

My friends are being tortured in Zimbabwe

Several years ago I and a number of other African-Americans came under attack for our public criticism of Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe and his repressive regime.

Some African-American activists who have been outstanding champions of the struggle for national liberation thought that it was, at best, inappropriate and at worst treasonous, for people such as Africa Action's Salih Booker, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists' Bill Lucy and me (at that time, president of TransAfrica Forum), to challenge the practices of an allegedly anti-imperialist individual and government.



BILL FLETCHER

At the same time, we received considerable support—quiet support I should add—from other African-Americans who were pleased that we had spoken out, though they were uncomfortable being public in their support. Since that time, in part because of the manner in which our criticism was so successfully caricatured by our opponents, I have been cautious in my comments.

Today, I throw caution to the wind. Very recently, leaders of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, (ZCTU), individuals who in many cases have long and distinguished histories going back to the national liberation war (1966-1979), individuals I have come to know and respect, were arrested by the Mugabe government. Some of them have been tortured while in captivity. This cannot go on. We cannot remain silent.

President Mugabe was a hero for many of us as one of the chief leaders of the Zimbabwe freedom struggle. He put his country on the line, upon its liberation, in supporting the anti-apartheid liberation struggle in South Africa. Yet, over the years something has gone terribly wrong. Instead of proceeding forward on a revolutionary transformation of Zimbabwe that would increase the power of the workers and farmers, something else slowly unfolded. Those closest to President Mugabe came to be the principal recipients of the benefits of liberation.

For many of us in Black America, Zimbabwe dropped off the radar screen until the land seizures that took place a few years back. These seizures of land from many White farmers were heralded by a considerable number of African-Americans as a step toward full liberation. Yet, few of us stopped to ask who was getting the land and what was happening to the African farmworkers who had worked the land? Such questions seemed inconvenient at best. So, two equations began to emerge as a way of silencing any opposition. The first went like this:

President Mugabe is seizing the land of White farmers; this helps to rectify the situation that has existed since the land was stolen in the 19th century; therefore, anyone who criticizes President Mugabe is actually a supporter of the White farmers.

The second equation that emerged, particularly after President Bush and British Prime Minister Blair got into the fray with their criticisms of President Mugabe, looked like this:

President Bush is a maniac attempting to dominate the world; President Mugabe criticizes President Bush for his global aggression; therefore, President Mugabe must be on the side of justice and anyone criticizing President Mugabe must be an ally of President Bush.

I wish that politics were that simple. When I briefly visited Zimbabwe in late 2004 and spoke with leaders of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions—a room full of black faces from the working class—it was clear that politics is never that easy. They do not want Bush and Blair to intervene in Zimbabwe any more than I do, but they do want justice.

The ZCTU has led a struggle against both the increasing immiseration of the Zimbabwe workers brought on, initially at least, by the faulty economic policies of President Mugabe's government. In addition, the ZCTU has been central to the struggle for democracy. They have dared to raise criticisms, only to be painted as allies of imperialism by those who in the past had no difficulty sitting in the comfortable rooms of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund developing economic policies that do not benefit the Zimbabwean people. The ZCTU's continued struggle against harsh economic conditions has now landed their leaders in jail and subject to—what does the Bush administration call it in Guantanamo?—extreme pressure.

We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us, as goes the famous saying. Yet, we cannot be trapped by those same shoulders. What was once done—actions taken, courage displayed—is always important, but it is not necessarily reflected in what one is doing today.

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Time for an upgrade at the ballot box

By Harry C. Alford

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Collectively, we African-Americans have been voting as a bloc since the late 1960s as the Voting Rights Act began being implemented throughout the South and other venues. We have been very kind, especially to the Democratic Party and to anyone black running for a local office.

We have elected officials who have spent an entire career in some slots without having anything of substance to claim as an accomplishment. African-Americans have been the least selective and least demanding of all blocs of voters. Poverty, crime, legal injustice, unfair taxation and unemployment have become household terms to us and for some reason we accept it. We do not hold our elected officials accountable, especially the black ones.

This November, I propose we do something radically different. If things aren't noticeably better than they were at the last election we should make big changes. Upgrade your local officials by voting in new ones who claim they can do better. Give the new ones a one term chance. If they succeed they can have another shot at it. If they don't succeed send them packing also. It is time to run our elections like a tightly-run business. Maybe then our plight will improve.

Many of our communities have black mayors, chiefs of police, fire chiefs, school superintendents and school board members, city council members, county commissioners, sheriffs, district attorneys, etc. etc. Yet, we have double-digit unemployment while the American average is 4.2 percent. We have children who are functionally illiterate. Our children, especially boys, are unjustly represented in court and go off to jail needlessly. We are taxed to the neck and get little government service in return. Things are bad and someone black either did it or let it happen. Why do we continuously reelect them or in succession elect their children or apparent heirs? No longer can we blame "The Man." It is on us.



Obama

How ludicrous is it when a locally-elected official proclaims that a construction project has been declared "union only" when there is no one in his district or precinct who belongs to any construction union. Negro please! You just secured total unemployment for the people who have elected you. How sick it is when school board members meet continuously while students cannot learn the fundamentals of reading, writing and basic math. In Detroit, the school system received millions of dollars in new books and it took years to deliver them from the warehouse to the classrooms. Why do we put up with such incompetence? Let's throw them out and get some forward-thinking leaders.

The biggest rip off to the residents of "chocolate cities" around the nation is professional sports stadiums. Billions of dollars have been appropriated for the erection of stadiums that replace perfectly fine existing ones. The money is raised through industrial or revenue bonds that are, in effect, tax increases upon the residents of those cities. The work benefit (jobs/contracts) goes to people and companies that do not reside or pay taxes within those cities. Those hotels and restaurants around the new stadiums are not owned by any resident of the affected city. The vast majority of the fans who will enjoy the sporting events come from the suburbs and rural areas that do not have to pay a cent in the tax burden. Thus, it is total exploitation. Outsiders get the thrill and the Black residents get the bill. Vote out anyone who supports another tax-subsidized stadium deal.

After you clean up the "local trash," begin evaluating the state and federally-elected officials. Has your governor done something about prison reform? If not, vote him out. What has he done about your state's healthcare delivery system and affordable service? If not enough, vote him out! Call the local office of your congressional and senate office and see how they voted on the renewal of the Voting Rights Act. If they voted against it (including earlier amendments to cripple it), vote him/her out! Do they support affirmative action? If not, vote them out! It is imperative that we put pertinent issues on their mind so that they can adequately think these issues out and do the right thing.

That is why a Corey Booker in Newark and a Barack Obama of Illinois excite us all. They bring fresh air and dare to lead. This is what America needs. No longer, in this dangerous world, can we afford to have followers instead of leaders. Those who go along to get along or do not think at all cannot sit in places that require people who can act on behalf of the voters who put them in office. Vote them out!

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Students lack understanding of education

By Paul H. Hailey
SPECIAL TO THE POST

The article by professor Sherman Miller in the Aug. 31 edition of The Post casts light on one of several fallacies and troubling characteristics of not only secondary schools but American education in general.

After 25 years in college teaching and 15 years in public school, I concluded that many students go to school without ever establishing in their own minds a real connection between a solid education and the quality of life they can establish for themselves during their adult years. Consequently, these young people—primarily through innocence—go to school because it is the politically correct place to be during these years (including the college years). Allow me to share here a few of the most indelible impressions that I received which engender a twisted culture set for many young people.

In public school teaching there was a requirement for each student to have a spiral-bound notebook for the class. For certain notebook assignments I would ask the student to have their parent or guardian sign on the line provided below my comments after I had checked the assignment. This comment would rarely be a request to leave home to drive for a conference or meeting; just sign to indicate that you have been made aware of what the child is doing and my assessment of his or her efforts.

I found after 12 years of using that approach, most parents would not sign (maybe as high as 80 percent). Also, the ones most likely to come to the school (or call) at the end of the term and have a tantrum because their child did not receive an A or B in the course.

Our young people in college (particularly first-generation college students) are often perplexed by their impression of college is often little more than a projection of impression from popular culture. They enter testing in quite often at grade 8 or below on standardized reading tests. Many graduate reading as high as the ninth or 10th grade, which indicates that there is nothing wrong with the students' learning apparatus. The deficit is further exacerbated by the fact that relatively few, if any, colleges have remedial reading clinics as required "courses" for the students who do not do well on the Nelson-Denny and other standardized assessment-placement tools.

Perhaps the most egregious of the quirks and anomalies in college education is in grading. College instructors are required for each class they teach to give each student a syllabus for the course. This syllabus is supposed to include a section on grading schemes which should include such data as weights given to tests, reports, etc. and what raw score a student must acquire to earn his grade.

This is where the trouble is amplified. Call it the curse of the computer. The teacher pre-arranges in his computer file the same scheme that corresponds with the statement on the syllabus. Using that same configuration at the end of the term, the teacher turns to his computer to calculate the student's numeric and letter grade. Some students will not stand for that. The student who has out class, failed some tests and missed other tests will then, like the non-signing high school parent, throw a tantrum and even appeal and protest grades to the administrator. The teacher now becomes loser-victim because he must spend countless hours in meetings with department chairpersons and others explaining why the student is not receiving the A or B that he or she wanted.

We should all be proud of our young people. Many complete their degree work and go on to a great service to humanity. However, they could reach even higher achievements—and they can do it—if the education culture would fully understand and lift itself out of its delusions and contradictions.

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