

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

**March 19 , 2009 - Issue 316**

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

**Remembering Bianca on March 18th  
The African World  
By Bill Fletcher, Jr.  
BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor**

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

On March 18, 2009 my first born, Bianca Cason Fletcher, would have been 23. Instead, on March 21, 1986 she became a statistic, falling into the category of infant mortality among African Americans.

My wife's pregnancy had been proceeding along very well. Then one weekend she came down with the flu. Whether this triggered the premature labor we will never know, but into labor she went. The medical personnel thought that they could bring everything under control, but it was not meant to be. On March 18, 1986 a beautiful, and very small, little golden brown girl briefly entered the world. My wife was 6 months pregnant at the time of the birth and we had not come close to establishing what we would name our child, though the name Bianca had been in the running.

I saw Bianca waving her arms around and she was squeaking (there really is no other word since her lungs were not fully developed). Under other circumstances, it would have been charming. She was quickly moved into an incubator and we prayed. By March 21st, however, it was clear that something was very wrong. The doctors notified us that Bianca had suffered a brain hemorrhage and that, in addition, her lungs were insufficiently developed. In effect, she was being kept alive by a machine.

My wife and I made the decision to have the machine turned off. We did not want Bianca to go on that way. We could not imagine her simply *existing* with whatever the long-term consequences might be.

On March 21st my wife and I entered a world we had not known existed. It was not simply the agony and fury that accompanied the loss of one's child. It was also not the intense impatience that shadowed us for months like an apparition, an impatience the likes of which I had never experienced. This was the world of the parents who had lost children; a world that exists almost like an underground movement.

Let me tell you about this world since it is not regularly discussed in polite company. We, who have lost a child, rarely bring up this loss in public. In part because we live in a society that does not know how to deal with death generally, there is little space to share one's grief and not be treated as if one has lost one's mind. It is even difficult to share this with friends. I actually lost a good friend at the time of the death of Bianca. I called him, not looking for answers but looking to just know that he was there. He was silent except for repeating that he did not know what to say. In fact, from that day on he avoided me altogether, admitting years later to a mutual friend that he simply "...did not know what to tell..." me.

I did not want or need him to tell me anything. I just needed him to be there.

So, those of us in the 'underground' often keep it to ourselves. About two weeks after the death of Bianca most of our friends and associates assumed that everything was fine now and that we could all go about our lives as if everything was normal. Unfortunately, it does not work that way because what those of us in the 'underground' know is that while we can and will regain happiness in the future, there is a hole that has opened up; a wound that has been inflicted, that never quite heals, even if one is lucky enough to have another child.

Those of us in the 'underground', when we discover another 'member,' are often surprised. We open to each other carefully because no two people mourn in the same way, a fact, by the way, which apparently contributes to relationship breakups upon the death of a child. Some members of the 'underground' never wish to discuss what happened to them, barely acknowledging it. Others are so gratified to find someone with whom they can share the experience and gain empathy.

And then we go about our ways. We are often reluctant to raise the experience, even with other members of the 'underground,' for fear that we will be judged as having never gotten over the loss. So, we hold onto the pain, normally suppressing it and hoping that nothing ever reminds us of the experience.

There is a particular aspect of this horror that affects men differently than women, an aspect that demonstrates how toxic are both male supremacy and gender roles. Men are expected to not be as affected by the loss of a child as are women. In fact, I had an associate point out to me that no matter how bad I felt, I needed to remember that my wife felt worse. *What the hell was he thinking?*

In a technologically advanced society one is not prepared for losses in child-birth. One reads about them in books and articles, but usually one thinks about them happening somewhere else and to someone else. When it happens to you, there is a tendency to blame yourself and/or blame your partner. What if I or we had done this or that, you ask. But at the end of the day, if you were getting good prenatal care it was more than likely nothing that you did or did not do; it was fate, a concept very hard to accept but a concept that is very real.

Every March 18th and March 21st I think about my first born, that is, I do some special thinking about her. She will always be part of who I am. And our loss of Bianca will also remind me of so many other people out there who have had similar such losses, sometimes having known their children less time, in other cases having known them much longer.

My regret, in addition to having lost Bianca, is that we live in a society that is so intolerant of sadness and grief; is so fearful of expressions of certain emotions; and

fails to acknowledge that the experience of life is one that has the polar opposites of happiness and grief, and that we must be prepared to experience both, not only by ourselves, but with our friends and loved ones.

I never say "happy birthday, Bianca." It seems so odd to me when I read the obituaries and I see notes to departed friends and family to that effect. I say, instead, "Kiddo, I miss you, and I wish that you had grown up to know and love your great sister who entered this world two years and eleven months after we lost you."

[Click here to comment on any article in this issue or see what others are saying in the](#)

### **The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog**

**BlackCommentator.com** Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice](#) (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

Click Here To

CONTRIBUTE TO  NOW

Click Here To

CONTACT 

Your comments are always welcome.

### **e-Mail re-print notice**

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002-2009  
www.BlackCommentator.com  
All Rights Reserved