

# Education the cure for Haiti's ills in a new century

HAROLD EUSTACHE



Quite a few times in the past, I have had passionate discussions and debates with well-meaning fellow Haitian-American friends and family about potential solutions to Haiti's woes. This little Caribbean nation once hailed as the "Pearl of the Antilles" is not just a little bit behind in terms of the usual markers of world progress in global trade, literacy, education, healthcare, business investments, etc., it is almost hopelessly behind and at the bottom. What on this earth is going to pull Haiti out of this seemingly deep, dark abyss in which it is languishing? The answer is of course very complex, but I believe there is one great issue that rises above all others as the best long term solution: a massive national campaign focused on education.

Ironically, under the brutal colonial system, and thanks to free African slave labor, Haiti was France's most prosperous colony and the backbone of Napoleon's might. But Haitian Black slaves of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries had enough vision and courage to initiate the great slave rebellions that propelled not only Haiti to freedom and independence but initiated the chain of events that ultimately gave rise to such leaders as Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass and eventually Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Nat Turner was three years old when Haitian slaves defeated the last of Napoleon's military reinforcements and declared Haiti a free nation in 1803. Indeed the inspiration for, and techniques used in Nat Turner's slave rebellion were reminiscent of the secret Haitian slave meetings in the mountains in the 1700s, as well as the regular slave raids that preceded their descendants' battlefield heroics on the road to independence.

Frederick Douglass not only was inspired by its history but became Haiti's U.S. general consul. In an address at the Haitian Pavilion at Chicago's World's Fair in 1893, he said "We should not forget that the freedom you and I enjoy today is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons of Haiti ninety years ago ... striking for their freedom, they struck for the freedom of every black man in the world."

Today, Haiti is at another historical crossroad fighting for its future. Except that

now the problems are less definable, more intractable, more pernicious and more insidious. Can the great Haitian fighting spirit rise to the occasion once more and conquer today's problems with the same courage and vision as when it overthrew its colonial masters? I believe it can! The weapon of choice is education. It has been said that the education of its young is the most important investment any society can make in its future. A Chinese proverb says that if you want success in a year, plant rice; in a decade, plant trees; and in a century, educate.

A quick visit to Haiti would reveal to the casual observer that not only has political and social order broken down, but a national education program is not even on the radar screen of priorities. I fully understand the pressing every-day needs of the people of my native land. However, after the "brain drain" of the Duvalier years when most the intellectual and professional class were pushed out of the country, precious few are now left to respond to the needs of Haiti at a time when it needs them the most.

I believe that Haiti can never shed the label of "poorest country in the Western Hemisphere" without a grand plan, a comprehensive, national level program for the education of its young minds. Until then, it will stay mired in the mistakes of the past, relegated to the scrap heap of failed states in which the international community has lost all hopes of ever turning around.

I have often and will continue to advocate that what Haiti needs the most is a national, government-sponsored education plan composed of basic elementary schools in the small rural geographic areas called "Communes," which would serve as feeder schools for larger secondary schools in the larger geographic regions called "Arrondissements." These regional schools should in turn feed universities established in the nine established "Departments." I know it sounds simplistic, and I understand of course that a lot more would need to go into making this vision a reality, but it's a start. I believe that such an ambitious and forward-looking plan would mobilize a great number of the legions of well-educated Haitian Nationals now living abroad and put them in the service of their motherland.

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POSTSCRIPTS

# The tie that binds blacks of all stripes

## We're always ready to forgive – at least most of the time

ANGELA LINDSAY



As I watched President Bush's national security advisor, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, testify at the 9/11 Commission Hearings recently, I felt a poignant sense of conflict.

Personally, I feel that she, the president and the White House failed the American people on 9/11 and continue to twist the knives in our backs as the war in Iraq rages on. So, on the one hand, the animosity shown to her by the commissioners, as they fired critical questions and glared at her over their eyeglasses with accusatory glances, seemed valid. Still, given the harsh scrutiny and downright rudeness of some of the members of the commission, I couldn't help but



Thomas

think that they



Simpson

seemed to be attacking Dr. Rice as much for who she is, a powerful black woman, as for her job performance. I wanted to yell, "Leave her alone!" Despite my overwhelming disapproval with the way the Bush Administration apparently handled the terrorist threats prior to 9/11, I still felt the obligation to defend Rice as a fellow, professional black woman.

Black people have a rich history of empathy. Maybe it is a consequence of our being brutally separated on the auction blocks during slavery. Perhaps it dates back to our collective struggle during civil rights. Whatever the reason, black people seem to be a more cohesive unit during troubled times than other races. But it seems the more we are able to connect with one of our own who has fallen out of favor with society, the fiercer we are to protect them from public scrutiny.

Remember O.J.? Many black people will admit that they think O.J. Simpson was guilty of the crimes for which he was tried and ultimately acquitted, but in the same breath, those same people will also admit they that felt a sense of triumph because finally "the system worked for us." Previously, O.J. had been a beacon of greatness, a celebrity almost devoid of color, in our society.

But when his murder indictments came down, he came back down to earth with them I heard several comments from black folk like, "O.J. is black again" or "We've taken him back." As the race card was played out during the proceedings, O.J., undoubtedly, was forced to subscribe to the notion that many African Americans have long since adopted—that no matter how successful or "accepted" you are, you are still black.

Most black men can relate to and many have experienced the harshness of police brutality, prejudice and racial profiling by racist officers like Mark Furman from the O.J. trial. Black mothers, sisters, girlfriends, and wives know the anger kindled inside them after their black men came

home and told them about being bogusly pulled over by the police in their luxury cars as they headed home from work. That kind of sentiment can only be identified by those who have suffered through it, which may explain why, despite all the overwhelming evidence against O.J., we, as a race, stood behind him.

But, in the same vein, many black people turned their backs on Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, often referred to as "Uncle Tom," during his sexual harassment case despite the fact that we didn't necessarily rally behind his African American accuser, Anita Hill.

Clarence Thomas is a conservative who objects to, among other things, affirmative action. Conversely, during the trial of boxer Mike Tyson for allegedly raping a black beauty contestant, many African Americans stood by him and actually placed much of the blame on the victim, Desiree Washington. This discrepancy hints toward the perception that we tend to embrace those in our race to whom we can most closely relate and whose views or experiences mirror our own.

Are Clarence Thomas and other blacks whose political views, backgrounds, or professional status do not traditionally reflect that of most African Americans any less "black" because of it? Are these members of our race any less deserving of our sympathy and support? Are we so sanctimonious that we point a condescending finger at these people and flippantly remark that they deserve the mess they're in because their views or lifestyles do not coincide with ours?

Do we assume that they cannot really know how it feels to be black in America? How abandoned must they feel to have to resign themselves to the very real possibility that, in addition to society, they may not be quite "accepted" by their own race either. It seems hypocritical.

So, now that one of our own has come under fire again, it leaves me wondering whether we will we reach out and embrace Dr. Rice into our protective arms by virtue of her being a member of our race. Or will we leave her standing on the outside because of her membership in the Republican one?

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FILE PHOTO

National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice could be a sympathetic figure after her testimony on the Sept. 11 attacks.

DON REID



# Spending spirals out of control

In the history of the world, has any nation enjoyed a prosperous time period like that of the U.S. starting in the early 1990s and extending through 2000, and possibly even today?

Certainly, I have never experienced it or read about it. Yet today, evidences of overspending are manifest throughout the society. Personal debt and bankruptcies are at an all-time high, many cities and states are in great financial difficulty and our federal government debt is a threat to the security of all our citizens.

Consider this information I obtained from a reputable, national financial newsletter: From 1929 to 1973, per capita federal debt ranged from approx. \$100 to \$1500, reaching a high of \$5,000 in 1983. Between 1983 and 1997, the figure grew to \$20,000 per person, remaining relatively flat through 2002, and is now \$23,270! Over the last three years mortgage financing and refinancing by consumers doubled, from \$376 billion to \$758 billion! In 1988, the national debt was about \$1 trillion – it is now over \$7 trillion!

Laurence Kotlikoff, writing in Fortune magazine, says that hyperinflation is a real and present danger because the U.S. government is effectively bankrupt, with a fiscal gap of \$51 trillion, when measured as a present value. That's 11.6 times the official debt and 1.2 times ALL PRIVATE NET WORTH! Coming up with the \$51 trillion would equal cutting social security and medicare by 51 per cent or a permanent income tax hike of 78 per cent. These cuts, of course, are impossible politically, leaving the feds two choices: inflate (print money) or die!!! Add to all this, the fact that consumer debt rose from \$654 billion in 2001 to \$879 billion in 2003 and you can better understand the title of the newsletter article, "Could a Crash Be Coming?"

The effects of wrong priorities and over-spending are evident in the city manager's new budget proposal. While her budget grows almost \$300 million, there is not enough money for basic services such as road repair and sidewalks and possibly even public safety, without a tax increase. Why this predicament, when per capita property taxes have increased 38 percent since 1998 and over the same time period, other taxes and fees have increased to the point that Charlotte is most heavily taxed city in North Carolina?

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