

# Leadership lacking on Katrina response

By Ron Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

What is occurring before our very eyes is a stark reminder that what Kanye West said about George Bush, his not caring about Black people, is true of the American political system as a whole at this moment in history. Maybe you watched, as I did, the arrogance with which some Black people from New Orleans were treated who testified before Rep. Tom Davis' committee about what they experienced during the hurricane and the botched relief efforts.

This display of incredulity on the part of some member of Congress that sat on the committee illustrated that they may as well live on another planet when it comes to their understanding of the ill-treatment that is meted out to Black people every day of their lives. The only other explanation for such resistance to the telling the truth of these horrible experiences in such vivid terms is that they were embarrassed that such things happened inside the United States when they are attempting to strike a pose as the icon of democracy to other people around the globe.

Thus, "Moma D" and others testified about Black people being held at bay with guns aimed at them by police and the National Guard; that they experienced concentration camp-like conditions in the Superdome; that racist epithets were hurled

at them; and that, in fact, they were treated like the enemy in their own city. It seems not to matter whether they were Phi Beta Kappas, college-educated, land-owner, working, tax-paying, or all of the other criteria that conservatives lay down when they are challenging Black people to be like them. It only seemed to matter that they were Black.

This fact, that the victims were predominantly Black, seems to figure into another disaster in the making. It is that this session of Congress will end and no legislation will have been passed to deal with the disaster.

No leadership for an urgent attention to this crisis can be found, outside of the action taken by the Congressional Black Caucus that put together a package of legislation that represented all 42 members. No leadership in the White House is available. In fact, the word is that Bush has not decided whether the federal government will even pay for the cleanup. That is to say, he has not decided whether to stop trying to shore up his falling rating by trying to pump up the war in Iraq as a "success" long enough to be responsible about the American Gulf.

The insurance companies that were supposed to insure homes against floods and high



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Engineers have not decided whether to rebuild the levees.

What? It is only six to eight months before the hurricane season will be upon that region again, and, if the levees cannot be strengthened in that time, people face the prospect of another season of misery. Thus, for the decision to languish about whether the federal government will take responsibility for the reconstruction — even for the question to be raised about who will pay — is a massive rejection of responsibility, so deep and historically incomprehensible that it cries out, why.

Could the answer be that Black people are the worst victims? Where is the leadership? The newspapers show Bush exercising leadership on making tax cuts permanent, just now figuring out how to take money out of the treasury that will surely be needed for

winds are jumping ship and, in any case, they will only cover a portion of a small percent of the damage. The nature of the damage, for anyone who has seen even a little, is so vast that it will take a Marshall Plan-size project of the federal government to address the reconstruction. But, word is that the Department of Defense and the Corps of

rebuilding the American gulf. We should look the size of this abdication of responsibility in the face right now. By doing so, we help our leaders and our friends to take off the blinders and come to the conclusion I have reached: This issue will have to be forced onto the national agenda by direct action.

As a policy analyst, I believed, and have written, that Hurricane Katrina forced open the doors of the house of poverty and let all come in to see that the social policies of the last two decades are not working. I had hoped that the discussion about poverty would become nationalized and made credible by this act and that possibly new policies might be entertained. But I also understood the determination of White nationalists to succeed with their agenda, which meant that they would find a way to submerge the human needs under the rubble of materialism and racial dominance.

They have been very successful, and they have had the assistance of the media, as the shift of American attention moves on to shopping sprees and parties celebrating Christmas. We shouldn't feel much like celebrating this Christmas. But the season of Martin Luther King Jr. is coming and we should use it to figure out how to move this agenda back onto the national stage.

Ron Walters is the director of the African-American Leadership Institute.

## African-Americans, Africans in U.S. must unite

By Bill Fletcher Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It is time to begin a dialogue between non-immigrant African-Americans, and people of African descent who migrate to the USA. This dialogue is a long time coming and very badly needed. The continuing misunderstandings that emerge between the groups undermine our ability to act collectively and to cooperate on common goals. As such, we can be played against one another.

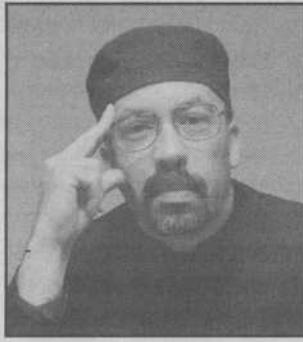
If we think of African-Americans as those who are the descendants of people brought to the U.S. in chains between 1619 and the mid 19th Century, we are beginning with the wrong assumption. Even prior to the relatively recent wave of immigrants from Africa and from parts of Latin America, "African-Americans" as a group were never homogenous. There were, of course, those who were brought here beginning in the 1600s, most of whom remained in indentured servitude and later slavery, a minority achieving freedom.

Yet, in the early 1800s, another African

population came to the U.S. but under very different circumstances.

Cape Verdeans, from then Portuguese-controlled Cape Verde islands (an archipelago roughly 500 miles west of Senegal), migrated to the U.S. as fisherman, whalers (and eventually bringing with them their families). Their identity, for the 19th Century and much of the 20th Century was linked to both Portuguese colonialism and a very different experience as Black people in the U.S. Yet, over time, Cape Verdeans began to influence and penetrate into the evolving African-American population. Jazz artist Horace Silver (actually Silva), for instance, was for many years seen as simply another Black artist, with his Cape Verdean heritage completely ignored. Yet, he was emblematic of so many other Cape Verdeans who helped to change what it meant to be an African-American.

By the early 20th Century, immigration from the West Indies began to increase and with it additional changes in Black America. While there have been and remain tension between West Indian immigrants and non-



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immigrant African-Americans, the contributions of West Indians to what it means to be an African-American are overwhelming. Great political leaders, including Marcus Garvey, but also the recently deceased Shirley Chisholm, altered what it meant to be African-American. Indeed, over the 20th Century, the merging of the West Indian immigrant

communities and traditional African-American communities brought with it cultural, political and linguistic developments that would have been nearly inconceivable 100 years ago.

So, the lesson? Pure and simple, there are no pure and simple African-Americans. We are constantly undergoing changes as people from different parts of the African world enter the U.S. The political, economic and cultural realities of the homelands of the immigrants differ vastly from what they encounter in the U.S. In many cases, particularly when these immigrants originate in Black-majority lands, the demographics and racial politics of the U.S. do not make a great degree of sense. Yet, in time, irrespective of

intention, they too merge with the great river of Black America.

None of this is to deny the national and cultural identities of immigrants of African descent. Rather, we must all acknowledge that the historical lesson seems to indicate that over the course of one or two generations, immigrants of African descent (whether from the Caribbean, Africa, or Latin America) come to play an important part in defining what it means to be an African-American.

If we can arrive at such a conclusion, we must then talk. Immigrant and non-immigrant organizations of people of African descent need to, quite literally, sit down and begin to educate one another. We must, in other words, commence a dialogue toward greater mutual understanding.

Through such a dialogue we cannot only get a better understanding of how to work together here in this country. Those of us from the U.S. can get a better understanding of a much broader world that does not end at the borders of the USA. Perhaps with such a mutual understanding, we can reassert our role in changing that world.

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### Clingman

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take Carter G. Woodson's advice to heart: "We must have servant leaders." And, if you are serious, you have no choice but to change your behavior, economically, politically and socially, in a radical way, if you truly are playing to win.

If you are serious, grab somebody of like mind and start doing the things that will lead us to economic freedom. If you are serious, throw off the old paradigm of Black leadership. If you are serious, be a leader, not a lemming.

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in dissent, in race cases where his decisions have disproportionately affected African-Americans," said Rep. Mel Watt, D-N.C., the caucus chairman.

"We are troubled by what appears to be a very conservative judicial philosophy that seems greatly at odds with much of 20th century constitutional jurisprudence," Watt said.

A group of Democratic House women also planned to announce their opposition to Alito on Thursday, along with the National Women's Law Center.

On Wednesday, the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, urged the Justice Department to release additional documents on Alito's government career.

The department has made public thousands of documents from Alito's career as a government lawyer and an appeals court judge, but some documents have been withheld using exemptions to the Freedom of Information Act, Leahy said.

"The Senate, in the exercise of its constitutional function of advice and consent for

presidential nominations, is not subject to those exceptions," Leahy said. "Nevertheless, in the interest of expediting this matter and avoiding any need for delaying our proceedings, we request that you immediately supplement the material already provided."

Leahy wants the department to review the documents in question, determine why they were withheld and whether they can be given in whole or in part to just the committee's senators.

Republicans want a confirmation vote for Alito by Jan. 20.