

# Conflict in Western Sahara needs attention

By Bill Fletcher Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

An occupation; settlers; a "security wall"; an indigenous resistance: It almost sounds like Palestine, but it is the Western Sahara, officially known by 80 countries as the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic.

Located on the northwest corner of Africa, south of Morocco, West of Algeria, and north (and west) of Mauritania, the Western Sahara resembles a slice of cake. In many ways it has — having been seized by the Spanish in 1884 after the notorious Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 — divided up the African continent between European rapists.

Although the indigenous people, known as the Saharawis, consistently resisted Spanish rule, in the 1970s during the twilight of the right-wing dictatorship of Francisco Franco in Spain, a new movement emerged among the Saharawis demanding independence.

Known by its acronym as POLISARIO — in French, Frente Popular para Liberacion de Saguia el Hamra y Rio de Oro or, in English,

Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro — the movement began a guerrilla war; first against Spain, and later against the Mauritians and Moroccans, the latter two countries claiming the territory as their own.

Though a peace agreement was signed between POLISARIO and Mauritania, the Moroccans remained steadfast in their insistence on controlling the Western Sahara going so far as to send in more than 300,000 Moroccan civilians to settle and change the population demographics. Additionally the Moroccans built a so-called security wall to divide the country and stop attacks by POLISARIO.

In the early 1990s, POLISARIO agreed to a cease fire, and most independent observers have concurred that they have upheld their side. Morocco, on the other hand, has participated in ceasefire violations and repres-



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sion in the territory it controls. Morocco has also repeatedly undermined efforts at a mediated settlement, resulting in former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker resigning in frustration from his position as special United Nations envoy for the Western Sahara where he was attempting to broker an agreement.

This past summer, Morocco suggested that the Western Sahara should be an autonomous province of Morocco. Ignoring global demands for Saharawi self-determination and the significant international recognition of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic as the legitimate government of the people and territory of that land, Morocco took this audacious stand, as if it were seizing the moral high ground.

Further, and quite cynically, the Moroccan government maneuvered to portray the POLISARIO as terrorists in order to gather more brownie points in the so-called war

against terrorism.

Instead of rejecting the Moroccan proposal for the manipulation that it represents, a significant number of Republican and Democratic politicians embraced it, as if it were legitimate. Much as President Bush took on the "role" of the alleged spokesperson for the Palestinian people, some members of both the Democratic and Republican parties seem to have stepped away from the role of attempting to broker a settlement of this decades-old conflict and now view themselves as the voices of the Saharawi people.

The Saharawi people deserve self-determination. In fact, the United Nations has insisted upon it. The least the USA can do is to pressure its allies in Morocco to respect international law and agreements.

This, however, becomes slightly difficult when the USA reserves for itself the right to decide who is telling the truth, and whose stand is just.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is a labor and international activist and immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum.

# We owe big debt to Haiti for anti-slavery efforts

By Harry C. Alford  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Today Haiti is looked at as a struggling island filled with poverty and conflict. It truly gets labeled with the "Third World" stereotype. Actually, the history of Haiti is rich and shows that it was actually the home of some of the greatest heroes in the fight to end western hemisphere slavery. Haiti caused the break up of the worst form of slavery in the history of the world.

This island with the largest Black population in the Caribbean has immense economic challenges. They were caused by design as a form of payback by the Eurocentric powers that be. Haitians put Europe and the "First World" conquerors into an economic tailspin and caused them to redress their whole strategy for world domination.

There were five principles in the slave trade and the conquest of the western hemisphere: Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands were the monsters that constructed a trail of blood and despair for people of Africa.

While they murdered and forcibly transported millions of Blacks from their land on

the African continent, they also performed an organized version of genocide on the indigenous people of the new world. They replaced that potential labor force with the Africans they brought in between the years 1525 and 1862. It was worse than any other horror known to world history.

France laid claim to Haiti, which was known at that time as Saint Domingue. The French were offering aid to the American colonies that were engaged in their fight for independence with the British. One adventure was the lending of Black Haitian slaves in 1779 to fight as a military force against the British in the Savannah, Ga., area. The French, British and American colonists didn't know it, but that event would be the catalyst that would eventually change the world.

This adventure taught the Haitian survivors a great lesson: The European military machines are vulnerable and could be defeated with proper planning. When they re-



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turned to Haiti, they spread that information amongst the slave populace and the planning began. In 1791, the historical slave revolt in Haiti began. It lasted until 1804.

The first hero in this 13-year struggle was Toussaint L'Ouverture. He organized these slaves into a fierce, fighting force that surprised the French war machine time

and time again. It soon became clear to all of Europe that France was loosing this conflict. In 1798, the British sent an expeditionary force to help the French out. They too would face defeat and become embarrassed.

What was even scarier, the Haitian rebels organized an invasion of Santo Domingo in neighboring Dominican Republic and defeated Polish mercenaries and set the slaves free there. Europe saw this as a cancer beginning to spread. They pressured France to get serious about this and end it. Through counter intelligence, Gen. L'Ouverture was betrayed and captured by the French. He was sent to a prison in France and never heard

from again. However, the organized Haitians didn't miss a beat as Jean Jacques Dessalines became their new revolutionary leader.

Bonaparte Napoleon, Emperor of the French Empire, decided to get serious. He sent a formidable force of his best troops and top officers to crush this rising rebellion. To the horror of the whole European military establishment, the French troops were soundly defeated; 40 percent of their best officers were now dead. It was so bad that it threw France into economic turmoil. It would have to rebuild its Army in the middle of a new war with Britain and find the money to supply them.

With the troop lost, it made their possessions less defensible. Plus, the nation was headed to bankruptcy. Thus, Napoleon sold his North American possessions to the then-new United States in what would become known as the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. This 800,000-square-mile addition to the fledgling United States changed the power formula in the western hemisphere forever.

Finally, in 1804 the French surrendered Haiti and abandoned their western properties with the exception of Martinique and Guadalupe.

The victors of Haiti formally took on its name, which was an Arawak (indigenous people) name for the island. It became the first Black republic in the history of the world. It was formally recognized by France in 1834 and by the U.S. in 1862.

The rebellions caused Britain to give up on the slave trade in 1807, and the rest of Europe started their withdrawal of this evil practice. Many White French settlers left Louisiana and Haiti and moved to what are now Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Many of the free Haitians moved to New Orleans and those ties still exist.

Haiti was the catalyst in the abolishment of slavery. Thank you my brother Haitians.

Harry C. Alford is the co-founder and president/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

## Clingman

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Muhammad personally, but I have spoken to him several times over the years since 1994 when I first called him to inquire about the RBD program. He was accommodating and clearly open to collaboration and sharing information.

We were definitely on the same page when it came to Black economic empowerment, and that will be my personal remembrance of him. In general, I will remember his work, and I will continue to do my work with his work in mind.

I know I have to leave here, and I am working hard to leave something here when I leave. We should all consider that sobering thought and, if we are not doing it already, we should get busy doing the work of leaving a legacy

of some kind.

It does not have to be like Muhammad Nasserdeen; everyone cannot start and maintain an organization. But everyone can do something, and that's what we need. I always say, "If everyone did a little, we could all have a lot."

As you remember Brother Muhammad Nasserdeen, remember also to do your part to uphold and continue his work, no matter where you are in this country. Find others of like mind, and do some collective work to empower Black people — the way he did. Get involved in movements and initiatives that have as their mission the economic empowerment of Black people.

Here's something else you can do to honor our brother. On Nov. 2, the National Black-

Out Day called by Brother Warren Ballentine, let's recycle Black dollars. While we are doing our Black-Out, let's also do a Black-In, by buying at least one product or service from a Black business, either where we live or on the Internet.

One more thing we can do: Join the Blackonomics Million Dollar Club by going to [www.blackonomics.com](http://www.blackonomics.com), and start helping our Black organizations. Now, that's "Recycling Black Dollars," y'all.

Do your part, brothers and sisters, the way Muhammad Nasserdeen did his part, because we all have to leave here, but what will you leave here?

James Clingman is an educator, lecturer and author of a respected Black economic empowerment book series.