against its spread.

Dr. Pence says the second component of traditional public health policy is identifying other AIDS carriers through contact tracing. This practice has been abandoned in all but two states.

The third component is shutting down places harboring activities which contribute to the spread of AIDS. Dr. Pence says Minnesota bath houses have posters advertising condom use, thus they are kept open and defended as places of AIDS education.

Adding to this irrationality, the homosexual lobby has gotten Congress and the state legislatures to appropriate millions of dollars for a cottage industry under the banner of AIDS education.

Taxpayers' money is handed out to men who not only engage in the behavior which spreads the AIDS virus but who publicly and proudly proclaim their lifestyles as a virtue, and hold considerable contempt for those of us who practice "straight" sex.

Would anybody in their right mind ever contemplate soliciting cigarette smokers or executives of the tobacco industry to lead the educational effort against the hazards of smoking and lung cancer.

Dr. Pence concludes that public health policy should require that individuals testing positive for AIDS must forego all penetrating sexual activity and must disclose all sexual contacts to public health officials.

Carriers who will not refrain from sex activities, or disclose sex partners, must be isolated or quarantined as recalcitrant carriers.

Who needs experts for AIDS public health policy. We just need officials with common sense — and the guts to use it.

## Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

## Struggle in Natchez

Victories come in many forms, some of them unexpected. That's the way it was recently in Natchez, Mississippi in Adams County.

Back in January we reported to you on the boycott of downtown businesses which had been started there around the situation in the schools. The boycott began because a white principal grabbed a little black child and ejected him from the cafeteria for sitting next to a little white child.

That incident prompted the African-American community to examine other problems in their school system. They formed the Concerned Citizens of Natchez and demanded not only the ouster of the principal but other changes as well.

Though the school system is 70 percent African American, the school administration is 87 percent white. The group asked that 50 percent of the instructors be African American and that the administrative staff be fairly representative of Natchez's African American population.

When the town's power structure refused to negotiate in good faith, the African American community began a boycott of all downtown stores. It has been effective.

As Rep. Barney Schoby, the town's African American state legislator told us, "The boycott has had a tremendous effect. When I viewed the sales tax collection figures it became clear that the Natchez businesses are not doing as well as they did last year—they are suffering. And they have admitted this."

There have been other successes, too. When the community first announced the boycott, the white Mayor of Natchez, Tony Byrne, didn't take it seriously.

Then he tried to say that the boycott was being mounted for political reasons. He tried to put the blame for failed negotiations on Rep. Schoby and sent a letter to some of the black leadership denouncing him.

The African-American community asked for the mayor's resignation. They reminded him that back in 1982 he had opposed extension of the Voting Rights Act.

They reminded him that when the Federal Government released a study in 1979 saying that Adams County was on a list of the 15 most segregated school systems in the nation, he replied that it was untrue.

They reminded him of all this, and still he didn't take them seriously.

On May 24 the African Americans of Natchez voted Tony Byrne out of office after 20 years as mayor of that city. Now he takes them seriously.

More importantly, this victory has renewed the struggle. The Concerned Citizens of Natchez are continuing to support a court suit to desegregate the schools as a means of improving the educational opportunities of their children.

They are continuing their demands that 30 percent of the $20 million which the Adams County school board spends each year be used with minority firms. They are continuing their legislative struggle to have their school board members elected, not appointed. They are continuing their struggle for empowerment at every level.

The African-American community of Natchez understands that, like the Montgomery bus boycott, this could be a long struggle.

As Natchez Alderman George Harden explained when we spoke with him back in January, "Wherever there's a cause, there's sacrifice. The people knew that when we took this thing on."

State Representative Schoby recently reaffirmed this when he said, "We're in the trenches and we're set to stay in the trenches for as long as it takes. And if it takes until hell freezes over, we'll be here."

With this kind of commitment and strength, the African-American community of Natchez cannot help but win its struggle.

COMMENTARY

## Our children are under attack

By M. Carl Holman
President, National Urban Coalition

Our black children all over this country are under attack in a particularly vicious race war. Caught up in an ugly, mean-spirited struggle in high schools, colleges and universities, neighborhoods where it is now taken for granted that their white peers can with impunity insult them, hurl epithets, stones, construct crude effigies.

If black students actually do well in school, they are told directly and by innuendo that they have not really earned the grades they get. Faculty members, including cowards in some of the most prestigious colleges in the land—take advantage of one of the worst eras of racial feeling in American history to add their gibes laced with subtle or often not so subtle disparagement.

Occasionally, when black, Hispanic and other minority students take over a building or stage a campus protest, a college administrator here and there admits that there does indeed seem to be a problem meriting perhaps the appointment of a committee or the commissioning a study.

But, you see, I really don't care about them. I feel the gall rising in my throat when I hear about young people — at the very time when their personalities and self-image are most fragile — disappearing into themselves.

Or deciding to tough it out and behave as though they really do not see, hear, feel what is being done to them. Done daily. Done deliberately and maliciously, with intent to hurt and destroy.

I see young blacks electing to opt out of predominantly white schools and enroll in some of the good black colleges where they will not have to run a daily gauntlet and can escape the contemporary American South African experience.

And I ask myself one question: What is wrong with US? What is wrong with black parents, black grownups who had, I thought, learned something about what it means to survive in an often hostile society?

These are our children. They are under unremitting destructive assault. They need to be aggressively supported, nurtured, assured that they are not alone. That they are not simply to be left to do the best they can on their own to somehow make it from day to day with such shreds of self-esteem as they may be able to muster.

We do not need to pass some other piece of civil rights legislation. We need to be about the business of taking on the bigots and seeing that our children are not left any longer to the untender mercies of the new racists.

We don't need studies, white paper, black papers, learned discussions. We need to get on now with the critical task of individually and collectively reaching out to save a generation of young blacks who are being systematically robbed of their personhood.

While we sit on the sidelines and watch the destruction take place.