

Horrors aside, Zimbabweans need support

By Nicole C. Lee
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In the last few months, I have devoted several columns to the situation in Zimbabwe and the complexities of advocating for the most vulnerable.

Right now, the country teeters on a precipice because of the entrenched inequality that reversed the initial gains made in Zimbabwe and the current state sponsored violence against its own people.

I have received numerous critiques, both positive and negative, of my organization's positions on Zimbabwe's political situation.

Many critics think TransAfrica is not tough enough on Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe. He is a "monster," they say, without humanity or a conscience.

Cynthia Tucker of the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* in an op-ed a few weeks ago inferred that TransAfrica is an apologist for Mugabe because we point out the historical role that the U.S. and U.K. have played in Zimbabwe's demise. Tucker goes on to call Mugabe a "demon."

On the other hand, there is a pervasive sense among some that TransAfrica must stand up for the Mugabe government because

of Mugabe's historical significance and legacy, stating that it is only fitting that we stand behind him.

They state that TransAfrica's allegiance lies with the duly-elected government of Zimbabwe and that those who oppose the standing government are at best apologists for the White Rhodesian colonizers and at worst puppets of imperialism.

For me, these polar positions have lulled many into inaction. Mainstream media has fed us the problems of Zimbabwe with no roots in history, saying, "forget about the past and focus on the last sound byte we fed you."

Never mind those nagging facts, just believe: The U.S. and U.K. are against Mugabe. So if Mugabe is bad and the U.S. is against Mugabe, then the U.S. policy must be good. Right? WRONG.

Those who choose to "demonize" Mugabe are really missing the point of standing up for the people in Zimbabwe.

The revolution didn't begin or end with Mugabe, as the fight for freedom in the U.S.



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has not ended with any particular popular or political figure. The core of this debate is not about the state of Mugabe's eternal soul. It is about a sustainable solution that serves the needs of Zimbabweans.

With this history in mind, we must not dismiss the present. While some post colonial policies distributed political and economic power from the White minority to the Black majority, many of these same policies are used to target legitimate political dissenters within Zimbabwe.

When Mugabe ordered the forced displacement of 300,000 impoverished residents of Harare, rich Rhodesian farmers were not affected. When the legislature passed arcane laws to curb speech and assembly, street vendors and trade unionists were jailed.

Today, the list of disappeared and dead from the Zimbabwean military strategic assault between April and July is filled with the names of ordinary Zimbabweans. These facts cannot be dismissed for the benefit of the Pan-African movement. Who is this

movement supposed to serve if not the most vulnerable among us?

The bottom line is this: The people of Zimbabwe have been betrayed, not just by Robert Mugabe, but also by a government that claims to represent them, and by Western governments that promised to support the people's aspirations for economic development and democracy.

While governments continue to discuss and debate, we need to stand up for the people of Zimbabwe. We need to let them know they are not alone. The world, and the African Diaspora, has not forgotten them.

We are calling for a day of solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe—Monday, July 21. We are calling for the violence to cease, for a transitional authority that will oversee free and fair elections, and people-driven social and economic investment.

We are planning a mobilization in Washington, D.C. Wherever you live, take a stand for Zimbabwe in your community. For more information, visit our website at www.transafricaforum.org. I hope to see you on the frontlines for Zimbabwe.

Nicole C. Lee is the Executive Director of TransAfrica Forum.

Personal, collective responsibility imperative

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Lou Dobbs of CNN prodded his panel the other night to explain what was underneath the awful image of castration used by Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., in voicing his frustration with Barack Obama.

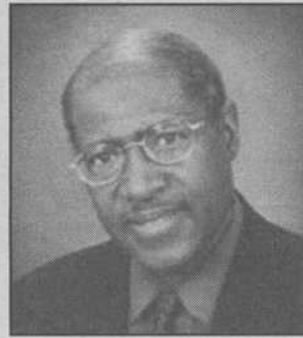
His panel completely missed the lively underground disappointment among some Blacks who support Obama, reflected in these two headlines: "Obama Calls For More Responsibility for Black Fathers," reflecting his speeches recently to large Black audiences such as the Apostolic Church in Chicago and the AME Convention; then another headline, "Obama Brings Economic Message to N. Virginia" in which — before a largely White audience of 10,000 — he proposed legislation to ensure equal pay for women, expanded paid family and medical leave, childcare services and pre-school programs, all paid for by reducing the Iraq War funding.

The rhetoric of the moral failure of Black men has helped to nationalize an image of their inferiority. But after serving on a Commission on the Black Male, I have become sensitive to the facts that Black families fall apart — or are never consummated — most often because Black men lack education and or money, and, therefore, Black women do not see them as viable partners. Part of the

pressure to get money in the absence of an education pushes Black men into bad choices that result in their disproportionate incarceration or other conditions. So they are often not available as fathers to provide for their families.

This image of the mass irresponsibility of Black males also gives a pass to the difficulty for anyone to accept responsibility for a family where access to the economic resources are difficult and they are often blocked by racism. Research shows that Black children arrive at most schools three to four years already behind White children, and their disproportionate poverty places them in schools that do not have the resources — in fact, there they need much greater resources than average — just to educate them on an equal basis. The 50 percent drop-out rate manifests this result, and so, they become fuel for the streets.

They also become fuel for a racist public policy that sweeps them up by racial profiling, targeted neighborhood policing and long sentences into prison, even though 80 percent of them are there for non-violent, petty drug offenses. Where is the outcry for the



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collective responsibility of government that put them there and, therefore, is implicated in their inability to support their families? Where are the bridging programs that effectively connect them to their families while they are in prison?

Rep. Danny Davis of Chicago should be applauded for passage of his Second Chance Act that promises to build a foundation for those just leaving prison, but my discussion with him reveals that it has not been funded. Barack Obama should be applauded for proposing to create a White House Office on Urban Policy because when Black males go to the street for their livelihood, they will find few positive options because urban policy has been on the backburner of public policy for nearly 30 years now.

How did that happen? Ronald Reagan was able to sell America on "personal responsibility" rather than government assistance to blunt charges of racism as implicated in Black progress.

With that support, he was able to take billions of dollars from cities to give to the suburbs, private corporations and the defense establishment.

Therefore, the sensitivity of Blacks to the principle of "personal responsibility" is the awareness of its danger; it has been elevated

from a natural act of virtue that Blacks have consistently performed to a powerful political ideology of the right that marginalized the image of Blacks and supported the dramatic shift of government resources out of urban areas. So that today, even a new "urban policy" must be targeted to achieve results.

The sensitivity to the ideology of personal responsibility also reflects the intellectual awareness where in the absence of balanced proposals that also privilege a robust version of the collective responsibility of government, the large structural problems that are faced by the Black community will not be addressed. These problems that ravage cities and their Black neighborhoods now include: the home foreclosure crisis, globalization of the economy and jobs, competition for low-wage employment, depression-level unemployment rates, the persistence of poverty and under-education and crumbling infrastructure of urban institutions and places.

This debate should result in both presidential candidates speaking to those needs, giving concrete public policy answers to the question of how they would address them, especially at venues where Black audiences are gathered.

Dr. Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Center, and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.

Alford

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The worst hatred is self-hatred and we must avoid it at all times. It is so easy to fall for the hype and start chanting stereotypes about our own.

We have challenges, but to write off Black males as bad fathers and husbands is a bunch of negative bunk.

It is dangerous for us to allow people to put us in this mold and we must be vigilant to fight the appearance or verbiage whenever and wherever it comes up.

I know we need to make sure we take ad-

vantage of the opportunity to have for the first time ever a Black president.

However, it cannot come at the expense of our culture and stature. For every absent Black father there are two or more absent White fathers. Don't single us out in a disproportionate manner.

Sen. Obama I know you need more White votes, but don't think you have to sacrifice the image of Black America or support some racist stereotype to get it. It's not worth it.

Harry Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc.

McCain

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to make an informed vote this November I really need to hear what all the candidates have to say," Shields said.

"As far as my opinion on his speech, I feel he did not address certain key issues I wish he would have elaborated on," such as more specifics on education funding, she said.

McCain said vouchers and merit pay for teachers whose students perform well are two important ways to help kids in failing schools.

"After decades of hearing the same big

promises from the public education establishment and seeing the same poor results, it is surely time to shake off old ways and to demand new reforms," he said. "That isn't just my opinion. It is the conviction of parents in poor neighborhoods across this nation who want better lives for their children."

Both the merit pay and voucher proposals have met stiff opposition from teachers unions. Obama has indicated he would support some kind of merit pay system for teachers, if teachers help craft it.