

NATIONAL BRIEFS



Gore leads among blacks

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies recently released its 1999 National Opinion Poll on politics, showing Vice President Al Gore the favorite among African Americans. Gore was viewed favorably by 69 percent of African Americans; Gov. George W. Bush, by 43 percent; and Bill Bradley, by 41 percent.

Gore's rating among African Americans is essentially unchanged since 1997, but the support for Bush is up eight percentage points from his 1998 rating. This is the first year the Joint Center has included Bill Bradley in its poll.

Other public figures included in the 1999 poll are President Bill Clinton, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Colin Powell and Congressman J.C. Watts, R-Okla.

In addition, for the first time since 1996, Jackson was rated more favorably than President Clinton among both blacks and whites. While only slightly improved among blacks, his ratings among whites improved substantially, due in part perhaps to his role in the release of the three U.S. servicemen captured during the Kosovo conflict.

The complete poll is available on the Joint Center's website at www.jointcenter.org

Shabazz faces year in detention

Former Mayor David N. Dinkins and Percy E. Sutton, chairman emeritus, Inner City Broadcasting, both lawyers, combined their legal expertise earlier this month to defend the grandson of Malcolm X in family court in Yonkers, N.Y.

Malcolm Shabazz, 14, who is in juvenile detention in Westchester County, was charged with escaping from the facility on July 28 with a 15-year-old companion. He was sent to the center after he reportedly admitted setting a fire that killed his grandmother, Betty Shabazz.

Dinkins said it was determined during the court proceeding that young Malcolm "needs a more secured facility where he wouldn't be able to escape in the future."

The court ruled he be placed through the Office of Children Family Services, formerly the state Division of Youth, for another year starting Aug. 3.

"If and when a suitable place becomes available," Dinkins said, the court agreed to place him in a residential facility.

Authorities said this was Malcolm's third escape from the facility. He pleaded to juvenile manslaughter and arson in connection with setting the June 1, 1997, fire in his grandmother's apartment in Yonkers.

Betty Shabazz died three weeks later, suffering third-degree burns over 85 percent of her body. Malcolm served an original 18-month sentence in a juvenile detention center in Massachusetts.

He was transferred last February to Lake & Watt, a group home in Yonkers, from which he escaped twice. — *Amsterdam News*

INTERNATIONAL

Hostages set free by Sierra Leonean rebels

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (IPS) — The last 37 hostages, including U.N. military observers, captured by a rebel group in Sierra Leone earlier this month, have been released.

The hostages were released Aug. 10 after intense negotiations between British authorities, the rebel high command, the Sierra Leonean government and West African leaders.

The hostages — which included several Nigerian soldiers, five senior military officers of the U.N. Military Observer Mission in Sierra Leone, a Ghanaian, a Malaysian, a Russian, and a Kyrgyz national — were kidnapped on Aug. 4 while on their way to Okra Hills, about 70 kilometers north of Freetown, to collect some 200 children abducted by the rebels in January. The children were also released.

The abductors were mostly from the former Sierra Leone Army, renegade soldiers who fled into the bush after their Armed Forces Revolutionary Council junta was toppled in February 1998.

The rebels' demand for food, medicines and an opportunity to meet with their estranged leader, Major Johnny Paul Koroma, who was chairman of the AFRC, were acknowledged by the negotiators. — *Lansana Fofana*

Millions may starve in Sub-Saharan Africa

HARARE, Zimbabwe (IPS) — Nearly 10 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa need emergency food assistance, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization report released earlier this month.

The report, "Food Supply Situation and Crop Prospects in Sub-Saharan Africa," says the current main season cereal crop has failed due to erratic and insufficient rainfall, army-worm outbreaks and unusually high temperatures. It is the seventh consecutive poor harvest since 1996, says the report.

On the positive side, according to the report, crop prospects are generally favorable so far in most of western Africa, notably in the Sahel.

The food supply situation is forecast to remain satisfactory until the next harvest, except in Sierra Leone. Implementation of a peace accord signed recently should improve the situation, the report adds.

U.N. to treat victims of toxic warfare

NAIROBI, Kenya (IPS) — The United Nations sent a team of medical doctors earlier this month to treat hundreds of civilians suffering from severe infections, allegedly caused by toxic chemical weapons, in the southern Sudanese towns of Lanya and Kaya, on the border of Uganda.

"The medical team has gone there fully prepared because we don't know yet what the cause of the symptoms are," said Sharad Sapra, spokesperson at the U.N. humanitarian office in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi.

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Father of youth slain in Bensonhurst coping

By VERENA DOBNIK
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — The killing of Yusuf Hawkins in Brooklyn's Bensonhurst neighborhood a decade ago has spurred a national movement against violence rooted in racism, the Rev. Al Sharpton said on Saturday.

"How do we make it clear that this is about race?" the activist preacher asked at a Harlem rally marking the 10th anniversary of the slaying.

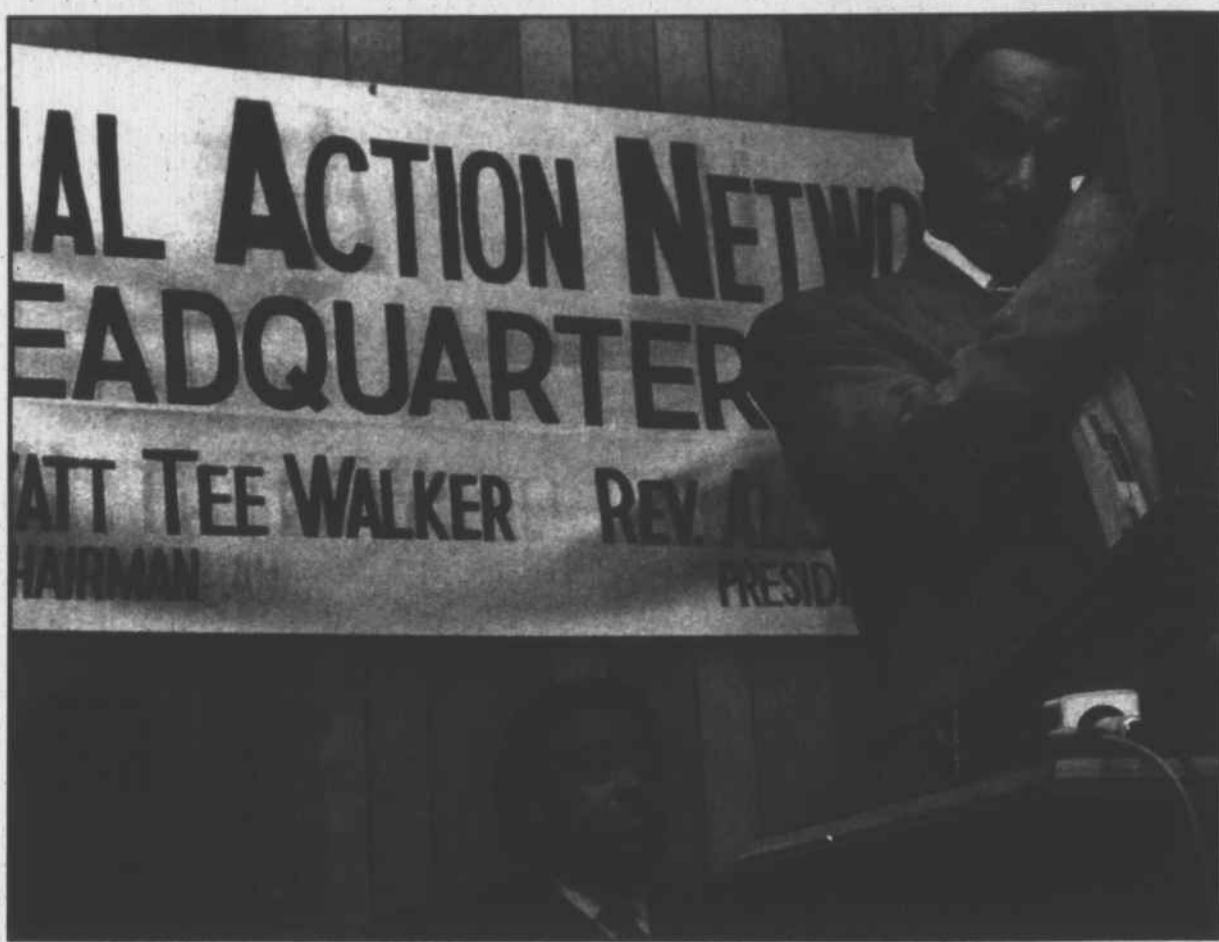
Sharpton was joined by the father of the 16-year-old who was fatally shot Aug. 23, 1989, when he crossed paths with a mob of bat-wielding whites.

"It's really rough, it's really rough," said Moses Stewart, his voice breaking at the memory of his son. "It's real hard to watch your children die, their life's blood running out of them for no other reason than somebody had deemed them less than human because of the color of their skin."

Eight people were tried for the attack. Three went to prison; two others were convicted but given probation; three were acquitted. Only the gunman, Joey Fama, remains in prison on a second-degree murder conviction.

The leader of the Bensonhurst mob, Keith Mondello, was freed last year after serving eight years of a 12-year sentence. He admitted he had assembled the youths to head off a group of blacks — Hawkins and some friends — that he feared were coming to beat him up.

After the slaying, Sharpton led a series of marches in Bensonhurst, jeered by bystanders. Protesters were pelted with bananas, watermelons and fried chicken by some residents of the mostly white neighborhood. Sharpton was stabbed in the chest during a 1990 march.



Moses Stewart, flanked by the Rev. Al Sharpton, wipes away tears during a service honoring his son, Yusuf Hawkins.

Bensonhurst was "one of the worst and most bigoted neighborhoods in the city," Stewart told Saturday's audience of about 100, including the Rev. Herbert Daughtry of Brooklyn and Minister Benjamin Muhammad of the Nation of Islam, whose leader, Louis Farrakhan, attended Hawkins' funeral.

Stewart reminded them that at the time, a local priest said he would leave his parish before "he allowed, as he put it, 'niggers and their leaders to come in his church.'"

But Stewart also said the marches had brought "hope to

the ugliness," by sparking the activist movement against racially-motivated crimes.

The activism was revived in two recent high-profile cases — the police torture of Haitian immigrant Abner Louima and the killing of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed black immigrant gunned down in a barrage of 41 police bullets.

New York's movement against crimes of bigotry and hate started in Bensonhurst, said Sharpton, "but now the whole nation's got to deal with it, from Columbine to Los Angeles back to here."

He praised Stewart for devot-

ing his life to helping other families victimized by racial violence and turning his "pain into power."

Sharpton also called for passage of a hate-crime bill in New York, one of the few remaining states without one.

Speaking in the present tense of his son a decade after his death, Stewart said: "I love my son. I love Yusuf a great deal."

Even now, he added, "everywhere I go now, I carry Bensonhurst with me. Everything I do, Bensonhurst is always with me. Bensonhurst will be with Moses until I go to my grave."

WWII munitions explosion survivor seeks benefits for families

By JESSICA SAUNDERS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — For years, Jack Crittenden feared that people might discover his secret — that he was among 50 black seamen court-martialed for mutiny after refusing to load ammunition in the wake of a deadly 1944 explosion on U.S. Navy transport ships.

When people asked about his military service, he told them he was in the Army. Even his wife didn't know he had really been in the Navy.

Today, the 74-year-old retired Alabama state employee has reconciled himself to the conviction. He says he won't ask for a pardon, an effort being pursued by Freddie Meeks, the only other known survivor of the group convicted of mutiny at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine near San Francisco.

"If a pardon means freedom from punishment, and I've already served my time and been punished — I really have a problem with understanding it," Crittenden said Monday.

Meeks, 79, of Los Angeles, asked for a presidential pardon in May, arguing that the military prosecution was racist. A 1994 Navy legal review concluded the black seamen faced racial prejudice but found no grounds to overturn their courts-martial.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the World War II Black Navy Veterans of Great Lakes have called on President Bill Clinton to clear the soldiers' names.

The White House has said the matter is under review.

Crittenden doesn't want to stand in the way of a pardon, but said he would rather see the families of the 320 men killed in the blast get the full death benefits they are owed, with interest.

"My concern is that my country, my Navy, do the right thing," he said.

Crittenden said he had just reported for guard duty at the barracks about 9 p.m. on July 17, 1944, when a blinding light

lighted up the sky. Seconds later it was followed by an earsplitting noise. The next thing Crittenden knew, he was picking himself up off the ground outside the barracks.

"There was hollering and screaming just all over the place," he said.

Two transport ships carrying ammunition had blown up, killing 320 Navy men and injuring 390, and destroying the ships, a train, a pier and the base. Two-thirds of those killed were members of the all-black loading crews that stacked bombs and other explosives

aboard the ships.

Gathering to look for survivors at the waterfront, the seamen faced a gruesome scene.

"I saw a foot in a boot, an arm on top of the water, heads here and there, pieces of the ships," Crittenden recalled. "If I had any knowledge of that kind of an explosion, I never would have gone down there."

The next day, the district commander gathered all the black seamen and told them they would be going back to work loading ammunition.

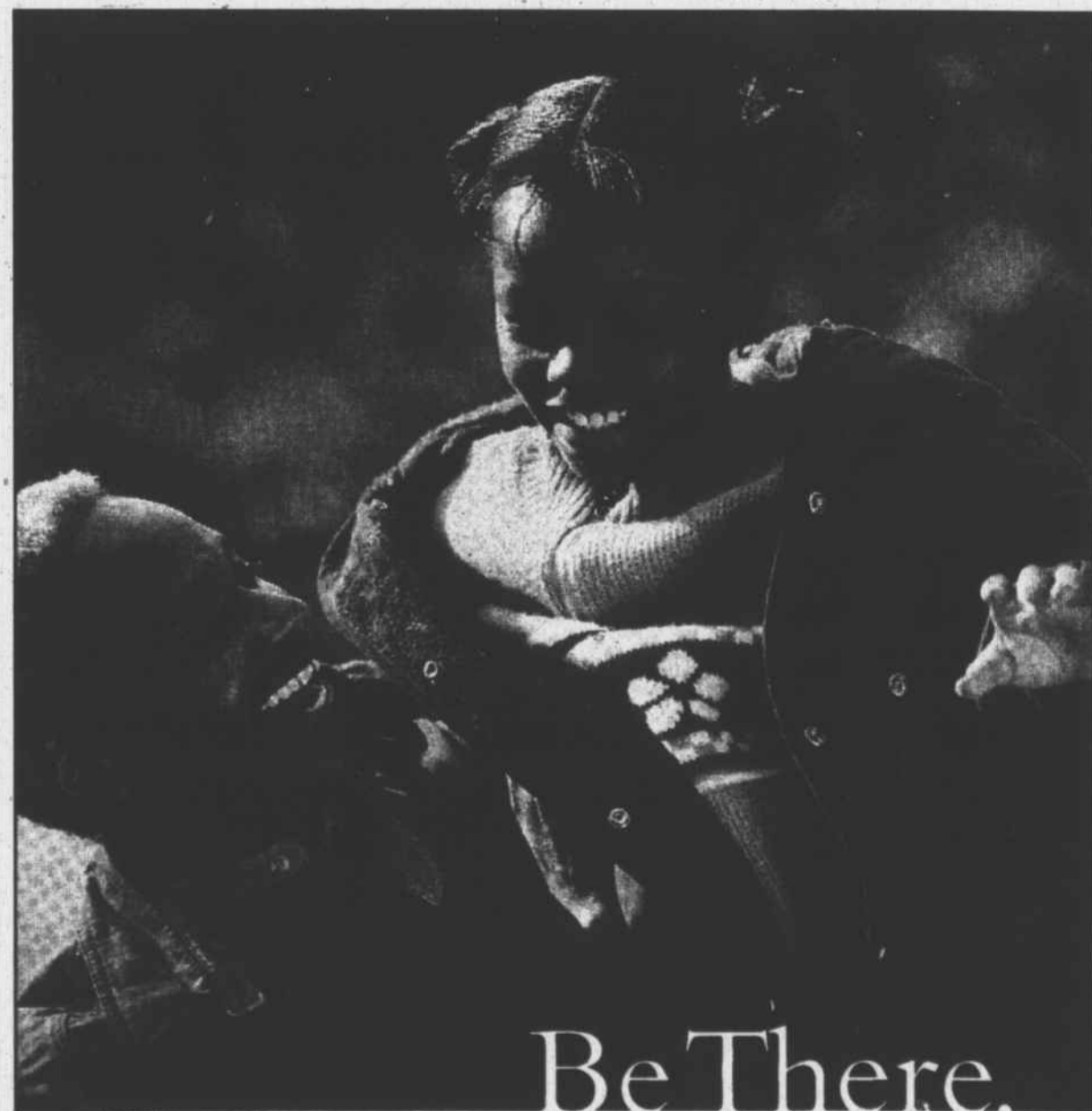
The commander threatened to shoot any who refused and

those who questioned the decision or asked for transfers were arrested and held on a barge out in the bay, while white officers were given 30 days' leave to deal with the trauma, Crittenden said.

Crittenden, then 19, said he was so fearful of another explosion he went absent without leave, but was arrested within hours and detained.

He was tried for mutiny and found guilty. He served about eight months of a 15-year sentence before being paroled.

The cause of the Port Chicago explosion remains a mystery.



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This Week In Black History...

Aug. 26, 1905 — Frontiersman George Washington dies. A settler of a vast claim of land at the junction of the Skookumchuk and Chehalis rivers, Washington endured a host of schemes by white settlers to take his land. He founded the town of Centralia, Wash., in 1875.
Aug. 27, 1963 — W.E.B. DuBois dies at 95 in Accra, Ghana.
Aug. 28, 1955 — Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till is kidnapped by whites in Money Miss. His battered body will be found four days later. The incident will raise awareness of the atrocities of the South.

The Chronicle's e-mail address

is:

wchron@net.unlimited.net