

Alabama bridge path over troubled waters

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Edmund Pettus Bridge crosses over the Alabama River, spanning these ancient and troubled waters, providing a symbol of the triumph of Black people over the denial of the right to vote. I have visited the shrine of Bloody Sunday, the many other scenes of struggle and participated in the ceremonial marches to commemorate this event. What troubles me is whether the courage — exhibited by John Lewis, Hosea Williams and others of their young band of brothers and sisters who laid down the initial challenge to racist troopers snarling at them from mounted on horseback with clubs dangling at the ready — is still alive in those who are the heirs of that legacy.

In the movement, young people were our shock troops, our power. Have our young people today lost the courage that it took to confront the dangerous police on horseback, or have we failed to create the opportunities for the exploitation of the courage they possess.

The irony in this is that we strove to create a world where our young would not have to face the snarling racists and their billy clubs, but the dangers to the survival and progress of Black people are not yet laid to rest and still

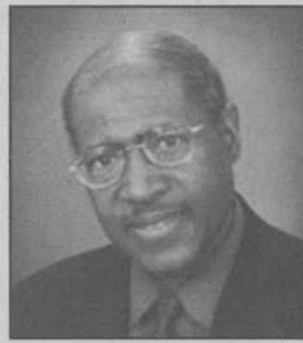
call forth their courage to confront them.

If they don't confront racist cops, we may want them to exercise their courage in a confrontation with the challenges of their self-development, to finish secondary school and college, to prepare themselves for the rigors of work, and to achieve excellence in their chosen profession whether mechanical or intellectual.

We may also want them to exercise their courage, on behalf of their community and its global environment, by adopting a set of African centric and humanistic values in the face of the terrible pressures to conform to a totally materialistic paradigm of life.

In short, we may also want, then, desperately need, them to engage in serious struggle with the forces that still continue to oppress our people, whether it is racism in policing, consumer affairs, housing, education, work or international affairs.

The logical extension of the legacy of Bloody Sunday is the arrival of more than 9,000 Black elected officials, made possible by the passage of the Voting Rights Act. I worry whether they have exhibited the kind



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their lives.

What is the relationship between the fact that Black people in Alabama and Mississippi are still the poorest in the nation, and yet, those states have the largest number of Black elected officials. Does it raise the question about how we are using that power?

I believe in the commemorations of the struggle at Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge, but I also think that we should use the legacy of courage, sacrifice and commitment exhibited on that day in 1964 as an ongoing object lesson of what it takes to confront racism in America.

I am afraid that we have locked too much of our civil rights legacy away into a ritualistic time-warp of cobweb infested memories that serve little useful purpose in the here and

now. What should Bloody Sunday mean today?

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I meet too many young people in my work whose parents have tried to steer them away from the meaning of the legacy of being Black in the world, rather than having them embrace its self-informing richness. And I find too many confused about self and their role in the world, having to find their own way to their identity and to the purpose of their lives.

I find too many Black officials having settled for a job — rather than remembering how the job was created — and having the courage to pull others up and into a positive space in their firm, their agency, their business or their productive environment (because too many are still afraid of "the man" — or the woman). Too many have forgotten the courage that it took, for others to prepare the world for them, and lack the decency to give back to others.

The memory of what was achieved at the Edmund Pettus Bridge is in our imagination, in our culture and history, to be used not merely as symbol, but as power for each generation.

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Haiti: One year later, country still worse for wear

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Can it be that it was one year ago that the duly elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was overthrown? This is the question that I have been asked in several recent interviews. At first glance, it appears to be something of a throw-away question, until one understands that there is a reason that it is hard to believe that one year has passed: in most media we hear nothing about Haiti.

The coup that overthrew President Aristide, a coup that had the clear blessing of the Bush administration, has been responsible for plunging Haiti into a nightmare of violent repression, stories of refugees' attempts at escape, government incompetence in the face of political and natural calamities (such as the tropical storm this past fall), all shrouded in a deafening silence in most U.S. media. With the exception of the occasional paragraph in out-of-the-way portions of international news sections in papers, and certainly with the noted exception of the coverage of Haiti offered by the Pacifica News Service, little is discussed about the devolution of Haiti since the coup.

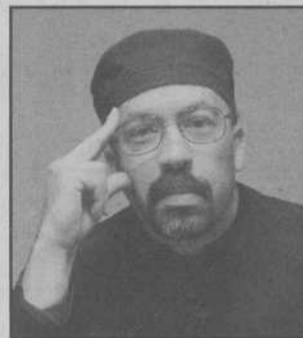
There really should be no surprise there. The reality of Haiti contradicts the fantasy that the Bush administration attempts to promote about its commitment to democracy

and human rights. Had the Bush administration truly been committed to democracy, then it would not have sanctioned a de facto blockade of the Aristide government, nor would it have turned a virtual blind eye as former right-wing Haitian military began their invasion of Haiti from their camps in the Dominican Republic during February 2004.

As such, Haiti is a situation that is best not discussed in polite company, at least as far as the Bush administration seems to be concerned.

Nevertheless, the Haitian people do not seem content to comply with the Bush administration's desire for silence. Despite overwhelming odds, supporters of President Aristide, as well as other believers in democracy, continue to protest and resist what is, in effect, a puppet regime that has no international legitimacy.

The tragedy of Haiti has been compounded by the role of the United Nations-sponsored Brazilian so-called peacekeeping force. When the Brazilians were deployed and the U.S. troops allegedly removed, there was a sigh of relief in both Haiti and among Haiti's friends around the world. There were very high expectations that the Brazilian troops would



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actually serve as peacekeepers, helping to bring an end to the death squads and other retaliatory violence perpetrated against Aristide supporters following the coup. Nothing of the kind has taken place. This was not a naive hope, given that Brazil's President Lula has been a critic of U.S. foreign policy and a supporter of more independent

paths of development. Sadly, the Brazilian troops are now broadly perceived as being an occupation army serving the interests of the Bush administration and their Haitian puppets. These troops have done little, if anything, to disarm the right-wing military death squads and other armed units, but have rather served more to block the supporters of democracy from mounting any real counter-offensive against the criminals currently occupying power.

One year after the coup, the same issues that confronted Haiti and its supporters then

confront it now. The U.S., despite the horrendous conditions in Haiti, refuses to open its doors to Haitian refugees, furthering its discriminatory policy towards Haitians in complete contrast to the policy towards Cubans. Haiti, rather than progressing toward democracy, has moved back toward an oligarchy, as such governed by a ruthless and rich clique.

Yet, with resistance percolating in Haiti, the courage of the supporters of democracy must be reinforced by friends outside of Haiti who refuse to permit the situation to remain quietly swept underneath the rug.

This means that a real movement to support Haitian democracy and sovereignty must emerge within the United States, one that is prepared to challenge the hypocrisy and belligerence of the Bush administration on foreign policy.

Silence in the face of the foreign policy arrogance of this administration means only one thing: complicity in the crimes that have been unfolding since February 29, 2004.

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Clingman

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marriages and abortions. Okay, now we're bringing it home to Black folks.

Bush and his brain, Karl Rove, slicked Black preachers and some of their flock to fall for the morality charade; of course, a little money on the side, or under the table, made things easier, I'm sure. The election was all about sin.

The crazy part is how they got us so caught up in the two sins they were railing against, and how we completely forgot the sins Bush

and his flock were committing and presiding over — sins such as lying, killing and coveting. Sin is sin, isn't it?

On those recently discovered tapes, Bush himself said, "...How can I differentiate sin?" Now that I have thought about it, the president may be a Bush-leaguer, but when it comes to Blacks playing on his team, we are strictly minor-leaguers.

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Darfur

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their fair share of the region's oil wealth. In retaliation, the government armed and authorized Arab militias to attack the rebels' villages, resulting in the deaths of about 70,000 men, women and children; the displacement of about 2 million Darfurians; and untold misery caused by rapes, tortures and the wholesale destruction of crops, animals and villages.

When world censure fell on its head and the United Nations stepped in, the government danced around the issue, ignoring ultimatums, breaking agreements and blaming the rebels.

But "the impact of the attacks on civilians shows that the use of military force was manifestly disproportionate to any threat posed by rebels," stated a January 2005 report

on Darfur by the International Commission of Inquiry. The report, which is the culmination of a three-month investigation into the situation in Darfur, stated that, while the yet persistent killings in Darfur do not constitute genocide, the situation poses a "threat to international peace and security."

Many actions on the parts of the Sudanese government, the Janjaweed and members of JEM and SLM/A are crimes against humanity, the report continued, and the perpetrators should be prosecuted.

"The prosecution by the [International Criminal Court] of persons allegedly responsible for the most serious crimes in Darfur would contribute to the restoration of peace in the region."

Zenitha Prince writes for the Afro Newspapers