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OPINION

The only critique of Castro that matters

Cuban leader has been steadfast in support of blacks

By James Early
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Influential pockets of America, especially the mainstream corporate media, are obsessing about Fidel Castro's health problems and possible death. The black world must therefore pay close attention to these groups. Their gleeful reactions reveal America's not so friendly intentions towards Castro and Cuba, a land that has consistently stood by African and African-American people.

Castro is justifiably revered globally as a political icon. Several reasons show why. First is his visionary leadership. Fidel did not just dream a nation free of injustice, poverty, disease and ignorance. Envisioning a country of "new man" he and his comrades with direct and consistent collaboration with Cuban citizens of all sectors brilliantly wrestled back their country—an island being exploited, debauched and corrupted by the greed and imperial domination of U.S. capitalism. And despite missteps and some failures the self-determined national revolutionary project has transformed much of the dream into life-defining achievements in health, education, and physical security.

The Cuban Revolution from the beginning squarely confronted institutional racism, an ongoing social and governance transformation with a renewed national focus in the last few years in the Color Cubano project under the ministry of culture and other special social and educational policies instituted by the Cuban government.

In less than half a century, Cuba did not just achieve great things inside the country. It shared. A solidarity foreign policy benefited underprivileged peoples in other lands. Cuban educators, doctors, scientists, artists, athletes and analysts are winning hearts and minds across the world by contributing to the material, intellectual and spiritual uplift of all humankind.

Cubans built medical facilities, trained health personnel and educated students from marginal communities—in Africa, the Caribbean, and even the U.S. While black and white Americans were being ravaged by Hurricane Katrina, Castro and the Cuban people (along with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez) offered to send doctors and supplies. But despite the failures of FEMA and the American Red Cross, the Bush administration rejected the generous offer because of its hatred of Castro and the Cuban National Project he has led since 1959.

Most inspiring, Cubans died to liberate non-Cuban people of color. The battle fought in Cuito Cuanavale, an Angolan town, best exemplifies this. In 1988 Cuban and Angolan soldiers stopped apartheid South Africa's war machine that had invaded Angola and was bent on capturing Cuito Cuanavale and then all Angola. The purpose? To impose the murderous Jonas Savimbi as an apartheid-defending puppet president of Angola. Defeating apartheid South Africa at Cuito Cuanavale was highly significant. It marked the beginning of the end both in the liberation of Namibia and of South Africa, and in ending Angola's nightmarish civil war.

A grateful African world defiantly insisted on thanking Cuba. Thus, in May 1994, a freshly inaugurated President Nelson Mandela said to Castro, publicly, "You made this possible. And it is why the ANC had elaborated earlier, 'Without the ... Sacrifice of the Cuban people ... We possibly would not have reached the historic victory ... Cuba remain[s] a shining example.'"

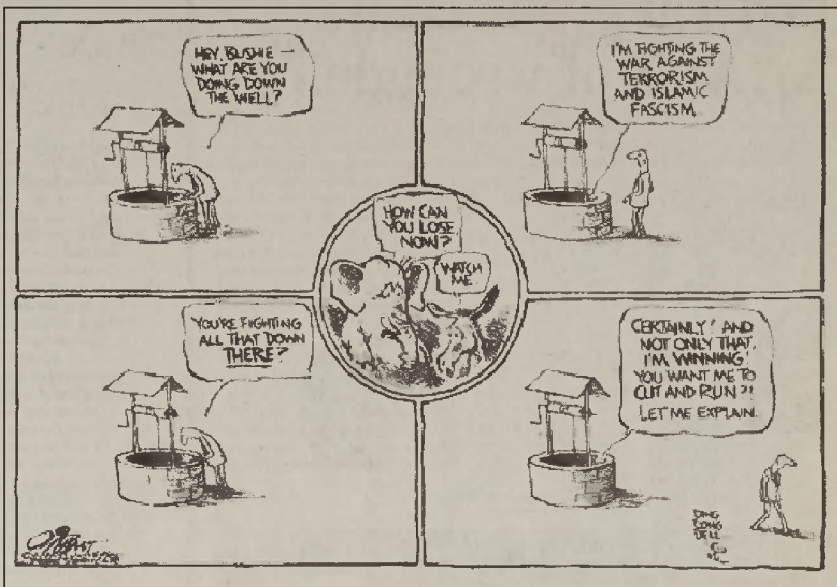
Castro is not immortal. He will surely die one day. However, the accomplishments that really count—ideals of equality and justice, freedom, and solidarity that Cuba has institutionalized under his leadership—will endure. This crucial point seems lost on some Americans such as the reactionary Cuban community engaging in crass, morbid jubilation and the corporate media, enraged and vengeful, demonizing Castro as an anachronistic dictator from a by-gone communist era while dismissing his profound and continuing influence on modern history.

There are also the sensationalist pundits and bloggers, churning out wild speculation, and the Bush-Rice foreign policy machine, issuing state ideological critiques and politically threatening policies to "bring democracy to the Cuban people." Fury blinds these Castro-haters to the obvious: Cuba is more than the towering figure of Fidel Castro.

Cuba is no paradise. And Fidel Castro is no god, just an extraordinary statesman over the last half-century who, despite at times stumbling on some fundamentally important issues of participatory democracy, has never fallen away from the Cuban nation's solemn historical quest for true independence and self-determination.

However, besides history's, only one appraisal of Castro really counts—that of Cuban citizens. Only they will properly weigh Castro's successes and failures, and determine where their country must go. It is therefore Cuba's self-appraisal that the African world must value.

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Working more, and enjoying it less

Although most U.S. workers were off on Labor Day, we enjoy fewer government holidays and vacations than employees in Western Europe. Still, we remain staunchly devoted to work, even as we grow increasingly worried about job security.

"Americans believe that workers in this country are worse off now than a generation ago—tolling longer and harder for less wages and benefits, for employers who aren't as loyal as they once were, in jobs that aren't as secure, and in a global economy that might very well send their work overseas,"

according to a new study by the Pew Research Center.

Even with those general worries, the report states, on an individual level, the attitudes of U.S. workers toward their jobs have remained remarkably consistent over the years.

"Most people still have positive feelings about their own jobs, and even though many are troubled by the way the forces of modernization are affecting the American workplace, the level of public concern today is not substantially greater than it had been a decade or two ago," the study says.

Those findings were contained in a special Labor Day report titled: "Public Says American Work Life is Worsening, But Most Workers Remain Satisfied with Their Jobs."

Those surveyed were asked about eight different aspects of the world of work and most said all eight areas had gotten worse. Yet, 89 percent said they were either satisfied or completely satisfied

with their own job.

Employees were asked whether five trends affecting the workforce—immigration, offshoring, automation, modern communication and technology and declining unionization—had helped or hurt American workers.

"The offshoring of jobs drew the most negative assessments, with the public saying by a margin of more than 5-1 that this has hurt rather than helped American workers," the Pew study said. "The public says the same thing about the increasing number of immigrants working in America, but they do so by a more modest margin of 2-1. They also say the decline in union membership has hurt rather than helped, but the margin on this question is more narrow, 3-2."

The public is almost evenly split on the question of automation and is most positive about technology, with 69 percent saying the use of e-mail and other new ways of communicating has been helpful.

In 1997, 41 percent of workers felt benefits were better than they had been a genera-

tion before. By this year, however, 45 percent say worker benefits aren't as good as they were a generation ago.

U.S. employees work harder than their European counterparts, including the Japanese. It is often said that Americans live to work while Europeans work to live.

Because workaholics are held in high esteem in the U.S., Americans, on average, have more money, larger houses, bigger cars and other items considered status symbols.

But Professor Mauro Guillen of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School explains: "It is a sign of social status in Europe to take a long vacation away from home. Money is not everything in Europe, status is not only conferred by money. Having fun, or being able to have fun, also is a sign of success and a source of social esteem."

Guillen's comments are part of an interesting article on cultural differences between Europe and the U.S. on the [http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/ Web site](http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/Web site).

Because most jobs in Europe are covered by collective bargaining agreements, workers have been able to negotiate longer vacations there. Workers in France and Spain, for example, get a mandatory 25 paid vacation days per year. By contrast, the U.S. is the only industrialized nation that does not require companies to provide a minimum number of paid vacation days. Consequently,

a third of all women in the U.S. and one-fourth of all men do not receive paid vacations. Disturbingly, more companies are pressing to reduce the number of vacation days an employee receives.

When employees do receive vacation days, they tend not to take all of them. Time taken off in Western European countries exceed the allotted vacation days. In France and Spain, workers take off 30 days a year; in Sweden they take off 35 days; in Italy, 25 and in Britain, 25. In the U.S., workers take 10.2 vacation days each year.

"There's a tendency to really relax in Europe, to disengage from work," says Christian Schneider, manager of the Wharton Center for Human Resources. "When an American finally does take those few days of vacation per year, they are most likely to be in constant contact with the office."

That can be chalked up to the growing number of cell phones, hand-held devices, laptops and old-fashioned workaholicism. I know about this first-hand—I wrote this column in Johnson City, Tenn., over the Labor Day weekend.

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Racial 'tribes:' Has CBS lots its mind?

When I read the story I could not believe it. I assumed it to be a joke or a p.r. stunt.

The thought that in 2006 a major media network would suggest that competition on a so-called reality show should be on racial lines defies belief. That, however, is precisely what CBS proposes to do with its ratings-declining TV show "Survivor." The so-called "tribes" will now be divided along racial lines.

What about U.S. history does CBS fail to understand? Do the executives at CBS believe that the USA has sufficiently overcome racism that it can now be used in the arena of entertainment? Has someone failed to understand the potential for exacerbating racial conflict?

That this action is outrageous is obvious to any reasonable person. Why CBS would choose to commit such

an act of lunacy is another matter. More than anything else this decision reflects a combination of cynicism (if you have never seen the classic 1970s film "Network," now is the time to see it) and a superficial understanding of race and racism in the USA.



BILL FLETCHER

Leaving cynicism aside for a moment, the belief that racial divisions can be treated neutrally grows out of the white backlash to the black, Latino, Asian and Native American freedom movements of the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s.

Most particularly, with the advent of the Ronald Reagan presidency in 1981, white people were fed an almost irresistible story-line. It was

simple: racism allegedly ended with the 1964 Civil Rights Act. There were now no structural impediments to the advancement of people of color. Any further problems, it was argued, were now personal rather than institutionally racial. This storyline was precisely what many, if not most Whites wished to hear. It eased their consciences.

The problem is that this storyline is a fallacy and institutional racism (not to mention ideological racism) exists at every level of U.S. society, ranging from health-care to housing. Yet, this racism is obscured by the absence of explicitly racial signs and discriminatory laws.

The absence of legal racism, in other words, makes it possible for vast segments of White America to exist in near total denial as to what is and has been unfolding

before their eyes.

For CBS to pretend, or to believe that racism no longer exists or matters, is only to say that the dominant forces in that institution remain trapped in the Reagan-esque hallucination that has played a major role in helping to undermine the victories that we—people of color and our allies—won in the first place.

A suggestion for CBS: Take "Survivor" off the air and deliver an apology to those who have fought, and continue to fight, racial discrimination. Do we need to remind CBS that racism is no game? It never has been?

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