

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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MATTERS OF OPINION

Keeping Darfur in forefront

Almost unnoticed by the media in the national Hispanic mobilization was the demonstration on the Mall in Washington D.C. to bring and to keep attention focused on the continuing catastrophe in the Darfur, a region located in the African country of Sudan.

Out on the grounds of the demonstration I could not help but notice the vivid contrast of a largely black movement begun last year almost single-handedly by Joe Madison, Radio One talkshow host who was on the stage serving as the MC in the midst of a largely white turnout. This is important because if Black people cannot be depended upon to continue the leadership on this issue, in the long run – and that is always the case – how can the pressure build for the United States government to pressure its allies to do something to stop the killing and genocide.



Cummings

But the racial issue aside for the moment, the conflict is still critical and so, it was good that actor George Clooney, with Sudanese basketball player Manute Bol, Congressman Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) and Don Payne (D-N.J.) and others drew some attention to the gathering. They reminded the crowd that by now an estimated 200,000 people have been killed, raped and tortured and 1.5 million displaced by an armed force called the Janjaweed. The thugs continue to be sponsored by the Sudanese government trying to impose an Islamic culture on Christians and others observing traditional African religious practices.

Originally, the pressure on those in the South and West, who were non-Muslims, was resisted by several militant groups, such as the Sudanese Liberation Movement/Army and Justice and Equality Movement, that came together to resist the imposition. The government responded by letting loose the Janjaweed.

The group of about 20,000 rallied to protest the inaction by the world community and to attempt to spur the U.S. government into action. This is a strategic moment because in the Bush administration, there is a black Secretary of State who has formerly expressed an interest in Africa and a black assistant secretary of state for African Affairs. If they can't move this issue who can? Furthermore, at the moment, the United States has just begun its term as the chair of the United Nations Security Council, placing it in a strategic position to lead, if it would.

Some movement is occurring in the talks that have been initiated in Nigeria between the warring parties under the sponsorship of the African Union. The AU has proposed a deal involving wealth-sharing and power-sharing between the militant groups and the Sudanese government; U.S. diplomats are involved in attempting to pressure the Sudanese to accept it. But, as one diplomat involved in the talks reported, "It all comes down to a power-play between Washington and Khartoum." The deal is also dependent on the agreement of the militant groups that have had a history of internal conflict among themselves.

With respect to Khartoum and the United States, however, there is the rising specter of oil politics as a factor in the background that limits the pressure that each can either employ or resist. Khartoum has recently begun the flow of 500,000 barrels per day in a new pipeline that is a product of a jointly-owned Chinese pipeline, with both the Chinese and English (White Nile Ltd.) operating in Southern Sudan. The reserves of Khartoum are vast and an Italian firm has been contracted to build a refinery in Port Sudan. Therefore, Sudan is involved in the increasingly treacherous game of global oil politics and that tends to guide the approaches of other countries to critical decisions.

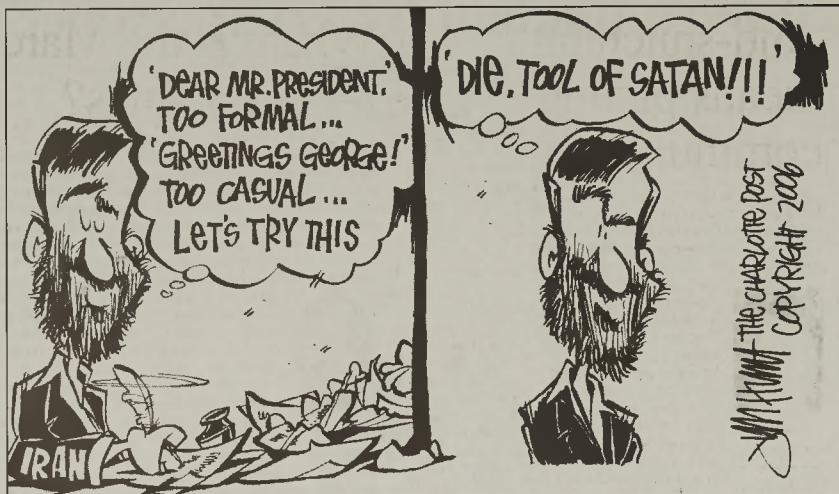
Whether oil interests will trump the violence in the case of Darfur and provide a context in which all parties can see the future (even African countries such as Zambia and Kenya are attempting to establish access to Sudanese oil resources) or, it will harden those interests remains to be seen. The presence of oil in Southern Sudan should be a catalyst for politics that results in peace and stability, but it cannot occur under the oppressive control of the Sudanese government. Thus, real power-sharing and wealth-sharing are the only solution between the government and leaders of Southern organizations.

All citizens, including Blacks, need to monitor this situation and keep the pressure on the U.S. government to guide Sudanese government impulses toward peace and self-determination for Southern Sudanese Africans.

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War in the Darfur region of Sudan has created an extended humanitarian crisis.



Defying odds to improve lives

When a person dies, a dash is placed between the year of his or her birth and the death year. That dash symbolizes what happened between the time that person entered the earth and the point of departure. In the case of



GEORGE E. CURRY

Damu Smith, who died last week, he crammed more into his 54 years on earth than people who live twice as long. Yet, the feeling lingers that he left us too soon.

Always quick to greet one with a broad smile and a robust hug, Damu Smith, with his boundless energy, resembled a meteorite looking for a place to land. He was perpetually in motion. Damu traveled at warp speed and didn't have much patience for those who only wanted to travel at the speed of light. There was always an air of urgency about him, because he didn't know how long he would be on this earth. He didn't know when he would come to the end of his dash.

Damu was a man of integrity. D.C. is a city where after shaking another person's hand, you're tempted to look down to make sure all of your fingers are intact. Yet, Damu, living in Washington, was able to transcend the culture

of pin-stripped suits, business cards and selfishness and remain genuine.

He was also a visionary. Long before most of us had heard the terms environmental racism or environmental justice, Damu recognized the danger of people unknowingly being exposed to toxic waste. The communities targeted as dumping grounds were populated by people of color and the poor, the very people least able to defend themselves. But Damu defended them, first as a staffer for Greenpeace USA and later as founder of the National Black Environmental Justice Network.

He and other activists drew national attention to a polluted stretch of land between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, labeling it Cancer Alley. Petrochemical officials argue that they created jobs for local residents. But Damu and others argued that they caused cancer and other dreaded diseases and numerous studies support their view.

Writing for the Web site, SeeingBlack.com, investigative reporter Ron Nixon noted: "Nationally, a 1987 study by the United Church of Christ's Commission on Racial Justice found Blacks were four times more likely to live in areas with toxic and hazardous waste sites than

Whites. A 1992 investigation by the National Law Journal found that when government does enforce environmental regulations and fine companies, fines are much higher in White communities than in Black ones.

"In Louisiana, reports by the US Commission on Civil Rights and an unreleased report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region Six, have raised concerns about the location of chemical plants and their possible impact on the health of their neighbors, who are primarily people of color."

Prior to those findings, Damu was a lonely voice in the wilderness. But that was his style. Rather than follow a pack, Damu would rather take the road less traveled or, better yet, one not traveled at all.

Like Dr. King, the St. Louis native saw a connection between militarism and social injustice. And he became a leader of the anti-war movement, creating Black Voices for Peace. In fact, he was on a peace mission to Palestine preparing to lead a Palm Sunday march when he became ill and was rushed to a Bethlehem hospital.

It was not until he was at Providence Hospital in Washington that he was told he was in the most serious

stage of colorectal cancer. I visited Damu as soon as I learned he was in the hospital. He was always one of my biggest supporters when I was editor of Emerge magazine, so I presented him with an anthology I had edited, "The Best of Emerge Magazine." He thanked me and expressed appreciation for my finding time to visit him.

I told him to dispense with the formalities. He was – and is – a natural treasure, I assured him, and a visit to the hospital was nothing compared to how he had dedicated his life to uplifting his people.

When I left Providence Hospital, Damu was doing the same thing as when I entered – he was calling people on his cell phone, more concerned about others than his own health. I pleaded with him to get some rest and he promised that he would. I am not sure he did. Until his final days, he was still working, even participating in peace marches to his doctors' chagrin. Damu was given three to six months to live, but he survived more than a year. But he always defied the odds. And Damu has the dash to prove it.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

From polygamist to today's player

Today, terms such as "baby daddy," "baby mama," "baby mama drama," and "player" are evolving into the American lexicon.

However, I worry that the symbolism embodied in some of these linguistic terms may be very counterproductive to the academic development of many children now under their sphere of influence.

Let me become a hood lexicon for a moment to offer my own definition of these terms so that we are all on the same wave length.



SHERMAN MILLER

1. Baby Daddy: Unmarried birth father of a child who may or may not assume fatherly responsibilities for her socioeconomic development in the economic mainstream.

2. Baby Mama: Unmarried birth mother who is hamstringing raising children from relationships with one or more baby daddies.

3. Baby Mama Drama: Baby mamas attempting to exploit their own children as emotional leverage against baby daddy new relationships.

4. Player: Potential Baby Daddy seeking to impregnate as many baby mamas as he can without becoming responsible for the welfare of the children coming from this relationship and perhaps



viewing the relationship with the mother as merely a trophy to his sexual prowess.

It is common knowledge that parental involvement with public school systems will enhance the success potential of children. But when I ponder the legal lifestyle mindsets defined above, I shudder to think of the irresponsibility symbolic message they offer.

I chatted with a middle-aged black player who told me that he had 20 children through seven different women. As I listened to this player speak, I wondered if he was still on some sort of female impregnation quest.

I was about ready to question his obvious sexual exploitation of his undisciplined harem of baby mamas when his face radiated that he was about to make a major proclamation. This player said something to the effect, "I introduced all of my children

to each other so they will not have any sexual contact with one another." He appeared to see these introductions as a major accomplishment versus something that might be expected of him.

I concluded that this player relishes the role of being a mere sperm donor where baby mamas are relegated to being trophies to brag about when he is with his homeboys. What was disquieting in this scenario is the player's children may never gain the socioeconomic upward advantage that comes with both parental families contributing to their learning and access to mainstream opportunities.

If we extrapolate just a bit from the player's comment, it may be difficult for us to see this chap attending many parent-teacher meetings. Furthermore, he might find himself wrecked by the fallout of baby mama drama in

just trying to make or avoid making child-support payments. Surely, this player may want to limit his contact with his baby mamas to merely sexual interludes. One might argue that the player's children are lost in the economic mainstream even before they are conceived.

If you think about it, you may recall the name of a player that you know with children through multiple baby mamas. Thus, I see today's player as nothing more than a morphing of yesterday's polygamist, only he cannot be arrested for bigamy. Hence, I find myself grappling with the question, Is today's quasi-polygamy one of the key elements underpinning poor public school performance in America?

SHERMAN MILLER lives, studies for a PhD and writes in Wilmington, Del.