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OPINION

Selling off black folks' interests

"I thank God that most of the money that supports the NAACP comes from black hands; a still larger proportion must so come, and we must not only support but control this and similar organizations and hold them unwaveringly to our objectives, our aims and our ideals."

W.E.B. DuBois wrote those words in the Crisis magazine in 1915, the same year Booker T. Washington died. Ironically, what was written in the Crisis has now become the crisis in the NAACP and other so-called black organizations.

Just six years after the NAACP was established in 1909, yes, by black and white folks, blacks put their money up and supported the organization. Today, nearly a century later, the NAACP and many of its local chapters would go out of business if they did not receive money from non-black corporations and individuals whose "controlling interests" have reduced the NAACP to paper-tiger status in many of our communities.

Whose fault is it?

If black people provided the majority of the money to the NAACP in 1915, what should our commitment be in 2007 with our nearly \$800 billion in annual income? Sure, White-owned corporations and individuals should donate funds to black organizations, but that is no reason for blacks to abdicate organizational control and support.

We just celebrated Kujichagulia, one of the principles of which is Kujichagulia, which means self-determination. How can we be self-determined if we have to rely on the whimsical notions of folks who could not care less about our aspirations and goals? Where can self-determination be found in having to beg someone to purchase tables and program booklet pages for an awards banquet at which we really have nothing to celebrate?

How can we ever be self-determined if we fail to plan and execute initiatives that move our organizations toward ownership and economic self-sufficiency? The foundations of black organizations must be laid with black dollars, just as DuBois admonished in 1915. That way, any contribution given by others is icing on our own cake.

DuBois was very concerned about outsiders controlling the NAACP, and today we know that internal control of black organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League, black Chambers of Commerce, and other vital black institutions is of paramount importance. As long as these organizations remain docile and compliant to the status quo, they are supported; let them get "too big for their britches," let them get "out of their place," and watch the funds dry up. The same thing applies with black media.

Surely you have seen this scenario play out in your city at some time or another. Here in Cincinnati, we are currently fighting for the local chapter of the NAACP, which has been taken over by corrupt people, some of whom call themselves and are called by others "preachers" and "religionists." If you didn't know it already, the NAACP national convention is scheduled for Cincinnati in 2008. The deal was made despite some serious problems in this city vis-a-vis black disparities and discrimination.

The folks who run the local chapter, as well as some "hidden hand" culprits, can't wait to get in on the corporate goodies that will be handed out; they even went so far as to rig the NAACP presidential election to make sure they are there when the convention comes to town, as if a convention is the end-all for our problems in this town.

Well, they lost the election, despite lying and cheating, and despite collusion with the state NAACP office to keep their person as president. Now we are waiting to see what will happen as the former president and her cronies refuse to vacate the premises or to concede the election. And once again, with the ghost of W.E.B. DuBois looking over its shoulders, the NAACP in Cincinnati is in a crisis, attributable to the outside influence of outside money.

One of the executive board members, a "preacher," to justify the former president staying on and I suppose also to justify their cheating, was quoted as saying, "corporate Cincinnati will only deal with the current president!" That's code for, "If we don't play along with the powers-that-be, they won't fund our convention — and we won't get our share."

How sick is that? It's shameful that there is no low to which some of our brothers and sisters will not stoop, and there is no muck in which they will not wallow in order to get a few dollars. Corruption abounds in our current NAACP administration, and much of it has been caused by the love of the almighty dollar.

To reiterate, the saddest part about the situation within Cincinnati's NAACP is the involvement of church leaders who are acting like straight-up gangsters and thugs. They lie, they curse, they threaten, and they operate behind closed doors to cut deals that literally sell their own people, and the NAACP, down the river.

We will see if DuBois' words take hold, in this town as well as other towns across this country, within our organizations. We must stop the corruption; we must put an end to the selling out; and we must do what DuBois suggested: Support our institutions with our own money first, and take the "For Sale" signs down.

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Iraq forces Democrats' 'safe' agenda

After outlining a safe agenda of its first 100 hours, Democrats in Congress are being forced to become more aggressive in challenging President Bush on the Iraq war and may have to address



GEORGE E. CURRY

growing complaints that they are moving too slowly in developing an urban agenda. Democrats regained control of Congress not because of a masterful political strategy, but largely because of the public's disenchantment with our military presence in Iraq. Until this week, Democrats had been reluctant to challenge Bush on the war for fear of being depicted as being unsupportive of U.S. combat troops. Republican propagandists have repeatedly described Democrats as offering a "cut and run" strategy in Iraq and gun-shy, fragmented Democrats have been content letting Republicans misdefine them.

Even after voters repudiated George Bush's "stay the course" policies in the Persian Gulf, Democrats were still hesitant to act on the central issue that swept them into power in the first place — the war. But Bush's planned Wednesday night speech on the war in which he is expect-

ed to announce a plan to send more troops into Iraq, changed that. It forced Democrats to abandon their intention of focusing only on safe domestic issues, such as raising the minimum wage, expanding college aid, and funding stem cell research.

Voters have made it clear at the polls in November and in subsequent public opinion polls that they want the new Congress to deal with the war. A recent CBS News poll showed that 45 percent of the public wants Democrats to focus on the war; a distant second at 7 percent was an emphasis on the economy and jobs.

With Bush going on the offensive with a nationally televised speech to the nation, Democrats have shifted to second-gear by quickly arranging a series of public hearings. On Wednesday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is expected to have Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice discuss Bush's strategy in Iraq. On Thursday, Rice is expected to testify before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. And on Friday, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joints Chief of Staff, are expected to appear before the House Armed Services Committee.

All of the jockeying by Democrats and Republicans

is done with an eye cast toward the 2008 presidential election Democrats want to show before the next election that they can lead effectively. Republicans want to portray them as being weak on terrorism, paving the way for them to return to power in 2008. Both sides are making their moves while claiming to be interested bi-partisan cooperation.

As Democrats step up their involvement in addressing the war and continue to champion their announced 100-hour agenda, they are facing criticism from Jesse Jackson and others who charge that Democrats have no urban agenda.

At his 10th annual Wall Street conference this week in New York, Jackson assembled Congressional leaders, mayors and civil rights leaders in an effort to pressure Congress to pay more attention to Urban America.

"We need an economic agenda that corresponds with our political victory in November," Jackson said. He noted that while it is important to raise the minimum wage, that action alone does not address the needs of the unemployed or other serious problems facing cities.

Indeed, the new leaders in Congress could help revitalize urban America by simply restoring the cuts in domestic spending. There is no ques-

tion that cities need more help. A survey released in December by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, for example, showed that overall requests for emergency food assistance increased in 2006 by an average of 7 percent over the previous year; 74 percent of the surveyed cities registering an increase.

"This survey represents real people with real needs in cities all across our nation," U.S. Conference of Mayors President Douglas H. Palmer, mayor of Trenton, N.J., said at the time. "As mayors of cities in the richest and most powerful nation in the world, we cannot simply stand by as our residents — families with children — continue to suffer. We have a responsibility to work together with our federal partners, as well as the private sector to turn the tide of those most in need in America."

President Bush has essentially slashed domestic spending to fund an unnecessary war and unnecessary tax cuts that largely benefit the wealthy.

If Democrats want to make their mark, they should start by repealing the tax cuts and quit funding the war. They can't credibly say they're against the war yet continue to provide the financing.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

If we can like Vietnam, why not Cuba?

One of the last acts of the 109th Congress was to declare the nation of Vietnam a "favorite nation trading partner." This officially opens up opportunities for businesses from this nation and the Peoples Republic of Vietnam.

President Bush was a big backer of this legislation and is proud that we now have an open business relationship with this communist country.

The big mystery of the present day is why do we run to communist nations such as China and Vietnam for friendship and favorite nation status and, still, officially abhor neighboring communist nations such as Cuba.

Located 90 miles off our shore, Cuba is treated like a pariah. One would think it was the most oppressive and anti-democratic nation in the world. The reality is it isn't. In fact, Cuba is a product of the U.S. foreign policy — just like Vietnam. How Vietnam became our good friend and Cuba is officially taboo is a prime example of the confused and awkward foreign policy of the United States during the last 60 years.

Vietnam was under French colonial rule for more than 100 years. The Japanese imperial Army took over during the 1930s and provided ruthless oppression. The Vietnamese fought back and from this struggle evolved a great hero, Ho Chi Minh. He led his people to victory, at great costs, but still victory. Immediately after World War II ended in the mid-1940s, the French thought they could walk right back in. Ho once again led his people to victory in 1954. It was perceived that finally there would be total independence for the people of Vietnam. But, no, our CIA convinced our government to intervene and put up a puppet rival group of opportunists to resist the very popular national movement led by Ho.

Ho offered a national election to decide who should rule. It was quite apparent that 80 percent of the popular vote would go to the communists. Thus, our government resisted a democratic election and plunged the nation into a manufactured civil war. We initially sent in a few US troops. Before you knew it we had more than 600,000 troops on the ground. It was "Good versus Evil" and we were the "Evil." After losing

more than 50,000 troops, we eventually packed up and went home (unofficial surrender). The Vietnamese paid a great price; more than 2 million of them (documented) died in this conflict. What a shame and what a waste.

After the American intrusion, Vietnam got back on its feet and has become a communist nation that is rapidly learning the advantages of capitalism. It is now a major trader in fishing, coffee and tea. Growth is rapid and the United States wants to play in this market in a very big way. There is peace and an evolving prosperity.

So, if we can now love Vietnam what is our problem with Cuba?

Cuba had been a possession of imperial Spain for hundreds of years. A slave state, it developed a Black population that today represents about 70 percent of the national population. The U.S. stole Cuba along with Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines from Spain during the Spanish American War. This was part of our Manifest Destiny campaign. Cuba and Puerto Rico should have become official states of America but their black populations were too large for our Jim Crow South to align itself with. Cuba eventually

became somewhat independent with puppet like tendencies towards the United States.

Unlike Vietnam, communism was nothing new to Cuba. Since the 1920s, the communist party has been a player in the Cuban political landscape. It didn't become a major entity until the U.S. sponsored economic oppression of an elite upper class and the business enterprises of the Mafia became too much for the Cuban people to stomach. They rebelled and the disgust was so large that Fidel Castro marched into downtown Havana in 1959 with only 600 troops and took the nation over. For the first time in history, the Cuban people were able to be self-ruled. Castro nationalized all the businesses and told the oppressors and opportunists to leave immediately. They all ran to the United States and have been pouting ever since.

So, what is our problem? It is time to look at Cuba for what it is — a nation ready to do business. If Vietnam meets the test then Cuba also does.

HARRY C. ALFORD is co-founder and president of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.