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Hate crimes bring back painful memories for African Americans

Jeri Young



There is something insidious about hate crimes.

They are born of another's refusal to break away from the ignorance that encompasses the mind and heart.

Hate crimes are as old as racism itself. From lynching to fire bombing, from the Ku Klux Klan to the Knights of the White Camelia, African Americans have endured it all.

We have become accustomed to the threat of violence. We have developed coping strategies. We are often cautious when approaching strange places and people. We slow down when driving through small towns to avoid conflict.

And still the violence and threats continue.

The last 16 months have seen a return of the violence of the '60s.

Across the South, the rash of violence against churches has spread. Eleven churches violated, thousands of hearts and spirits temporarily crushed.

Temporarily, because we are used to the devastation. We rebound quickly, sights set on a new horizon, minds set on rebuilding that which is lost.

It is a constant, vicious cycle. One to which we have grown far too accustomed.

The violence plaguing black churches has finally reached North Carolina, the heart of the Bible Belt. Recently, African American churches in Durham and now Charlotte have received threats that seek to shake them - the one American institution that is entirely ours.

That is why the hatemongers choose churches. More than any other institution, they represent who we are and where we have come from.

They are the centers of our protests and our joys. They are where we dedicate our young and bid farewell to our elders. When we broke the shackles of slavery, the first edifice we built was a church - to give thanks for the blessing of freedom.

For African Americans, churches are for more than worship. They represent family, leadership and most important, are the cornerstones of our history.

Perhaps that is why they are chosen. By striking out at our churches, terrorists feel they are destroying us, cutting to the core. They are.

Perhaps they feel by destroying our churches, they will render us helpless. They do. Fear engulfs us and keeps us on edge.

Perhaps they feel that they are making a statement of power. They are. The threat and the reaction to the threat give them the upper hand - temporarily.

What they don't understand is our resilience. They have forgotten that no matter what has been done to us in the past, we have overcome and risen above it. You may trample us, but we will rise again.

They have forgotten that we will develop a strategy to defend ourselves and our churches. We always have.

Most important, they have forgotten our uncanny ability to join together in the worst of times. One church service may be rescheduled but another church door will open to those members.

There is nothing to be gained from a church bombing.

It's a stupid crime committed by stupid people. It shows the ultimate lack of respect.

A church symbolizes something larger than the sum of its doors and stained glass windows. It represents spirit and drive.

The edifice may be destroyed, but the spirit and drive persists.

JERI YOUNG is community projects coordinator at The Post.

100 years, still separate, unequal

By Ron Daniels
SPECIAL TO THE POST

One hundred years after the historic Plessy vs. Ferguson Supreme Court decision which sanctioned the doctrine of "separate but equal" and provided the judicial capstone for the betrayal of the civil rights of Africans in America, there is a view that Black America is experiencing a second post-Reconstruction.

One could argue that the period from 1954 to 1965 marked the second Reconstruction period with the milestone Brown vs. Board of Education decision sparking a civil rights revolt that resulted in several new civil rights laws culminating with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Taken together the court decisions, presidential executive orders and civil rights laws essentially reclaimed that which Black America lost after the betrayal of 1876 and the onslaught of post-Reconstruction. The Voting Rights Act in particular unleashed a mobilization of black electoral power that resulted in the election of thousands of black people to public office.

However, by the time Martin Luther King journeyed to Memphis as he prepared to launch the Poor People's Campaign, he was sounding the alarm about a "white backlash" that threatened to stall the steady march of Africans in America towards first class citizenship. Indeed, the white backlash that King warned about steadily gained momentum.

During the Nixon years there was a concerted effort to curtail civil rights enforcement in response to the "silent majority." Ronald Reagan borrowed the "burden of government" themes of George Wallace's campaigns for president, with all of the racist code words and phrases, to propel himself into the White House.

Once in office, Reagan launched an all-out assault on civil rights and affirmative action, introducing such terms as "reverse discrimination" and "black racism" into the national dialogue on race relations in America. The Justice Department under Reagan was assigned to dismantle civil rights laws or interpret them in such a way as to undermine their original intent. The not so subtle message of Reagan's attack on civil rights and affirmative action was that the federal statutes enacted by Congress and the decisions rendered by the courts were infringing on the rights of white Americans.

Throughout the Nixon, Reagan and Bush administrations, there was a gradual erosion of the gains of the civil rights movement as the conservative forces fueled the white backlash against black progress. The assault on civil rights and affirmative action reached its apex, however, with the appointment of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court by George Bush and the Republican capture of both houses of Congress in

1994. With the appointment of Clarence Thomas, a black conservative, to the Supreme Court, the reactionary forces gained the majority within the body which had promoted and defended civil rights for more than three decades. And, the rise to power of Newt Gingrich and company with a majority in both houses of Congress positioned conservative forces to initiate a legislative attack on civil rights, affirmative action and related issues through the racist and reactionary Contract With America.

Though there are qualitative differences between 1896 and 1996, there is no doubt that once again forces within White America are at work to thwart the forward advance of Africans in America. And, just as the Supreme Court of 100 years ago provided the judicial sanction for our reversal of fortune, the current Supreme Court is leading the charge in turning back the clock on black advancement. The Supreme Court with brother Mr. Justice Thomas casting the decisive votes is systematically destroying affirmative action as an instrument to overcome past and present discrimination, and gutting the Voting Rights Act as a tool which produced the largest number of blacks in Congress since Reconstruction.

Just as the first post-Reconstruction had its black apologists in the person of Booker T. Washington and his school of black accommodationists, so it is today that we now have a school of black conservatives,

symbolized by Clarence Thomas, who are the new accommodationists and apologists for the racist and reactionary attack on black progress. And, just as the accommodationists of the 19th century were promoted and rewarded by the establishment for acquiescing to or doing the bidding of the power elite, today we have new crop of black apologists who are being promoted by the right wing forces e.g., the Christian Coalition, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute and the media, to provide legitimacy for the assault on Black America.

As Africans in America we should indeed be concerned about the dangers of what could be termed a second Post Reconstruction period in our history. The lesson to be learned from our past and present experiences is that our destiny will likely always be precarious as Africans living in a European/white dominated nation. However, unlike the first post-Reconstruction, Black America is far better equipped to fight back. We have a far more educated population, scores of black faces in positions of power and an accumulated economic power in the consumer market in excess of \$400 billion. What remains to be seen is whether we have the vision, values and resolve to gather ourselves as a national community to see the black freedom struggle through to its conclusion.

RON DANIELS is a columnist living in East Elmhurst, N.Y.



Shortage of black men on campuses: Are they less valuable?

By James Alsbrook
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Hundreds of young black women attending historically white colleges are condemning young black men for dating white women.

Some of their complaints are reported in the May 10 issue of the prestigious and widely circulated Chronicle of Higher Education. Its front page features an integrated couple walking on the campus of Brown University, the highly respected Ivy League pride of Providence, R. I.

The large photo shows Rachel Davidson, a white sophomore, clinging to the arm of Ralph Johnson, a black sophomore and treasurer of Brown's largest black-student group, the Organization of United African Peoples. Johnson spent much time scheduling speakers for

Black History Month and once each week he serves as mentor for black high school students at a community center in Providence.

The Chronicle reports that Johnson said, "Two people love each other and there should be nothing wrong with that."



Johnson and other black men who date white women are condemned by Brown's black women and their names are posted on the dormitory room door of one "neglected" black female student.

One factor affecting black women at Brown is that for

every four black women on campus there are only three black men. Brown has 211 black female students and only 154 black males. On a nationwide basis, the ratio is even worse. The U.S. Department of Education reports that for the approximately 900,000 black women in college, there are only

550,000 black men.

Various reports show that the wide differences in the numbers of college-attending black women and college-attending black men exist because the black family traditionally has valued its women more than its

men. The black family seemed to think that a black male could get a job, work hard, and be a man by finding and marrying a good woman and raising a family. The young black man could not get pregnant and could not get raped.

But girls in the black family usually by tradition have been "special." They needed more family protection, the reasoning goes, and therefore they needed whatever special advantages a family could bestow. Their options increased when they had a college degree and they did not have to "work in the white folks' kitchens." With college training, she could find a job teaching school, be a respectable lady and a good "catch" for a professional man such as a doctor, lawyer, teacher, merchant or undertaker. With this education and status she would become an influential and contributing member

of the local black community. Her parents and kin folks therefore would grow in community status and in self-pride.

Moreover, the parents of black girls knew some who had "worked out in service," seldom came back home to visit and never became married. Some had half-white children by the white heads of households and were trapped in shame and unimportance, untrained except for menial service outside the black community. Her family loved her but felt pity and embarrassment for her. The thinking black family followed this reasoning and used its limited resources preferably to educate the young black female.

The same reasoning in reverse usually applies to white families and their young white males. The white young male has been looked upon as a potential family and community leader and

defender. He was becoming a white man. The family image was tied to his success. He would perpetuate the family name and the family fame.

White girls, on the other hand, have never been prized as highly as white boys and if only one sex could go to college, preference went to the white boy. For many years, only white males were admitted to the highest-rated schools such as Harvard, Yale, and other private colleges.

Long ago the black family should have sought upward mobility by training its black men as well as its black women. Yesterday, the choice was kitchen work or teaching for girls. Today it is becoming either college or prison for the boys.

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