

The Colors of War

BY A. LEE HENDERSON

The heroes of this war will be the people, those who selflessly gave of themselves to comfort and support the families and service personnel drawn into the President's



Dr. A. Lee Henderson

signal to stop Saddam Hussein's ruthless aggression...before it got worse. The military heroes of this war will, unfortunately, also be those who have put their lives on the line...and suffered the consequences, from loss of life to loss of buddies.

Every one in service, to me, is a hero...sung or unsung.

We have already learned that African Americans as a group are the majority heroes, since each and every one of them signifies a disparity that renders their group the largest, proportionately, of any other group of people in service!

I doubt that this will be accorded the salute it properly deserves from the President of the United States and those, including General Colin Powell, chairman of the Chief of Staff, whose business it is to orchestrate the Persian Gulf war.

General Powell's designation as Chief of Staff has afforded him the visible luxury of standing out as an American of great stature...an African American who has achieved what few Blacks would have believed possible during World War II in any branch of service.

Blacks were then considered expendable, along with other good soldiers, but certainly not worthy to be major office-candidate material, much less a General functioning as Chief of Staff at the highest Pentagon level!

Yet there are still things in this nation that are covered over in a camouflage that passes for haste to get on with first-things-first on a wartime priority basis. The winning of the war is first.

Down home issues are conveniently tabled, unless we speak out through

our newspapers, as I am now doing, to rally the democratic opposition. Even among Republicans like myself!

The luxury of exercising one's constitutional right to critique the powers that differentiate us from our Arab nation adversaries.

The end of a bayonet of firing squad speaks the language that silences any opposition. And it does, most effectively. We are free from that calamity.

But we must exercise our freedoms, even in wartime, to explore the things that provoke us. Indeed, some are so provoked against the government that they have used themselves as a peace protest to the government and this administration.

The tactical need for war is not at issue any longer.

We're in it. We're pledged, all of us, to side with reasonable thought and fervent prayers for the resolution of conflict on both sides.

Meanwhile...the minority of Blacks in this country are already waging the war for all of us at home, and we ought to remind Americans everywhere that they should be grateful!

Circulating the facts on this situation can re-awaken the civil rights seeds that have fallen dormant.

Now is the time to stop sleepwalking the path of promises. Now is the time to dig in and re-claim the path by re-seeding it with new, well-expressed demands. We have all earned the right to do that, and we had better maximize our political advantages while they stand out loud and clear in military statistics that support the United States and President Bush, too!

We want something back. We deserve it, fairly, but like any disenfranchised and at times "dysfunctional" group of serverly misunderstood and mistreated minority peoples, we have not been as effective in a positive way as we want to be.

Yet our own position against tyranny is sounding out loud and clear, as mine is, as a mandate of support of our women and men in service.

There is evidence that Blacks in the United States are bearing too great



President George Bush

a burden in our current Persian Gulf crisis.

Defense Department of the United States statistics showed that the Kuwait border numbers of one hundred four thousand (104,000) Black women and men, account for nearly twenty-five percent of the American troops in the Persian Gulf. The total of thirty percent of all Army troops provided by Blacks compares with Blacks making up only twelve percent of the nation's civilian population!

Some anti-war groups are trying to discourage Blacks from joining the military since their community will be forced to pay disproportionately for a war that many Blacks fail to find purposeful.

The eloquence of Bertha Bailey, a Black high school teacher in McKinney, Texas, speaks for many of us, however. She has a grandson serving in the heat of the gulf area war, and unlike the Muslims in the U.S.A. opposed to the war, Bertha was not afraid to express her own simple patriotism and heartfelt feelings when she said: "Sometimes, some things can't get corrected without someone getting hurt. We don't need a fight within a fight. Why worry about who is over-represented when they're all at danger point?"

Yet the voices of Rev. Jesse Jackson joined those of Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks, president of the national Association of the Advancement of Colored People decrying surplus numbers of Blacks in the voluntary service, drawn into the gulf hostilities, as evidence of their

economic, not necessarily their patriotic need!

Hooks said, "This nation ought to be ashamed that the best and brightest of our youth don't volunteer because they love it so well, but because this nation can't provide them jobs."

Right now their loyalty to this nation is being played out in life-and-death confrontations.

President Bush, may I ask you, on their behalf to initiate a tribute to all women and men of color a civil rights bill that unequivocally restores to them the so-called "inalienable" rights entitling them to justice in the job arena...to freedom from any and all discrimination, and to a widening of economic opportunities?

President Bush, may I ask you, on their behalf to initiate the best legal tribute that they could have more incentives to look forward to in a just homecoming from hostilities?

Peace without equal opportunity is peace in chains.

Emerging Blacks prove themselves, time and again, in industry and commerce. We point with pride to those who have achieved distinction, and we promote with perseverance the rights of those still discriminated against by the privileged systems of employment practices which are a disgrace to our nation.

In view of President Bush's aggressively righteous actions against Saddam Hussein, we wish to see the backdrop screen of his civil rights position re-clarified.

Can we expect less from the leader of our nation who has moved with challenge and might to correct the abuses of an international tyrant. The abuses of national inequities deserve swift and certain redress.

To sustain the momentum of the war, we ask you to write to President Bush, along with us, to accomplish this objective.

Instead of "Throwing out the baby with the dirty bathwater," we must take command of our visions to rouse the nation at war into a nation committed to fulfilling its civil rights duties to our service personnel all around the world! Our nation and its President

must guarantee them a future worth coming home to, and we must press these homefront issues loudly...firmly...positively...and in concert with each other.

Henry A. Kissinger defined the philosophical parameters of the current war when he said, "In several thousand years of recorded history, the Middle East has produced more conflicts than any other region. As the source of three great religions, it has always inspired great passion...An Arab-Israeli negotiation will not end all the turmoil, because many Middle East problems are quite independent of that conflict. Fundamentalism in Iran has next to nothing to do with the Palestinian issue, though Teheran has exploited it. And Saddam Hussein would have tried to dominate his neighbors even if the Palestinian problem did not exist. But what the Arab-Israeli conflict has done is to make it difficult for the voices of moderation in the Arab world to cooperate with their supporters in the West. Victory in the gulf will create a historic opportunity to alter that particular equation-and it should be seized.*

Another historic opportunity awaits our President on the homefront.

He is a man who can clearly perceive that a domestic agenda of consequence awaits him, and his recent "unification" speech to the nation reflected some crystal clear vision.

Yet, it is up to us to write to him and communicate our expectations...now, not later when the press of new priorities intervene!

I would hope someday to be invited to sit down with President Bush and share my own thoughts on practical avenues to solutions to the morass of problems that will continue to mount if left unattended during this crisis.

President Bush invites communication from those who care.

I do.

You do.

Let's speak out supportively, but in the spirit of constructive criticism, let's "prioritize" home business side by side with the war.

May we encourage you to read these words of our President to inspire you. The leader who gave this speech

to a troubled nation on the evening of Tuesday, January 29, 1991, reveals himself as a human being whose "points of light" rest in us, his people. Let us share our own thoughts with President Bush and urge him to create and correct those fundamental issues in which you have a personal stake. Express yourself, even as he, in the following words has expressed himself, simply, to you:

Excerpt from President Bush's Speech to the Nation:

"Halfway around the world we are engaged in a great struggle in the skies and on the seas and sands. We know why we're there. We are Americans, part of something larger than ourselves...The strength of a democracy is not in bureaucracy, it is in the people and their communities. In everything we do, let us unleash the potential of our most precious resource: our citizens, our citizens themselves. We must return to families, communities, countries, cities, states, and institutions of every kind the power to chart their own destiny and the freedom and opportunity provided by strong economic growth. And that's what America is all about.

"I know tonight, in some regions of our country, people are in genuine economic distress. And I hear them. Good health care is everyone's right.

"Let (the future generations) know that together, we affirmed America and the world as a community of conscience. "The winds of change are with us now. The forces of freedom are together, united. And we move toward the next century, more confident than ever that we have the will at home and abroad to do what must be done-the hard work of peace."

That peace making process can turn the colors of war into a rainbow of hope providing each and every one of us self-empowers our communication. In your own words, speak out.

Self-confidence comes with practice. Democracy demands such practice. Use it or lose it!

*"A Postwar Agenda" by Henry A. Kissinger, Newsweek, January 28, 1991.

Pride Felt When Giving Blood

Different groups of people have different blood types. Nearly 20 percent of all African Americans have type B blood, compared to about 11 percent of white Americans. As an African American, you can make a special contribution to the African American community and to all Americans by donating blood regularly.

The blood you give will result in changing the shortage of Type B blood. The African American community does not give in proportion to its numbers of black patients needing transfusions. If this shortage persists, patients...Black and white...will be in jeopardy because the blood types they need might not be

readily available.

According to William J. Hicks, M.D., "If there was ever a time when we (Blacks) should be considered special donors, this is the time. Blacks need to gain a greater awareness of our blood and blood donating services. There are some misconceptions about giving blood, but through information sharing and education this problem can be eliminated."

If you are at least 17, weigh a minimum of 110 pounds and are in good health, give a special gift-give life. To schedule a donation appointment, call Trudy Sullivan, 284-0011, ex.292



Candlelight Prayer For Peace

Diane Enright urged the people of Portland to help create a world of peace Sunday, January 27. A cross-section of faiths and congregations from the Church of Scientology attended the candlelight service with Portlanders joining together to sing and pray for world peace.

The interdenominational service was organized by the Church of Scientology of Portland to give support to friends and family of servicemen and women in the Persian Gulf and to broadly promote a message of peace.

Reverend Diane Enright of the Church of Scientology added that, "Our prayers and hopes are a united and powerful force. These are the seeds from which world peace can grow."

Peace Group Announces New Offices

The Coalition Against U.S. Military Intervention in the Middle East has moved to a new office space at 1841 NW 23 Avenue, Portland, 97210. The new phone number is (503) 226-6411. Soon the office will have several phone lines in operation making communications much easier. Before this week the Coalition had been sharing office space with the Portland Central America Solidarity Committee (PCASC). Please feel free to call for any updates on activities or if you need information.

On Friday, February 1, 1991, at 5:00 p.m., there will be a gathering in Pioneer Courthouse Square to express opposition to the continued use of force in the Middle East. Area veterans have organized Northwest Veterans For Peace. They are presenting the forum this week to express their support for the men and women soldiers in the Gulf, and their opposition to the government's policy.

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Glory: Black History and Struggle

The history of Black America has always been, fundamentally, a struggle to be free. Enslavement and racial oppression were more than physical restrictions and the use of coercion against a people. Domination could only be achieved when the mind and spirit, as well as the body, was controlled and broken. More than a century ago, the slaves came to understand that their freedom could only be achieved if assumed an active role in the struggle to liberate themselves, mentally and physically. Freedom handed down from above to the oppressed, is not freedom at all. Freedom is only real when the oppressed themselves, through their own initiative and inner strength, shatter the chains of bondage.

This is the central message of "Glory," a historical drama depicting the ordeals of a Black regiment which fought during the height of the Civil War. The film is based partially on the actual letters of Union Army colonel Robert Gould Shaw (played by Matthew Broderick), who trained and led the Massachusetts 54th Regiment in a devastating assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in July, 1863. The son of wealthy abolitionists, Shaw was convinced that African-American troops, if properly trained and equipped, could exceed the performance of white Northern troops. As the film unfolds, there is a synthesis of sorts between this abolitionist-inspired belief in the equality of Blacks and whites, with the African-American desire to strike a personal and collective blow against the evils of slavery.

The wisest decision of "Glory" director Edward Zwick was to focus the heart of the film not on Broderick's character, but instead on four fictional Black men, who are used to represent the divergent personalities within the 54th Regiment. Denzel Washington portrays a Nat Turner/Malcolm X styled character, a Black man whose back has been bloodied many times by the

slaveholder's lash, who fights in order to settle scores. Morgan Freeman plays the regimental sergeant, a former gravedigger who fights because of his willingness "to die for freedom." Jihmi Kennedy portrays a rural and illiterate ex-slave, but a crack shot and screen newcomer Andre Braugher does an excellent job as a New England educated, middle class Black man, who finds his roots and identity by bonding with his fellow Black soldiers. The device permits a largely white audience to see both the diversity and humanity among the African-American soldiers, who have volunteered into the Union Army in order to liberate their brethren in the South, as well as themselves. Through the ordeal of conflict, in battle against white slaveholder officers, the Black soldiers become active participants in the struggle for freedom.

This is not to suggest that "Glory" holds up to historical examination. As American films go, it is generally very good, particularly the detailed accuracy of the battle sequences. However, it is short of the mark within the framework of Black social history.

"Glory" provides many examples of white racism within the ranks of Northern troops and officers, who refused to accept the idea of Black men carrying guns. But this racism within the military was simply a reflection of bigotry within the entire Northern society and political establishment as a whole. Lincoln didn't free the slaves with the Emancipation Proclamation as a humanitarian gesture, but solely as a military decision to disrupt the South's labor supply. The war was widely unpopular among white Northern workers, and they targeted their grievances by making Blacks scapegoats. On July 13, 1863, only days before the galant and bloody assault by Black troops on Fort Wagner, the white working class in New York City rioted against the city's Black population. Hun-

dreds of people, mostly women and children, were killed; thousands more were left homeless. For Black abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet, who was nearly killed in the riot, these were "dark and terrible days."

One of "Glory's" most moving sequences which depicts Black troops rejecting discriminatory wages beneath those of white soldiers is also historically accurate, but insufficient. The Enlistment Act of July, 1862, had set the pay scale for white privates at \$13 per month vs. \$7 per month for Black privates. The 54th Massachusetts Regiment refused any pay for more than a year, and the policy of discriminatory wages was finally reversed in 1864. However, many other Black troops protested the policy as well. In the third South Carolina all-Black regiment, sergeant William Walker mobilized his fellow soldiers, stacking their rifles and refused to fight under Jim Crow wages. Predictably, Walker was court martialed and shot.

Finally, "Glory" gives the audience the false sense that Black troops were an exception to the rule in Civil War combat. Actually, a total of 180,000 Blacks fought in the Union Army by the end of the war. More than 38,000 died, a 40 percent higher casualty rate than for white Northern troops. Blacks fought in over two hundred fifty separate engagements, beginning as early as the fall of 1862. There were also scores of Black officers, including abolitionists Major Martin R. Delany and Captain P.B.S. Pinchback. Ex-slaves, both women and men, worked as spies behind Confederate army lines. African-Americans, civilians and soldiers alike, were not passive witnesses in the struggle for freedom. Despite these weaknesses, "Glory" makes a substantial contribution to our awareness of the role of African-Americans in the conflict to abolish human bondage.

"Reinvestments in the Community" is a weekly column appearing in API publications throughout the USA.

PORTLAND OBSERVER

(USPS 959-680)
OREGON'S OLDEST AFRICAN AMERICAN PUBLICATION
Established in 1970

Alfred L. Henderson
Publisher

Joyce Washington
Operations Manager

Gary Ann Garnett
Business Manager

Leon Harris
Editorial Manager

The PORTLAND OBSERVER is published weekly by Exie Publishing Company, Inc. 4747 N.E. M.L.K., Jr. Blvd. Portland, Oregon 97211 P.O. Box 3137 Portland, Oregon 97208 (503) 288-0033 (Office) FAX#: (503) 288-0015



Deadlines for all submitted materials:

Articles: Monday, 5 p.m. -- Ads: Tuesday, 5 p.m.

POSTMASTER: Send Address Changes to: Portland Observer, P.O. Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208. Second-class postage paid at Portland, Oregon.

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