

## Black voters need to press Kerry on issues right now

RON WALTERS



Now that John Kerry has enough delegates to clinch the Democratic nomination for president, it is time to think about how the black community should relate to him.

I believe that it is dangerous for Blacks to buy into the electability game without infusing it with our own issues. To adopt the "anybody but Bush" attitude is to also invite someone to pretend to be a valid alternative, to get elected, but then carry out George Bush-like public policies.

Kerry



Sharpton

Any public policy aimed at improving the human condition should first be first concentrate on black community. In the past two decades, however, policies favored by blacks have been off of the radar screen. Even though blacks have solidly supported the Democratic Party, the leaders of the Party have frequently distanced themselves from us because they did not want to alienate undecided or independent White voters.

So, African-Americans face the dilemma that they have always faced - whether to upset the Party by pushing hard for their own agenda, or not rocking the boat, hoping and trusting that whomever gets in under the banner of the Democratic Party would be "better" for Blacks than the Republican nominee.

Rather than merely trusting that John Kerry does right by us, I would prefer that we make sure he has our best interest at heart by getting him to formally commit to an agenda before we commit to him.

Al Sharpton is evaluating whether he should continue his presidential campaign and will talk with Kerry to assess Kerry's commitment to black interests. Sharpton's influence comes from the relationship he developed with his fellow campaigner rather than his limited delegate strength. Still, this is excellent timing because the campaign between Democrats and Republicans has started early and there is still an opportunity to see where Democrats stand on issues important to their most loyal supporters.

But what if Sharpton is

rebuked in his efforts?

I proposed that there should be a process whereby the Congressional Black Caucus takes the initiative, perhaps along with the Black Leadership Forum, which contains a larger group, including civil rights leaders Jesse Jackson Sr., Dorothy Height, Marc Morial, Kweisi Mfume, Joe Lowery, as well as business, fraternal leaders and others.

This group could co-sponsor the black agenda conferences that are being planned for this spring by groups in Boston, Chicago and in other cities. The goal of these conferences is to produce a black agenda document to present to Kerry at the Democratic convention. The extent of Kerry's support for the Black Agenda would be made known at the annual Congressional Black Caucus weekend and the black community could then campaign for Kerry with the confidence that he will support their issues.

What options do we have if Kerry does not agree to the black agenda?

That's the who-wants-to-be-a millionaire question. Most blacks would vote for Kerry, anyway. But Kerry would be running the risk of committing political suicide.

He already faces a certain danger because Ralph Nader is again running for president. Four years ago, Nader cost Al Gore, the Democratic nominee, the election. If blacks are turned off in any significant numbers, Kerry has no chance of being elected. That's the real electability question.

Say, we don't present Kerry with an agenda and spare him the embarrassment of turning it down. And there are some who advocate this position. They argue that it allows Bush handlers to charge that the Democratic Party has moved too far to the Left. This kind of reasoning illustrates how little we know about forcing change in the political process.

In order to move the system, blacks have to look after their interests first, not the party's. That requires both courage and savvy. We must decide whether this time, it is worth pushing the envelope to make Kerry accountable or to trust him and the system to work it out and look after our interests.

Our history tells us not to trust the system, to fight for every inch of advantage and to be proud of that fight.

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### POSTSCRIPTS



FILE PHOTO

Jean-Bertrand Aristide's ineptitude in building democracy in Haiti led to revolution by former soldiers (above) and his ultimate resignation.

## Despite the hype, Haitians were duped by Aristide

By Harold Eustache  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

As a Haitian-American, I was a big fan of Jean-Bertrand Aristide when he was restored to power by American forces in 1994. I longed for democracy, peace and prosperity for Haitians including the many members of my extended family still living there.

I remember growing up in my home town of Cap-Haitien in the 1950s and '60s under the brutal Duvalier regime. Many classmates and I, as young high school students, came close several times to being victims of the infamous death squads called "Tonton Macoutes" during their crackdowns on so-called "Communist Students."



Eustache

Several close friends of my family, some of them prominent intellectuals disappeared in the dead of night, never to be heard from again. Everyone lived under significant fear of political repression, but the brunt of this fear was generally sporadic, and it was not unusual to go a couple of years or more without major disruptions in our daily lives.

Outside of the occasional political arrests or rumors of arrests, there was a certain sense of order. In Cap-Haitien where I was born and grew up until I immigrated to the U.S. at 18, children went to school and played outside, families went about their daily affairs, shopkeepers opened their stores, and life went on without murder and mayhem on the streets every day. Haiti was not even close to being the economic, social and political jungle that it is today.

Over the last dozen years, Aristide and his Lavalas Party have had a firm grip on Haiti's political, economic and social fate and direction. When he was reinstated by force in 1994, hopes and expectations were high internally as well as abroad. Finally, we thought, we have someone in power who was elected democratically. Since he was a former priest, I and most other Haitians and Haitian-Americans took it for granted that the corruption problem was licked. Boy, were we wrong!

It soon became all too apparent that he was encouraging street thugs who were his supporters to exact mob vengeance on his political enemies. He even praised them for using the dreaded "necklace", which is a gasoline-filled tire hung around the neck of a person and set ablaze. It is unbelievable that a former member of the clergy

would condone such atrocities. This is not to say that the victims of these cruelties were saints, or innocent of similar crimes. But democracy also means law and order, and the president has a duty to set the moral tone and be the example, especially in a country with a long history of gross human rights abuses.

In addition, during the 2000 elections, Aristide boldly and brazenly manipulated every aspect of the election including using violence and threats against his opponents. In the end, the opposition boycotted the election and he won by a landslide, something akin to Saddam Hussein's landslide election victory a year or so before the Iraq war.

Aristide spent a small fortune, nearly \$8 million a year on lobbying the U.S. government. Other countries twice the size spend less than half as much. A significant portion of that money went to Ron Dellums, former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, and Hazel Ross-Robinson, wife of Randall Robinson, founder of TransAfrica Forum. I am not suggesting impropriety on their part, but naturally, one would have to take their cries of foul play and accusations of kidnapping by the U.S. government with a grain, maybe even a whole spoonful of salt.

Aristide's private residence, looted by street thugs, was found to be hoarding piles of U.S. currency a la Saddam Hussein and sons. Under Aristide's rule, aid money routinely went directly to him and his cronies.

Of course, I and most others in the Haitian-American community, would not want to see power returned to the assortment of characters currently or perennially lining up to exploit our impoverished native country. However, we don't have to accept just any wolf in sheep's clothing either, as we did with Aristide. The good people of Haiti, with the help of the international community, now have a chance to do it right, to start anew without any charismatic characters and demagogues like the Duvaliers or Aristide tugging at their pride and patriotic heartstrings for personal gain.

Let us seize this opportunity to put in place timeless and democratic institutions that can function reasonably well without regard to the personality, emotional appeal, or duplicity of the leaders who get elected to head those offices.

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### OUR VOICES

## Questions conspiracy vs. Haiti

Bad news can seem less grievous when it is announced by some one with whom you can identify.

My conception of bad news is that President Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti has been forced into exile. The recent announcement provoked deep concerns as I listened to Beatrice Thompson, a local radio news director who also tries to educate listeners on local, national and international affairs.

My identifying with her is primarily a symbolic one or origins. These same origins also symbolically include the Haitian president new dislodged from his elected office.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Beatrice Thompson and I collectively represent present day descendants in the African Black Diaspora that comprises the "New World."

We are just a miniature reflection of the Africans brought to enrich the "New World" developed by European and American powers. Yet given the historical forces of an era that continues to define race and class relations in world politics today, each of us have some origins in common.

I contend that the recent toppling of President Aristide should be questioned by any thinking person of African descent. The current crisis in Haiti notwithstanding the pros and cons about President Aristide must demand answers about who underwrote the opposition movement against the duly-elected Aristide.

As one thinking person of African descent, I have five pressing questions: What was the role of American involvement in both periods of time that Jean-Bertrand Aristide was the Haitian president?

- Was there a Central Intelligence Agency role in the training and military arming of the Haitian rebels commanded by Guy Phillippe?

- From whom did rebel leaders and forces obtain weapons, uniforms and transportation?

- Why did France, with ongoing security forces in the Caribbean, not propose a peacekeeping plan for Haiti to the United Nations prior to Aristide's ouster?

- What is the current political position of the Caribbean community's organization known as "Caricom" in the debate on Haiti?

In finding answers, I'd also like to hear the perspectives of Haitian expatriates living in Charlotte. Might Thompson include some in one of her public affairs programs?

Mildred Dwigins Swift  
Charlotte

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