

A WORD OR 2

Mba Mbulu, Editor

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“Black Nationalism is the only real solution for Black People in the United States.”

WHO MATTERS?

I attended the opening ceremonies for Venezuela Cultural Week a few days ago. As I entered the building, a security guard rushed to intercept me, but as soon as I told him what I was there for, he stepped aside. Two Venezuela hostesses seemed a bit surprised to see me, but they courteously greeted me and provided me with some informative materials. And as I strode through the viewing area prior to the brief speeches that were to be made, nobody seemed to notice my presence. The largely Venezuelan crowd seems to have learned a thing or two about race and class, but racism and elitism will continue to be huge obstacles to President Hugo Chavez and his forward aspiring comrades.

I saw two other Black males there; one was a media cameraman and the other carried a platter filled with glasses of wine (a “white” Venezuelan/Hispanic was also carrying a platter of wine). I saw two Black females, both African-American. Everybody else in that crowd of maybe 200 people was “white” (even though one of the speakers could have passed for Black). I think it is significant that I could not identify a single Black Venezuelan/Hispanic among that admittedly small group of people.

The theme of the week was “Venezuela Matters.”

Six big screen monitors ran videos almost non-stop, each covering a different theme. The only video that showed Blacks in a prominent role was on baseball. Baseball is Venezuela’s national pastime, and a lot of Venezuelan players are on Major League rosters.

The fact that Blacks were not prominent in the other videos does not suggest Blacks were not present. The presence of Black Venezuelans in the videos is not noteworthy, but their lack of prominence is. Hugo Chavez and his comrades are putting their best foot forward to address realities like that. He calls his platform the Bolivarian Revolution, but Chavez is trying to bring about a level of justice and equality far beyond what

Simon Bolivar could have attempted or contemplated. The initiatives Chavez has implemented since becoming president indicate what his vision for Venezuela is, and immediate results are encouraging. One of the questions is, “Will the initiatives be able to sustain themselves, breed greater changes of similar ilk, and become cherished institutions?”

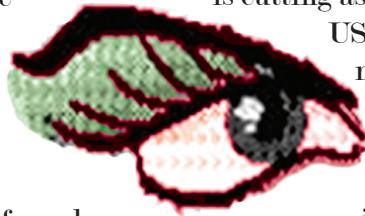
Hugo Chavez is faced with huge obstacles, and he has made some notable concessions. He paid off Venezuela’s debt to both the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. I would not have wanted to pay either of them. He has paid private investors large sums of money so that he can nationalize telecommunications and electrical industries; paid them too much as far as I am concerned. And Chavez is cutting as many critical economic strings with the

US of A as he can. That’s a wise move, in my opinion, but he must be careful that he doesn’t establish counter-progressive ties with other world powers, including China. Cuba is the only world power that is trying to do what Chavez is trying to do.

Other world powers will slip language into trade and social agreements that tend to re-enforce long standing imbalances that Chavez is intent on eliminating. Asians have demonstrated that they are just as racist (anti-Black) and elitist as Europeans. They could inject language into business and social agreements that favor their racist and elitist tendencies.

In spite of my reservations, Chavez certainly knows more about Venezuela’s capabilities than I do. Maybe he didn’t want to pay the IMF, World Bank and private investors, but he knew Venezuela could afford it. Today, Venezuela is producing almost 4 million barrels of oil a day. In five years, it will increase to 5.8 million barrels. At that rate, it will take 175 years for Venezuela to run out of oil. Unless something strange happens, Venezuela should not be cramped for cash anytime soon.

In addition, Chavez probably realized that paying more now could end up cheaper in the long run. Better



BE BLACK SMART

to not fight a minor battle that might flare out of control and result in the loss of something of far greater value.

Before Chavez became president, 80% of Venezuelans lived in poverty. Only \$40 million a year was spent on social programs. Chavez and his comrades are changing that. Already, the amount of oil money put into social and civic programs has increased by 500 times (to more than \$1.7 billion). There is a push against discrimination, illiteracy has been practically wiped out, and all Venezuelans with a high school diploma or equivalent are eligible to receive a free college education. The economy is being transformed so that it focuses on "social needs and the full time incorporation of the population." A healthy population has been made a priority. As such, 500 medical clinics provide more than 10 million Venezuelans free medical attention and medications, and that program is intensifying.

These advances are not being made because Venezuela is rich, but because the Chavistas value human beings more than they value business. Venezuela was rich when 80% of Venezuelans lived in poverty, so Chavez' program is not about riches. If Venezuela were not "rich," it is likely that Chavez would be bringing about his revolution in much the same way Fidel Castro did in Cuba. A government that is committed to human beings is what explains why Venezuela matters so much.

Like Castro, Chavez recognizes an obligation to people throughout the world. That is why Venezuela is providing assistance to poor people outside of Venezuela. That includes the United States of America; from November 2006 through March 2007, Venezuela delivered 100 million gallons of heating oil to poor families in 19 states, including major cities like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Wilmington, at a 40% discount. A Tribal Heating Oil program delivered warmth and funds to 173 United States Indian tribes in six states, and assistance was provided to many victims of Hurricane Katrina. Much more substantial programs are being developed in Africa, South America and the Caribbean.

Because of the transformation Hugo Chavez is taking Venezuela through, Venezuela matters. Because Venezuela's Black President is breaking ties with white power to the extent possible and does not let the violent tendencies of the US of A control him, Venezuela matters. Because Chavez has put everything on the line as proof of his commitment to a new world order based on human priorities, justice and equality, Venezuela

matters. Venezuela was an oil rich country before Chavez became president, but it was a pawn of white power. Venezuela did not matter then, but Venezuela matters now.



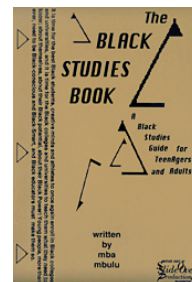
Quite unlike Black Venezuelans, Black People in the United States of America do not matter. Even those who consider themselves "progressive" are afraid to challenge white power in a meaningful way, so they are unable to do anything that can benefit Black People or the forces of progress throughout the world. By coward-like default, so-called African-Americans stand on the side of white power. Instead of advocating the destruction of this corrupt system, they hope a Black person will soon become the president of it. Instead of fighting for the destruction of this capitalist system, they stress the importance of creating jobs for Blacks and facilitating Black capitalist economic ventures. Instead of standing up for Black Nationalism and self-determination, they pray white power will loosen the noose a bit. Black People in the US of A, so-called African Americans, are the victims of white power and the enemies of those who pose a real threat to white power. Political zeroes, empty economic suits, social balloons filled with hot air; and loving it! What an incredible combination.

30 years ago I wrote a book entitled Ten Lessons: An Introduction to Black History. In Chapter 5, I wrote about Voluntary and Involuntary Submitters, and in Chapter 10 I wrote about "The Future: Will Black People Be Prepared?". It would have been good to be proven wrong.

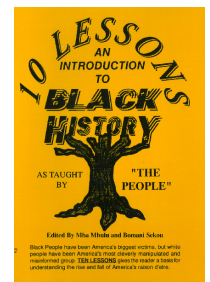
There has been much discussion about the fall of Blacks in Africa, from the greatness of Antiquity to the mediocrity of modern times, but those Africans resisted bottoming out as best they could. I don't think the same can be said of so called African Americans.



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