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**From the Selected Works of Aubrey W. Bonnett**

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## Colin Powell : Where are You ?

Aubrey W. Bonnett



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## COLUMNISTS



view from america by aubrey bonnett

## Colin Powell: Where Are You?

It was the traditional Labor Day West Indian carnival parade in New York and, though well attended and full of revelry, party going and ribald behavior, there was an underlying somber mood. A national disaster worse than 9/11 had struck our nation and the response and presidential leadership was non existent and woefully inadequate. "Bush is missing in action," some one in the sweltering crowd shouted, "He hiding!" bellowed another, "He 'en care 'bout the poor and minorities, what do you expect? Impeach the bastard, this is genocide?" The mood was angry.

It was also the prelude to an election later in November in New York, and a Democratic party primary in less that a week where many West Indian Americans are running for higher office - District Attorney in Kings County (Brooklyn); Civil and Supreme Court judges; and city council members, for example. An election which will again reflect, and rightly so, the "Two Americas" - rich (whites) and poor (largely minorities). A billionaire mayor, Bloomberg, who says he cares; as against a Hispanic candidate Ferrer, who pointedly and repeatedly reminds us all of what the census just reaffirmed. New York City is symptomatic of the growing underclass in our country; "trickle down" economics has not worked and few leaders are genuinely committed to structural change to alleviate the plight of the disaffected.

It was in this context that the unfolding events in New Orleans and Mississippi were framed. A President who seemed aloof and uncaring, again lost without Cheney, more concerned with rallying support for a quagmire and failed policy in Iraq, even as our oil and gas prices continue to rise. A President still engaged in enacting more tax cuts for the rich while our treasury runs bare and we remain a debtor society; cutting social programs while increasing military and intelligence ones. New Orleans is the nation's busiest port and the state of Louisiana one of its poorest, therefore the anticipated loss of over 400,000 jobs in New Orleans will have, at minimum, a deleteriously ripple effect on the US economy.

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It should also be remembered that the President has cut funds for the U.S Army Corps of Engineers and this negatively impacted on the levees in New Orleans, all this while the Republican party and the President try to make permanent more tax cuts for the rich, wealthy and opulent in America. It is these “Two Americas” that the US Census highlighted in a recent report describing the widening gulf between rich and poor, and the corresponding deadly effect on life chances and quality of life indicators for poor Americans - many aged and racial minorities.

So as we view the tragedy of Katrina in Mississippi, Louisiana and the Gulf States, billionaire New York City mayor Bloomberg puts it succinctly when he stated...“The sad fact is that the majority of those who were left behind in New Orleans were black or poor or both...as a nation we are all to blame and we must do better next time”.

Where is the skilled, determined and adroit leadership? The caring and empathetic features with the ability to prioritize for the poor, the aged the forgotten-the underclass – the Other America?

When former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill left the administration in disgust and wrote his “tell all” book about the President’s lack of leadership skills and his aloofness, I became alarmed at Bush’s ability to channel an agenda for the disaffected and helpless. When Colin Powell departed, however, the fount of skilled, multi variegated “can do” leadership of this great American was sorely missed.

As I reread The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell, by Oren Harari, I kept wondering if Bush had read some of these principles:

Clarity, consistency and commitment  
Execution is the key  
Put truth and integrity above else  
Get rid of non performers  
Always work on building your “trust factor”  
Walk the talk  
Challenge the pros to get better solutions  
Look past today, and monitor the environment for tomorrow  
Become a servant leader, work “for” your people

Badly damaged by the mistruths of Bush and Blair and their neocon cronies' view of maintaining America’s hegemony, Powell - then the most credible voice in the administration, with a worldwide positive believability index - helped convince a skeptical national and global public ,that war with Iraq was the inevitable antidote to our new War on Terror. Later, realizing that he was duped, he resigned quietly in disgust and despair for the nation. He has kept quiet until now, and in an interview slated for Friday September 9, on ABC news program 20/20, we will hear more as he is interviewed by Barbara Walters.

Meanwhile, no amount of spin by Karl Rove – no trying to avoid responsibility for presidential inaction by branding critics of his failed policies as Un American – will save this President, now attacked by both liberal and conservative columnists. The country remains as divided as ever, our military stretched thin, our so called “leaders” mute or in disarray, even as our nation drifts economically.



Only a now contrite but still charismatic leader such as Powell can help bind a badly fractured and divided nation, with a new vision for all Americans, as we face numerous challenges in a rapidly changing global world.

Forget the War on Terror; let's fight the War on Poverty. It was never won; it never ended. Meanwhile, our nation tethers and looks for help; its invulnerability bubble burst, once again. Please contribute whatever you can to help the dispossessed.

Colin Powell - son of Africa, Jamaica, New American, where are you when America needs you, I wonder?

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Business

Columnists

Sports

What's On

Letters

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