

FORUM

Friends Lost; Heroes Found



Nicole Lee
Guest Columnist

I think the word "hero" is over-used. The meaning - "being of great strength and courage, celebrated for bold exploits" is a high standard to meet. There are few people I know who actually fit the definition.

Lovinsky Pierre Antoine, is a Haitian activist and leader of Fondasyon Trant Septanm (September 30 organization), named in commemoration of the coup against democratically elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide in 1991. His organization worked with victims of torture, rape and extrajudicial executions by the Haitian military and paramilitary. I met Lovinsky when I lived in Haiti. I admire his fervent commitment to educate Americans about the negative impacts of US policies towards Haiti. In 2004, under threat by the former military whose human rights abuses he had vehemently denounced,

Lovinsky left Haiti for the US. But two years later, after democratic elections, Lovinsky returned to Haiti. Like many of his friends, I was concerned for his safety, but Lovinsky was unwavering. Last August, while working with a human rights delegation, Lovinsky received a telephone call and left his home. His car was found the next morning, but he has not been seen since. He is "disappeared", a term used to describe someone who is kidnapped out of a political motivation.

If Lovinsky were here he would be sounding the clarion call about the food crisis in Haiti. He would challenge us to find real economic solutions, not quick fixes. Not just for Haiti, but for the entire African World.

If he were here, I think he would be friends with Harold Gamboa, a labor leader from the South American nation of Colombia. Colombia has the 3rd largest population of African descendants in the Western Hemisphere. Due to conflict, US drug policy, and corporate greed, Afro-Colombians are being forced off their land. It is 2nd largest internal displacement rate in

the world, right after Darfur. Colombia is also the most dangerous place to be a labor leader.

Harold Gamboa has been a port-worker for 28 years in Buenaventura, Colombia's largest port. The port is the major employer for the 90% black population. Over 70% of the imports into Colombia come through Buenaventura. Port workers make about \$100.00 a month, well under the minimum wage. Since the port was privatized, over 31 workers have been killed due to widespread safety violations. When workers are injured or killed, no provision is made for their families.

Gamboa was in Washington to meet with TransAfrica and members of Congress, and he told us:

"I think our politicians don't feel the daily pain of our city, of our people, death that we have to face day after day. There are mothers that don't know how they will feed their children, fathers who don't know what to do because jobs are always so scarce."

Colombia is a place where Blacks and trade unionists are killed regularly. So to be an Afro-Colombian trade unionist, like Harold, comes with

extreme risks. The Port Association has actively attempted to destabilize unions through intimidation and harassment. Buenaventura has become an oppressed, violent city where the bodies of civilians are found weekly.

But Harold Gamboa is staying to fight. Last week he came to the U.S. to speak out against the racism and abuses against workers in Colombia. He came to fight against the Free Trade Agreement between the US and Colombia that will only make the situation worse for him and his fellow port workers.

Like my friend Lovinsky, his bravery overwhelms his fear. Their fights are not just at home in Haiti or Colombia, but here in the U.S. These husbands, fathers and leaders risked their lives so their children have some hope for a dignified future. All evidence to the contrary, I hold out hope that these two heroes will meet one day. They share a common understanding that the world is not yet how it should or can be.

Nicole C. Lee is the Executive Director of TransAfrica Forum.



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NC House of Representatives

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McCain's 'Minister' problem unnoticed



George Curry
Guest Columnist

As Jon Steward said on The Daily Show, Rev. Jeremiah Wright has been dominating cable news coverage, like a missing White girl. Meanwhile, John McCain has his own Rev. Wrong in the form of Rev. John Hagee, a San Antonio-based minister who refers to the Catholic Church as the "Great Whore" and calls Hurricane Katrina divine retaliation for New Orleans' support of gays and lesbians.

Unlike O' Bama, McCain actively sought and accepted the support of Hagee. The Democratic frontrunner has been hammered about controversial statements of his former pastor even after strongly rejecting them. In the Feb. 26 debate alone, Farrakhan's name was brought up nine times. On the other hand, McCain has not been hounded to denounce and repudiate Hagee.

Not counting last weekend's stories, a study by Media Matters for America, a monitoring group, the New York Times and the Washington Post have published 12 times as many articles mentioning Obama's ties to Wright as they have on McCain's link to Hagee. From Feb. 27 until the past week, the Washington Post had published 53 stories mentioning Obama's relationship with Wright, but only three articles mentioning McCain and Hagee. Over that same period, the New York Times published 46 stories mentioning Obama and Wright, but only five about the McCain and Hagee connection.

Writing in Sunday's New



The controversial Rev. John Hagee.

York Times, columnist Frank Rich stated, "...It is disingenuous to pretend that there isn't a double-standard operating here. If we're going to judge black candidates on their most controversial associates - and how quickly, sternly and completely they disown them - we must judge white politicians by the same yardstick."

However, that isn't the case. And it never has been. Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell blamed the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on abortion supporters, gays, feminists, the A.C.L.U. and People for the American Way yet no one called on President George W. Bush, who enjoys their political support, to denounce and repudiate them.

As Rich pointed out in his column, former Republican presidential candidate Rudolph Giuliani allowed a former priest kicked out of a Long Island diocese in 2002 for sexual abuse to officiate one of Giuliani's weddings. The candidate was never asked to denounce and repudiate the defrocked priest.

McCain, the Republican's presumptive nominee, he gets a pass on Hagee. Consider the

following:

• Speaking on National Public Radio's Fresh Air [Sept. 18, 2006], Hagee said, "...The newspaper carried the story in our local area that was not carried nationally that there was to be a homosexual parade [in New Orleans] on the Monday that Katrina came. And the promise of that parade was that it was going to reach a level of sexuality never demonstrated before in any of the other Gay Pride parades. ... And I believe that the Hurricane Katrina was, in fact, the judgment of God against the city of New Orleans."

• He also said in that same NPR interview, "...Those who live by the Quran [Muslims] have a scriptural mandate to kill Christians and Jews."

• The Wall Street Journal [July 27, 2006], referring to Hagee's church bulletin, reported, "To help students seeking odd jobs, his church newsletter, The Cluster, advertised a 'slave' sale. 'Slavery in America is returning to Cornerstone,' it said. 'Make plans to come and go home with a slave.' Mr. Hagee apologized but, in a radio interview, protested about pressure to be 'politically cor-

rect' and joked that perhaps his pet dog should be called a 'canine American.'"

• Summarizing Hagee's record, Catholic League President Bill Donahue said, "For the past few decades, he [Hagee] has waged an unrelenting war against the Catholic Church. For example, he likes calling it 'The Great Whore,' an 'apostate church,' the 'anti-Christ,' and a 'false cult system.'"

• In his book, "What Every Man Wants in a Woman," Hagee said, "Do you know the difference between a woman with PMS and a snarling Doberman pinscher? The answer is lipstick. Do you know the difference between a terrorist and a woman with PMS? You can negotiate with a terrorist."

• In another section of the book, Hagee writes: "Only a Spirit-filled woman can submit to her husband's lead. It is the natural desire of a woman to lead through feminine manipulation of the man."

On the April 20 edition of ABC's This Week, McCain, referring to Hagee, said: "I'm glad to have his endorsement." He explained, "I admire and respect Dr. Hagee's leadership of the - of his church."

That position disturbs Donahue of the Catholic League. He said, "Senator Obama has repudiated the endorsement of Louis Farrakhan, another bigot. McCain should follow suit and retract his embrace of Hagee."

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.

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