

FORUM

Commemorating Those African-Americans who Die for a Cause

Afro-Jamaican and Harlem Renaissance troubadour Claude McKay's most famous poem "If We must Die" gives us enthusiasm and brackets our anger as Memorial Day approaches. McKay wrote, in part: "If we must die, let it not be like dogs... chained and bound and bleeding, as some inglorious lot!"

How many African Americans will die this Memorial Day weekend?



LIFT EVERY VOICE

By WILLIAM H. TURNER

How many will join the daily U.S. average of one black death every 45 minutes. Between Memorial Day weekend and July 4, more blacks will be murdered than have been lynched in the past 110 years. Who will die in the African-American community this weekend; behind whose caskets the anguished muttering in the sobbing hearts of veiled mothers shall be heard again to say, "He didn't have to die this this!" Like a dog.

Few eulogies will intone with veneration and vaulted tribute these dead for their heroic acts. The timeless words spoken by our eloquent clerics about the character of the casket occupants are replaced with thoughts of how senseless the deaths have become. Cold-blooded murders, few having met this final fate "for a cause."

The cause of racial justice espoused but a generation ago and for which many noble souls perished has ebbed and waned, traded away for its effects:

racism, poverty and the violence that imprisons us all.

Memorial Day invites us to look anew at the Civil Rights Movement and those who died in the struggles. Many of our martyrs are well known, but unlike many dying in the streets today, many deaths were never investigated, many killers never identified, and there are many victims whose names have been lost. Their deaths, unlike most victims and killers in the black community today, were not in vain: they died for a cause.

We salute the memory of the countless millions of Africans who died during slavery's Middle Passage, whose bodies would cover ten-deep the victims of the ridiculous and stupid savagery in the African-American community today. We offer heartfelt Memorial Day accolades to those who, like Kunta Kinte, gave limb and life in resisting the deep-seated feelings of racial superiority during the ravages of slavery.

When you stand this weekend near the tombstones of African Americans who would be in their 90s-and-up, ponder on George Henry White, White, a North Carolinian, the only black U.S. Congressman at the turn of this century, sponsored the first anti-lynching bill. Remember the 2,800 blacks lynched between 1882-1901 who died "just because" they were black. Venerate and consecrate this Memorial Day weekend our forbearers who fought against Jim Crow laws at home and perished defending democratic-loving peoples on the battlefields of Europe in World War I and II, and in Korea, Vietnam and the deserts of Iraq.

Pause this Memorial Day weekend to reflect on Little Rock, Montgomery and Selma. Harassment and physical attacks at the hands of angry whites then is no different than the tyranny we suffer at the hands of "our own." Then, as now, we have no alternative but to protest, protect and defend our little girls — as we did when they died (gloriously) in that Birmingham Sunday School. At least their cooling boards dripped with the blood of a cause.

May our collective memories this Memorial Day focus on the value of the confrontations that demonstrated the justice of our cause and exposed the brutalities of racism. In like manner and with even greater zest, we must retain the Monday morning spirit of young African Americans in the Greensboro Woolworths. African-American youths willing to fight — nonviolently — against the senseless violence in the neighborhoods and to be battered with fists and clubs and guns (this time in the hand of their neighbors) would make for a better site than what we see today.

At least in the Movement days, we knew that our struggles would silence the sounds of gunfire, the constant killing, and the undeviating tragedies. If they've "come to live with it," they must be shown how to die for it, for its cessation. If we could but enlist a corps (remember CORE and SNCC) of youths exercising their right to be free from crime and violence, any brutality against their just cause would force public and federal actions to end this malaise and foe of us all.

Of course, it is our will to live in peace (and with honor) with each other and all peoples of the earth. But, we should not resign ourselves to live in fear of those who would take our lives because they have no cause. Most of us have something for which we are willing to give our lives. We fought and died on slave ships and against slavery. We fought Jim Crow. We walked and died on freedom rides. We died to get our citizenship rights for schooling and access to public accommodations. Today, we have another adversary and formidable foe. We fought and died too long and hard to break the chain of discrimination and racial prejudice to let it come to this implosion. I hear McKay this Memorial Day, speaking to us as we commit to die "for a cause." "We will conquer every foe, or together gladly die."

(William Turner is a regular freelance columnist for the Chronicle.)

'Applauding TransAfrica's Rise to Prominence and Credibility'

Haiti and South Africa. Two distinct nations. Two distinct legacies. Two distinct challenges.

Neither time nor space will allow this writer to delve into the depth of the analysis necessary to give true understanding of the complex histories of, and even more complex challenges facing these two countries. Yet, suffice it to say here that much of what we are witnessing today as far as U.S.

to invoke economic sanctions against racist South Africa. It was TransAfrica's scholarly research and concerted activism that documented and brought to light the unjust incarceration of Nelson Mandela, as well as the insidious financial ties of U.S.-based (and European) multi-national corporations with South Africa's then-brutal oppressive apartheid government. Consequently, in conjunction with entities such as the African Liberation Support Committee, NAACP, the Congressional Black Caucus, National Conference of Black Mayors, National Association of Black Elected Officials, the Commission for Racial Justice, etc. TransAfrica's pressure fundamentally changed the way the government and business dealt with South Africa.

From the economic-divestment movement to the South African Embassy protests, TransAfrica kept the public's attention focused on that pariah nation.

But do not be misled. TransAfrica has not risen to prominence and credibility as just a "one-issue" organization. Indeed, again from its inception, it was TransAfrica that enlightened the African-American community and its leadership on the then-heroic liberation struggles in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola and Namibia. Moreover, it was TransAfrica's mission to systematically change the historic rule that the U.S. government and American-based corporations played in bolstering the repressive, imperialist European governments in those nations.

For the record, Brother Robinson would want you to know that TransAfrica's posture has been to challenge injustice whenever it reared its ugly head — no matter the race of the perpetrator. Thus, TransAfrica led the change in exposing the brutality of Idi Amin in Uganda, as well as the corruption of Mobutu in Zaire.

As for the Caribbean, TransAfrica again has been the catalyst for policy makers in the White House and at the State Department to rethink political and economic relations with countries like Jamaica, Cuba, Panama, the Bahamas, Puerto Rico and yes, Haiti. And as critical as TransAfrica was of the 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada, it is now in the forefront of advocating a military solution in Haiti.

While this writer is not yet sold on the idea of U.S. military intervention in Haiti, given the sordid legacy of imperialist "gunboat diplomacy" in that region, I nevertheless applaud TransAfrica for its courageous and consistent stands. (Indeed, even sources within the Clinton Administration concede that were it not for Randall Robinson's much-publicized fast protesting Clinton's Haitian policy of returning refugees without hearings, the changes that we are currently witnessing would not be occurring.)

To be sure, there were African Americans before (and since) TransAfrica who saw our struggle in its global context and pressed for more association and alignment between Africa, the Caribbean and throughout the Diaspora. From Martin Delany to Frederick Douglass, Henry McNeil Turner to Paul Robeson, Marcus Garvey to Malcolm X, Martin Luther King to Benjamin Chavis, Jesse Jackson to Owusu Sadukai, Angela Davis to Maya Angelou, there have always been among us those who challenged us to view our struggle as extending beyond the geographic boundaries of the continental United States.

Randall Robinson and TransAfrica proudly and diligently continue that legacy. We all should be grateful. Certainly President Nelson Mandela and the masses of our folk in South Africa and Haiti are. May God continue to bless TransAfrica and Randall Robinson.

(Clifton Graves is a frequent guest columnist for the Chronicle.)



GUEST COLUMN

By CLIFTON GRAVES

foreign-policy initiatives, media attention and public awareness regarding Haiti and South Africa is directly attributable to the efforts of TransAfrica, and its dynamic executive director, Randall Robinson.

Since its founding in 1977, TransAfrica — the only recognized African-American lobbying entity focused on African and Caribbean interests — has positioned itself as the "foreign-policy braintrust" for the African-American community. Under the leadership of Brother Robinson — a Virginia Union and Harvard Law School-educated scholar/activist — TransAfrica has been and continues to be on the cutting edge of issues confronting the African Diaspora.

It was TransAfrica as early as 1978 that began to challenge the Carter Administration, Congress, prestigious universities, states and municipalities

'Encourage Congress to Support A Safe Start for our Children'

The upcoming weeks are critical to the safety and life chances of our nation's children. Within the next month, members of the U.S. House of Representatives will meet with members of the Senate to develop the final version of a comprehensive crime bill for approval by President Clinton. It is up to us to make sure that the best provisions for our children in both the House and Senate versions of the crime bill are left in, while the worst are taken out.

We must encourage our Congressional representatives to push for the inclusion and full funding of prevention measures. Following the Senate's lead, the U.S. House of Representatives voted recently to include the Ounce of Prevention and the Community Schools provisions, and added the Youth Employment and Skills Crime Prevention programs to its version of the crime bill. These programs and others will give our youth wonderful alternatives to lives on the streets and meaningful opportunities for growth and achievement. With quality after-school and summer recreational, tutoring and mentoring programs and significant employment opportunities for youth, we will begin to take the steps necessary to reinvest in our young people.

If we are to keep our children entirely out of harm's way, we also must urge our Congressional representatives to support strong federal laws controlling the manufacture, sale and possession of non-sporting firearms and ammunition. The House version of the crime bill does not include a ban on assault weapons. We must let our representatives know that their failure to help us ban these deadly machines will endanger our children's lives.

America's young are harmed everyday by the pervasive gun violence around them, by losing parents or siblings or classmates, by having to sleep in bathtubs for cover, by losing much of their childhood and all of their innocence to this immoral tidal wave of violence that reaches all corners of our society, but particularly afflicts certain poor and minority and inner-city

communities.

Between 1979 and 1991, almost 50,000 American children were killed by guns. Thousands more children are injured by gunfire. The Center for Disease Control estimates that there are five non-fatal gunshot injuries for every fatal one. That works out to more than 26,000 children and youths injured by gunfire in 1991. Remind your Senators and Representatives that the time for enacting strong legislation against the sale and manufacturing of non-sporting firearms is now. The longer we wait, the more our children

adults. We know that waivers, which allow juveniles to be tried as adults, disproportionately affect minority youths. In 1990 black youths petitioned in juvenile court were more than twice as likely as white youths to be waived to adult court. Adult courts are not equipped to meet the needs of juveniles, especially children as young as 13. There are many troubled 13-years-old (who have a seventh-grade education at best), who will not even be able to comprehend the significance of a criminal trial in federal court. Federal probation officers often have little, if any, experience working with juveniles, and there are no federal juvenile facilities in which to house children. Perhaps the most harmful aspect of this provision is that it symbolizes the abandonment of any hope of rehabilitation for even the youngest of offenders.

At a minimum, Congress should set aside the waiver provision until an already mandated study is completed and Congress can take a more careful look at the impact on young people of existing state provisions for waivers to adult court. In 1992, Congress requested the Comptroller General to study juveniles waived to adult court, and certainly no federal action should be taken on this issue until the results of this study are received and carefully reviewed. Again, I urge you to contact your Congressional representatives about keeping the Ounce of Prevention and Employment and Skills Crime Prevention programs in the final version of the crime bill. At the same time, let them know that you're counting on them to protect our children with strong laws on non-sporting firearms. Finally, encourage them to keep out any provision that requires children to be tried as adults. Our actions today are what give our children chances for the future.

To contact your Senators or Representative in Congress, call the Capital switchboard operator at 202-224-3121.

(Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund, a national voice of children, and a leader of the Black Community Crusade for Children.)



CHILD WATCH

By MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

will suffer.

One provision in the Senate version of the crime bill that will be particularly harmful to children requires juveniles over the age of 12 to be tried as adult in federal court for certain crimes. We simply must keep this provision out of the final version of the crime bill. Although this proposal is intended to make young people accountable for the consequences of their actions and to stop the tremendous rise in violent juvenile crimes, it will not effectively deter violence and instead will have unintended negative consequence that will affect a much broader group of troubled young people who could benefit from the rehabilitation that is the hallmark of the juvenile court. In most states, judges already have the option to try violent juvenile offenders as

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How to Reach us...

910-722-8624 • Fax 910-723-9173

NEWS STAFF
DAVID DILLARD
VERONICA CLEMONS
723-8428

PRODUCTION
KATHY LEE, SUPERVISOR • CHARLOTTE NEWMAN
• SCARLETT SIMMONS • CRYSTAL WOOD

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