



“Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now”

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Embracing the Real Black History

One hundred and fifty years ago, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. It was a flawed document that freed enslaved people in Confederate areas that he did not control. At the same time, it was a progressive document because it initiated discussion about the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteen “FREE-DOM” Amendments.

One hundred years later, in 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. riveted the nation with his “I Have A Dream” speech during the Aug. 28 March on Washington. Many will remember that he said, “I have a dream that one day people will be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Somehow people forget that in the same speech he said, “We have come to the nation’s capital to cash a check that has been marked insufficient funds.” If people said “cash the check” as often as they said “I have a dream,” we’d move more quickly forward in closing the economic gaps that African Americans experience.

We’ve been doing this 50-year thing for the past couple years, and we’ll be doing it for another few. The “Greensboro Four” North Carolina A&T State University Students (with the help of Bennett College students, often ignored) sat in at Woolworth counters on February 1, 1960, more than 50 years ago. The March on Washington happened 50 years ago. The Civil Rights Act was passed in



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1964, and beyond that the 1960s will resonate for the next few years with commemorations and anniversaries.

These celebrations are important historical moments, but who remembers? The median age of the population in the United States

have never experienced discrimination. Even when they experience it, they are slow to embrace it. They are post-racial, whatever that means.

If some of these young people had been immersed in history, they might understand why the Black unemployment rate is twice that of the White rate. If they had read some Dr. Martin Luther King, who spoke of racial disparities in much of his work, they would understand the many ways the struggle continues. But popular culture suggests that when Black folks and White folks can both act extreme fools on reality

150-year-old dots. President Obama’s choice in using both Bibles in this anniversary year is a testament to his sensitivity and ability to juggle the tightrope he must manage as both president of the United States and the first African American president of our nation.

Most folks 50 and older get it. What about those who are both younger than our nation’s median age and unschooled in the nuances of history? Is our conversation about race in America stuck in some kind of time warp, where we are unable to speak cross generationally because we have extremely different memories, recollections, and knowledge about that which happened 50 years ago?

We do our nation a disservice when we duck and dodge our racially tinged history. We have to grace and embrace the past in order to move forward with our future.

Somehow this is a message that needs to be transmitted to young people, especially in this 150th year after emancipation, this 50th year after the March on Washington, this season of embracing and celebrating our history.

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‘We have come to the nation’s capital
to cash a check that has been
marked insufficient funds’

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr

is about 37 years old. Many of these folks remember the civil rights moment through twice and thrice told tales. Those who are under the median age see the civil rights movement as something like a fable, something they heard about, but doesn’t really matter to them. Many of these young people see themselves as “post-racial.” They hang out with their peers, race notwithstanding. They

shows (I think I blanked out after about a minute of “Bad Girls Club”); there is some measure of equality.

There has been a rich history and legacy of struggle and protest that has been swallowed by the notion of post-racialism in the first decades of this century. It is laudable that President Obama used both a Bible of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and that of President Abraham Lincoln, connecting the

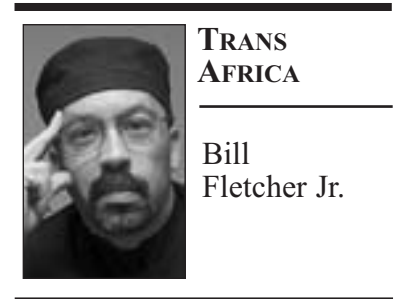
African Americans and the Philippines

Although the Spanish-American War (1898) is a well-known episode in U.S. history, few of us know that immediately following the end of hostilities with Spain, the USA initiated a war of colonization against the Philippines. Interestingly, Black America figured into this war in a very odd way.

The U.S. claimed the Philippines as a trophy from their war with Spain. The problem is that before the U.S. military arrived in the Philippines, there was a very successful insurrection underway by the Filipinos, an insurrection that was nearing victory. The Philippine rebels believed that the U.S. had arrived to assist in the final push against the Spanish. Instead, the U.S. troops turned against the Filipino rebels and embarked on what can only be understood to have been a racist, genocidal war aimed at subjugating the archipelago.

The war started Feb. 2, 1899. Black America found itself in an odd place at that moment. Reconstruction in the South had been defeated by White supremacist forces and African Americans were in the process of becoming disenfranchised as Jim Crow segregation was emerging as the law of the former Confederacy. In order to prove ourselves worthy of full citizenship, many African Americans volunteered to fight Spain in 1898, and later went to the Philippines to fight a population they had been led to believe

were heathens.
The U.S. war against the Philip-



**TRANS
AFRICA**

Bill
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piners was one atrocity after another, including indiscriminate killings and the use of a torture technique that we have come to know as water-boarding. Entire cities were destroyed, such as Iloilo on Panay Island. And in this

the White military, most infamous—was that of Army corporal David Fagen. Fagen abandoned the U.S. military and went to fight on the side of the Filipinos against his country. In fact, Fagen became an officer in the Filipino guerrilla army. This so infuriated the U.S. military that they put a price on his head. Although there were claims that Fagen was killed, it was never proven. In either, case he never surrendered and was never captured. The war lasted until at least 1902, though skirmishes continued well past that.

The week following February 2 has become, for many Filipino activists, Philippine Solidarity Week. It is a time to remember

ment, including under President Obama, supports government after government in the Philippines that serve the interests of the USA. More to the point, such governments either directly engage in human rights abuses or turn a blind eye to such abuses including what are politely called “extra-judicial killings,” i.e., political murders, aimed at opponents and dissenters.

African Americans, both at the birth of the 20th century and today, have had a connection with the Philippines. Soldiers and civilians, in 1899, were aware that the war was one of aggression and in many cases were prepared to speak out. As the U.S. of the 21st century seeks to further militarize the Philippines and block efforts to peacefully settle the long-standing civil war, we, once again, need to be prepared to speak up. And, in so doing, remember the moral dilemma faced and answered by David Fagen more than a century ago.

[For more information on David Fagen, please see: E. San Juan, Jr. “An African American Soldier in the Philippine Revolution: An Homage to David Fagen.” *Cultural Logic*, 2009, pp.1-36]

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In order to prove ourselves worthy of
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setting the Filipinos were not only demonized, but racially demonized, with White soldiers referring to the Filipinos as “n—” as they went about murdering them.

The overtly racist side to this conflict became apparent to African American soldiers, resulting in demoralization as well as some desertions. The most famous—or from the standpoint of

that the U.S. colonized the Philippines and held it in subjugation until 1946 at which point the country received nominal independence but actually became a neo-colony of the U.S. Struggles for genuine independence have continued through today, including an insurrection led by the National Democratic Front of the Philippines. The U.S. govern-