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Sizwe Bansi And Us

Those of you who missed the North Carolina Black Repertory Company's recent production of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* were deprived of not only a theatrical masterpiece, but a pertinent political message as well; a message so powerful that at times it overshadowed the excellent acting of Noble Lee Lester and Larry Leon Hamlin, and directing of Paul Wyatt Davis!!

The play - set in present day South Africa - focused on the daily struggle for survival by Black folk against the brutal, dehumanizing apartheid system; the system of institutionalized racism and oppression that permits the white minority to control and dominate the lives of the native African majority.

Sizwe Bansi was not about revolution, but rather about the conditions that create revolutionaries - freedom fighters, if you will. For the characters of Buntu, Styles (portrayed by Hamlin) and Bansi (portrayed by Lester) were down to earth, every day folk - not unlike many of us who work at Reynolds, Hanes, or Western Electric. Like most of us, the characters of "Styles," "Bunter" and "Sizwe Bansi," had their own respective techniques for survival in a white-

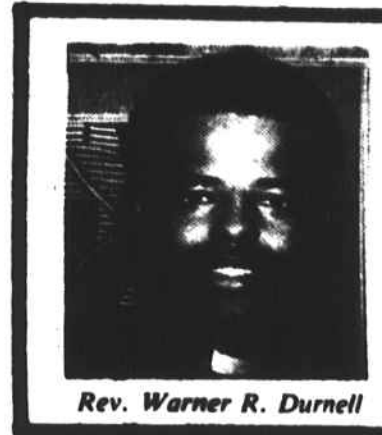
dominated society. Further, like many of us in this country, the characters expressed bitterness and frustration over the forced duality of their existence. In other words, the constant "game-playing," "politicking," and "boot-licking" some of us engage in daily in order to get what we want from a system that seeks to deny us everything...

Sizwe Bansi was about the fight for dignity in a land of indignation; a struggle to salvage some humanity from the throes of a dehumanizing system; a battle for justice in a system predicated on injustice...

Yes, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* was about - South Africa... America... North Carolina... Winston-Salem...

Accordingly, this community is indebted to Brother Hamlin and the N.C. Black Repertory Company for having the courage and insight to stage a quality production of such social/political significance. And while it was truly disappointing - indeed downright embarrassing - that the performances received such a poor turnout from this community, I, for one, wish to encourage the Black Repertory not to despair, and to press on with its mission to "ignite a cultural explosion" in this city and state.

Lord knows, we need it...
Clifton E. Graves, Jr.



Rev. Warner R. Durnell



Father Michael B. Curry

Were Black People Cursed?

After the story of the great flood is told (Genesis 6-9) there is a little story about Noah and his three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Noah has gotten drunk and "lay uncovered in his tent." (Gen. 20-21) Ham comes into the tent and sees his father in his nakedness. For this transgression, Canaan (the son of Ham) is cursed as a "slave of slaves." (Gen. 9:24) Ham himself was not cursed, Canaan was. But over the centuries this passage has variously been called the curse of Ham. And since Ham represented the various peoples of Africa 19th century slave traders and masters, and their religious servants, used this story to justify the slavery of black folk. Since Ham was cursed (contrary to the literal record) all Africans are cursed and meant to be slaves. That's how the argument went. It was called the "Curse of Ham."

Clearly this was not the original biblical intention. First, Ham is not cursed, Canaan is. The Canaanites were the people who lived in the promised land before the Hebrews settled it. This was Israel's way of saying that that land was to be theirs. But secondly, one need only look at a few of the biblical references to Africa and her peoples to see that no such curse on Africans is at all implied in the Bible.

When the Bible speaks of either Cush or Ethiopia or Egypt (it is referring to Africa. For example, just after the famous curse passage in Genesis a table of nations is recalled. The peoples of Ham (Africa) are praised as noble warriors and as mighty hunters before the Lord. (Genesis 10:6-9) Last week we mentioned some of the African influences in the Bible. To show that there is no sense of curse applied to Africa we might simply mention a few other references to Africa and her peoples.

The prophet Jeremiah is saved from prison and death by the intervention of an Ethiopian diplomat named Ebed-melech. (Jeremiah 38:7-13) The maiden in the Song of Songs gives praise and glory for her beautiful blackness. Most versions of the Bible translate the sentence: "I am very dark, but comely or beautiful." (Song of Solomon 1:5) But recent biblical scholarship has shown that the word but should be translated 'and.' The passage would then read: "I am very dark (black), and comely (beautiful)...like the tents of Kedar." One might take note of the fact that shepherds' tents in Kedar were blackened by the sun. This is a song in praise of her beautiful color.

And (in the book of the psalms, the psalmist prophesies that "one day Egypt will bring tribute to God and Ethiopia will stretch forth her hands to God." (psalm 68:31) That prophecy is fulfilled in the New Testament when a high official of the Ethiopian empire accepts Christ and returns to his own land. (Acts 8:26-40) A man from North Africa, Simon of Cyrene, carries the cross for Jesus as he is on his way to crucifixion (Luke 23:26). Africa is joyously represented among the nations mentioned on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit of Christ was poured out on the Church and the world (Acts 2:8-11, note Egypt, Libya and Cyrene). And finally, the apostle Paul is ordained or commissioned for his ministry by some leaders of the Church. One is named Barnabas, another is named Manaen and two are of Africa. One is named Lucius of Cyrene (North Africa) and the other is identified as "Simeon who was called 'Niger.'" (Acts 13:1) The word "Niger" means 'black.'

From just this brief look one can find no evidence of a curse upon Africa and her peoples. In fact, the opposite is the case. Africa and her peoples played a decisive role in the dawn of salvation history. So much is this the case that the prophet Hosea foretells that the messiah will be called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). The Gospel according to Matthew interprets this to be a prophecy with respect to the fact that Jesus was taken to Africa's Egypt as an infant to be protected from the wrath of the wicked King Herod. Only after time is the baby Jesus brought back to Israel.

But surely this would not have been said or written about a nation cursed by God: "Out of Egypt have I called my son." (Hosea 11:1, Matt. 2:13-14) There is no eternal curse of Africa of her peoples and children to be found in the biblical witness. In fact, she is blessed. Out of her comes the saviour.

Editorial Response

The Chronicle welcomes responses to any and all columns and editorials. Address all correspondence to:

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27102

Sadat's Death Terrible Waste

Washington - The saddest thing about the death of Egypt's Anwar Sadat is that it was such a waste.

It is impossible to know what mix of motives, religious, political or personal, inspired his assassins. But it may not be overstating the case to say that what cost Sadat his life - and the thing that will make the world miss him most - was his historic gamble for peace.

Sadat understood as well as anyone that the barrier to peace in the Middle East was always psychological: a melange of bitterness that the world seemed to care too little when the Nazi



William Raspberry

Holocaust claimed the lives of six million Jews and of guilt that too many Jews went too unresistingly to their deaths. The Israeli psychology is capsulized in the phrase: "Never again." Sadat understood as well that the Palestinians, who

had no part in the Holocaust and who cared nothing about the psychological scars it left on the Jews, were equally bitter and guilt-ridden that they had been displaced, also too unresistingly, by the establishment of the

Jewish state. Their answer to the Jews: "Never again," was their determination to liberate their homeland from the Jewish intruders.

This psychological standoff, Sadat knew, was incapable of military resolu-

This psychological standoff, Sadat knew, was incapable of military resolution. What was needed was a psychological breakthrough. Sadat provided the opportunity for just such a breakthrough with his unprecedented 1977 visit to Israel.

It was a masterful gesture which said, in effect: Let us put our psychology behind us and agree to make peace.

It seemed for a while that the gamble might work. But the Camp David peace talks engineered by then President Carter fell short of Sadat's dream. It was the Egyptian's notion that if he and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin could agree to make peace, it could mark the beginning of a generalized peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. What was required was not a lawyerly working out of details - technicians could handle that - but an agreement in principal between the two chiefs of state.

Ironically, until shortly before Sadat's statesmanlike gesture, it was the Israelis who were insisting that the barriers to peace were psychological: that the problem was the refusal of the Arabs, specifically the Palestine Liberation Organization, to accept the legitimacy of Israel's existence. Sadat's move could have swept away this deadly psychology, if only there had been a complementary grand gesture from Begin. It never came.

Instead of accepting Sadat's statesmanship as an effort to cut the Gordian knot of bitter history, the Israeli leader treated it as the opening gambit in a round of ordinary negotiations: negotiations which, for all the hoopla that surrounded each petty point of agreement, in fact, got nowhere.

As a result, Sadat, instead of becoming a leader of his Arab brothers became isolated from them as a man who had dared make peace with the mortal enemy. He was viewed by them as a traitor and a fool, and he was, almost from that moment, a dead man.

Israel, if it had seized the opportunity, could have saved him - or at least could have saved and institutionalized the peace process. As it was, the peace effort, from the Arab side, was embodied in the person of Sadat. And with his death, both sides are far worse off than before.

It is easy enough to understand why Israel was unwilling to enter into a gamble of the magnitude of Sadat's. The far-more-numerous Arabs could lose militarily again and again and still survive. For Israel, a series of military victories could only buy time; a single defeat would be fatal.

The other side of that somber fact, though, is that Israel could never save itself through military might but only through peace with its neighbors. Sadat tried, and failed, to make that peace.

Sadat laid everything on the line: his personal and political prestige, his credibility and his life. If Israel had joined in the gamble - if even a few of the Arab chiefs of state could have seen that it was in their overwhelming self-interest to become party to the search for peace - Sadat's gamble could have changed the course of Middle East history for all time.

They didn't. Sadat has died a wasted death, and business in that strife-torn part of the world will go tragically on - as usual.

Blessed are the Peacemakers*



CHUGH HAINES
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THE L.A. TIMES SYNDICATE

*Offer void in the Middle East.

To Be Equal

Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

By Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

Social Security is the most popular federal program and has been since it was started back in the 1930s. Now it is being undermined by widely-backed proposals to cut back benefits, and by scare tactics used by the system's opponents that suggest imminent bankruptcy for the Social Security trust funds.

The constant barrage of reports that "Social Security is in trouble" are wrong. The system is not in trouble, and it won't be if Congress resists the plans to cut it.

A short-term deficit is likely in the trust fund that finances pension payments. That can easily be dealt with

Social Security Disability Hearings Under The Law



by shuffling money between the various funds making up Social Security or by using general revenue.

There is no reason to overhaul a system that works because of a temporary cash flow problem that is easily resolved. By 1986, for demographic reasons, the funds will be solvent again. After that, trouble is not expected until well into the next century, leaving plenty of time to work out long-range answers to long-range problems.

So it is just plain wrong to frame the system's problems in grossly exaggerated terms designed to scare people into losing confidence that they will ever collect their retirement benefits.

And it is wrong to try to correct the system's minor problems through major surgery affecting the most vulnerable of the elderly. But that is what many current proposals amount to.

Last summer, the Administration rammed through one such idea. It persuaded Congress to drop the minimum benefit, a measly \$30 per week. That was a terrible blow to the poorest of the elderly -- many of them women who typically worked in low-paying jobs or in non-covered employment.

They were told that if they can't make it without the minimum benefit, they could always apply for welfare. That insulted elderly people who worked hard for low wages all their lives just to keep off the welfare rolls.

With Congress moving swiftly to rescind that callous move, the President has decided to join in asking for restoration of the minimum benefit -- a wise decision. But the flap over that issue has severely damaged his credibility in the coming debate over the future of social security.

After all, people heard him say he would not take any benefits away from current recipients, and then he proposed a measure that would strip away the minimum below which no elderly person could fall.

So while the Administration is to be commended for now attempting to put social security on a permanently sound footing, its track record in dealing with the poor and the elderly engender great suspicion.

Those doubts were only reinforced by the President's continued backing for drastic benefit reductions for those retiring at age 62.

People taking early retirement already get reduced benefits. The majority choose to retire early because they are in poor health or because they can't find work.

We can expect further attacks on benefit levels as political leaders seek spending cuts to absorb the huge deficits caused by tax cuts and military spending.

We must be on guard against any attempt to change Social Security from a universal insurance system to a means-tested welfare program for the elderly. Warnings of impending bankruptcy for the Social Security system and suggestions that people rely on personal savings for retirement only inspire fear.

Chronicle Letters

No Black Leaders?

In reference to article in last week's Chronicle, I would like to know why Mrs. Newell has made such a statement, when she in fact, is in a position to be a leader in this community? However, if she feels that her position of Alderman and black educator does not put her in the forefront as a leader, then why should any other black step for-

ward to aid the community? We all know that in order to progress we need people to form a cohesive base of leadership -- and everyone is not a leader. So Mrs. Newell, where are you? As for the other statements, there in itself is the base for leadership in North Carolina.

Rayford Thompson

Hello, Winston-Salem

Dear Editor:

Hello Winston-Salem. I am little Alphonso Hodge, Jr. - 8 months old. I was born in Winston-Salem, January 29, 1961. I live at 203 Styers Road, Winston-Salem with my mother and sister Mrs. Henrietta Hodge - my father is the late Alphonso Hodge, Sr. My grandparents are Lizzie and Henry Settles, 4795 Cherry Street. I am now 20 years old and attend Baptist College in Charleston, South Carolina.

I have come this far by faith. I have just returned from California where I took 6 weeks training in ROTC for management. I am working very hard and let me say to



Alphonso Hodge, Jr.

See Page 9