

# Maryland assembly remorseful for slavery

By Ron Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

By a vote of 130 to 6, the Maryland House of Assembly has just passed a bill expressing its "profound regret" for the role that the State of Maryland played in the crime of slavery.

Having testified at the invitation of Rep. Michael Vaughn in the House and the bill's sponsor, Sen. Nathaniel Exum, in the Senate, I also witnessed a representative of Jews who suffered the Holocaust during World War II. They asked the Assembly to urge payment of reparations by German companies.

Like U.S. Rep. John Conyers who has proposed H.R. 40 in the U.S. Congress for several years, Maryland's Senator Exum should be applauded for having been persistent with this bill.

But H.R. 40 has not moved in the U.S. House of Representatives, but a new bill, H.R. 121, has been introduced urging Japan to apologize for its treatment of the "comfort women" during World War II.

The Maryland measure was no doubt made somewhat easier by the fact that its neighbor, the Virginia Assembly, last month also passed a measure of "profound regret" for slavery.

I tend to believe that Virginia did this in light of its commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the establishment of the

Jamestown Colony. However, they could not invite hundreds of thousands of people to visit the Jamestown Colony this year and not, at the same time, recognize that a few years after settling Jamestown, African "indentured servants" arrived there in 1619 and by the 1640s they were enslaved for life in both Virginia and Maryland.

In arguments with the press over this bill, I was confronted with the view that this expression of regret was meaningless, a view given to them by some Blacks who wanted immediate reparations rather than an apology, and by some legislators who did not want its passage at all.

As a long time advocate for reparations and the author of a new book in progress due in January on this subject, I understand the perspective that when it comes to slavery, "sorry is not enough."

But I also understand the legislative process and the conditioning that it often takes to bring lawmakers along on an issue they would otherwise not instantly support. So, I would hope that this is just a first step, that as it follows what was done in Virginia, it



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leads to something in another state, such as Missouri and Georgia that are considering similar legislation. And what if other states follow them and a snowball begins to roll that could not stop just with statements of regret or an apology, kicking off a new national discussion about the role of slavery in modern American life?

Slavery is still more than a memory. The other day, I attended a ceremony at Howard University, marking the 200th anniversary of the elimination of the slave trade by Britain.

It was co-sponsored by the Caribbean and African diplomatic services in Washington, D.C.

The British government observed this event last year, and Tony Blair issued a statement much short of even regret, that simply noted that he was sorry that this unfortunate event happened.

At the same time the Church of England expressed an apology for its role in slavery and, more recently, the second most senior Bishop of the Church, the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu said that Blair needed to issue a formal apology.

At the Howard event, Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. was the keynote speaker, and he passed on to me a picture from the front page of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* of Saturday, February 10. It was an image of Black inmates inside the Richmond, Va., city jail. All were stripped to the waist, bearing their half-naked bodies, crowded together in a space that resembled the hull of a modern day slave ship.

It was a picture that brings you quickly to the reality of the linkage between then and now, not only in the power of the image, but in the knowledge that the jails in Virginia and Maryland were vital parts of a system strikingly similar to that of slavery that lasted long into the 20th century.

Ironically, this linkage between past and present was the subject of a dialogue featured in another recent *Times-Dispatch* story, between young Black high school students in Richmond and in Liverpool, England, the British city that slavery made.

One hopes that, eventually, regrets for slavery leads to reparations and, perhaps, racial reparations. So, although sorry is not enough, it is a beginning.

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# Bush can't get his enemies straight: Iran or Iraq?

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Colin Powell ominously displayed the aerial views of dangerous chemicals and biological weapons in Iraq. George and Condi spoke to us about "mushroom" clouds and the yellow cake purchase from Niger. Cheney and all the PNAC boys sounded the alarm about WMD, and it was on! We were at war in Iraq.

Since that time, the reason for going to war has changed so many times it's ridiculous. From U.S. dollar hegemony (Petrodollars if you will), to control of the oil in the region, to Saddam killed his own people, to liberation of the Iraqi people. All have been offered as reasons for this stupid war. But now, I know why we are there in Iraq; it was all due to a spelling error.

I can hear the conversation now between George Bush and Dick Cheney, of course, with Condi and Karl lingering near. "Hey, Dick, tell me again what our reason is for starting a new war with Iran," George asks.

"If we have told you once, George, we have told you a million times. Iran is the real

culprit in the war on terror; it poses the greatest threat to us. Haven't you been watching Sean Hannity, Glen Beck and our other buddies on the news? Haven't I told you to watch Fox News at least once a day?"

Condi chimes in, "George, I have told you what to say and when to say it as well. What's wrong with you? Why is your attention span so short?"

George responds, I don't know, Condi; I just seem to get distracted so easily, you know, this is hard work, hard work. But let me get this straight: our greatest threat is Iran not Iraq, right?"

George thumps the side of head like the man in the V-8 commercial and says, "Now I get it! It's that darned 'Q' that got me confused. I should have put an 'N' in there instead of that darned 'Q.' What was I thinking?"

"Back in 2002, when we were talking about going to war, I kept thinking it was Iraq,



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and I kept writing Iraq in my notes. Now you are telling me that Iran is the real threat? I'm sorry; I have been misspelling it all this time," George laments. "It's that darn 'Q' — Iraq, Iran, this is so confusing. How will I ever explain why we wasted — that's right, I said 'wasted' — more than 3,000 soldiers and maimed 30,000 others, all because of a stupid

'Q'?" Karl responds in exasperation, "That's all right, George, we'll take care of it, just like we always have. The American people bought the WMD story and all the other reasons we gave them, and they will understand that you simply made a spelling error and ordered the destruction of Iraq rather than Iran." Cheney interjects.

"The more we tell them Iran is our greatest threat and the place we should be worried about, the more we scare them out of their wits about nuclear weapons being developed over there, the easier it will be for us to go to war with Iran."

"That's right!" George responds. "Those people are not even as smart as I am; they will believe anything we tell them, at least they used to. Do you really think they will buy it this time, Dick?"

"No problem, George, we'll handle it. After all, it's time we build your legacy. I can see it now, George W. Bush, the Greatest War President in American History. Even though you went into Iraq by mistake, because of a simple spelling error, it was an honest mistake. Now you have the opportunity to fight two major wars at the same time. Wow! What other President can claim to have done that?"

"Thanks, guys. You're the best team a president could ever have. You all are doin' a heck of a job," Bush says, as he breathes a sigh of relief.

The new campaign has begun. We are being told on a daily basis, many times over, that Iran is the country we must fear as we seek control of the so-called Middle East. It's Iran that has killed the most Americans prior to 9/11; Iran that poses a nuclear threat; Iran that funds the terrorists. It's now Iran, stupid!

But, wait. Didn't the folks who flew the planes into the World Trade Center come from Saudi Arabia? Hasn't it been proven that the Saudis have funneled money to fund terrorists? Wasn't it Saudis that were allowed to leave the country by airplane when no one else was allowed to fly after 9/11? Oh yes, I forgot; the Saudi Royal Family is friends with the Bush Royal Family. Sorry for being so naive.

Okay, try this one. Wasn't Osama Bin Laden the one who ordered the WTC and Pentagon destruction? Wasn't he living in some cave in Afghanistan, where we went prior to going into Iraq? Whatever happened to Bin Laden anyway? Oh well, as Yul Brynner said in the "King and I": "It's a puzzlement."

But at least we have a plausible reason for our impending war with Iran: Bush couldn't spell it, and he ordered troops into to Iraq instead.

Back to the conversation. Condi sighs, "The Iraq war was all a huge mistake. Much like Dan Quayle could not spell 'potato,' George, you couldn't spell Iran."

Cheney, in support of his President says, "That darned 'Q' kept getting in his way, but what a difference one letter can make, huh? Halliburton made tons of money; I'm set for life!" Bush boyishly chimes in, "I may not be able to spell, but Saddam did try to kill my daddy!"

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## Alford

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D.C., we are settling for 1 percent.

It is time to turn the heat up, and we all must chant our displeasure and utilize the power of our vote to address this matter.

As of March 15, Black-owned firms account for 112 companies participating as prime contractors in the Gulf rebuilding for an amount that just exceeds \$308 million. That amounts to about 1 percent of the total.

Again, do we settle for this? If you want to see just which companies are participating and exactly what states they actually reside in, just go to the National Black Chamber of Commerce website and review it or download the information. It took months to get this data, and it came lumped with all

other data (585 pages). After a couple of days, we were able to sift out the Black business participation.

Go to [www.nationalbcc.org](http://www.nationalbcc.org) and view the data on the homepage.

If you know any of the business owners, please call and congratulate them. What they are doing is historical but don't forget that right now it should be considered remedial. We must quickly build from there and get into double-digit percentages as soon as possible.

Only then can we say that the rebuilding is taking form. It must include us and 1 percent is certainly not enough.

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