

Still Victims of the "Shitstem"

At **Abeng News Magazine** we hate the culture of victimology. It's where minority people spend much time lamenting the reasons for our oppression rather than being focused on the means of empowerment. But four news reports in Canada and the USA Tuesday - let's call them two pairs - cause us to temper our position with caution.

In the first set of reports, we learned that the US Congress had voted to apologize to African Americans for the 300 years of enslavement their foreparents had endured and that some recordings of Richard Nixon in his White House years had been released, one showing his contempt for black people.

In Canada, side by side a report that First Nations (politically correct term for the aboriginal people) communities had been denied alcohol-based hand sanitizers to help prevent the spread of swine flu on the grounds of rampant alcoholism among them, while in Ontario the government's liquor control board made record sales as people stocked up in preparation for a labour strike.

According to a report by public broadcaster CBC, Dr. Kim Barker the senior public health adviser to the Assembly of First Nations told a Senate committee Tuesday that Health Canada delayed the delivery of alcohol-based hand sanitizers to some First Nations communities affected by swine flu because of concerns the alcohol content might be abused.

The report added that Canada's First Nations communities have been hit hard by the H1N1 influenza A virus, but Barker told the Senate committee on aboriginal peoples that there is no consistent approach to the outbreak across the country.

"For example, First Nations were told to avoid contact with others, even though most live in cramped and overcrowded conditions," she said. "Similarly, they were told: 'Wash your hands frequently,' even though many did not have running water in their homes."

A cogent point was made by Liberal Senator Sharon Carstairs of Manitoba who is quoted as saying that the delay in delivering hand sanitizers "represented the type of paternalism that we have treated First Nations with for a very, very long time."

A recent academic study showed that alcoholism is no greater among the First Nation communities than the rest of Canada but really represents the stereotyping of a marginalized people.

On Wednesday Manitoba First Nation chiefs called for an apology from Health Canada for delay in supplying the hand sanitizer.



Stocking up for the possible liquor sale workers strike.

Meantime, wider Canada, frequently reports drunk driving deaths and prides itself as a beer drinking, liquor loving community. The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) reported that its sales of \$17 million on Tuesday, was \$10 million more than its usual busy days as people filled trolleys and carton boxes to empty the shelves of the liquor outlets in anticipation of a strike by workers that eventually did not materialize Tuesday night.

According to TV reporters, it was not just household consumers who were involved in the run on the outlets but some small

businesses such as event planners and offices intending to hold events.

Apparently no one is needed to supervise the excessive consumption of "mainstream" Canada from whiskey, vodka, brandy, rum, wines and beer but the apparently desperate First Nations people will set up machinery to extract the harmful alcohol or just down the substance for a high before setting off in bands to reclaim their land.

In Washington, the Senate June 18 passed a resolution apologizing for more than two centuries of slavery in the U.S. and for the years of racial segregation that followed. The non-binding resolution is seen as a symbolic gesture, which now heads to the House of Representatives for voting.

The resolution makes some bold declarations that correctly acknowledge the sublime residue of racism that exists:

"Whereas during the history of the Nation, the United States has grown into a symbol of democracy and freedom around the world;

"Whereas the legacy of African-Americans is interwoven with the very fabric of the democracy and freedom of the United States;

"Whereas millions of Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States and the 13 American colonies from 1619 through 1865;

"Whereas Africans forced into slavery were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and subjected to the indignity of being stripped of their names and heritage;

"Whereas many enslaved families were torn apart after family members were sold separately;

"Whereas the system of slavery and the visceral racism against people of African descent upon which it depended became enmeshed in the social fabric of the United States;

"....Now, therefore, be it Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), That the sense of the Congress is the following:

(1) APOLOGY FOR THE ENSLAVEMENT AND SEGREGATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS- The Congress-

(A) acknowledges the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery and Jim Crow laws;

(B) apologizes to African-Americans on behalf of the people of the United States, for the wrongs committed against them and their ancestors who suffered under slavery and Jim Crow laws; and

expresses its recommitment to the principle that all people are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and calls on all people of the United States to work toward eliminating racial prejudices, injustices, and discrimination from our society."

Nixon's newly released tapes depict some attitudes that we did not believe were overtly harboured in the White House's Oval Office at the height of the Civil Rights movement. On Dec. 9, 1972, Nixon says to his aide Charles Colson: "They talk about all the tokenism. We appoint blacks, and they don't think we're for blacks. Mexicans. They don't think we're for Mexicans. But a working man, by golly, that is really something."

If you thought his appointment of non-whites was not tokenism what would you think of his comment to Colson on abortion one day after the court's decision on Roe vs Wade?: "There are times when abortions are necessary. I know that. You know, suppose you have a black and a white... or a rape..."

[audio:http://www.abengnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/richard_nixon.mp3]

By Nixon's yardstick, it would be quite in order for Barack Obama's mother to have aborted what turned out to be America's first mixed race president.

The resolution apologizing for slavery acknowledges that residues of racism still exist and there is no doubt that there still closet Nixons working to keep North America's First Nations under thumb and to abort the election of the 44th president of the USA. In Canada and the USA as in all the world, we need to be on guard against the return of institutional racism and victimization.