

Forum

Light-skinned vs. dark-skinned

NEW YORK -- One of the dangers that the victims of centuries of racism in the United States need to be cautioned about is the pseudo-struggle between light-skinned and dark-skinned Afro-Americans.

One of the basic strategies of the powerful and oppressive forces of this society is to divide and subdivide racial and ethnic communities against themselves. The history of the United States is a history of racism.

Unfortunately, the victims of racism sometimes get caught up in their own victimization by fostering the continuation of racist stereotypes and myths along the color line.

The established media take great delight when a chance is given to expose internal contradictions within the Afro-American community. In a recent front-page article in *The New York Times*, titled "Law-suit Raises Issues of Color Bias Between Blacks," the issue of conflict between light-skinned and dark-skinned Afro-Americans was highlighted.

The fact that there persists in some communities a contrived notion of bitterness and envy between light-skinned and dark-skinned Afro-Americans is a sad commentary. One of the achieve-

ments of the civil rights and Afro-American cultural revolution of the '60s was the re-evaluating of the relationships between all members of the Afro-American community without prejudice due to skin color.

descriptions to describe the bone of contention speaks to the depth of the problem. Who would believe that in 1989 two sisters would be squaring off in a federal court because of the perception or the



CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By BENJAMIN CHAVIS JR.

Interestingly, it is out of the city of Atlanta, a place where Afro-Americans in particular have made great progress, that a recent lawsuit is advancing in the federal courts. The two plaintiffs are both Afro-American women. One is dark-skinned and one is light-skinned.

Tracy Lynn Marrow, an employee of the Atlanta office of the Internal Revenue Service, has sued the IRS and Ruby Lewis, who is the dark-skinned supervisor of Ms. Marrow, who is light-skinned. Ms. Marrow contends that she has been discriminated against in her employment at the IRS by Ms. Lewis because of Ms. Lewis' "prejudice against Ms. Marrow because of her light-skinned color."

The fact that I have to use these

reality that skin color is the problem?

All-Afro-Americans as well as all peoples in this world have been created equally by God. If Afro-Americans continue to carry forth the racist myths and stereotypes of this society, then the resulting division and internal conflicts will only serve to further perpetuate the exploitation and oppression of the community.

It matters not what color you are. What matters is how you use your life to ensure that justice and freedom are for everyone.

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. is executive director of the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ.

Something bothersome in society

There is something bothersome about the way we deal with crime, criminals and victims in our society.

But until we acknowledge and attack it as a society, our present system simply will continue to become less sensitive, less humane... and less effective.

For "traditional" victims of criminal acts we often feel a sense of relief, justice or vengeance when the perpetrators are captured and punished. But we must not permit our views to be so myopic that we are sensitive only to the "traditional."

One non-traditional example is a young lady, whom I will call Susan, who was an honor student at Florida A&M University. Her brother became addicted to drugs, eventually consented to enter a treatment program and Susan had to virtually baby-sit him when he was allowed to return home. She missed so many classes that she eventually had to drop out of school. She was a first-semester senior.

Just how much sympathy should go to the brother, I don't know. But I think some is due this young lady with such a bright mind who became a victim of her brother's drug abuse. She is not back in school yet; perhaps she will return soon.

The point is, though, that she is willing to make that kind of sacrifice for a brother she dearly loves. Somehow, that's just not fair to her. But it is love.

Too often we tend to overlook the Susans and focus on the abusers. But Susan's brother abused her love for him as much as he abused himself with drugs.

She is a victim, too. So are the other members of their family. So are we as a society.

A recent traditional example is the case of James Leon Simpson, a Forsyth County man convicted of brutally murdering Shirley Ann Ford, his ex-girlfriend.

The Ford family has been through a long ordeal that the justice system seems finally to be

ending. For them, no grief can compare to that they have suffered, particularly when the 12-gauge sawed-off shotgun blast did not leave enough of Ms. Ford's head to be reconstructed for viewing at her funeral. Instead, they had to place a photograph of her on the casket.

One would have to look long

and hard to find anyone to sympathize with Mr. Simpson, a man who only a few months earlier had attacked the same woman with a knife.



GUEST COLUMN

By ROOSEVELT WILSON

But Mr. Simpson's family cares.

It is obvious what a victim's family suffers and we are rightfully quick to sympathize with them. But somehow in our society we have developed an insensitivity toward the families of the perpetrators and have come to view them as people who should share our feelings of outrage.

But it simply does not work that way.

Because a family member commits a criminal act, the rest of the family should not be expected to -- in fact, cannot -- simply stop loving the father, or brother, or sister, or mother, or whatever.

All of the Simpson family members in the courtroom cried when they heard the guilty verdict, but two of the women took it exceptionally hard.

One said while sobbing aloud, "James didn't do all those things. Oh, James! He didn't do all those things." She tried to follow as Mr. Simpson was led from the courtroom. She almost collapsed three times and had to be assisted by paramedics.

The other paced back and forth as if in a daze, staring at the palms

of her hands and saying to no one in particular, "I can't believe it, I can't believe they did this to him. I just don't believe it."

Then she fainted and was out cold for about a minute, sitting in the corner on the floor. Later, she suffered seizure-like attacks and appeared to have trouble breathing.

The real culprit here is Mr. Simpson. Because of him, not only will the six Ford children have to grow up without their mother; not only will Ms. Ford not see another birthday; not only will the Ford family have to live the rest of their lives without their loved one; but also, the Simpson family have one they love locked away, and their family will never be the same again, either.

The Simpson family are victims too. In a sense, we are all victims.

As a society we should not tolerate insensitivity in such instances. We should reach out to all victims. And, as corny as it may sound, if we really cared about each other, and reached out and touched each other more often, probably there would be fewer reasons for people to commit offenses, whether against themselves or others.

And certainly we would have fewer victims.

Roosevelt Wilson is working with the Chronicle this summer as the T. Thomas Fortune fellow.

Our profound apologies go out to the participants in the European and Asian regions. We hope that you all understand that we were forced into reorganizing the entire festival with less than three weeks

next door couldn't have been the best environment for low noise levels, but they indulged our intrusion. To all of you go the Urban Arts of the Arts Council Inc. award for Neighbors of the Month!

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hours of planning which went into the making of Mayfest International '89. It is common knowledge that without our committee members and volunteers, there simply would be no Mayfest. To you go the Urban Arts of the Arts Council Inc. awards for Service Beyond the Call of Duty!

Next, we wish to thank the residents of Stratford Apartments for their cooperation in the last-minute re-mapping of the festival components. Having the beer garden right

Chronicle Mailbag

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that must be done. The many thanks to sponsors and supporters were repeated many times over during the course of the festival, but we want to take this opportunity to officially say "Thank You."

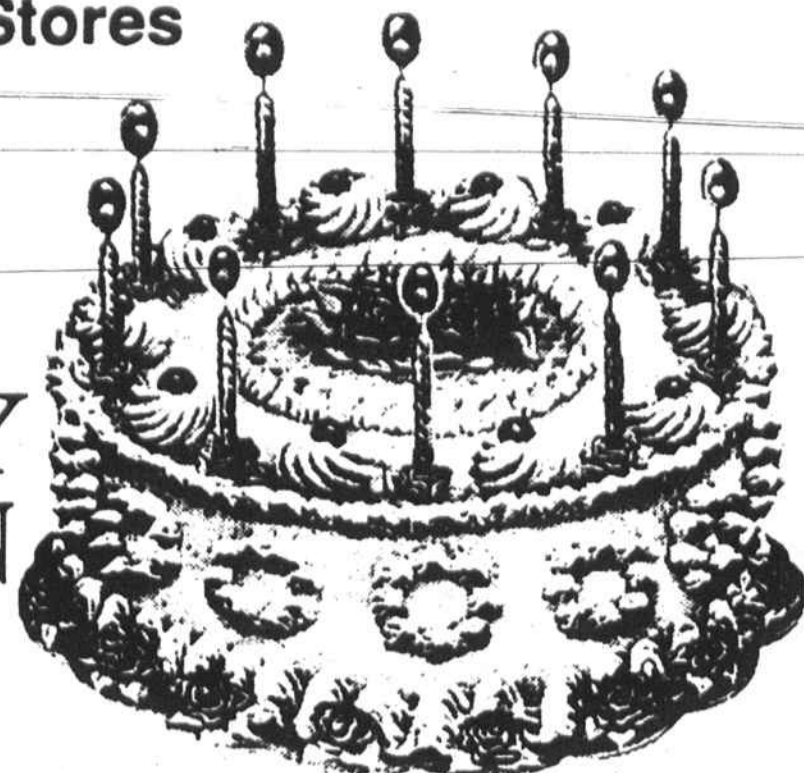
First and foremost, the biggest thanks goes to all of our regional committee members, steering committee members and volunteers, most of whom not only put in hours of manual labor over the Mayfest weekend, but some of whom were also involved in the thousands of

hours of planning which went into the making of Mayfest International '89. It is common knowledge that without our committee members and volunteers, there simply would be no Mayfest. To you go the Urban Arts of the Arts Council Inc. awards for Service Beyond the Call of Duty!

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