

C O M M E N T A R Y

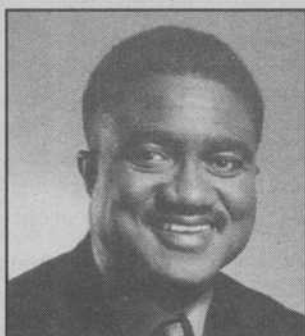
Americans should take pass on new passports

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In recent weeks, much of the public attention — at least that not taken up by the funerals of Pope John Paul II and Johnnie Cochran — has been focused on State Department plans to require Americans to present passports when traveling to and from Mexico, Canada, Bermuda and the Caribbean. Currently, one can enter and return from those nations on a driver's license or certified birth certificate.

Lost in the debate over whether the plan would harm tourism with our neighbors, especially those south of the border, is another provision to add a computer chip to passports, making them easier to read by custom officials and border control agents. That is a noble goal, but one fraught with problems. The 64-KB electronic chip, which would be embedded in a passport's back cover, is called RFID — radio frequency identification. Like the regular passport, it will contain the carrier's photograph, name, date, place of birth and passport number.

Using special readers, custom officials will be able to call up chip information on a computer screen. They can then use fa-



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cial-identification software and digital cameras to verify the identity of the passport holder.

Bill Scannell, the privacy advocate who launched a successful campaign against Delta Airlines over what he termed a misuse of passenger information, has initiated a similar campaign against

RFID. He has established a website to educate the public, www.rfidkills.com.

Scannell has circulated an e-mail stating, "Close up, the information broadcast from the RFID chip can be read by anyone with an inexpensive electronic reader. Farther away, the RFID can be activated enough to identify the passport holder as an American. From identify theft to identity death, an RFID-chipped U.S. passport means good news for the bad guys."

Several business travel groups have voiced similar concerns.

"American business travelers have gone to great length in traveling abroad to maintain a low profile," Kevin Mitchell, chairman of the Business Travel Coalition, said in a statement. "Most U.S. citizens do not expect their government to protect them while traveling on business in for-

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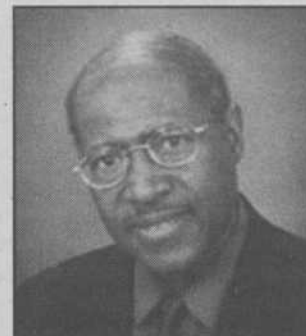
Support Kofi Annan: A tale of conflicting news

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The recent release of the Oil-for-Food report by the independent commission headed by Paul Volcker, looked into the issue of the mismanagement of the program by the United Nations and, specifically, whether Kofi Annan was culpable in a corrupt scheme involving his son.

Suspicions were rife in the U.S. that Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, arranged or influenced the award by the oil-for-food program with Swiss firm Cotecna Inspections with his son Kojo Annan as the middleman.

This program was set up after Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait as a sanctions measure to be administered by the United Nations. It would administer the sale of oil through contracts held by 4,000 firms, from which part of the proceeds would be sent to Saddam Hussein's government to allow it to purchase food. In fact, it grew to a \$64 billion program that reimbursed Hussein in a manner that allowed him to profit handsomely. And among the 4,000 firms, there arose the inevitable pattern of graft and corruption in the award of contracts and the handling of



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money through the UN.

Republicans in the House have wanted blood, calling for Kofi Annan to step down from his job. To this demand, Annan pronounced "Hell no" that he wouldn't go, and he felt within his right since the commission produced no proof that he was in any way liable for his son's re-

lationship with the European firm. So the headlines of most newspapers said that Kofi Annan was cleared of any wrong doing.

However, some news reporters have been asking me whether I believe that these demands came partially because of Kofi Annan's race. While I do not believe that the major reason was race, the fact that Kofi is Black is a convenient motivation for many conservatives to disbelieve in his capability to manage the United Nations.

The United Nations has long been a sore point to conservatives in the U.S.—and especially so when it does not clearly facilitate American foreign policy. George Bush's invasion of Iraq was not sanctioned by Kofi Annan, and, from that moment, he became one of the enemies.

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The fate of the Black union—Ominous, paradoxical

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In February 2005, once again, we learned about the State of the Black Union. Now we know the condition, the position, the status, and the circumstances of Black people. With that in mind, let's now look at the Fate of the Black Union. Let's look at our destiny, our chances, our luck and our lot. Knowing the State of our Union, and not being fully engaged in doing something to improve it, logically suggests a strong need for us to know the Fate of our Union.

Union? That word denotes coalition, alliance, harmony, accord, unity, amalgamation, coming together and unification. Union? Doesn't that also connote one-for-all and all-for-one? Wouldn't you think that for Black folks the word, "Union," would be used for more than just its marquee value? I sure do, but it sounds good, doesn't it? And you know how we love hype. Is hype short for hypothesis?

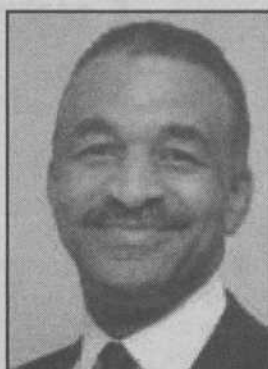
Anyway, what about our fate? I assert that our fate is inextricably attached to our present state. And judging from what I have seen and heard over the past five years about the state of Black men, Black children, Black families, Black churches, and Black folks in general, our fate is all but sealed. Why? Because all we seem to do is talk about our state; it seems to me that anytime prominent, educated, intelligent, national leaders get together for two days to discuss the state of Black folks, there should be some immediate action steps set forth for the people to follow,

that is, unless, as the President always says, "The State of the Union is secure!" Or, "strong," or "better than ever," or whatever lie he decides to tell us every January.

For years now, we have heard Black "leaders" give numerous pronouncements regarding our condition and offer absolutely no direction, no action steps and, thus, no positive results from their discussion of the state of our union. Seems to me they are wasting their talents by just getting together on television to discuss our issues and then leave without doing anything about those issues except making plans for the next year's discussion. Surely all of our Black intellectuals can come up with something we foot soldiers can do to improve our lot. We are listening.

We are waiting. (Where is Harold Cruse when we need him most?)

Here's what we know: Black families have been all but destroyed; Black children are being mis-educated and taught to grow up and work for the children of those who are teaching them; Black people have the highest infant mortality rate; Black women have the highest increase in HIV/AIDS; Black men are the least employed; Black men — and women — occupy most of the prison cells in this country; Black people have the lowest home ownership rate in this country and the worst housing; Black people have



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the fewest businesses per capita; Black families' median net worth is ten times lower than White families; Black politicians have no real "power" in government; Black businesses have the lowest annual revenues; and Black people top the list of victims of police brutality.

What else do we know? Black people attend church services more than other groups;

Black congregations build multi-million dollar edifices; Black people rank among the highest consumers of travel and tourism; Black people spend billions to attend music festivals, football games, and conventions; Black people earn more than \$750 billion per year; Black people have accumulated trillions of dollars in intellectual resources; Black people have risen to the highest heights in corporate America; Black people earn billions in entertainment and athletics; Black people have thousands of elected officials and comprise a huge voting bloc; Black people are survivors, and have been since we were brought to this country; Black people have a heritage of community, entrepreneurship and self-help; Black people, throughout recent history, have shown what we can do when we work together in support of one another.

That's the state of our union. Now, what is the fate of the Black union? Despite the tremendous resources and talents we have been blessed to accumulate, Black folks are

busy squandering them at a mind-boggling rate. Some Black business executives get to the top and all of a sudden forget about the rest of us; some Black politicians get elected and instantly become invisible when it comes to Black issues; some Black entertainers and athletes are so busy seeking the approval of others that they forget about their own; some Black ministers are more interested in stadium-sized church buildings than they are in helping those who sit in those buildings every week; and some of our Black intellectuals are content with giving speeches rather than writing strategies to help Black people move forward.

The fate of the Black union ominously awaits us. It is paradoxical that we have so much and yet do so little with it.

Many of our leaders are ensconced in vying to see who is the most im-po'-tent, I mean important, and have no time to serve anyone but themselves — and their former masters, of course.

Many of our "everyday people" are so busy racing the rats and spending what we have on "nonsense," as Maria Stewart said. We complain about other folks' businesses being in our neighborhoods, but we don't start our own businesses, and we refuse to make the sacrifices necessary to enhance our feeble economic position. The State of the Black Union is in our minds; the Fate of the Black Union is in our hands.

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