

African Americans vs. the new Africans

It's time we find common ground on common issues

It is time to begin a dialogue between non-immigrant African-Americans, and people of African descent who migrate to the U.S.A.



BILL
FLETCHER

This dialogue is a long time coming and very badly needed. The continuing misunderstandings that emerge between the groups undermine our ability to act collectively and to cooperate on common goals. As such, we can be played against one another.

If we think of African-Americans as those who are the descendants of people brought to the U.S.A. in chains between 1619 and the mid 19th century, we are beginning with the wrong assumption. Even prior to the relatively recent wave of immigrants from Africa and from parts of Latin America, "African-Americans" as a group were never homogenous. There were, of course, those who were brought here beginning in the 1600s, most of whom remained in indentured servitude and later slavery; a minority achieving freedom. Yet, in the early 1800s, another African population came to the U.S.A. but under very different circumstances.

Cape Verdeans, from then Portuguese-controlled Cape Verde islands (an archipelago roughly 500 miles west of Senegal), migrated to the U.S.A. as fisherman, whalers (and eventually bringing with them their families). Their identity, for the 19th Century and much of the 20th Century was linked to both Portuguese colonialism and a very different experience as Black people in the USA. Yet, over time Cape Verdeans began to influence and penetrate into the evolving African-American population.

Jazz artist Horace Silver (actually Silva), for instance, was for many years seen as simply another Black artist, with his Cape Verdean heritage completely ignored. Yet he was emblematic of so many other Cape Verdeans who helped to change what it meant to be an African-American.

By the early 20th Century, immigration from the West Indies began to increase and with it additional changes in Black America. While there have been and remain tension between West Indian immigrants and non-immigrant African-Americans, the contributions of West Indians to what it means to be an African-American are overwhelming. Great political leaders, including Marcus Garvey, but also the recently deceased Shirley Chisholm, altered what it meant to be African-American. Indeed, over the 20th Century, the merging of the West Indian immigrant communities and traditional African-American communities brought with it cultural, political and linguistic developments that would have been nearly inconceivable 100 years ago.

So, the lesson? Pure and simple, there are no pure and simple African-Americans. We are constantly undergoing changes as people from different parts of the African world enter the U.S.A. The political, economic and cultural realities of the homelands of the immigrants differ vastly from what they encounter in the U.S.A.

In many cases, particularly when these immigrants originate in black-majority lands, the demographics and racial politics of the U.S.A. do not make a great degree of sense. Yet, in time, irrespective of intention, they too merge with the great river of black America.

None of this is to deny the national and cultural identities of immigrants of African descent. Rather, we must all acknowledge that the historical lesson seems to indicate that over the course of one or two generations, immigrants of African descent (whether from the Caribbean, Africa, or Latin America) come to play an important part in defining what it means to be an African-American.

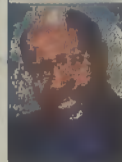
If we can arrive at such a conclusion, we must then talk. Immigrant and non-immigrant organizations of people of African descent need to, quite literally, sit down and begin to educate one another. We must, in other words, commence a dialogue toward greater mutual understanding. Through such a dialogue we can only get a better understanding of how to work together here in the U.S.A.

Those of us from the U.S.A. can get a better understanding of a much broader world that does not end at the borders of the USA. Perhaps with such a mutual understanding, we can reassert our role in changing that world.

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Leadership needs obvious after Katrina disaster

Hurricane response shows what nation thinks of victims



RON
WALTERS

What is occurring before our very eyes is a stark reminder that what Kanye West said about George Bush not caring about black people is true of the American political system as a whole at this moment in history.

Maybe you watched as I did, the arrogance with which some black people from New Orleans were treated who testified before Rep. Tom Davis' committee about what they experienced during the hurricane and the botched relief efforts.

This display of incredulity on the part of some member of Congress that sat on the committee illustrated that they may as well live on another planet when it comes to their understanding of the ill-treatment that is meted out to black people every day of their lives. The only other explanation for such resistance to the telling truth of these horrible experiences in such vivid terms is that they were embarrassed that such things happened inside the United States when they are attempting to strike a pose as the icon of democracy to other people around the globe.

Thus, "Moma D" and others testified about black people being held at bay with guns aimed at them by police and the National Guard, that they experienced concentration camp-like conditions in the Superdome, that racist epithets were hurled at them, and that, in fact, they were treated like the enemy in their own city. It seems not to matter whether they were Phi Beta Kappas, college educated, land owner, working, tax paying, or all of the other criteria that conservatives lay down when they are challenging black people to be like them. It only seemed to matter that they were black.

This fact, that the victims were predominantly black, seems to figure into another disaster in the making. It is that this session of Congress will end and no legislation will have been passed to deal with the disaster.

No leadership for an urgent attention to this crisis can be found, outside of the action taken by the Congressional Black Caucus that put together a package of legislation that represented all 42 members. No leadership in the White House is available. In fact, the word is that Bush has not decided whether the federal government will pay for the cleanup. That is to say, he has not decided whether to stop trying to shore up his falling rating by trying to pump up the war in Iraq as a "success" long enough to be responsible about the American Gulf.

The insurance companies that were supposed to insure homes against floods and high winds are jumping ship and in any case, they will only cover a portion of a small percent of the damage. The nature of the damage, for anyone who has seen even a little, is so vast that it will take a Marshall Plan-size project of the federal government to address the reconstruction. But, word is that the Department of Defense and the Corp of Engineers have not decided whether to rebuild the levees.

What? It is only six to eight months before the hurricane season will be upon that region again and if the levees cannot be strengthened in that time; people face the prospect of another season of misery. Thus, for the decision to languish about whether the federal government will take responsibility for the reconstruction, even for the question to be raised about who will pay, is a massive rejection of responsibility, so deep and historically incomprehensible that it cries out, why.

Could the answer be that black people are the worst victims? Where is the leadership? The newspapers show Bush exercising leadership on making tax cuts permanent just now, figuring out how to take money out of the treasury that will surely be needed for rebuilding the American Gulf. We should look the size of this abdication of responsibility in the face right now. By doing so, we help our leaders, and our friends, to take off the blinders and come to the conclusion I have reached - this issue will have to be forced onto the national agenda by direct action.

As a policy analyst, I believed - and have written - that Hurricane Katrina forced open the doors of the house of poverty and let all come in to see that the social policies of the last two decades are not working. I had hoped that the discussion about poverty would become nationalized and made credible by this act and that possibly new policies might be entertained. But I also understood the determination of White nationalists to succeed with their agenda, which meant that they would find a way to submerge the human needs under the rubble of materialism and racial dominance.

They have been very successful and they have had the assistance of the media, as the shift of American attention moves on to shopping sprees, and parties celebrating Christmas. We shouldn't feel much like celebrating this Christmas. But the season of Martin Luther King, Jr. is coming and we should use it to figure out how to move this agenda back onto the national stage.

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What I would do with the rest of my life

Condemned killer sought chance to make amends with anti-gang choices

This column was written by Williams and made available to the NNPA News Service by the NAACP as Tookie Williams awaited word on whether he would live or die. On Monday, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger rejected Williams' bid for clemency, paving the way for his execution Tuesday.



STANLEY
"TOOKIE"
WILLIAMS

My name is Stanley Tookie Williams. I've been residing on San Quentin's condemned row for over 24 years. As a death row prisoner, my testament to redemption has been met at times with condemnation and misinformation. Fortunately, it is God who anoints with the oil of redemption. The forgiving God to whom I pray has sublimated me, humbled me - and vicariously works through me.

In the beginning, redemption was an alien concept to me. However, while in solitary confinement, during 1988 to 1994, I embarked upon a transitional path toward redemption. I underwent disciplined years of education, soul searching, edification, spiritual cultivation and battling my internal demons. Though I was loathed for being the co-founder of the Crips, my redemption caused me to repudiate my gang leadership role, to repudiate any affiliation with the Crips or other gangs.

Redemption has resurrected me from a mental and spiritual death. It symbolizes the end of a bad beginning as well as a new start. Being redeemed has enabled me to reunite with God, reclaim my humanity, find inner peace and discover my raison d'être - my reason to exist.

Recently I was asked if I am prepared to die. I responded, "I'm prepared to live." Though execution looms like poisonous toxins, God's gift of redemption revivifies my life. I inhale redemption and exhale joie de vivre. That's why I do not fear death. Socrates stated while defending his life before court judges, "A man who is good for anything should not calculate the chance of living or dying. He should only consider whether in doing anything, he is doing right, or wrong, and acting the part of a good man, or of bad." I opted for good to assist the hopeless.

Consequently, my spirit deeds are exhibited in my nine children's books; my memoir, Blue Rage, Black Redemption; my educational website, www.tookie.com; my Internet Project for Street Peace; and my Peace Protocol. All of my work is predicated on persuading youths and adults to not follow in my footsteps. Still, my desire is to do more.

Recently I met with Bruce Gordon, president and CEO of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). From that extraordinary meeting came an historic partnership. Each NAACP chapter will be working with me to create and implement a violence prevention curriculum for at-risk youths throughout America. The partnership with this nation's oldest civil rights organization will provide me with the structure and support to carry out my vision of a gang-free America.

I know that to whom much is given, much is expected. If Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger grants me clemency, I will accept it as an obligation to society to spend the rest of my life working to reverse the cycle of youth violence. It is my desire to help save society from producing more victims.

Here and now, I bear witness that God's bequest of redemption has replenished me with a mission and revealed that the impossible is possible.

All of my work is predicted on persuading youths and adults to not follow in my footsteps.

