

COMMENTARY

White House hopefuls compare wrong records

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

President George W. Bush and presidential wannabe John Kerry are engaged in a tiff about who did what during the Vietnam War. Kerry supporters point to his Silver Star, Bronze Star with Combat V and three Purple Hearts for bravery and combat injuries while noting that Bush might have been AWOL from National Guard duty. Bush supporters counter that although Kerry served in Vietnam, he joined Jane Fonda and other peaceniks in protesting the undeclared war after he returned home.

Both sides are arguing about the wrong war. What about the war at home? No, not the Civil War — neither man was alive then. Where were they during the bloody civil rights battles that changed this nation? Where were they when police dogs were let loose on elementary school children in Birmingham? Where were they when fire hoses knocked protesters to the ground? Where were they when people were jailed for asserting their First Amendment rights?

On September 15, 1963, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was rocked by a powerful dynamite blast that left four little girls dead. They had been attending Sunday School. I was beginning my junior year at Druid High School in



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Tuscaloosa. Although my parents didn't know it at the time, some of us skipped school and went to Birmingham to protest the dastardly violence. What did you do Kerry? What did you do Bush?

When students from across the country descended on the Magnolia state the following summer as part of the Mississippi Summer Project, where was Kerry? Where was George W.? Three young civil rights workers — James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner — gave their lives for freedom that summer. Where is the evidence that either Bush or

Kerry even gave a cuss?

The Selma-to-Montgomery, Ala. March occurred in 1965. Both Bush and Kerry talk about the importance of the ballot, but where were they that year when we were fighting to get a Voting Rights Act passed? Where were they when John Lewis was getting his skull cracked on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma?

I was a senior in high school and some of us took part in the march. I will never forget arriving in Montgomery and seeing James Baldwin and Harry Belafonte for the first time. In such a large crowd, it would have been easy to overlook Bush.

George, can you get anybody to come
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United States should play productive role in Haiti

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I have no idea how the Haitian crisis will unfold by the time that you read these words. The current crisis involves a very diverse and contradictory opposition movement demanding the ouster of the duly-elected President of Haiti: Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

In one sense, this crisis is one that has emerged since the parliamentary elections of 2000. In another sense, this crisis is one that has been playing out since the first election of President Aristide in 1990.

Though democratically elected, President Aristide was overthrown in 1991 by forces representing the old dictatorial regime. A brutal military dictatorship took power crushing all dissent. In the face of international pressure, the Clinton administration brought about the return of President Aristide and the restoration of democratic rule. The old regime, however, never fully accepted the change in their circumstances.

The current situation emerged when President Aristide successfully ran for another term of office several years later. Problems emerged surrounding several contested seats in Parliament.

Ironically, even if these seats had been won by anti-Aristide forces, it would not have changed the balance of power in Haiti. Nevertheless, anti-Aristide forces cried "foul" and began a campaign to remove him from office. Interestingly, on these and many other challenges, the forces around President

Aristide were ultimately willing to compromise. Over the weekend, Aristide offered to share power with some of his detractors.

Compromise has not seemed to be the modus operandi of much of the opposition. Each time that President Aristide has agreed to compromises aimed at resolving the growing tension, the official opposition seems to raise the bar, demanding even more and greater concessions.

This situation is not assisted by President Aristide himself and many of the people around him. Policies, such as privatization, which were ultimately stopped, alienated sections of his base. Human rights abuses have been carried out while Aristide has been on watch, either directly or indirectly connected to his political party (Famni Lavalas). Some trade unionists have found themselves under attack by government forces, both detained and harassed. At a minimum, there are rogue elements associated with the government and party that are presently out of control. At worse, a blind eye is being turned to these abuses.

Aristide continues to enjoy considerable, if not majority support in Haiti. He continues to be seen as the champion of the dispossessed, the major reason for the support that he has gained not only in Haiti, but overseas as well.



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The other side — the opposition — simply wants Aristide out. They have now been joined, or have themselves instigated, armed attacks against the government in what may be a lead up to a full-scale civil war. It is hard to believe that such a war would be anything but extremely bloody.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary, the Bush administration has not taken a neutral position on developments. Its attitude has ranged from being chilly to being outright hostile to President Aristide.

As anyone who has followed events is keenly aware, the U.S. blocked efforts to release more than \$300 million in loans that Haiti desperately needed. The rationale — and if this is not ironic coming from the Bush administration, nothing is — concerned the election irregularities in the 2000 parliamentary elections.

Thus, rather than working with both sides to find a mutually acceptable solution to the heightening political crisis, the Bush administration has, through its actions, been encouraging the opposition to be obstinate. As long as the opposition can view the U.S. as a potential ally against Aristide, their resolve is strengthened to lengthen the crisis.

The only possible objective of such a course would be to provoke a military intervention by either the U.S.A. or the Organiza-

tion of American States. Under no condition should such an intervention be permitted.

Haiti has been the U.S.'s outhouse for nearly 200 years, subject to isolation, intimidation, invasions and domination, all because the African slaves on that land, under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, rose up and ousted the French colonizers. The Haitian people need to be encouraged to work out their issues themselves, and not based upon whether a U.S. bayonet is pointed at their collective throats.

If the Bush administration wishes to be helpful, they can begin by offering Haiti — the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere — a major foreign aid package to assist that country with infrastructure development, public health, education and economic construction. They could additionally offer unbiased mediation of the current crisis.

Secretary of State Powell has said that no coup should take place in Haiti, and that the U.S. government does not favor such a development. This is an excellent statement, though at odds with the Bush administration's multi-year hostile and finger-pointing stand toward President Aristide.

Let's hope, however, that Secretary Powell truly speaks for the administration on the issue this time. Let's also go one step further and insist that the U.S. keep its hands off of Haiti.

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Progressives should not leave presidential race

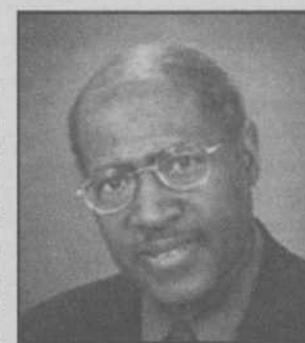
By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Right about now, the media is beginning to form a ring of legitimacy around John Kerry as the presumptive presidential nominee of the Democratic Party, a role they assume as the "gatekeepers" of electability. The flip side of this mission is to force everybody else out of the race by asking why don't they get out.

I remember 1984, when Jesse Jackson lost in New York and then lost in Pennsylvania and the media began the chant, "What does Jesse want?" They reminded everyone: "It's clear now that he can't win."

We decided then that we were not the traditional campaign for the Democratic nomination and that we had fought to represent the interests of the poor and locked out and that as such, we would determine what winning meant in relation to that cause.

This is an untraditional campaign in 2004 for everyone because the degree to which Democrats oppose George Bush staying in the White House is so intense that little else matters but to get him out. Since this position excludes a close scrutiny of the issues — even many Blacks argue that this is "too serious" to worry about Kerry's accountability to our issues — an



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other strategy of accountability should be adopted.

I propose that Howard Dean, Al Sharpton, and Dennis Kucinich stay in the race to the end and since they constitute the progressive wing of the group running for the Democratic nomination, they should form a "coalition of conscience" to accomplish the goals that all three of them have espoused.

Each has proposed changing the direction of the Democratic Party: advocating for the poor, homeless, and drug addicted, supporting a robust urban policy, standing up to Bush on the war in Iraq and making peace by bringing the boys and girls home from Iraq. They also advocate moving toward universal health care, rolling back all of the Bush tax cuts, repealing the "No Child Left Behind" education policy and many, many other things.

This coalition would pool their delegates; then try to gather others from those candidates who have dropped out of the race. They could then go to the convention with an "accountability delegation" to bargain collectively for a progressive agenda. This would give them the most important reason for staying in the race, practicing the politics of leverage so that the things they championed in the primary elections

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