

# FORUM

## **Oil fuels Bush's sudden interest in Africa**



**George E.  
Curry**

**Guest  
Columnist**

I be the president."

Now that he is indeed president, Africa isn't such a low priority for Bush anymore. There he was last week on Goree Island, of all places, declaring that slavery was "one of the greatest crimes of history."

The "compassionate conservative"-turned-revolutionary said, "Some rose up in violent revolution, delivering the closest thing to justice on a slave ship."

Bush talked about American "hypocrisy" and "injustice" and stated, "The very people traded into slavery helped set America free."

It's interesting that Bush would make his strongest comments on slavery thousands of miles from the United States — where they would not have the same impact or rile his conservative base — rather than at home. If he was serious about addressing the issue of slavery, why didn't he do it at a prominent site in the United States? Can you imagine the impact of Bush making those remarks at Jamestown, Va., where many slaves arrived in 1619?

But he was reading a script and this wasn't intended to be the main event. It was a set-up for his last and most important stop — Nigeria.

Having left emotional sentiments behind in Senegal, his flight to Abuja, Nigeria, was a business trip. It was the business

of oil. Nigeria supplies the United States with 620 barrels of oil per day, or 15 percent to 18 percent of its total, according to the Energy Information Administration. It is the fifth largest supplier of oil to the United States, ahead of Iraq, which is ranked seventh. (Canada, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Mexico top the list.) The United States wants to decrease its dependence on oil from the Middle East and hopes that Nigeria can fill that void.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution recently ran a front-page story under the headline "U.S. has eye on African oil," in which analysts state that the United States has a new interest in Nigeria because of the volatility of the Middle East.

The article notes that Nigeria already produces 2 million barrels of crude oil a day, or about a third of Africa's total output.

"...West Africa is a growing factor in U.S. crude oil supplies," the article says. "Over the past five years, ChevronTexaco Corp. has invested \$5 billion in the region. It plans to invest \$20 billion more over the next five years. ExxonMobil Corp. (recently) announced a \$1.7 billion project to increase oil production in the waters off Nigeria."

Those companies, and a half-dozen other multinational oil conglomerates, are attracted by the region's vast stores of low-sulfur

oil and its location, which offers the ability to load crude oil directly onto tankers for shipment to the United States or Europe without the need for costly pipelines."

It doesn't get any clearer than that. And the Texas oilman in the White House knows that as well as anyone.

Another factor in Bush's interest in Africa is a selfish and perfectly rational one: to create an increased presence on the continent so that it does not become a hotbed for terrorist training camps.

In his speech to the delegates of the Leon H. Sullivan Summit here, Bush said: "Several African governments face particular dangers from terrorists, and the United States is working closely with those nations to fight terror, and we will do more. I proposed a new \$100 million initiative to help those governments in East Africa protect their people and to fight terrorist networks," he said. "The United States is also supporting the efforts of good friends all across this continent, friends such as Mauritania. We will not allow terrorists to threaten African peoples or to use Africa as a base to threaten the world."

So much for Africa being a low priority.

*George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.*

*Nigel Alston is on vacation. His Motivational Moments column will return next month.*

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