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BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

Issue 159 – November 17 2005

*Letter from a Black Man in Canada:
Rosa Parks v. Condoleezza Rice
by Norman (Otis) Richmond
Guest Commentator*

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Rosa Parks was loved all over the world. She visited Canada in 1998 and was given an honorary degree from Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Parks became the first woman in U.S. history to lie in the Capital Rotunda, joining a select few – including presidents and war heroes – given a public viewing in the historic venue. Her memorial service was held at the St. Paul AME Church in Montgomery.

It is significant that the AME stands for African Methodist Episcopal and was the church of Paul Robeson, Harriett Tubman and other African American freedom fighters. Parks also has the distinction of being recognized by both the civil rights and Black power movements. While the corporate media has highlighted Parks' role in the civil rights movement, they are unable or unwilling to discuss the fact that she also supported the more radical wing of the African American liberation struggle.

Parks actually spoke at the funeral of Robert F. Williams, the black revolutionary from Monroe, North Carolina who was forced to flee to Cuba and China after being falsely accused of kidnapping a Euro-American couple during a confrontation with a racist mob. At Williams' funeral on October 22, 1996, Parks told the congregation at a Monroe church that she and those who walked alongside Martin Luther King Jr. in Alabama had "always admired Robert Williams for his courage and his commitment to freedom. The work that he did should go down in history and never be forgotten."

Parks died of natural causes at the age of 92 at her home in Detroit. She was arrested in 1955 for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man. Parks was born Rosa McCauley in Tuskegee, Alabama. When she was still a young child, her parents separated and she moved with her maternal grandparents and her younger brother, Sylvester. Montgomery, Alabama, was hardly a hospitable city for blacks in the 1920s and 1930s. As she grew up, Parks was shunted into second-rate all-black schools, such as the Montgomery Industrial School for Girls, and she faced daily rounds of laws governing her behavior in public places.

The Black Commentator – Rosa Parks v. Condoleezza Rice

Alabama, like all places on earth, has produced working class heroes, revolutionaries, buffoons, sell-out and idiots. Along with Parks, Angela Davis, Carl Lewis, Alma Powell (wife of former Secretary of State Colin Powell) and Condoleezza Rice are all products of the Yellowhammer State. Parks and Rice are both daughters of Alabama and are a perfect example of the class struggle taking place among African Americans.

The passing of Parks gave Rice another opportunity to discuss U.S. racism openly, as quoted by the Toronto Star during her visit to Canada. Rice referred to Birmingham as "Bombingham." She went to great lengths to celebrate her past when she toured her native Alabama with British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. The two attended the Alabama-Tennessee football game, and Rice also showed Straw her roots in segregated Birmingham. She told the story of her "granddaddy" from Eutaw, Alabama, who was a poor sharecropper who went on to become the first "colored person" to get formal college "book learning" in the family. And she spoke of the racism she confronted, including the death of a young friend in the notorious church bombings in that city in 1963.

"Despite of my fond memories of Birmingham as a place where I was, as a child, secure, I also remember a place called 'Bombingham' – where I witnessed the denial of democracy in America for so many years," she said. "It was, after all, the city of Bull Connor and the Ku Klux Klan, where blacks were haunted by rebel yells and terrorized by nightriders and accused of burning their own homes.... And of course, it was the city where my friend Denise McNair, and three other little girls, were blown up one Sunday morning while they were going to Sunday school at the 16th Street Baptist Church."

In an interview with the BBC, she said an African American woman would one day be elected president, but again said she had no interest in running.

While Rice can now openly sound off on racism, don't hold your breath waiting to hear her speak out against the "free market" system. The last stage of capitalism is imperialism. We are living in the age of imperialism. Many, including myself, have always said that there would come a time when imperialism would need black faces in high places. Rice is just what the doctor ordered. Rice is of African origin. She is a woman. She is bright. However, she is still a mouthpiece of the neo-liberal project and the chief spokesperson for the Babylon system.

Since taking the job of Secretary of State, Rice has traveled 278,944 kilometers, visited 39 countries and spent 357 hours and 27 minutes in the air before making the 90 minute hop to Ottawa for two days of meetings recently.

Rosa Parks and Condoleezza Rice are from the same bowl of grits. However, history will judge both differently. Parks stood with the oppressed of the world and Rice stood with the oppressor.

Toronto-based journalist and radio producer Norman (Otis) Richmond can be heard on Diasporic Music, Thursdays, 8 p.m. – 10 p.m., Saturday Morning Live, Saturdays, 10 a.m. – 1 p. m. and From a Different Perspective, Sundays, 6–6:30 p.m. on CKLN-FM 88.1 and on the internet at www.ckln.fm. He can be reached e-mail at norman@ckln.fm.