

Day of Absence rekindles Civil Rights

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It's no secret that oppressed groups in the United States and abroad — including women, the physically challenged, gays and lesbians and Latinos, among others — have borrowed the tactics of the modern Civil Rights Movement to advance their cause. And most groups are quick to acknowledge that debt to Black America.

But Monday's "Day of Absence" by Latinos took it to a new level. "Day of Absence" was the title of a 1965 play by Douglas Turner Ward, founder and artistic director of the Negro Ensemble Company. The play, set in a small community in the South, explores what would happen if all of the town's Black disappeared for a day.

So when I heard Hispanics discussing "a day of absence," I realized that they had not only studied the Civil Rights Movement, they had paid attention to every detail. Evidently, they know about a play that many African-Americans are unfamiliar with. I ain't mad at 'em, as we like to say, but I am impressed that they had really done their homework.

Initially, Monday was to be a day that Hispanics boycotted work, stayed out of school and refused to go shopping in order show the importance of Hispanics to the American economy. However, that was modified be-

cause of dissent over whether undocumented workers would risk losing their jobs and keeping students out of school would send the wrong message.

The League of United Latin Americans or LULAC, one of the key organizers, helped re-vamp the effort.

"We are asking individuals to keep from spending a penny that day," LULAC National President Hector M. Flores said in a statement. "We are also asking students to stay in school on that day and not make any purchases. We do not want children out of school or people missing work without permission from their employers. We ask that people be disciplined and responsible and to show our respect, yet, make a clear statement."

Monday was also International Workers Day, a holiday that began in the 1880s. Flores said it is celebrated in every country except the U.S., Canada and South Africa.

In making the case for a sensitive immigration policy, Latino leaders point to a UCLA study by Raul Hinojosa that shows the combined value of undocumented immigrants' labor, stimulus to the economy and taxes exceeds \$890 billion a year. According



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to the study, those immigrants use only \$43 billion in public services annually, most of it in education and emergency care.

"Undocumented immigrants contribute about \$850 billion more per year than they cost — a huge net gain for the United States," said Brent Wilkes, national executive director of LULAC. "It's about time that we provide a legal avenue for them to come here in recognition of their tremendous contributions to our country."

While Monday's modified "day of absence" was met with mixed results, there is no doubt that Latino street demonstrations in more than 75 cities on April 10 showed that old civil rights tactics can still be effective. I emphasize the word can. Sadly, on the same day at least 500,000 were marching in Los Angeles, less than 10,000 — possibly less than 5,000 — African-Americans were marching in New Orleans to protect the voting rights of displaced residents.

Even with Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and the heads of the NAACP and the National Urban League present, the turnout was a disappointment. If we can't do any better than that, it's time for Act II.

I don't have all of the answers and don't know what should constitute Act II. That should be a community decision. But I do know what it should not be; it should not be an over reliance on press conferences and street demonstrations. We shouldn't rule demonstrations out, but we should use them more sparingly. It's time to develop some different approaches. Let's face it: There is an eagerness on the part of many to focus on the growing Hispanic population and ignore the long-standing needs that Blacks are entitled to. It is our job, however, to stand up and be counted. This is not about being the flavor of the month, but, as Dr. Martin Luther King put it, it's about collecting on the bounced check, marked insufficient funds, that our nation has given its Black citizens.

As we attempt to collect on this overdue check, I guess Act II means not waiting on another Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins, Huey P. Newton or Stokely Carmichael. Act II can begin by doing what we can do as individuals and groups to uplift the people who need it most. Sometimes that might be through organized civil rights groups, and at other times, it may mean an individual act. Whatever we do, we can't afford to be absent from the struggle.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.

Lies about WMD continue to imperil U.S., Iraq

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Someone said, "Get all the fools on your side and you can be elected to anything."

More and more, as I watch and listen to the "Resident," I am convinced that there must be a lot of fools who vote. Don't misunderstand; a fool is not necessarily someone who is uninformed or uneducated. Remember our grandparents calling people, "Educated fools?"

The evidence abounds that this country has an abundance of fools, many of whom are well educated, wealthy, and refined, but continue to support the and the ridiculous things he says and does.

First of all, let's call it like it is.

The Resident is a liar. Rumsfeld is a liar. Cheney is a liar, and Condoleezza Rice is a liar. No need to recount all the lies they have told; if you have paid just a little attention to

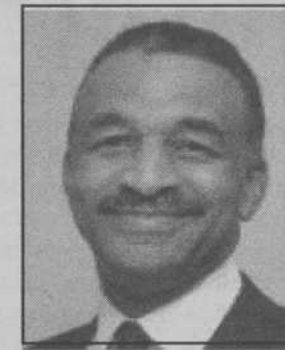
them you know they are all liars. And let's not use euphemisms like "misspoken words," "misinterpretations," and "taken out of context."

No, they are plain and simple lies, and the folks running this country are plain and simple liars.

It would require reams of paper to cite all of the problems caused by these liars and the lies they have told — and continue to tell. Remarkably, most of us know they are lying, but we refuse to call them on it.

Consequently, we find ourselves in a quagmire in Iraq, preparing for an unprecedented long-term presence in that country by building a \$1 billion Embassy, the largest in the world. Osama Bin Laden?

The president says, "I don't know where



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he is; I really don't spend a lot of time on [looking for him]."

Say what?

Our secretaries of defense and state fly around the world, at our expense, arrogantly threatening other countries, and lying through their teeth about how well things are going in Iraq. Our "Vice" Resident is one who knows where, doing who knows what, raking in money (What was it? A \$1.8 million tax refund?) from a company with which he said he has no financial interests — Halliburton.

We have a new press secretary, one who now has to defend the policies of a guy he has trashed in the past. Talk about waffling; it is amazing what some people will do for politics. We have a lackluster, do nothing,

unaccountable Congress that hardly ever works and sits idly by while the Resident lies, defies, and plays them like a bunch of idiots.

Anyone who votes for a congressional representative, a senator or a governor who supports the current resident of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue should be given at least 30 days in jail. But like I said, get all the fools — and I would add, all the liars on your side — and you can be elected to any office.

Iraq is draining our treasury and running up our debt, and the Resident wants even more money thrown into this bottomless pit, despite the suffering that continues in New Orleans where he rolls up his sleeves, dons a tool apron, drives a nail or two, and expects us to be impressed by his "compassion."

Nearly a half-trillion dollars spent in Iraq, record oil prices, gas pump shock and awe, indictments of high-level officials and CEOs,

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ing not to exercise.

More specifically for African-Americans, who will be the hardest hit if the illegal aliens win this battle? Where is the Congressional Black Caucus? Why haven't they come out with a report that provides information or analysis on the possible effects of the massive, uncontrolled influx of cheap, low skilled labor on Black wage and employment rates?

Why haven't they told us that according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (the nation's report card) approximately 1.5 million native-born Americans with a high school diploma or less left the workforce during the past five years? During the same period, the number of immigrants in the workforce (legal and illegal) with high school diplomas or less increased by almost the same number — 1.6 million, based on a study by the Center of Immigration Studies. While the study asserts that un-

skilled foreign-born workers have displaced native-born workers at a ratio of 1 to 1, it is unsupportable at this time. The examined data does target and assess a number of other factors that raise urgent questions for a society coping with alarming unemployment rates among unskilled Blacks.

A recent Pew Research poll shows that 52 percent of Blacks maintain that illegal immigration has led to the loss of too many lower paying jobs and 51 percent of those polled said the country could not afford more legal immigration. But who's listening?

The worst may be yet to come. Only 25 percent of Black 17-year-olds read as well as the average White 17-year-old; nearly 90 percent of Black 17-year-olds score below the average White 17-year-olds in math; more than 90 percent of Black students score below Whites in science, and the average Black high school graduate has the academic proficiency of the average White eighth grader.

These figures suggest that over the next

several years a significant percentage of Black workers are likely to be unskilled or low skilled and they will be competing against a swiftly expanding cohort of illegal aliens.

Let me close by focusing on two points. The first being that there has been no public deliberation regarding the impact that immigration reforms contemplated by Congress will have on low-skilled American workers. The public deserves a thorough airing of the possibilities before Congress passes any bill that may aggravate both the displacement of low-skilled American workers and the racial divide in employment. Contact your Congressional representatives and demand this discussion.

The second is that as Blacks, while we will be the hardest hit by immigration reform, we are to blame.

We have missed several opportunities to advance our agenda and our people. We need to improve our families and their lack of edu-

cation so that they can rise above menial labor. No full-grown man should be making minimum wage. Also, we can't blame George Bush or anyone else that we want to blame.

We fought for civil rights and we got them; we fought for opportunity and it was provided, but what have we done with it? How have we capitalized on it?

The facts are this, no one has caused us to allow our children to know the words to every rap song but not know their math and English but US, no one has caused us to have an over 50 percent high school drop out rate but US, no one has caused us to have over 50 percent of our Black children born out of wedlock but US, and no one has caused us to have the high Black on Black crime in this country but US.

So as a people, we need to wake up, accept responsibility for our failures, and rise up now to make a difference like we never have before. Because if we don't, as a people we are doomed.