

FORUM

Black and African lives have always mattered in Castro's Cuba



Bill Turner
Guest Columnist

"What's it matter to people of color, Black Americans, in particular?" That is the question I asked myself - as I do about most things - when the U.S. and Cuba [moved toward] normalized diplomatic relations last week [Aug. 15].

Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez pre-empted the possibility of a lecture from U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Cuba's record for human rights abuses and its track record of silencing political opposition and limiting the rights of its citizens. In his speech, Kerry's counterpart said, almost sarcastically: "In Cuba, we have our own concerns in the area of human rights for the U.S."

Then he ticked off the flaws and faults on the record of the U.S., citing the world's highest incarceration rate, income inequality, police brutality, racism, and the rule of special interest groups on the economy and politics.

The Cuban government has mattered to human rights struggles around the globe since Fidel Castro and his brother, [then] Defense Minister Raul, came to power in a coup in 1959. In 1960, President Fidel Castro and the Cuban delegation to the United Nations stormed out of a midtown Manhattan hotel to stay instead at Harlem's historic Theresa Hotel. According to the New York Times, Castro felt that "Negroes would be more sympathetic" to his cause, and he drew enthusiastic crowds of supporters. He was visited at the Theresa by Malcolm X, poet Langston Hughes, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the president of Egypt, and

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India.

Not long after visiting Harlem, Castro welcomed Robert Williams, the head of the Monroe, N.C. NAACP who fled to Havana after being charged with kidnapping. Fidel supported Williams with a radio station; his fight against the U.S. government became a global case. With Cuban support, Williams was completely exonerated upon his return in 1975, when the State of North Carolina dropped all charges.

Also:
*Assata Shakur - the godmother of rap legend Tupac Shakur - fled to Cuba in 1984 on the lam for murder charges filed in the late 1970s. In 2005, Shakur became the first woman to be named to the FBI's most wanted list. There are other African-Americans in Cuba, who, like Shakur, are fugitives from U.S. justice whom the

FBI considers armed and extremely dangerous.

*Stokely Carmichael - the well-known '60s-era Black Power disciple later known as Kwame Turé - mattered to Fidel Castro; in fact, they were mutual admirers. Before his death in 1998, Carmichael sought treatment for prostate cancer in Cuba, before dying in Ghana, where Castro had earlier supported the efforts of its first post-colonial president, Kwame Nkrumah.

*In a piece titled "9 Instances of Fidel Castro and Cubans Helping Black People Fight Colonialism and White Supremacy," the Atlanta Black Star noted how Cuba has never hesitated to contribute weapons and its own military forces to freedom fighters, those the U.S. called rebels, insurgents, guerillas, and terrorists, especially in Africa, such as the cases in the wars for independence

in Angola, Namibia, and Mozambique. In the Western Hemisphere, Cuban troops fought the U.S. military when it invaded the tiny Caribbean nation of Granada in 1983.

*Nelson Mandela, soon after being released from prison in 1990 after nearly 30 years of imprisonment, called his friend Fidel Castro, thanking him for sustaining the military arm of the African National Congress (ANC) party, which elected Mandela President of South Africa. Before and for the duration of Mandela's years as a political prisoner, the U.S. supported the apartheid system.

*Cuba offered to send its world, renowned medical workforce to New Orleans in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina hit. Of course, the U.S. State Department declined the offer. Cuba sent a large group of disaster relief per-

sonnel to Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake there five years ago. Cuba's impact continues into the present, especially in Latin America where, most notably, it assists Venezuela, a target of U.S. sanctions. Cuba is credited internationally for spearheading efforts to extinguish the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, West Africa, last year.

The thaw in dealings between Cuba and the USA started, significantly, when President Obama shook hands with President Raul Castro in 2013 at President Nelson Mandela's funeral. No doubt, Cuba will matter even more, now that we're closer.

Dr. Bill Turner is a noted educator, writer and thinker who called Winston-Salem home for many years. Reach him at bill-turner@comcast.net.

New Southeast Community Partnership hosts event at school

BACK TO SCHOOL

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The children in the Southeast Ward were recently treated to a back-to-school event at Main Street Academy. During the event, students were given book bags containing school supplies and were fed.

The Southeast International Community Day was organized by the newly formed Southeast Community Partnership. The team consists of several churches, organizations and government agencies. Many from the community were excited about the event and pleased to see an event in the Southeast community.

The Rev. Anthony Jones, pastor of United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church, described the experience:

"For 10 years, I have been serving as the senior minister of United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church, located in the Southeast Ward. One of my passions for ministry is working with children and youth. Over the years, I've noticed there was a lack of positive activity for children and youth in the area. I prayed to God to provide an idea to help build upon my desire to provide succor and strength to the children and youth and in our area. As a result of the Southeast International Community Day, the

efficacy of agencies and people who share the passion to produce a proper environment [united]."

Big Brothers/Big Sisters is also a member of the Southeast Community Partnership. Shawan Gabriel, CEO, expressed her opinion of the event as follows: "It was great to have so many community partners to unite and host this type of event for the southeast community, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters was glad to be a part of it."

There were countless families represented at the event. The Martinez family has three children in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools system. They were very grateful to be able to receive free school supplies.

Stan Martinez said: "This is a blessing, buying school supplies for three children can be very costly, we in the community really appreciate this event."

Ronald Travis, principal of Main Street Academy, concluded with the following: "I am very grateful we are able to partner with so many outstanding agencies. We appreciate their support."

"We are very grateful that our community supported



Submitted photo

A few children pose with supplies they received during the back-to-school event at Main Street Academy on Aug. 13.

an event of this magnitude. We are also thankful for the support of Officer Pam Peoples-Joyner and the Winston-Salem Police Department. Her leadership was very critical to the success of this affair.

"Lastly, to Councilman James Taylor, Councilman of the Southeast Ward. He supported this occasion and has visited our campus and pledged his support of our endeavors. Main Street Academy wants to continue to be a productive partner in the Southeast Community."

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