

Forum

The Bosnian Quagmire

Like most Americans, I am torn about what our government should do to end the slaughter of innocents in Bosnia.

There is the emotional tug of wanting to send massive force to impose peace. The insane orgy of murder and rape cannot be allowed to continue. A civilized world has to stop it.

The memory of Nazi Germany's genocidal murder of Europe's Jews while the world silently watched is a constant goad to action.

But there are other considerations clamoring for attention. Should we allow media coverage to determine foreign policy? After all, this world has many Bosnians and we don't hear about them.

And African Americans contrast the concern about "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia with the worldwide indifference to it when it was practiced against blacks by white South Africa.

Another consideration is whether we can do anything constructive or whether American intervention will just prolong the civil war and allow the violence to continue.

Whatever President Clinton decides, he is faced with the public's doubts that there are compelling national interests at stake that would justify such a commitment of troops and resources.

There's another factor that worries me most. Whether justified or not, American intervention could lead to another Vietnam — an endless guerrilla war in a hostile environment.

The Clinton Administration faces a serious political dilemma too — it was elected to renew the faltering American economy and put it on a long-term growth trajectory.

But if it becomes enmeshed in a nasty war in the former Yugoslavia, the economy and the Administration's most precious goals may go down the drain.

So when all is weighed, this may be, as many say, the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time.

But that doesn't mean we can just sit on the sidelines. In the absence of willing allies to stop the fighting, we can still take the lead in pressing for a total embargo on the Serbs and other aggressors.

And we should be clear about identifying "ethnic cleansing" with the crime of genocide and insist on its punishment. The U.N. ought to amass evidence of war crimes and eventually

TO BE EQUAL

John E. Jacob



hold an international trial.

Serbia and, if the evidence warrants, Croatia and other guilty new nations, should be barred by the U.N. and from international bodies until they turn their war crimes offenders — including their leaders — over to the designated UN body. And stiff embargoes should be applied to Serbia and any other aggressor.

The U.S. can join that U.N. effort to punish the guilty, even as it avoids becoming ensnared in the Bosnian quagmire. Bosnia presents the President with the most painful challenge of his young administration, and it will take courage to steer a course that is both morally and practically sound.

NAACP and the Black Press

In the more than 15 years I have been privileged to serve as the executive director/CEO of the NAACP, the nation's oldest, largest and most effective civil rights organization, I have found that one of our staunchest allies, one of our most enduring friends, has been the Black Press.

This was certainly not new knowledge, for I cannot remember a time in my more than six decades on this earth and since I mastered the art of reading, that I have not been aware of the power of the Black Press, or the great debt we African Americans owe to this unique institution which for over 150 years has waged a ceaseless war on our behalf.

My earliest exposure to the Black Press came as a child in my hometown of Memphis, where I both read and sold the *Tri-State Defender*, beginning a relationship that has lasted and been enriched throughout the years.

As I prepare to retire from the NAACP, I have cause to reflect on how so many of our institutions — and I speak specifically of the Black Press and the NAACP — are so often taken for granted, with the good deeds they have achieved so frequently unappreciated or even discounted.

In the instance of the NAACP, one of the most frustrating challenges I have faced over these years has been to counteract the misinformation that has appeared in much of the general media about the work of this organization.

Much too often, the NAACP has been portrayed in this media as being out of date and out of step with today's world. Conversely, it has been the Black Press that has understood what we have been about and brought to its readers a more accurate rendering of our stewardship of this venerated institution.

In so doing, the Black Press has kept alive the noble tradition, begun with the first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, in 1827, when its editor set forth its purpose as providing a medium for African Americans to tell their own story, not leaving this task to the often unfriendly hands of others.

This purpose remains as valid and needed as it ever has been. A telling example of why this is so can be found in a public opinion poll taken several months ago by a daily newspaper chain.

After sampling well over 1,000 adults on a nationwide basis, it used screaming headlines to trumpet its alleged discovery that the NAACP had run out of steam and fallen into disfavor among its constituents, who had lost the faith.

However, once a reader got past the negative headlines and looked at the results of the poll, it was apparent that an entirely false impression had been conveyed.

When the respondents were asked to list the most effective institutions within their communities, the black church and the NAACP were

ranked for first place with an 87 percent approval rating.

That is hardly the mark of an institution that has lost ground or is in any way irrelevant to the needs of African Americans.

Over the past decade and a half, the NAACP, your NAACP, has achieved a truly amazing number of legislative and judicial victories, fought racism and discrimination on every front, pioneered with new innovative programs aimed at correcting social problems affecting our communities, made it possible for billions of dollars of fresh economic benefits to be channeled into the pockets of African Americans, and fostered educational excellence and pride among our young people.

For 12 of the years I have served as the NAACP's executive director, we have a hostile

White House under Reagan and Bush; a radically conservative Supreme Court chomping at the bit to turn back the clock; and the ominous growth of a particularly ugly brand of racism centered on attacks on affirmative action and other efforts to redress past racial wrongs.

Such an array of foes would surely have taxed the patience of Job, but despite the odds against us, the victories of the NAACP, often in collaboration with other groups, have been many including the Civil Rights Bill of 1991, the Fair Housing Amendments, the South African Sanctions Bill, the Civil Rights Restoration Act, the Martin Luther King Holiday Bill, among others.

Through our membership of over 500,000 and our network of some 1,800 adult branches, college chapters and youth councils, the NAACP has been engaged in a daily battle on the front lines to protect and defend the rights and best interests of African Americans.

In a five-year period, our Fair Share Program, which has developed agreements with more than 50 major corporations, has been responsible for \$18 million in contributions to African-American organizations; \$10 billion in the purchase of goods and services from minority entrepreneurs; \$1.2 billion deposited in African-American banking institutions; \$75 million expended in advertising in African-American media; \$36 billion in insurance placed with African-American insurance firms; \$200 million in construction contracts to African-American firms; and 60 franchise/dealerships or distributorships.

As impressive as the preceding citations are, they represent only a very small part of what the NAACP has accomplished over the past decade and a half, with the support and understanding of the major institutions within the African-American community — and that most assuredly embraces the Black Press.

GUEST COLUMNIST

By BENJAMIN L. HOOKS



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