

Solutions to inter-ethnic conflicts

The current clashes in the L.A. county jails between African-Americans and Latinos are both tragic and troubling, not only because of the deaths and harm they have caused, also because of the damage they do to our sense of shared interests in life and struggle as peoples of color seeking a just society and a good world. Indeed, it is common consensus among socially-conscious activists, intellectuals and others, that people of color are natural allies, given our common condition of race and class oppression and our common interests in ending and transcending it. Although these clashes don't challenge this fundamental understanding, it does raise questions about the causes and conditions of the conflict and our role in solving the problem and pursuing the common good.



MAULANA
KARENGA

To correctly understand and effectively address this urgent issue, we must have a clear conception of the basis and nature of these conflicts. First, we must avoid the easy path of posing them as simply a racial problem. Although they contain a racial element, the issue is much more complex and rooted in a series of interrelated institutional and social conditions. It is ironic that we tend to and are taught to explain every conflict between people of color by raising the issue of race. But in our negative relations with Whites, we are discouraged from doing so and told to look elsewhere for sources and solutions, especially within ourselves and our communities.

Secondly, we must not simply worry about what inmates will bring out of jail and prison, but also what they take in there from the society and communities from which they come. They do not enter naked and empty of mind and emotion, but fully-clothed in the ideas and attitudes of society. Among these are racism, ethnic chauvinism, domination, aggression, alienation, hostility and objectification of others that denies their humanity and justifies any act against them deemed necessary. Thus, there is also an urgent need for societal and community self-reflection and self-transformation.

Also, we must always deal with the conditions of the institution itself that by its very structure and function produces a degenerative and tension-filled environment. Thus, treatment of inmates, living conditions, opportunities for meaningful activities, i.e., education, recreation, skill improvements, relations with guards and in-place policies to avoid, intervene in and solve conflicts in effective and non-abusive ways, all must be considered. The county jail clearly has problems in all the above areas. It is oppressively over-crowded and woefully understaffed, by the sheriff's own admission.

Consequently, the living conditions are breeding grounds for tension and hostility, and the cultivation and manipulation of ethnic or racial hatred by gangs, guards-gone-wild or others. Moreover, the tension intensifies in the absence of programs that would allow learning, recreation, skills acquisition, and other self-improvement opportunities.

Certainly, another important element that helps create and aggravate the situation is aggressive ethnic chauvinism which evolves when a positive appreciation of one's own ethnic identity and commonality turns into a perverse need to deny the equal worth and rights of others. This aggressiveness is emboldened by a numerical advantage. Thus, the Latinos who incite the attacks on African-Americans exploit their numerical vulnerability. As reported, many Latinos don't share this aggressiveness or wish to participate in the attacks, but fear consequences if they don't cooperate.

It is important to note that many, if not most, fights start out as personal conflicts and confrontations over such issues as food, phone and sex access, bunk position, paper towels and toilet paper, or that perennial quest of men of color for recognition and respect so often denied by the larger society. But these incidents and issues are quickly taken up by racial provocateurs as insults and challenges to the group that must be avenged or answered in some macho-demanding way.

Key also to understanding and effectively dealing with this problem is recognizing the role some guards play in provoking groups, pitting them against each other, or letting them savage each other as a form of discipline, punishment, ethnic preference or self-saving in a violent and dangerous situation.

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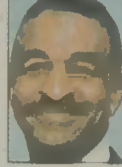
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Frankenstein's monster returns

They conceived him, they created him, they sustained him, they supported him, and now he has turned on them. Just like the old Frankenstein monster movies we used to see, once again we can break out our popcorn and Mary Jane candy and watch the latest version of Frankenstein, known as Frankenbush, as the dreaded monster turns on his creators.

That's right; those metal things that protrude from Frankenbush's neck have been charged by hundreds of lightning strikes and now, because he has so much power, he doesn't have to obey his masters any more.



JAMES
CLINGMAN

The Frankenbush monster thumbed his nose at his conservative creators by threatening to cast his first veto ever on the shipping ports deal. Dr. Frankenstein himself, Bill Frist, is leading his clones - House Speaker Hastert and the others - in an attempt to stop Frankenbush, but the monster is defiant and refuses to capitulate to their commands. Yes, the puppet is turning on the puppet masters; Chuckie is on the attack. Can anyone stop him before it's too late?

As I have said many times, it's always about the money, and you would think, listening to the moaning and wailing of "the people," that we just discovered this stark reality. Treasury Secretary John Snow, and the rest of those corporate crooks who have been stealing every dollar they can get their hands on, have pulled off another monetary coup with this port deal. Everywhere you look there is a connection from Frankenbush to his corporate cronies. And you thought he was accountable to the Congress. Silly you.

It was the Congress, at least the majority of Congress that created Frankenbush, giving him all the nourishment he required to get stronger and stronger. Now, he has turned on them and is exposing them as the weaklings they are. All they can do, now that the monster has been unleashed, is try to destroy him. If they don't come up with the silver bullet Frankenbush will destroy them in November 2006.

Can't you hear Vincent Price's spooky laugh in the background as you slide down in your seat, afraid to watch the scary climax of this B-movie?

The minor plots abound. The bride of Frankenbush, "Condi," as he calls her, is threatening folks all over the world. After all, she has the monster on her side. Again, I think about our prophet, Gil Scott-Heron, when he called Henry Kissinger, the "International Godfather of Peace." Just like Richard Nixon and his boys wanted "a piece of Laos, a piece of Angola, a piece of Viet Nam, a piece of Cuba." Condi also says she and Frankenbush want peace, a piece of Iraq, a piece of Iran, a piece of Syria, a piece of Afghanistan. Apparently the Frankenbush peace process calls for Condi to threaten leaders of these countries, as well as the duly elected leader of Venezuela, Caesar Chavez.

Can anyone stop this monster? Frankenbush, fresh from a recharge in 2004, hackneyed, skewed, discombobulated, and confused, is on the loose, running rampant and destroying everything in his path. He and his bride are bent on taking over the earth. It's Boris Karloff and Elsa Lanchester reincarnated. Keep your children in the house.

I have to believe that any person with an ounce of gray matter knows Frankenbush is an abject failure, at least as it relates to governing this country. But, as for filling his pockets and those of his cronies, he has been a rousing success. He has done what he was told; they trotted him out on the stage, after wiring him with an earpiece, and he stood there and delivered - exactly what they told him to say. Of course, there are always exceptions every time Frankenbush makes his feeble attempts to speak without assistance.

His inarticulate ramblings and mechanical movements and gestures are striking indications that Frankenbush is unsure of his balance, insecure, and unstable, at least that's the way it used to be. Now, the monster is walking on his own, still not making very much sense when he speaks, but he doesn't need to, considering the raw power he possesses.

Soon we will see how powerful Frankenbush is as he has thrown down the gauntlet before his creators. Now they must find a way to destroy him before he destroys them - and the rest of us. Can they do it?

Surely there is much awry in this, the latest Republican laboratory experiment. The monster is running wild, not obeying the orders from those who thought they were his masters; they didn't know he had other masters; they thought they had him under control, but the corporate hidden hands are giving Frankenbush his orders. We are in deep trouble if he is not neutralized soon.

Doesn't all of this make sense now? Frankenbush said he didn't know the levies would break; he didn't know Osama had plans to fly planes into buildings; and he didn't know about the Dubai deal; he didn't know Hamas would be elected.

Isn't it obvious that he doesn't know about a lot of things? After all, he is the most ignorant, uninformed, and disconnected president in the history of this country. That's because he was created in a laboratory by devious, greedy, mad scientists like Rove, Cheney, Wolfowitz, Abramhoff, Ken Lay, and the rest of their diabolical surgical team.

Yes, they created a monster and now, after turning on the people, the monster has turned on Congress, a collective body that assumed it had control of the monster. Wow! I can't wait to see the end of this horror movie.

JAMES E. CLINGMAN, a professor at the University of Cincinnati, is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald newspaper and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce.

OUR VOICES

One woman's sacrifice made impact on me

If I had to say who made the most profound impact on my life I would say Emmitt Till's mother.

Emmitt Till was a black teenager who was killed in Mississippi in 1955 after he whistled at a white woman. Emmitt was from Chicago, Illinois and may not have understood the way things were done in the South. He didn't set out to get killed or make history but he did.

When Emmitt was killed, his mother didn't hide. She told their story and she had an open casket at his funeral. A lot of people were uncomfortable seeing a dead child - one that was so beaten up that you couldn't even recognize him. A lot of people wouldn't want you to see their son or daughter beaten up but Emmitt's mother made you look.



KIANNA
MONTGOMERY

No one wanted to admit that something like that could happen in America. Some people were mad and some people were sad and some people were even glad. The people that were mad and sad began to rally and hold meetings and plan what they could do to change things.

I never met Emmitt's mother but she had a positive impact on my life. When you saw Emmitt's face in the casket you saw hatred and racism. Emmitt's mother helped the civil rights movement and the civil rights movement made it okay to be black in America.

Kianna Montgomery, 11, lives in Sanford, N.C. She wrote this winning essay to the question of which African American's contribution has had the most profound impact on your life and why. The essay contest was sponsored by the North Carolina Conference of Minority Transportation Officials. The Black History Month Short Essay Contest was open to all North Carolina youths ages 11-13.

Nuclear hypocrisy in Iran's treatment

As I look at the frantic gyrations in the attempt by the U.S. and Israel to keep Iran from obtaining the ability to process nuclear fuel, I keep thinking about my first book, "South Africa and the Bomb" (1987) that described the white-minority regime's attempt to acquire nuclear capability. Experts then rejected the notion that South Africa would manufacture nuclear weapons, or could do so, or that it wouldn't have to use them to control the black population, either inside the country or in the surrounding countries.

After several years of work with the United Nations Committee Against Apartheid on South Africa's military and nuclear capability, I had come to another conclusion. South Africa's military strategy of a "total solution" conceived on the possibility of being over-



RON
WALTERS

whelmed by blacks, heightened its xenophobia. Thus, its ability to reprocess uranium fuel gave it the ability to manufacture nuclear weapons, if needed.

Imagine my lack of surprise when on March 24, 1993, President De Klerk admitted in a speech they had manufactured nuclear weapons and vowed to dismantle them before the black majority government came into power. No one has yet come forward to say that my work or that of others was right, but that is not really the most important point.

The point is that while South Africa, a country known to have slaughtered thousands of blacks, moved millions into concentration camp-like conditions, passed the most racist laws, maintained terrorist squads to control dissidents, and invaded their neighbors to foster intimidation, was busy manufacturing nuclear weapons, no country came forward to respond to the warnings that I and others gave to the UN.

It's hard to argue that any country that wants to should have the capability to make nuclear weapons and therefore make the international system more dangerous, and so I won't argue that principle. But what we see in the frantic attempt by the West to keep Iran from achieving nuclear capability is a clubbiness about who can own and develop nuclear capability. One of the objectives of the West has been, by all means, to prevent a so-called "Arab bomb" from coming into existence.

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