

OPINION

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Along the Color Line:

Crisis of Leadership in America Today

BY DR. MANNING MARABLE

There is a crisis of leadership in American public life today. President George W. Bush's opinion-poll numbers are at an all-time low, due in large measure to his insane and completely unjustifiable war in Iraq.

Congress, dominated by conservative Republicans, is caught in corruption, scandals, and seems totally out of touch with the needs of the American people. The mo-

guls of corporate America receive astronomically high salaries and benefits packages, while millions of Americans are losing their pensions and health care coverage.

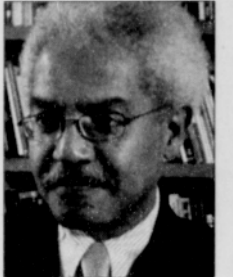
Where is the leadership we need that possesses a vision of what American democracy could be, a democracy without war and racism?

The place to begin is to reconsider past examples like Paul Robeson, the most courageous

model of civic leadership that the African-American people have produced.

Born in 1898, Robeson was an all-American athlete in college and received a law degree from Columbia University. Almost by accident he became involved in the theater and within a few years had become one of the best known actors in the country. His extraordinary singing voice also won him international popularity.

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Between the Great Depression until the late 1940s, he tirelessly supported trade union activism and

campaigns for Third World independence. In 1938, he defended the Spanish Republic in its unsuccessful war against fascism.

Robeson's advocacy for civil rights and trade union struggles led the FBI to place him under surveillance. With the onset of the "Cold War" between the United States and the Soviet Union, he courageously understood that international peace was essential to the interests of black and brown people, both within the U.S. as well as Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

In 1949, at the World Peace Conference in Paris, Robeson declared, "It is unthinkable that American Negroes will go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations...against a country [the Soviet Union] which in one generation has raised our people to the full dignity of mankind." The American press distorted this quotation, claiming that Robeson had stated that African Americans would never fight for the United States. Several prominent African American leaders including Harlem congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., NAACP National Secre-

tary Walter White, and baseball star Jackie Robinson, issued public statements harshly critical of Robeson.

In 1950, Robeson was banned from appearances on television, radio, and at concert halls. Subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1956, he defiantly refused to give names of American communists and challenged the committee members about their racism.

But the pressures of political harassment took their toll. In 1961 Robeson suffered a physical breakdown, and by the mid-1960s he had largely withdrawn from public life. He died in 1976.

Yet for the Black Freedom Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Paul Robeson continued to be the living embodiment of their political ideals. By remembering his fearless example, we might restore the democratic vision and political ideals of peace and freedom he lived for in our own time.

Dr. Manning Marable is professor of public affairs, history and African-American studies at Columbia University in New York.

Another Arms Sale to a Militant Dictator

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

Here's a question for Bush & Company: Can any of you even spell h-y-p-o-c-r-i-s-y?

I'm prompted to ask because of back-to-back news items I saw regarding Donald Rumsfeld's recent jaunt to Moscow. At a press conference, our Pentagon honcho expressed concern about Russian arms sales around the world - sales that the Pentagon calls "disruptive weapons technologies."

Then, the very next day, Rummy was in Algeria, meeting with the country's strongman president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Our Pentagon chief was again talking about arms sales - but rather than condemning them, he was trying to make some! "They have things they desire and we have things we can be helpful with," Rumsfeld said about a possible arms deal with the Algerian military. Among the high-tech weaponry they want are night-vision goggles, helicopters, and fighter planes to help them crack down on antigovernment rebels in the country's southern desert.

If Rumsfeld's salesmanship has a vague deja vu ring to it, that's

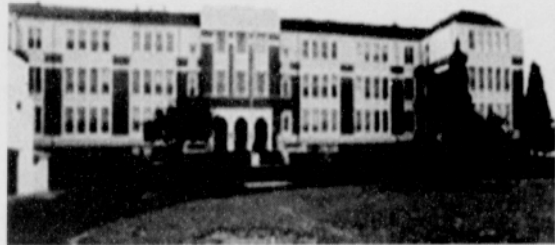
because the most infamous instance of his peddling U.S. firepower to the ruler of a desert nation was in 1983. He had been sent to Iraq as a special emissary from Ronald Reagan to assure Saddam Hussein that we would supply him with sophisticated weaponry and help him build up Iraq's military. That didn't work out too well for America.

Oh, say the Bushites, this is different, for Bouteflika is our ally against global Islamic terrorism. Hello...Saddam was our ally in 1983. And Bouteflika, who essentially seized power with military backing seven years ago, has a less-than stellar record on human rights and democracy. Once again, Rumsfeld is siding America with power elites... and arming them! Indeed, the arms we provide to Bouteflika would be used against his own people and possibly against Algeria's smaller Islamic neighbors.

How exactly is this helping America win the hearts and minds of the Islamic world?

Jim Hightower is the best-selling author of "Thieves In High Places: They've Stolen Our Country And It's Time To Take It Back."

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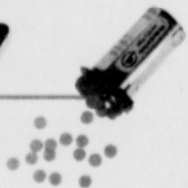
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