

## COMMENTARY

## Biko's beacon still shines

By Mumia Abu-Jamal  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

FROM A CELL IN WAYNESBURG, Pa.—It has been almost a quarter of a century since the great South African freedom fighter Steve Bantu Biko was tortured and assassinated by the apartheid regime's police.

The White supremacists of South Africa could not abide the brilliance, the courage or the rebellious spirit of Biko. As one of the leading voices of the Black Consciousness Movement, Biko and his fellow anti-apartheid students filled the vast vacuum made by the banning, imprisonment and forced emigration of thousands of key activists from the older African National Congress and Pan-Africanist Congress movements.

In his relatively short life Biko served the African liberation struggle in a series of positions: founder and first president of the South African Student Organization, honorary president of the Black People's Convention, and a full-time organizer for Black Community programs.

In his posthumously titled book "I Write What I Like," Biko's courageous voice rang around the world.

Biko loathed liberals, who held polite tea parties in the face of repression:

"First, the Black-White circles are almost always a creation of White liberals. As a testimony to their claim of complete identification with the Blacks, they call a few "intelligent" and "articulate" Blacks to "come around for tea at home," where all

present ask each other the same old hackneyed question, "how can we bring about change in South Africa?"

The more such tea-parties one calls the more of a liberal he is and the freer he shall feel from the guilt that harnesses and binds his conscience."

In a later interview, Biko touched on the future of South Africa and the danger of misdistribution of wealth:

"The Whites have locked up within a small minority of themselves the greater proportion of the country's wealth. If we have a mere change of face of those in governing positions what is likely to happen is that Black people will continue to be poor and you will see a few Blacks filtering through into the so-called bourgeoisie. Our society will be run almost as of yesterday."

Shortly before the racist government assassinated Biko, the brilliant activist was attending medical school at the University of Natal (under its Non-European Section, of course), in Durban.

The fight for Black liberation was so all-encompassing that he had to leave (or was kicked out of) medical school.

For many observers of the African scene, the state's terrorist attack on, and assassination of, Stephen Bantu Biko robbed the people of the nation of a committed freedom fighter, who was destined to lead a free South Africa.

That terrorism merely delayed the inevitable.

## Wrong emphasis on terror

By Kwaku Person-Lynn  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

After watching almost 12 hours of reports on CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS and BET, it became abundantly clear that 99 percent of those commenting on the Sept. 11 attacks are united in seeking a very violent retaliation for the tragedies that occurred in New York City and Washington D.C. The heart of America's financial and military symbols were utterly destroyed in one instance, and severely damaged in the other.

In other words, the nucleus of Americanism, capitalism and the industrial/military complex, were violently confronted head on with seemingly no fear. It almost seems like the apparent message is, "you may be the most powerful nation in the world, but that doesn't mean a thing to us."

And in listening to all the politicians, experts and commentaries, the general consensus was almost unanimous—"we have to strike back." Strong, equal retaliation was the central theme.

There is no effort here to judge whether that is right or wrong, it is only suggested that the root of the problem is not being addressed.

One newscaster, on CNN, while interviewing an Israeli politician, seemed as if he was attempting to address the real problem. But the Israeli politician was skillful in not allowing what many see as the real issue come to the surface—the illegal occupation of Palestinian land, the mass destruction and takeover of Palestinian homes and businesses, the policy of open assassinations against Palestinian officials and the wholesale denial of basic human rights of the Palestinian people.

Retaliation may or may not be a key issue, but in order to possibly prevent future attacks, the main emphasis should be settling the Middle East conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis. This could be done in a week if the Bush administration, which has virtually abandoned the issue, would put its full force behind a settlement. As diffi-

cult as it would be, if the U.S. threatened to withhold its aid and support to Israel, permanently, unless they resolved their issues with the Palestinians and stood out of the way of the Palestinians forming their own state, Israel would lay down as they did in the Gulf War, and as the U.S. told them to.

When America blames the Palestinians for the conflict, and openly supports the occupants of Palestinian land, and when it refuses to support a U.N. conference that would allow an open debate on this issue, using Israel as its excuse (though many speculate that it was to avoid the discussion of reparations for Africa and its descendants), though the deck was stacked, and supplies the occupiers with more foreign aid than the entire continent of Africa, which has a greater need, then it is going to reap the blunt of the anger of those who do not support this. Many believe the events of Sept. 11 were a testament to that.

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## Questions abound about Bush's verve on Middle East policies

By Dr. Ronald Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The airplane attacks on the World Trade Center Buildings in New York and the Pentagon in the Washington area was a nightmare scene that I have thought for many years could happen here. This thought began for me in 1979 when Andrew Young was fired from the United Nations for daring to talk about achieving peace in the Middle East with the Palestinians as well as the Israelis. For the transgression of talking to the Palestinians—something Henry Kissinger had established as not to be done—he was let go.

In reaction, angry Black leaders met in New York City, declared their right to have a position on the Middle East situation, and promptly formed delegations to visit several states in the region. As chief policy adviser for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, we visited Lebanon for a series of meetings with various religions from all sides of the spectrum and political leaders such as Yasir Arafat, head of the Palestine Liberation

Organization. On one trip to the battle zone in Southern Lebanon arranged by Arafat, I remember picking up spent cluster bomb shells with U.S. military markings and thinking that we, indeed, had a right to a position on the conflict in the Middle East because our tax dollars were involved in that war.

In any case, one of the most memorable moments of the visit was a trip to the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps. As we were entering the camp, I noticed two old women sitting on the side of the wall, and stuck out my hand to show that I had come in peace. They shrank back and said something to me in Arabic. Not versed in Arabic, I asked for a translation. I was told that one woman had asked if we were Americans and, if so, had we come to bomb them as other Americans had done.

This encounter taught me early on that there existed strong views on America's role in the conflict between the Arabs and Israel and the extent to which they were confirmed by its support of Israel with funding and ar-

maments, regardless of whether the use of its U.S. military equipment in a war was against U.S. law.

The reality is that regardless of whether or not successive U.S. presidents have tried to play the role of honest broker and mediator in the Middle East conflict, just beneath the surface was the impediment that because we are not really neutral, our role was, in many respects, fatally flawed. This was the foundation of the difficulty that Bill Clinton faced in his attempt to negotiate a peace settlement during his last year in office.

This perception that American national interest is part of the reason for the recent horrible conflagration that resulted in so much destruction of life and property on Sept. 11 and should cause the Bush administration to think deeply about the future.

One road leads to open-ended retribution—in effect joining Israel in the execution of military operations in the region against the Arabs in Afghanistan or wherever. This road will ironically make (See Middle East, Page 15)

## Choices will determine destiny in new genetic world of ours

By Nat Irvin II  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Think about this: Of the dozens of faces splashed throughout national television and print media over the past few months debating the future use of stem cells, how many of them were Black?

Judging from the appearance of the stem cell debate, one might think Blacks are being intentionally excluded, or, worse, are self-excluding themselves from what could be one of the most important chapters in the great human genomic debate.

Many Americans don't understand science, particularly genetics. So we relegate the serious thinking to the so-called scientific experts: the researchers, technologists, investors and the bio-ethicists who we believe are better able to understand the sequencing and mapping of genes, the difference between RNA and DNA, proteins and enzymes, the double helix and the images of spiraling staircases.

This is particularly true for Blacks who are often absent from major scientific policy debates. But whatever the reason for our virtual absence in this current stem cell debate, without our participation, Blacks and the rest of the society will surely be the losers.

Stem cells are the basic building blocks of the human body that are grown from a five- to seven-day-old fertilized egg, or embryos and are capable of developing into 220 cell types that make up the human body. The current debate has been over the use of federal money to support research in

the use of certain embryos produced at private fertility clinics. Current federal law bans the use of tax money for research that destroys embryos.

An ABC News/Beliefnet poll found that Americans by a 2-1 margin support stem cell research and say it should be funded by the federal government. Blacks were found to be the least supportive of stem cell research, with some 44 percent personally opposing stem cell research—a full 15 points higher than the level of opposition among Whites, including independents, moderates, and non-evangelical White Protestants.

Many scientists, including researchers at the National Institutes of Health, have declared stem cell research holds enormous promise and has the potential to revolutionize the practice of medicine and improve the quality and length of life. Scientists believe through the use of stem cells, we can find cures for several ailments, including several diseases that disproportionately affect Blacks: diabetes, arthritis, Alzheimer's, stroke and heart disease.

U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher said in a CBS interview earlier this year that stem-cell therapy using umbilical cord blood was one area that posed a lot of promise for the future of sickle cell patients—possibly leading to a virtual cure. He said one of the main problems in finding a cure is that sickle cell disease does not get as much federal funding as others diseases,

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