

Haitian immigrants must prioritize change

By Nicole C. Lee
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Bush Administration left several messes to clean up. Each and every cabinet member has his or her work cut out for them and former Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, our new Secretary of Homeland Security has her hands full.

Her first priorities must include a just and fair policy towards Haitian refugees. In Administration after Administration one of our most cynical and hypocritical is our policy towards Haitian refugees who reach our shores.

The U.S. policy towards Haiti has always been brutal. For fear that Haiti's 1804 revolution would embolden slave uprisings in the U.S., the U.S. government sided with France and our own "oppressor" Great Britain in shunning Haiti from the world community. Eventually, Haiti was forced to pay France for the loss of "land and slaves", thus forcing former slaves to pay for their freedom.

Today the children of Haiti continue to pay for that debt in political and economic ways. Haiti remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and is forced to divert \$58 million annually to pay off odious debt.

The international food crisis has only worsened conditions for everyone in Haiti, including professionals and the ever shrinking middle class.

There have been 32 coup d'États in Haiti's history. In recent years the U.S. government has been directly involved in the overthrow of democratic governments in Haiti, only to turn a blind eye to the suffering and chaos that ensues.

Because of the political destabilization and the lack of political will on the part of the international community, Haiti's infrastructure is neglected. Now even a mild tropical storm can cause massive flooding and devastation which only compounds the hardship and misery that so many Haitians live under on a consistent basis.

Yet, with so many people there is a disconnect between our foreign policy towards Haiti and our immigration policy towards Haitians. The policies completely disregard the misery and desperation so many in Haiti experience when Haitians arrive undocumented in the U.S.



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Even contributing members of our society who have allowed their documents to expire or came to the U.S. undocumented are deported. Many times they are deported despite the fact that they have minor children or spouses.

In 2008 President Preval requested Temporary Protected Status (TPS) be extended to Haitians living in the U.S. to allow the country to recover from four devastating hurricanes without the additional burden of deportees. This was not special treatment.

TPS had been granted to countries such as Nicaragua and Honduras for natural disasters. Why not Haiti? In typical form, then-Secretary Chertoff denied President Preval's request for TPS saying that Haiti "does not warrant a TPS designation." "Does not warrant?" Today in Haiti people are eating mud pies to survive and are going without basic medical care. As the world economic system continues to crash, the poorest of the poor in Haiti continue to die from preventable causes.

Clearly, Chertoff's decision was not mo-

tivated by this evidence but from the view that Haitian lives lack value. The only purpose of denial of TPS is to serve as a deterrent to Haitians who want to escape crippling poverty and come to the U.S.

Yet, according to Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center in a letter to Secretary Napolitano, there is no evidence that granting TPS would have any impact on the flux and would exactly speed in recovery to allow Haitians already in the U.S. to send remittances home to aid their families and communities. In addition, TPS allows the Haitian government to spend its internal resources on rebuilding and strengthening its economy. For far too long our adverse immigration policies towards Haiti have illustrated the USA's historical indifference for Haitian lives. In keeping with themes of change and progress, Secretary Napolitano can demonstrate the change we can believe by granting TPS for Haitians living in the U.S. The Administration must go even further and set a just immigration standard towards Haiti as the first step towards a more just, equitable and sustainable relationship.

Nicole C. Lee is executive director of TransAfrica Forum.

Cradle-to-prison pipeline form of U.S. apartheid

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Incarceration is becoming the new American apartheid and poor children of color are the fodder.

It is time to sound a loud alarm about this threat to American unity and community, act to stop the growing criminalization of children at younger and younger ages, and tackle the unjust treatment of minority youths and adults in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems with urgency and persistence.

The failure to act now will reverse the hard-earned racial and social progress for which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and so many others died and sacrificed. We must all call for investment in all children from birth through their successful transition to adulthood, remembering Frederick Douglass's correct observation that "it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

So many poor babies in rich America enter the world with multiple strikes against them: born without prenatal care, at low birthweight, and to a teen, poor, and poorly educated single mother and absent father. At crucial points in their development after birth until adulthood, more risks pile on, making a successful transition to productive adulthood

significantly less likely and involvement in the criminal justice system significantly more likely.

As Black children are more than three times as likely as White children to be poor, and are four times as likely to live in extreme poverty, a poor Black boy born in 2001 has a one in three chance of going to prison in his lifetime and is almost six times as likely as a White boy to be incarcerated for a drug offense.

The past continues to strangle the present and the future. Children with an incarcerated parent are more likely to become incarcerated. Black children are nearly nine times and Latino children are three times as likely as White children to have an incarcerated parent. Blacks constitute one-third and Latinos one-fifth of the prisoners in America, and 1 in 3 Black men, 20 to 29 years old, is under correctional supervision or control. Of the 2.3 million in jail or prison, 64 percent are minority. Of the 4.2 million persons on probation, 45 percent are minority; of the 800,000 on parole, 59 percent are minority. Inequitable drug sentencing policies including man-



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datory minimums have greatly escalated the incarceration of minority adults and youths.

Child poverty and neglect, racial disparities in systems that serve children, and the pipeline to prison are not acts of God. They are America's immoral political and economic choices that can and must be changed with strong

political, corporate and community leadership.

No single sector or group can solve these child- and nation-threatening crises alone but all of us can together. Leaders must call us to the table and use their bully pulpits to replace our current paradigm of punishment as a first resort with a paradigm of prevention and early intervention. That will save lives, save families, save taxpayer money, and save our nation's aspiration to be a fair society. Health and mental health care and quality education cost far less than prisons.

If called to account today, America would not pass the test of the prophets, the Gospels, and all great faiths. Christians who profess to believe that God entered human history as a poor vulnerable baby, and that each man, woman and child is created in God's own image, need to act on that faith.

The Jewish Midrash says God agreed to give the people of Israel the Torah only after they offered their children as guarantors, deeming neither their prophets nor elders sufficient. It is time to heed the prophets' call for justice for the orphans and the weak. America's Declaration of Independence says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...."

After more than two centuries, it is time to make those truths evident in the lives of

poor children of color and to close our intolerable national hypocrisy gap. America's sixth child is waiting for all of us to welcome him or her to the table in our rich land and show the world whether democratic capitalism is an oxymoron or whether it can work. Our national creed demands it. All great faiths demand it. Common sense and self-interest require it. And our moral redemption and credibility in the world we seek to lead compels it. Ending child poverty is not only an urgent moral necessity, it is economically beneficial.

Dr. Robert M. Solow, M.I.T. Nobel Laureate in Economics, wrote in *Wasting America's Future* that "ending child poverty is, at the very least, highly affordable" and would be a boost to the economy. A healthy Social Security and Medicare system for our increasing elderly population need as many productive workers as possible to support them. We can ill afford to let millions of our children grow up poor, in poor health, uneducated, and as dependent rather than productive citizens.

What then can leaders do to help build the spiritual and political will needed to help our nation pass the test of the God of history and better prepare for America's future? What steps can you take to heed Dr. King's warning not to let our wealth become our destruction but our salvation by helping the poor Lazaruses languishing at our closed gates? How can our nation use its blessings to bless all the children entrusted to our care and rekindle America's dimming dream?

As President Obama and Congress contemplate ways to stimulate our economy, let them begin by investing in a healthy, fair, head, and safe start for every American child and measures to ensure their successful transition to college and productive adulthood.

Learn more about CDF's Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign.

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previous year); \$450 million in grants and loans to underserved communities and rural communities for economic development and technology growth; \$20 billion for public school renovation and modernization.

There is so much more but I think you are getting the point. This is going to our neighborhoods. It will touch the common American and help uplift those who need uplifting.

It should inspire the gifted to reach the highest points also. Not only will minority and women inclusion laws be in effect but

the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs is proposed an \$80 million increase in funding.

This is the watch dog for Affirmative Action and Executive Order 11246. It will reverse a trend to minimize this office which was started back in the mid 1990s and continued up to the last election.

U.S. Senate — wake up! Pass this legislation and let's improve America. Yes we can.

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