

EDITORIAL

Vantage Point: Responding To The Crises In Africa

Africa is often in the news these days but except for the exhilarating victory of the liberation movement in South Africa the news coming from our homeland is often tragic and negative.

Over the last few years the world has witnessed horrendous famines in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan and destructive and debilitating conflicts in Angola and Mozambique. Now there are the horrible images of human catastrophe in Rwanda where upwards of two million people may eventually die from the ravishes of war, fratricide and disease. Africa is a continent racked by hunger, poverty, disease and war. But we should never forget that Africa is our home.

Much of the crisis in Africa is directly attributable to the legacy of the holocaust of enslavement, colonialism and neo-colonialism at the hands of Europe. As Dubois reminded us, Africa is the richest continent in the world. Unfortunately, for centuries that wealth has gone to nourish, enrich and develop Europe and Europeans instead of Africa and Africans. Indeed, as Walter Rodney points out in his classic work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the continent's current condition of underdevelopment is a clear consequence of the rape and pillage of Africa by Europe and Europeans.

The European slavemasters and colonialist used their superior weapons and divide and conquer tactics to pit nation against nation and neighbor against neighbor in their quest to exploit the human and material resources of Africa. In 1884 at the Congress of Berlin the European powers sat down and actually carved up Africa like a piece of cake or pie with each nation taking its slice. The ruin of Africa is the legacy of white supremacy and tragedies like Rwanda are the bitter fruit of Europe's domination of Africa.

It is important to know this history to avoid shame, self-hatred and blaming the victims. It is also important because we as Africans in America and the world must understand that it is our duty to do whatever is necessary to rescue and restore Africa. We must develop a Pan-African consciousness that compels us to promote and defend the interests of Africans throughout the Pan-African World. We are not responsible for the underdevelopment of Africa, but it is our responsibility, our duty and destiny to reclaim that which belongs to African people - Africa. Hence we cannot be silent, invisible or inactive when catastrophes like Rwanda occur. We must respond because it's our blood, our extended family and our future.

Africans in America provided invaluable political support for the struggle against apartheid in South

Africa and we have provided a strong base of support for the struggle in Haiti for democracy and human rights. But we have been far too silent on the human tragedies in Somalia, Sudan and now Rwanda. Our lack of response may be related to the fact that we have massive problems right here in the U.S. And, we claim not to have a lot of money and therefore cannot provide a great deal of monetary and material support. From my vantage point, however, it is a matter of principle. If we can spend money as much as we do on alcohol, cigarettes, sports apparel, and other superfluous items, we can spend more money on our self-development in this country and in Africa.

It is that principle which has guided the work of the Black United Fund movement in this country from its inception and thank God, that same principle has inspired Kermit Eady, President of the New York Black United Fund to fashion a response to the crises plaguing Africa. Brother Eady is moving to create a Pan-African Relief Fund which will begin by raising funds for assistance to the refugees in Rwanda. With the help of boxing promoter Butch Lewis and Congressman Floyd Flake and Charles Rangel, Eady aims to secure large contributions from artists, athletes and entertainers and thousands of contributions from ordinary Black people all across the country. His

goal is to raise \$200,000 immediately and \$5 million over the next five years.

To be sure this is a modest amount. Obviously, through the Congressional Black Caucus and agencies like Trans-Africa, we need to pressure the U.S. government to allocate more relief and developmental assistance to Rwanda and the entire African continent. However, projects like Eady's Pan-African Relief Fund symbolize our collective commitment to do something for ourselves no matter how large or small. Our children here in the U.S. and our sisters and brothers in Africa do not need to see only Europeans providing aid and assistance to relieve the problems of Africa. They must see our love for our homeland manifest in concrete deeds and acts. And, if targeted effectively, modest projects like the Pan-African Relief Fund can have a meaningful impact.

No matter how difficult our circumstance here in the U.S., we have a stake in being our sisters and brothers keeper. In the final analysis we must fulfill Marcus Garvey's dictum: "Africa for the African at home and abroad."

Persons interested in supporting the Pan-African Relief Fund concept should write to Kermit Eady: 2271 Adam Clayton Powell Blvd., NYC 10030 or call 212-234-1695.

per se c t i v e s

Minority Business: Where The Action Is/Was

Last week I described the so-called Portland "Asian Approach" to small business; particularly I mentioned "Keh," the Korean form of cooperation and mutual support - based on trust and friendship.

I anticipated some cries of dismay: "You know us ain't got the money," so I headed that off pretty neatly, I thought. But, still, I had several African Americans call and wail that "those were the 'good old days' I was describing in terms of black cooperation and support." I was quick to point out that those Williams Avenue entrepreneurs of the 1930s and 1940s faced the same kind of detractors; people who talked about "the 'good old days' of the 1920s - Madam Walker, the beauty products magnate, Marcus Garvey, and the Southern insurance company giants."

A black woman (I love 'em) called to suggest that any group of

twenty out of the blacks she knows could raise the capital to set up and operate a number of fair size enterprises by scaling down their investment in automobiles, by 50 percent. "They could drive some old 15 or 20-thousand dollar clunker, but then they would lose cultural face."

Shortly after that call, I looked out by back window and saw that the former crack house on Northeast 17th was swarming with three generations of an Asian family. Those too young for heavy cleaning and landscaping carried away debris. Those too old, for it, washed windows and gave directions to a black laborer who was emptying a pickup load of lumber. None of the three units of family rolling stock could have cost over 12 grand.

Across the street, the dozen children of six black welfare families played in front of their apartments,

recently bought and renovated by three young Hispanic men. Just in the past year there has been the most dramatic change imaginable in the ethnic makeup of this eastside neighborhood. A neighbor tells me that from the vantage point of his porch, he has determined that whereas several years ago 90 percent of the traffic on Alberta Street was black, now only every third car is driven by an African American.

Now, since those supposedly knowledgeable in business must know what this all means in terms of opportunities in retail and service enterprises, where do we go to obtain their assessments and evaluations? This "Alberta Street Plan" we hear about - is there funding? Is it a "turn-key" operation? Is this what a "Minority Business Organization" does? Furnish traffic counts, evaluate location, hook you up with

franchisors, bring in the bankers, arrange credit, what?

Calling cold at first, and later, profiting by word-of-mouth, I picked up one used car dealer accounting client after another.

Soon, two of the dealers, Sidney Ambrose and Sam Masters asked me would I set up a finance company for them, which I did; the "Union Avenue Finance Company" at 5911 N.E. Union. At the time, the stretch of the street I described was known as "car dealers row" with perhaps 50 dealers in the area (like 82nd Avenue today). The idea was for them to be able to finance the smaller dealer's stock of cars, instead of having that interest go to the big finance companies (This is called flooring.) As far as I know this operation created the first clerical job ever for a black woman on Union Avenue. (How many are there now?) I remember one other black entrepreneur on Union in those days, "Chester's Auto Paint and Detail Shop," which serviced the same dealers. Continued next week.



By Professor Mckinley Burt

Civil Rights Journal: Save Our Children!

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

The health of two million American children is at risk. Two million American children are at risk of having lower IQ's, shortened attention spans, hyperactivity, aggressive behavior, reading disabilities and behavioral problems. Some of them even face the possibility of mental retardation, coma, convulsions and death.

All of these health problems are related to the fact that two million American children still have dangerous levels of lead poisoning. And African American and Latino/Latina children face lead poisoning levels which are much higher than those of whites. Indeed, African American children are more than twice as likely to suffer from lead poisoning as white children.

New data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* show that we have made much progress in the fight against lead poisoning of American children over the past decade. The removal of lead from gasoline, food cans and new residential paint is responsible for the decrease in blood lead levels of most American children.

But there are still nearly 4 million homes and apartments occupied by families with young children in the U.S. which contain hazardous lead. Thus, almost one in every ten preschoolers is affected by lead poisoning. In some communities more than half of young children are suffering.

For instance, in Chicago 38 percent of children tested were lead poisoned. In St. Louis 47 percent of the children were affected, in Baltimore 40 percent, and in East St. Louis 53 percent. Rural children are not immune either -- a new University of North Carolina study found that 22 percent of rural children tested in 1993 had elevated levels of lead.

The older, more dilapidated the building, the more likely the child is to be lead poisoned. Poor children of color are more likely to reside in such housing and, thus, to eat lead-based paint chips or inhale dust contaminated by lead paint. Old buildings also often have high levels of lead in the drinking water caused by lead solder and pipes. Buildings built before 1950 are likely to contain paint with high concentrations of lead while those built after 1980 have virtually no lead paint.

Childhood lead poisoning is a preventable disease. It is also the number one environmental health threat to children in the United States. We can eradicate lead poisoning in

children, just as we have rid our country of small pox and polio.

But that will only happen if there is the political will and financial ability to clean up our housing stock. The cost of getting rid of lead-based paint in old buildings is surely greater than low-income private home owners, day-care providers and state and local governments can bear.

A provision in the House Ways and Means Committee's health care reform bill would address this need by providing a dedicated source of funds for cleaning up such hazards in housing and day care centers. Called the Lead Abatement Trust Fund, this provision would provide not only the dollars for such clean up, but would also provide much-needed jobs in the nation's cities through training workers to do lead abatement. But with all of the jockeying for passage of health care bill even as this is being written, there's no telling whether the Lead Abatement Trust Fund will still be a part of the final health care reform bill.

The reality is that there is an enormous cost in not eradicating this terrible condition in our children. It is estimated that every dollar invested in abating lead hazards produces about \$1.80 in benefits realized in reduced medical and special education costs, lower rates of infant mortality, and increased earnings and productivity. The fact is that Ameri-

cans -- all of us -- have a moral responsibility to do everything possible to stop the poisoning of our children.

There's something we can all do about lead poisoning of America's children. Parents can learn about potential sources of lead exposure and steps to take to protect their children by calling 1-800-LEAD-FYI. Parents should make sure that their children are screened for lead poisoning during regular medical check-ups.

Voters can call their Senators and Representatives and tell them they want to make sure that the Lead Abatement Trust Fund is part of the health care reform bill. Without a dedicated source of dollars to do the clean up, it will take generations to get rid of lead-based paint in our older housing stock.

Churches and community groups can think about helping day-care centers and low-income housing residents pay for lead abatement in their buildings. Perhaps that can become a new thrust in the Habitat for Housing program that so many local churches and community organizations are now taking part in.

Our children are our future. Losing the intellect, the creativity, the productivity of even one child is a loss for us all. Let's do something about lead poisoning now. Let's save our children.

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

BY DR. LENORA FULANI

Black Leaders Must Coordinate Our Fight For Democracy In Africa

The oil workers of Nigeria have been on strike for democracy since July 4, demanding that the military government of General Sani Abacha free Chief Moshood K.O. Abiola, who won the country's presidential election last year. The military prevented Abiola from taking office, and then charged him with treason and arrested him on the first anniversary of his election. In recent weeks, the oil workers (oil is Nigeria's largest industry) have been joined by other workers and students in bringing the West African nation to a virtual standstill.

The African continent and its people have for centuries been the victims of gross economic and political manipulation and destruction by Europe and America: from slavery and colonialism, to CIA-inspired civil wars, to U.S. and European government support for dictators, murderers, and thieves. That kind of treachery continues to this day, of course, as the Clinton administration maintains its support for rulers such as General Abacha and Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire.

The Reverend Jesse Jackson's visit to Nigeria has highlighted the importance of Black leaders speaking out against the Clinton administration's policies. Reverend Jackson, representing the State Department and the Clinton administration, has delivered a letter from President Clinton to General Abacha calling on him to release Chief Abiola, the democratically-elected president of Nigeria, and to turn power over to a civilian government.

Reverend Jackson's trip has, however, provoked controversy. Prominent Nigerian democracy leaders have identified Reverend Jackson as a "friend and collaborator of the military oligarchy in Nigeria." The brilliant, Nobel prize-winning Nigerian author Wole Soyinka has objected Reverend Jackson's visit on the grounds that General Abacha will be able to manipulate it for his own anti-democratic ends. And, indeed, he has. The latest word is that General Abacha has agreed to release Chief Abiola, but on the condition that he give up all claims to the presidency.

Reverend Jackson has also worked closely with Congressman Ron Dellums of California, whose wife is employed by the Washington, D.C. lobbying firm that represents the Abacha government. Mr Dellums has introduced a congressional resolution which gives credibility to the idea of a constitutional conference allowing the military dictatorship to extend its tenure and play an influential role in any transition to democracy. While Rever-

end Jackson and Representative Dellums have tried to mobilize support among Black leaders for their sympathies for Abacha, Congressman Donald Payne of Newark, New Jersey, the Congressional Black Caucus member most influential on Africa policy, has made sure that the CBC has held fast in its backing of Chief Abiola. So strong is Congressman Payne's support of the democratic forces in Nigeria that he was denied a visa by the military government last week.

Reverend Jackson's visit to Nigeria, in my opinion, was misguided. It is extremely dangerous for a Black leader of his international stature to lend any credibility whatsoever to the Abacha government. In Zaire, the U.S. government has continued its backing of the Mobutu dictatorship, allowing Mobutu to sabotage the new constitution and depose the democratically-elected prime minister, Etienne Tshisekedi. I am among those in this country who have militantly supported Tshisekedi and worked to expose those-Black or white-who would allow any compromise with the Mobutu government. I appeal to Reverend Jackson to learn from the example of Zaire. Any legitimacy afforded to General Abacha undermines the Nigerian democracy movement and Chief Abiola.

Reverend Al Sharpton's planned visit to Rwanda raises some similar concerns. The Rwandan tragedy is, of course, of a magnitude that is hard to describe. But, as ever, the U.S. government has found a way to manipulate it for its own political ends, namely by allowing President Mobutu to control the relief and military situation on the Sairean side of the border. Mobutu is being politically rehabilitated, at just the moment when the anti-Mobutu democracy movement needs the greatest support.

While Reverend Sharpton's visit to Rwanda is motivated by humanitarian concerns, the Hutu hardliners responsible for the genocide are massed at the Rwandan border under the protection of their old ally, Mobutu, ready to invade Rwanda. I urge Reverend Sharpton to use his visit to challenge the Clinton administration to fully withdraw its support for Mobutu.

As an African American leader who has done extensive work on behalf of African democracy in Saire, Nigeria and Rwanda on Capitol Hill, with the Congressional Black Caucus and with ordinary Americans around the country, I believe it is critical that all Black leaders work together at this important juncture. Our joint efforts to dismantle corrupt African regimes will do the most for African democracy.

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