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# THE CITIZEN

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*for Social Responsibility, a non-profit Corp.*

*Spring 2003*

**This issue of the CITIZEN** was to present part 2 of our 3 part series analyzing narcotics trafficking. As a result of the commencement of hostilities and the declaration of outright war on the country of Iraq THE CITIZEN dedicates this issue to Peace.

We will continue our exposé with our forthcoming issue.

## **The February 15<sup>th</sup> Peace March in NYC —**

*by: Victor Saraiva*

It is a brisk morning, a cold morning, with a bright sun overhead, I walk to the Path station, the Metro connecting the state of New Jersey to New York City. The cold wind makes each breath difficult. My fourteen year old son beside me speaks excitedly about our participation in the demonstration for peace which is to take place this morning in front of the United Nations. We seek to join the thousands which will presumably unite to make a statement for peace. Above us, the light azure sky is speckled with clouds, reminding me of the great beauty of our planet. A planet it seems always replete with destruction, poverty, and madness.

Many still suffer from the death and destruction of the twin towers in lower Manhattan as our government marches us to war. I am filled to saturation with the fear that surrounds me, visible on the many faces of strangers that are united in the kinship of terror of a post 9/11 world. A fear propagated to a large extent by our own government. We are bombarded with FBI alerts that a terror attack can/may happen. We are told to buy tape to seal our doors and windows to prevent chemical or biological poisons from entering our homes. This is Homeland 'defense' in action ! Our children are told to duck under their desks at school should a bomb be dropped, as if this would do any good, while in Washington, Rumsfeld considers using nuclear weapons. Madness ! Madness !

During evening broadcasts, our media propagates these fears without substantiation. Just as Colin Powell speaks to the world community without adequate proof regarding Iraq's threat to the United States or to the world community of nations. Threats, accusations are levied with impudent stride as a President Bush states to the world "you are either with us or against us". These thoughts are with me as I walk.

Three days ago in Washington, a U.S. Senator addressed his fellow Senators with courageous words. Senator Robert Byrd said what many think but none have the courage to utter; 'this war is unjust, over one half of the Iraqi population is made up of children.' In the vein of 'J'Accuse' (the French Dreyfus case) he states: 'that in less than two years the Bush administration has squandered a \$5.6 trillion surplus.' It has garnered unprecedented power, has arrested hundreds, if not thousands, of innocent civilians simply because they are Muslim, simply because they are from countries whose allegiance to U.S. interests is suspect, in essence simply because they are different or alien.

The war in Afghanistan has so far cost \$37 billion and continues to get costlier. Senator Byrd admonishes the Senate for remaining silent at the injustice of this planned attack on Iraq. In words destined to be prophetic, he implores; "This war is not in the highest moral traditions of our country." By implication-- it is wrong.

Although Sen. Byrd's speech elevated my sense of hope, overall I no longer recognize this country. I have lived here for thirty five years of my life. I arrived during the years of the War on Poverty, arriving to witness the strides for social justice and equality. Today, I witness instead the development of a Police State, that spies on its own citizens; on their calls, on their e-mails, on what they read, on what they purchase, on what lectures they attend, whether they participate in marches or protests-- I am

reminded of Orwell's *1984*— and I shudder for America.

The USA has 5% of the World's population and 25% of the world's prison population. Many prisons are not administered by the State but rather by private corporations. Prisons like everything else in America make money, make profits. As Bush cuts the taxes for the super rich, and cuts money for programs benefitting the poor, nearly 35 million people live below the minimum levels of sustenance which define poverty (US census bureau). Of these, 13 million are children. This represents nearly 10% of the US population. 3.1% of these homes, 8.5 million people including 2.9 million children, sometimes go entire days without any food. (U.S. Dept. Of Agriculture March 2002 ERS Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report FANRR, No. 21). And this year, with a dire economic outlook in store for America, the numbers promise to get far worse, or should I say, the human tragedy promises to be far gloomier.

We arrive at Herald Square, in New York City at 11:50 am. Already people are walking in small groups of 4 and more, walking in the direction of First Avenue. As we cross Broadway, before us a contingent of approximately 30 policemen in riot gear pass in formation advancing in double time as the plastic cuffs draping from their belts dangle to and fro. They turn onto 35<sup>th</sup> Street, followed by three paddy wagons and other police vans. As they march, they grasp their nightsticks diagonally across their chests, as if reflective of some object lesson to be taught soon enough, in some nightmare, waiting to happen.

Beside me walking on the sidewalk, passing electronic stores with gawking salesgirls and managers, file the demonstrators on their way to the rally adjacent the United Nations. Shouting slogans like 'Peace Now' and 'War is not a Family Value' they walk— some quiet, some scared, some excited and vibrant, some loquacious, some pensive-- all struggling with their thoughts. As I look behind me,

no longer are there scattered shadows of strangers walking in varying directions with different destinations, there is now rather, a solid march of humanity, of many faces, and races-- representing oddly enough a human race reflected in this society -- America. Walking on together, in the cold looking ahead in anticipation, as the sound of police boots strike the asphalt ahead of us parallel to our movement, we begin to pass streets that are closed off to the demonstrators, with metal police barricades, and policemen that seem bewildered at the sheer numbers passing them. 'The number of demonstrators must be several hundreds now,' I think. Chants of 'You work for us, You work for us' are directed at the police, and 'This is Democracy, This is Democracy'.

Beside me people from Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York walk in unison. A placard reads 'Spare the Innocents' another compares Bush to Hitler, another reads 'War on Terrorism ? War is Terrorism !' The mood is somewhat quiet as an organizer asks that we walk faster up third avenue. On my right a group of people speaking German carry signs against the war, they pass me animated by their participation in the march as the frigid breeze from the East River strikes us all. Above us the whirr of helicopters which are circulating, observe this mass of humanity in motion. I wonder what the people in the helicopters must be thinking, as they gaze at the thousands below occupying the streets. The Saturday morning traffic is blocked, and as we pass the side streets we hear relative quiet and surprisingly few blaring horns. I remember thinking it odd, since New York drivers have notorious short tempers.

By the time we reach 57<sup>th</sup> street and Third Avenue we are met with police on horseback, they advance side by side down the avenue toward the marchers who walk peacefully up the Avenue. As they advance the men on horseback draw closer to the demonstrators who try without being able, to get out of the way. The police advance closer still, threatening to trample the demonstrators. Some lose

their balance. People are pressed closer together and we hear some scream, *'there are children here, I have a baby'*. Still the police press harder knowing that the crowd continues to get larger as more and more protestors arrive coming up third avenue. The banners and the shouts for *'Peace Now'* continue to unfurl amid the cold and the fear.

On the radio, WBAI an FM public radio station, which is part of the Pacifica network, carries the speeches from the stage in front of the UN at 1<sup>st</sup> avenue and 51<sup>st</sup> Street. The son of Martin Luther King Jr. III speaks to the crowd;

*"My father once said darkness cannot put out darkness only light can put out darkness."* And the legendary Pete Seeger, 83 years *'young'* sings *'Somewhere over the Rainbow.'*

There are reports on WBAI that up to 79 city blocks are affected by masses of demonstrators with an estimate of over 7,000 people per block for a total of over half a million people. This despite the fact that the government of the City of New York and the Federal Court denied people the right to legally march to the United Nations to protest Bush's war plans. Even though the freedom to demonstrate is guaranteed by the United States Constitution, the government which is supposed to be *"of the people, by the people and for the people"*-- denied the people the right to protest an unjust war in the making.

My attention is once again drawn to the speeches on stage, the African-American actor Ossie Davis addresses the crowd, he says;

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they are the children of God"* he introduces the South African bishop Desmond Tutu who in turn speaks in a heavy accent;

*"God is proud of you, God is smiling as God looks down on 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues. God is with us. People marched and demonstrated and the Berlin wall fell and communism ended. People marched and demonstrated and apartheid ended. And democracy and freedom were born. Now people are marching. People are demonstrating because they are saying— No to war. We say No to war.*

*...war is immoral.*

*...Those who are going to be killed in Iraq are not 'collateral damage' they are human beings of flesh and blood. They are children. They are mothers. They are brothers, they are grand-fathers. You know what? They are our sisters and brothers because we belong to one family, we are members of one family; God's family; the human family. How can we say that we want to drop bombs on our sisters and brothers and on children?*

*We said no to communism, we said no to apartheid, we said no to injustice, we said no to oppression, and we said yes to freedom. Yes to democracy."*

The People roar with approval, and as we cheer, the ever present cold seems to vanish.

Someone amid the marchers who is speaking on a phone, raises his voice to yell to everyone *"2 million people are marching in London"* the people cheer, someone chants *"What do We Want?"* A resounding roar erupts *"Peace, Peace Now."* On the radio, John Lennon's *"Give Peace a Chance"* is playing as I turn to look at my son. I think of the countless fathers across our world who live in fear, for their children, and for their families. I am glad we are here, marching, even if the police will not let us advance closer to the United Nations. Even though we are trapped between barricades at Third Avenue I look around at the many faces, I see old soldiers with their military veterans' caps, mothers, fathers, children, old and young together, singing and chanting for peace, for world peace. And as I chant the words, I begin to think that perhaps hope is still alive in this country, and in our world. Maybe the sanity of the people will prevail.

As we struggle to walk amid the mass of humanity, overshadowed by the forces of greed and power, resisting the obstacles of policemen on horseback, of metal barriers, and indifferent stares from 'public servants', I begin to share an unspoken whisper with those around me that seems to get louder, and louder with each step we take, drowning out fear, repression and indifference, the whisper becomes audible and then thunderous as someone yells— *"We shall overcome."*

War was officially declared on March 21<sup>st</sup> with the outright invasion of Iraq, although sporadic bombing had been levied on that nation for the greater part of twelve years. Even though most foreigners left Iraq, and nearly all embassies closed (Cuba retains its embassy open), some foreigners decided to stay. A few were journalists. Indeed the first images broadcast out of Iraq within minutes of the first bombardment by coalition forces, was not by the 'embedded mainstream media' but rather by RTP, Portuguese TV, broadcasting from the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad, as missiles and bombs fell from the sky. Besides the journalists who stayed, some conscientious peace activists remained in Iraq too, as 'witnesses' to the carnage which was to ensue. They belonged to organizations such as "*Voices in the Wilderness*" and "*Human Shields*". It was through their independent postings on the Internet and their phone calls to WBAI that 'we' learned of the brutality of this war. It was from them that we learned that most of the victims were children, brutalized and traumatized, probably for the remainder of their lives.

L.A. Times Photographer Carolyn Cole captured images of the initial devastation, including ironically the death of a dove which died of fright huddled in a corner amid the thunderous clamor of exploding bombs. It can be said without doubt that one of the first victims of this violence, was this dove—the eternal symbol of peace devastated by the brutality of aggression—that is war.

By the evening of March 27<sup>th</sup>, many peace activists were facing the news of 'death and destruction' in Iraq amid a sense of 'personal failure', and intense depression. The protests had failed to sway Washington. I for one, saw people crying as they read the independent reports out of Baghdad, that week. That evening approximately three to four thousand people were present at Riverside Church, in Harlem, to pay homage to the memory of Martin Luther King Jr., who on April 4<sup>th</sup> 1967 gave his controversial anti-war address at Riverside Church. Of all the speakers who addressed those in attendance, I found the words of actor/activist Ossie

Davis to be the most profound and moving. Here is what he said that night, amid a crowded and hushed Church:

"Thank you... I am indeed... Ossie Davis. I say that so that those whose duty it is to report my behavior back to the proper authorities...

I am not as smart as Miss Condoleeza Rice, though she is yet my sister, nor so faithful unto death as Gen. Colin Powell though he is yet my brother. They have their sense of duty, I have mine. They are loyal to their commander-in-chief, and I am loyal to mine. My commander-in-chief is Martin Luther King Jr. And more than thirty years ago he stood in these sacred halls and gave me my marching orders, though I was predisposed to peace mongering long before I met Dr. King. It started for me with a jolt, on that day August the 7<sup>th</sup>, when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and I was a soldier twenty-eight years old faced with the brutal consequences of what my country had done. It was a period that left me in depression trying to find an answer, because I knew the quandary into which these acts had led us. I fully understood that our technology and our humanity were in full balance, which one would lead us to the future was the question.

I watched in horror when I left the service as my country used the atomic bomb as the center of its foreign policy. How the march away from colonialization in Africa and other places was affected by that concept of ourselves, which under the aegis of Mr. Churchill and also Mr. Truman, set out to establish their vision of a world where we had a second class place and were implored to remain in that position. I saw the struggle for people to be free. I saw the stand we took in 1954 when France was faltering as she was trying to reimpose colonialism in southeast Asia. And when France fell at Dien Bien Phu, I saw us step in and take over. I saw even then that we were on a course that could well lead to destruction. And much later in the war that came subsequent to that, I saw the country engaged in what Dr. King told us on that night, was adventures based on militarism, racism and poverty, which it was more constrained to pursue than peace and justice, and equanimity all over the world. I became that night, as many of you did, citizens who were also drum majors for justice, drum majors for justice second class, glad to be recruited.

I thought with the pain and anguish of Vietnam, that my country had learned a lesson, that we had decided that there was an end to our reliance on technological tricks and gimmickry. But I see today that I have been mistaken, as I read once again the magnificent words of Dr. King upon that occasion and saw how easily we might this very night transpose the word Vietnam for Iraq, and the document would still be an eloquent cry for sanity and for peace.

I have never looked upon myself as a magician, I was not sent by the Almighty to solve all the problems of the world at one fell swoop. I am not morally arrogant. I accept the fact that maybe this generation was not the one designed by fate to bring peace to the world. But I also believe that it is necessary to stay on the march, to be on the journey, to work for peace wherever we are at all times, because the liberty we cherish, which we would share with the world, demands eternal vigilance. Democracy is no easy path. Those of us who believe in it must be prepared to sacrifice in its cause, more willingly than those who are prepared to die in the wars of aggression. We too must be dedicated to the cause of Freedom.

And so tonight I am happy to join once again with those of you who see the cause as I do. I say to my commanding officer; 'Martin, here we are— Ossie, Ruby, our children and grandchildren, all our house, all of us joined with millions from one end of creation to the other. Martin, we report for duty Sir.' ...Thank you."

## POVERTY IN AMERICA, Martin Luther King's Last Struggle

As America's politicians in Washington authorize a budget in the Trillions of dollars for 2004, nearly \$80 billion of which for an illegal 'pre-emptive' war with Iraq, the country remains as the only industrialized country in the world with a child poverty rate of 22%. We lead the world not only in technology, military might, and economic might, but we also lead with the greatest number of children growing up poor ! What a testimony to this society's values !

The year that Martin Luther King died the child poverty rate in America stood at 13.8 %. And even then, his struggle was to redefine the civil rights movement into a 'new' movement. King began challenging the nation's fundamental priorities. He maintained that civil rights laws were empty without "Human Rights", including economic rights. 'What good were anti-discrimination laws for people who could not afford to eat at a restaurant or afford to own their own home?' King recognized that most of the poor in America were not black but rather white. So he developed the concept of a multiracial justice alliance. Similar to Jesse Jackson's idea of a 'rainbow coalition'. King wanted to see radical changes in America, and in the world. Indeed, he rightly said then, "*True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar, it comes to see that an*

*'edifice' which produces beggars needs restructuring.*" By 1967 King had become America's most prominent opponent to the Vietnam War and a critic of US foreign policy which he characterized as militaristic. His Riverside Church speech was delivered one year to the day, before he was silenced by an assassin's bullet.

King called America "*the greatest purveyor of violence in the world*". From Vietnam to South Africa to Latin America, King said, the US was on the "*wrong side of a world revolution*". King criticized "*our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America*" and asked why the US suppressed revolutions "*of the shirtless and barefoot people*" in the third world, instead of supporting them.

In the last months of his life he was organizing the *Poor People's Campaign*. He sought to unite all the country's poor for a march on Washington, in order to seek a declaration— a "*Poor People's Bill of Rights*". He sought to confront a Congress that appropriated military funds with generosity, while providing anti-poverty funds with 'miserliness'. How little has changed in these past 36 years.

Amid 2003, America continues on a path of perpetuating poverty, in fact it is far worse now, than the year Martin Luther King Jr. died. The voices of the poor go unheard, unheeded, for many in these United States of America, who are perpetually unnoticed by the mainstream. *While hunger in America is pervasive, while 27% of the nation's food supply is thrown out or wasted, America goes to war dropping multi-million dollar bombs and sets aside billions of dollars for the machinations of WAR and destruction. While American children, go hungry.*

## IN MEMORIAM

With sadness and immense respect we mark the passing of Eunice K. Waymon, who used the 'show-name' Nina Simone during her life. She died this past April 21<sup>st</sup> at her home in Carry-le-Rouet, France. A legend in the world of Jazz, Folk and Blues, she was a classically trained pianist who attended the acclaimed Julliard School of Music.

During a great portion of her life she lived outside the United States as a result of her professed inability to accept the social conditions which people of color are forced to face, as well as for her hatred of the racism so prevalent in America. Among her most remarkable songs of 'social protest' are "*Backlash Blues*", "*Mississippi Goddam*", "*To be Young, Gifted and Black*" and "*Old Jim Crow*".

She began her career as a singer, in 1954 in Atlantic City, by changing her name in honor of the French Diva Simone Signoret. In her 1991 autobiography, "*I put a Spell on You*", she claimed disgust at having been forced to seek a living by turning to show business. This as a result of what she described as a racist society. During her life Simone paid a heavy price for turning anti-establishment. She was highly criticized and marginalized to a great extent by the music industry in the U.S. Although she was essentially in self imposed exile until she died, she never stopped writing and performing songs with a 'social conscience'. At her funeral, the South African Government, which had sent an emissary, delivered a eulogy characterizing her, as a voice of conscience that "fought for the liberation of black people."

The world is that much more impoverished and empty without the voice and soul of Nina Simone.  
Au revoir Nina.

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## THE POLITICS OF SILENCE

EDITORIAL

Poetry is defined as "a writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through its meaning... a quality that stirs the imagination..."

(Webster's 3<sup>rd</sup> New Intl. Dictionary 1966).

Amiri Baraka the NJ State Poet Laureate, recently had his stipend revoked amid discussions in the state capitol to remove Mr. Baraka's title as NJ's Poet Laureate. Mr. Baraka's poem "*Somebody Blew up America*" caused a furor last summer, as a result of

lines in the poem insinuating that Israelis knew before hand, that the World Trade Center would be attacked. Jews, including the Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel have heavily criticized Amiri Baraka as being anti-Jewish. Joining state politicians in the 'crusade' to humble and dethrone the Poet Laureate of NJ is the Reverend Otis Bowden, Secretary for the Black Ministers Council of NJ who recently said (Star-Ledger, 5/13/03 Legislators urged to end Laureate Post) "...I recognize his right to freedom of speech, but when he represents the people of NJ, he cannot let his personal views take over..."

I, for one, cannot fathom how a poet, can separate his 'personal views' from his poetry. Poetry is by definition a statement colored by one's perspective. To expect a poet to reflect the popular, the conventional, the accepted, merely because he has been 'honored' by a title and paid an honorarium, is frankly to expect a social critic to self-censure, to silence his voice of dissent, merely as a result of receiving such honors. Such a view places the artist as subservient to society rather than on equal terms to that same society. To hold such an expectation is to do so, neither in the spirit of art, nor in the vein of freedom of expression, for in fact such expectations are founded on fascistic and totalitarian ideas.

I am reminded of similar acts of censorship when John D. Rockefeller ordered the destruction of a mural of Diego Garcia, the Mexican painter, who had been commissioned to paint, because it included the likeness of Lenin, at— Radio City— Rockefeller Center in the 1930's. That act of censorship led to massive protests and the severe injury of a seven year old girl when police on horseback, who had charged the protestors with clubs, struck the child. A like-minded approach occurred in NYC in the 1990's when then Mayor Rudy Giuliani threatened to cut-off funds to the Metropolitan Museum of Art because an exhibition was found to be an 'insult' to Catholic sensibilities.

Neither politicians nor people of privilege, have any business legislating or prescribing the defining characteristics of good art or poetry or literature. If