

AIDS help slightly helps Bush's Africa legacy

By Nicole C. Lee
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Dwelling on the past seems to be going out of fashion. I get it. It is a new day and for people who are seeking changing now is the time to seize our moment.

The future looks brighter than the past even with such a bleak economic forecast. Despite this, there are some who are already harkening back to the good ol' days of the Bush Administration. As shocking as this might sound, in the last few weeks, I have sat through several conversations about the legacy of the Bush Administration and what they have referred to as the administration's crowning jewel — "Africa policy and initiatives."

Now, considering all that has happened in the last eight years, I realize that victories and positive initiatives are hard to come by.

The Global War on Terror has ruined our standing in the world, and has revealed the worst of America's inclinations. Despite early warning signs that we saw during this administration, the economy is being decimated.

Those lessons, and the lessons of 30 years

of deregulation and free trade, have now brought our entire system to near-collapse. So in some ways it makes sense for the administration to spend their last days in office scrambling to find something of which to be proud.

Even still, it actually makes sense for them to try to pin their hopes and dreams on Africa policy. It's cynical, but many Americans like Sarah Palin do not recognize that Africa is not a country, but a vast continent comprised of over 50 separate nations. Some of the nations have been used as pawns in the Global War on Terror.

Some, like Congo, have been completely ignored by the administration while the nation falls more into chaos.

Many more, because they are desperately in need of aid money, have been jerked around by an administration that cares more about its own ideology than the pragmatic benefit of saving lives.

Now, I will give credit where the credit is



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due. The Bush Administration virtually quadrupled the amount of foreign assistance the U.S. distributes although the administration still boasts that between 85 percent — 90 percent of all aid money comes right back to the U.S. in jobs and contracts.

The President's Emergency Plan for HIV/AIDS (PEPFAR) is unprecedented.

But let us not be deceived.

AIDS activists and churches in the U.S. and around the world spent years pressuring our government to address the scourge of HIV/AIDS, a call that reached a crescendo during the early days of the Bush Administration.

As much as PEPFAR was new and innovative, it was also framed to be a vehicle of spreading and testing conservative ideology through restrictions like the gag rule, refusing to buy generic drugs, and the promotion of abstinence over methods of safe sex.

The Bush Administration has also failed to live up to his promise of debt cancellation

for the world's poorest countries. To date, many of the monies promised to these countries have not yet been allocated. The Bush Administration, through the International Monetary Fund and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, made sure that African countries that wanted to receive U.S. aid overhauled their economies. This meant charging citizens for basic services and opening up their economies to foreign investment even if their markets would not be able to withstand privatization.

This failed model has proven disastrous in Africa and Latin America, and it is now clear it has been disastrous for the U.S. too.

These policies are not crowning jewels, but cubic zirconias. They look shiny and pretty from afar until you look closely and see its flaws. The people of Africa deserve better than to be the fig leaf for an administration who put more glitz than substance into its Africa policy making. Yet time will show that Bush's policies toward Africa, as one expert said to me, may go down in history as Bush's fig leaf.

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Here's an olive branch for Rev. Jesse Jackson

By Julianne Malveaux
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When the 2008 contest for the Democratic nomination for President got heated, New York Sen. Hilary Rodham Clinton threw all kinds of wild accusations at President-elect Barack Obama.

He wasn't fit, he wasn't ready, and she didn't know whether he was a Muslim or not. Time heals all wounds, and now Sen. Clinton is poised to be Secretary of State. The fact that she campaigned enthusiastically for Obama didn't hurt her chances to be the third most powerful person in government, and the appointment suggests that Obama is serious when he says he wants to surround himself with the best and brightest minds in our nation.

Sen. Joe Lieberman campaigned against Obama, so enthusiastically supporting fellow Sen. John McCain that he hoped to get the vice-presidential nod that Sarah Palin ended up with. Elected as an independent, he has been allowed to maintain his seniority as a

Democrat, and even a committee chair, despite his acts of disloyalty to the Democratic Party.

President-elect Obama could signal that he wants Lieberman punished by stripping him of his committee chair, but he has not done so. Disloyal Lieberman has had to pay no consequences at all for his behavior.

Meanwhile, Rev. Jesse Jackson made some ugly comments when he was off-mike at Fox News back in July. He was roundly, and justifiably, criticized for his remarks by an array of people, including his son, Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr.

From all outward appearance, Rev. Jackson seems to be persona non grata to the Obama team. So while Clinton, Lieberman, and even McCain have been forgiven for their campaign behavior, there appears to be no forgiveness for Jackson.



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The elder statesman continues to lead Rainbow/PUSH and continues to make a difference on issues of social and economic justice. He has not let the cold shoulder from the Obama team slow or stop him, but it is clear that he would welcome the opportunity to spend a few minutes with President-elect Obama. And why not? Jackson has

rubbed elbows with Wall Street giants through his annual Wall Street Project conference, and understands some of the fundamentals behind this current economic meltdown.

Further, his reach is broad — from Wall Street to Main Street to the 'hood. The President-elect could benefit from Rev. Jackson's insight, just as he has benefited from the insights of Sen. John McCain.

During the campaign, it is understandable that Obama would not meet with Jackson for

fear of being considered "too Black" or "too left." After all, the Jackson wing of the Democratic Party is unapologetically left of center. Now, the campaign is over, Obama has been elected, and he has said he will be the president of all of America. He has reassured the right wing by meeting with John McCain. Why not reassure the Black left by meeting with Rev. Jesse Jackson?

The Black left was in full force at the State of the Black World Conference in New Orleans this weekend. But for a family emergency, Rev. Jackson would have been there. Rev. Al Sharpton was also scheduled to speak. Minister Louis Farrakhan was on the program for Sunday.

Organized by Dr. Ron Daniels, the gathering drew the Urban League's Mark Morial and the Congressional Black Caucus's Dr. Elsie Scott, the University of Maryland's Dr. Ron Walters, among others. I participated in the opening town hall meeting led by talk radio hosts Bev Smith and Mark Thompson.

While Revs. Jackson and Sharpton were missed, there was rich conversation about the state of the Civil Rights Movement, and the responsiveness that President-elect Obama will have to the African-American community.

While the President-elect is meeting with this group and that, hearing from this or that leader, it is important for him to maintain an open door to the civil rights community.

And it is important for him to be open to meeting with, among others, Rev. Jesse Jackson. Such a meeting would signal respect, magnanimity, and the open spirit that has welcomed Clinton and Lieberman to the Obama team. While the success of the Obama administration does not depend on a meeting with Rev. Jackson, it sends an important signal to a sector of our nation that supported this President-elect. Why not reach out to Rev. Jackson and, by extension, to the Black left?

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"Hero's" Blend. I am sure there are hundreds of other enterprising Black folks across the country who are making money via Barackonomics, and I see no problem with that.

I do see a problem with Black folks just settling for the moment, however. We had better get a good understanding of the fact that economics runs politics, and this time is no different from all the other presidential elections when it comes to economics.

Let's not merely live for the moment and then go back to sleep in the next couple of months. Let's take the small lessons of Barackonomics and do big things with them. Let's support one another with the knowledge that there is enough, more than enough, to go around.

Don't back off now; raise the bar even

higher. Be creative and innovative; devise new entrepreneurial ventures and strategies to capitalize on Barackonomics. You can't pay your bills with hope, history, or hysteria. Emotional investments do not pay dividends.

Euphoria is not bankable. Inspiration that is not followed by perspiration — taking some action, doing some work — will be as fleeting as a shooting star. If we don't turn, "Yes we can!" into, "Yes we did!" beyond the election, beyond the inauguration, and beyond the parties, then shame on us.

Allow your inspiration to catapult you to collective economic empowerment by establishing equity funds, bartering groups, urban gardens, food cooperatives, rotating credit associations, small business associations, cooperative purchasing programs, youth entrepreneurial training programs, and all of the entities we need to survive and thrive in this

dire economic environment.

If we do these things, and more, we will have justified our emotional euphoric response to Barack Obama being the 44th President of the United States.

If we fail to do these things, we will miss out on the economic benefits that always find their way to the "special interests." Aren't we special? Don't we have our own interests?

You had better believe the "big guys" will capitalize on their investment in Barack Obama. Question is: "Will we?" Let's understand that part of the "change" we voted for is grounded in economics, at least I "hope" it was. And let's commit that the "change" we receive will be much more than mere "chump change."

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