

EDITORIAL / OPINION

Vantage point

RON DANIELS

Educator • Organizer • Leader



REV. GEORGE STALLINGS: TREADING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF RICHARD ALLEN

In 1787 Richard Allen, an African-American preacher in the predominantly white Methodist Church, moved to organize Black parishioners to establish their own church in Philadelphia, Pa. The creation of what was initially an semi-autonomous black church was precipitated by racism in the Methodist Church and an insensitivity to the particular needs of the sons and daughters of Africa in America. The larger church wanted Africans to convert to the faith, but the price which Blacks were often asked to pay was an unequal and inferior status within the church and a lack of respect for the history, culture and traditions of the African converts. Indeed in the climatic incident which occasioned the Black break from the church, white worshippers, actually pulled Richard Allen and other Black worshippers from their knees as they prayed at the altar at St. Georges Methodist Church.

Enough was enough. Richard Allen, joined by an Episcopal pastor named Absalom Jones organized the Free African Society, which was dedicated to building a new church. By 1794 Richard Allen and his African-American followers were able to dedicate the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church became the foundation for the first organized African-American denomination in America, the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The tension between the needs and requirements of institutions within the majority Euro-centric white society in America and the needs and requirements of people of African descent who have been the victims of white racism and Euro-centric cultural aggression have been at odds every since our forced arrival in America. The conflict between the demands or conditions laid down by the larger society for our "acceptance" and demands of African people for equality, dignity, respect and self-determination has been a constant dimension of the African struggle for liberation in America.

In response to this conflict, Richard Allen was forced to create a new church, a parallel institution to the white church, in order to meet the needs of African-Americans. The African-American Masons, Elks, fraternities and sororities have had to do likewise because of an unwillingness by their white-counter parts to accept Black people and/or to accept Black people on an equal and dignified footing devoid of racism and cultural insensitivity. In 1989 more than 200 years after Richard Allen and his followers made their fateful decision, George Stallings a African-American Roman Catholic Priest from Washington D.C. is being compelled to confront the same historical conflict and dilemma that Richard Allen and so many other Africans in America have had to face.

The Catholic Church like all other predominantly white institutions in America is inescapably afflicted by racism given the history and culture of America. In addition each predominantly white institution in America contains its own peculiar Euro-centric cultural heritage. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church the rituals, customs and ceremonies are derived principally from the Roman/Latin traditions of the early Catholic Church in Italy. Hence even converts to Roman Catholicism from other European nations have sought their own particular accommodations within the Catholic Church based on their own culture and needs as distinct nationalities.

Here in America one frequently finds Irish Catholic Churches, or Polish, Italian or Hungarian Catholic Churches. The Roman Catholic Church has tended to tolerate the emergence of these essentially ethnic congregations in America. In Central and South America, and to a limited extent in Africa the Catholic church has made concessions have resulted from committed struggle waged by the faithful inside of the Catholic Church for respect for their particular ethnic or national culture identity.

Obviously we are not Irish, Italian, Polish, Hungarian or Hispanic. And of course we're not Roman. We are African-Americans. Rev. George Stallings contention is that the African-American struggle inside the Roman Catholic Church to overcome racism and for a fundamental appreciation and recognition of African-American culture and the Black experience has been very slow in yielding sufficient results. Consequently Stallings has moved like Richard Allen before him to create, along with his followers, a new church, the Imani Temple; a new church which could become a new denomination—the African Catholic Church in America.

It is most refreshing to see Rev. Stallings articulate a christian theology which is Afro-centric and promotes human liberation. The church, any church which purports to paster to African-Americans must meet the basic needs of Black people. Retaining the wholeness and richness of our culture, and working to heal the wounds resulting from slavery, racism, segregation and cultural aggression is essential to the salvation, growth and development of African-Americans. In that regard not only the predominantly white denominations, but the entire African-American Church itself might well learn from what Rev. Stallings efforts will eventually lead. What we do know is that Rev. Stallings is treading in the foot steps of Richard Allen. I for one hope that he keeps stepping!

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COMMUNITIES CAN STOP DRUGS

by John E. Jacob

Stopping the drug plague is going to take action on a wide variety of fronts. Government has to get serious about ending the flow of drugs into the country. That will take more than rhetoric. It will mean committing military resources to close our borders to drug importers, along with diplomatic negotiations and economic inducements to exporting countries.

And government will have to fully fund drug treatment centers. It is shameful that drug abusers who want to kick their habit must wait many months before a slot opens up for them at a treatment center.

Expanding those centers' capacities has to be at the top of any serious anti-drug campaign.

But the war on drugs also has to be waged on the streets and in our neighborhoods. This is a national problem affecting rich and poor, suburbs and inner cities. But it is African American communities who bear the greatest burden of drugs, and we'll have to take the initiative in making our neighborhoods drug-free zones.

For too long, people have been making excuses for drug abusers, reciting a litany of social pressures and racism that drives some people to take drugs.

That won't wash any more. If we wait for society's ills to be cured to end drug abuse and other anti-social behavior, we'll lose the battle for our communities and become subjects of the drug dealers and drug lords.

The brutal fact is that drugs are taking over many of our communities. Drug gang wars have turned many of our neighborhoods into combat zones. Little kids are out hustling for drug pushers and people are terrorized into silence.

Our future as a people is endangered by the drug plague that saps ambition, pulls young people away from school and jobs, and sends our infant mortality and AIDS statistics sky-high.

The drug dealers represent the biggest threat to African American communities today. They're killing more African Americans than the Klan ever did, and our communities must mobilize to drive them out.

Citizens have to join together to work closely with law enforcement officials to identify dealers, gather evidence to convict them, and ensure they are incarcerated.

Too often the drug lords intimidate and overwhelm neighborhood protesters but they won't be able to do that if people band together and join forces.

That's the way you win wars, and we are definitely at war for control of our lives and our communities today.

People will have to get tough on users, too. African American communities, which have been subjected to the intolerance of others for so long, tend to be too tolerant.

But we have to stand up for the values that enabled us to survive, and that means making it very clear to drug abusers that they and their drugs are not wanted in the community and they should either kick the habit or get out.

Local community institutions need to be in the forefront of the fight against the drug dealers. Urban Leagues, churches, social and fraternal organizations, and the press, need to come together to mobilize citizens and publicize anti-drug activities.

If we don't win the war against drugs, we can forget about winning our war for equality.

A CHILD OF AFRICA CRIES OUT FOR HELP

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Early on the morning of August 18, 1989 in the city of Huambo, Angola, the young life of six-year old Felismina Castilho was shattered when a mortar rocket exploded inside of her small block home. The rocket had been fired by the rebel group UNITA which is now supported financially and militarily by the United States. Until last year the largest supplier of military aid to UNITA was from the racist apartheid regime of South Africa. But now the Bush Administration has become the proud sponsor of UNITA's atrocities. I happened to be in Huambo, Angola on that tragic morning. I was awakened by the loud noise of the explosions of UNITA rockets hitting as close as several hundred yards from where our delegation was sleeping. I was one of eight persons who had traveled from the United States to the People's Republic of Angola to perform a health assessment of the current medical situation there. Our delegation consisted of Dr. Adewale Troutman, Medical Director for the City of Newark, New Jersey; Dr. Rosilyn M. Ryals, Arizona Department of Health Services; Dr. Sandy Daly, Orthopedic Surgeon; Ms. Wendy Perlmutter, Pediatric Physical Therapist; Mr. Ayo Sosona, Prosthesisist; Ms. Deborah Sanks, Professional photographer; and Ms. Denise O'Brien, Translator.

Later that morning we visited the Huambo Regional Hospital and we saw Felismina lying in a state of shock on a small hospital bed in a room that was overcrowded with other victims of recent UNITA attacks on the civilian population. Dr. Troutman, Dr. Ryals and Dr. Daly examined the severe wounds to Felismina's right leg and hip. The metal shrapnel from the explosion of the rocket had ripped her tender flesh.

As we leaned forward to show our expression of concern and empathy for Felismina she struggled to utter in her native tongue, "Where is my mama.....I want my mama." As tears began to fall from her bright eyes, several of us also began to cry. We knew that this young beautiful daughter of Africa would never see her mother nor her father again. Mr. Jose and Mrs. Lucia Castilho were killed instantly when the UNITA rocket tore through the roof of their bedroom and exploded while they were asleep.

After leaving the hospital we went to the Castilho's house which was still smoldering from the destruction. The bodies of Jose and Lucia were lying together in a room on top of a wooden table. We viewed them with a sense of deep regret, disgust and pain because we knew that our tax dollars helped pay for this merciless inhumanity. We had prayer with the remaining members of the family and pledged to let the American public know what we had witnessed in Huambo, Angola.

The cry of Felismina for her mother is the cry of millions of children of Africa. Today in Angola in particular, the painful reality of the death and destruction of war shatters the lives of innocent children. UNITA is guilty of crimes against humanity. Jonas Savimbi has become deaf to the cries of the children of Angola and it appears that President Bush is not the "gentle and caring" President that he has claimed to be.

The cry of this African child for help and for peace must not go unanswered.

Along The Color Line "SOUTH AFRICA: THE DEATH OF APARTHEID?" PART ONE OF A TWO PART SERIES

by Dr. Manning Marable

We are witnessing the beginning of the death of apartheid in South Africa. The glue which has held the oppressive system of racial domination together for over forty years has been the unity of the Afrikaner white minority, which has armed itself with the most sophisticated military weapons to ensure its survival. This month's elections in the white house of parliament illustrate that unity of the white electorate has shattered, in the aftermath of worldwide pressure from economic divestment and political isolation. The ruling Nationalist Party the architect of apartheid, suffered heavy losses to political rivals on the right and left.

The recent political crisis for white supremacy in Africa began with the forced resignation of former President P.W. Botha and the ascension to power of F.W. De Klerk as head of the Nationalists. De Klerk recognized that he had to cultivate a "liberal" image if apartheid had any prospect for regaining international support and investor confidence. The remaking of apartheid's "image" was unveiled at the Nationalists' party congress in late June. De Klerk called for "limited power sharing" between the nation's five million whites and the twenty eight million oppressed and disfranchised Africans. The Nationalists adopted a so called "action plan", which called for the removal of criminal penalties for violating segregated housing laws, and expanded government support for non-white education. De Klerk was prepared to amputate the party's neo-Nazi, ultraracist right wing, which had formed the new Conservative Party, and to appeal to the more moderate sentiments of middle class whites in the Democratic Party.

Coinciding with De Klerk's policy shift was a visit by an all-white, 115 member delegation from South Africa to Lusaka, Zambia, for meetings with the outlawed leadership of the African National Congress, headed by imprisoned martyr Nelson Mandela and exiled president Oliver Tambo. The majority in the white delegation was clearly unsympathetic with many of the ANC's policies, including the use of armed struggle against the apartheid regime. Most also opposed the use of economic or military sanctions against the all-white government. But on the central issue at hand, the ultimate elimination of the apartheid policy of racial segregation, and the establishment of a multiracial democracy with full constitutional rights for people of color, the white delegation and the ANC had no disagreements. Optimistically, Tambo declared at the end of the negotiations: "Today we can truly say that the end of the apartheid system is in sight."

The media, long intimidated by the goons in the apartheid propaganda department, began to give some space to the anticacist opposition. Sections of the ANC's 1955 "Freedom Charter" are now circulated widely in the press. In late June, a statement by Nelson Mandela was published in the country's largest white daily newspaper.

Even in the area of social equality, the steel barriers of racism are slowly collapsing. This summer, a formerly whites-only swimming pool in Johannesburg was desegregated in a protest in which several liberal white members of the city council participated. Police were called in when neo-Nazi racists blocked the integrated group's entrance to the pool. However, it was discovered that Johannesburg's city council had never actually ratified the law reserving specific pools for whites only, and that technically, Blacks were within their legal rights to use the facility. Consequently, the police removed the racist protestors, allowing the integrated group to use the public pool. Ten years ago, this little episode would have been unimaginable. The Blacks in this demonstration would have been swiftly

arrested, clubbed senseless, and perhaps shared a common fate with anti-apartheid martyr Steven Biko.

Why has this political change occurred within South Africa? There are several fundamental reasons for the new flexibility coming from Pretoria. International pressure against the regime, firstly, has been building since the early 1980s, despite former President Reagan's notorious policy of "Constructive Engagement" with apartheid, which aligned the U.S. behind the domestic terrorism and brutality of the government against progressive forces. The divestment of several hundred U.S. and European firms from South Africa placed economic pressure on the government. Most of these foreign firms were capital-intensive with substantial numbers of white collar employees. Given the racial stratification of the south African labor force, divestment meant that the overwhelming number of employees whose jobs were in jeopardy were not Black, but white. When American multinationals began to pull out, white politicians in the Nationalist Party recognized that some sort of liberalization policy was necessary to keep the economy going.

Secondly, the progressive forces of racial reform resurfaced in the 1980s, with the development of the United Democratic Front in 1983, and the rapid expansion of a non-white, multiracial labor movement. Even after the apartheid regime initiated a draconian state of emergency in 1986, these liberal social forces were not completely eradicated. Thousands of nonwhites began to disobey apartheid laws, and it became impossible for the government to arrest and imprison them all. Although world-incidentally, the United States is second—the country's legal system could not accommodate millions of dissenters. By 1989, thousands of nonwhites began living in formerly whites-only neighborhoods, in direct violation of the law.

A, third, and in many ways the most overlooked factor in South Africa's internal change has occurred because key elements of the white minority population no longer support apartheid. Significant sectors of the educated middle class, business executives and financial leaders have never been members of the Nationalist Party. Like liberal white politician Helen Suzman, they oppose the brutalities of apartheid as irrational, inefficient and antidemocratic. Clearly, they do not share the ANC's political commitment to social equality, which would require the economic redistribution of power and ownership in a postapartheid state. But they also have no intention of sitting silently on a white, racist Titanic, as the ship of state slips into the waters. Key groups of moderate whites are searching desperately for a strategy which will guarantee a sort of Zimbabwean solution—Black and Indian domination of the political system with a multiparty democracy, and continued white domination of the banks, industry, land and investment.

The harsh reality of "moderate apartheid" was also apparent during recent weeks, with the unjustified arrest of Nobel prize winner Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu in Cape Town, and the arrests and beatings of thousands of anti-apartheid protestors from religious, labor, and educational groups. In Durban, over two hundred medical students were arrested by police in protests. In Cape Town and other cities, police used heavy whips, tear gas, rubber bullets and occasionally live ammunition to break up nonviolent demonstrations.

While the recent steps toward liberalization in race relations are encouraging, it would be a mistake to suggest that the system of apartheid will gradually disintegrate and will be replaced by a multiracial democracy without struggle. The essence of apartheid is a system of white privilege and nonwhite exploitation, generating a surplus which is unequally distributed within the social order. Those who have materially benefited from apartheid will never willingly surrender their power and privileges.

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