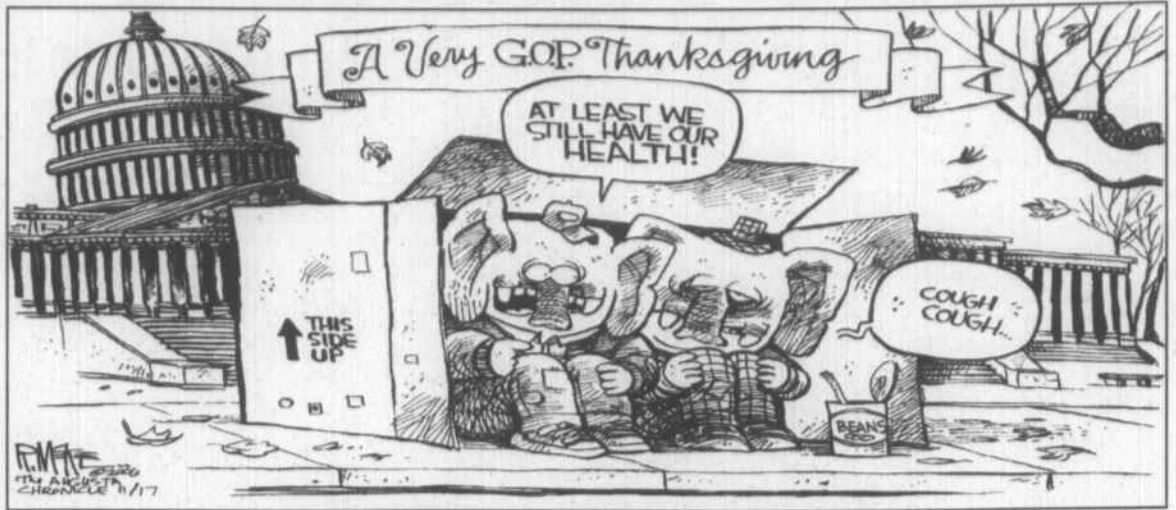


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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A Litany of Thanksgiving



Marian Wright Edelman
 Guest Columnist

In this season of Thanksgiving, I wish you wealth in the things of true value — family, friends, health and peace of mind and spirit. For those of us with plenty, it's a time to stretch our waistbands with customary comfort food — turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce. This is a joyous indulgence because it's shared with loved ones.

Thanksgiving is also the day when we watch televised parades, usually punctuated by the arrival of Santa Claus and the beginning of the countdown for Christmas shopping. It is my hope that those of us who begin our gift shopping the day after, known to some as "Black Friday," will remember the families who are less fortunate, especially the children. When my family gathers in this time of Thanksgiving, we begin the holy season leading to Christmas and Hanukkah with the prayer of African-American theologian Howard Thurman. A Litany of Thanksgiving, to help us remember for what and how much we should truly be thankful.

In Your presence, O God, we make our Sacrament of Thanksgiving.
 We begin with the simple things of our days:
 Fresh air to breathe,
 Cool water to drink,
 The taste of food,
 The protection of houses and clothes,
 The comforts of home.

For all these we make an act of Thanksgiving this day!
 We bring to mind all the warmth of humankind that we have known:
 Our mothers' arms,
 The strength of our fathers,
 The playmates of our childhood,
 The wonderful stories brought to us from the lives of many who talked of days gone by when fairies and giants and diverse kinds of magic held sway.

The tears we have shed, the tears we have seen;
 The excitement of laughter and the twinkle in the eye with its reminder that life is good.
 For all these we make an act of Thanksgiving this day.
 We finger one by one the messages of hope that await us at the crossroads:
 The smile of approval from those who held in their hands the reins of our security,
 The tightening of the grip

of a single handshake when we feared the step before us in the darkness.

The whisper in our heart when the temptation was fiercest and the claims of appetite were not to be denied.

The crucial word said, the simple sentence from an open page when our decision hung in the balance.

For all these we make an act of Thanksgiving this day.
 We passed before us the mainsprings of our heritage:

The fruits of the labors of countless generations who lived before us, without whom our own lives would have no meaning.

The seers who saw visions and dreamed dreams;

The prophets who sensed a truth greater than the mind

could grasp, and whose words could only find fulfillment in the years which they would never see.

The workers whose sweat has watered the trees, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations.

The pilgrims who set their sails for lands beyond all horizons, whose courage made paths into new worlds and far-off places.

The savior whose blood was shed with the recklessness that only a dream could inspire and God could command.

For all these we make an act of Thanksgiving this day.

We linger over the meaning of our own life and commitment to which we give the loyalty of our heart and mind:

The little purposes in which we have shared with our loves, our desires, our gifts.

The restlessness which bottoms all we do with its stark insistence that we have never done our best, we have never reached for the highest.

The big hope that never quite deserts us, that we and our kind will study war no more, that love and tenderness and all the inner graces of Almighty affection will cover the life of the children of God as the waters cover the sea.

All these and more than mind can think and heart can feel, we make as our sacrament of Thanksgiving to Thee, Our Father, in humbleness of mind and simplicity of heart.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council whose Leave No Child Behind mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

Whither the Sudan?



Bill Fletcher
 Guest Columnist

In the last several weeks the Sudan, wracked by the Darfur crisis, faced yet another challenge. Frustrated by the alleged failure of the Khartoum government of President Al-Bashir to implement agreements signed in 2005, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) withdrew from the Government of National Unity. This step sent shockwaves throughout the Sudan and throughout much of Africa as well, due to its potential implications.

SPLM has been the leading force representing the southern Sudan in its multi-decade civil war with the north. As a legacy of colonialism the Sudan was created in such a way that it weaved together a mainly Muslim north with a mainly Christian and animist south.

In the 1980s when a long-running peace agreement between the north and the south was violated by the demagogic (then) leader of the Sudan (President Numeiry, who desperately sought to cling to power), war was reignited. In 2005 a peace agreement was reached whereby a border was to be established demarcating the south/north; oil revenues would be redistributed; political reforms would be instituted; and the south would gain the opportunity for a referendum on self-determination. After two years of apparent stalling by the Al-Bashir government, the SPLM had enough. Though they have not returned to armed struggle, the situation remains quite tense.

If the north/south conflict were the only challenge for the Sudan, the country's future would still be questionable. If, however, one adds to the north/south conflict the genocidal war in Darfur carried out by the Khartoum government and its allies; the brutal struggle within Darfur between opponents of the Khartoum government; and, the pro-democracy movement in the country overall

(which includes the SPLM) which confronts the Al-Bashir tyranny, the Sudan faces a possible challenge to its very existence.

Numerous northern-based cliques have dominated the Sudan since independence and have refused to share power with other segments of Sudanese society, whether in the name of Islamism, ethnicity, or raw politics. This arrogance and short-sightedness has served as the basis for near continuous instability, including military coups and civil wars.

On one level, pointing out the tyranny of the Al-Bashir government simply states the obvious. What is needed now, more than at any other time, is a comprehensive peace, reconciliation and democratization process. This is more than the cessation of fighting and the holding of multi-party elections, but rather guaranteeing that the traditionally excluded groups have a significant role in deciding the future of the Sudan. This means getting the government of President Al-Bashir to the table with the host of constituencies and forces that often see it as a mortal enemy.

Though the USA was instrumental in the 2005 peace agreement—perhaps the only positive contribution of the Bush administration—it currently lacks the moral legitimacy and trust to serve as an honest broker. This role—of honest broker—is one that the African Union needs to serve. If the USA is to do anything positive at this point in the Sudan it should be to support the work of the African Union rather than making nonsensical pronouncements.

It might also be the case that the Congressional Black Caucus could offer its services to work alongside the African Union in helping to bring about the sort of comprehensive settlement so desperately needed. This would be a form of Pan African solidarity that could make a significant difference in the future of Africa's largest country.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a labor and international writer and activist. He is the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum and can be reached at papaq54@hotmail.com.



A 2006 AIDS Awareness poster featuring famous faces.

A day I will never forget



Bev Smith
 Guest Columnist

There was a day I will never forget. I was sitting on my deck in beautiful Rockville, Md., drinking vodka gimlet with one of my best friends and we were discussing all of the AIDS work I had done on my nationally syndicated talk show.

He said, "Oh Bev, you don't know how this work is going to change lives." He had always been interested in my show, but this was different. We got quiet and were just enjoying living in suburbia and as I was thinking how blessed I was, he looked at me and said, "I have AIDS."

I broke down and cried. This was the moment I made up my mind I would make a difference in the lives of not only him, but anybody touched by this disease. I lost Ricky, Jack from New York and Flynn from Washington, D.C. They were people who had beautiful hearts, souls and spirits whose families had abandoned them. There was also Gregory, who I worked with in Washington, D.C. We thought he was going to beat the disease, but he died

too. This disease is always living with me because there is not a day that goes by that I do not miss and wish I had Ricky in my life. As long as I live, I will do whatever I can to stop this disease from ruining lives.

As the only female African-American nationally syndicated talk show host for the American Urban Radio Networks, I have always been involved with issues regarding HIV/AIDS.

I have been in the business for more than 40 years and the theme for my talk show is "Get Involved." I push this phrase and even put it onto T-shirts: "Stand up, Be Counted, Get Involved."

Why? First of all, I am not just your average talk show host. I am an activist. Therefore, my talk show is not about sitting around and talking, but about making changes in peoples' lives. This is what I'm all about.

However, my awareness on AIDS/HIV was heightened after reading Randy Shilts' book, "And The Band Played On."

As the first black in Miami with a talk show, I began to get involved because I could not believe that the Centers for Disease Control could put out a theory that said a green monkey bit a man who went to San Francisco and had sex, and went from San Francisco

back to New York and that is how it spread.

It just sounded like I ought to be singing "dooda, dooda, dooda." I thought that was asinine. I believe the origins of HIV/AIDS is man-made. According to "Queer Blood: The Secret AIDS Genocide Plot," by Dr. Allen Cantwell Jr., M.D. the smallpox eradication vaccine program sponsored by the World Health Organization was responsible for unleashing AIDS in Africa.

Cantwell also debunks the African green monkey theory of AIDS and explains how AIDS started as a covered-up genocide experiment, using blacks and gays as guinea pigs. I also think the Black community is ignorant about AIDS. According to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, in 2004 African-Americans represented 61 percent of HIV/AIDS cases among 13- to-24 year olds.

This alarming statistic tells me there is a hidden silence that says: "Don't talk about it and it will go away" and "Don't mention you have a gay friend." "Don't mention that there are gay people in the pulpit, gay people in the White House." "Don't talk about it and it will go away."

The people who do talk about it are generally those who have sons or brothers with HIV or AIDS. For the most part, I think the Black

community is just ignorant about it and fearful that it will be one more negative stereotype of our community.

I would like to see that mindset changed, because we still do not get how widely this disease impacts us all. No matter how many young college women I have on the show who say, "I just went with him one time" or no matter how many wives who say, "My husband came home from prison and I contracted the disease," the Black community still sees this as the gay disease.

We have senior citizens with AIDS! Yet, our churches are still too judgmental, but God will deal with them. Still, I am going to talk about it no matter what kind of response I get from the audience. I am straight up.

So, if you do not like it, turn the channel. When there is a problem, whether it is racism or George Bush or whatever, I am going to address it. So, I am not afraid. I have never had a problem. Maybe, I am just blessed. Maybe, the Lord just says, "I'm going to take care of this fool." But if you don't stand up for something, you're going to fall down for everything.

Bev Smith is host of the Bev Smith Show on American Urban Radio Network.