

## A Response to "1+10=50,000"

By Wilma Peebles-Wilkins

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From the outset, when responding to a narrative such as this one, it is important to acknowledge the value of both domestic and global interracial cooperation for social and institutional development. By the same token, self-help initiatives and internal development are essential within communities of the African diaspora. My response to 1+10=50,000 is influenced by these dual realities.

I had mixed emotions when I read this narrative. Some of my ambivalence stemmed from my stronger leaning toward the belief that community building from within is essential for all Black communities world wide. That is, interracial cooperation while often necessary, is not totally sufficient. Other mixed emotions stemmed from the sense of *de ja vu* I feel whenever I read or hear about violent attacks on a White person by Black people in any part of Africa. My *de ja vu* feelings go back to the days of my Catholic high school education in the early sixties when nuns, Catholic and other missionaries were victims of violent uprisings in parts of Africa. Some individuals were killed because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time and others were deliberately singled out for violent attacks which resulted in death. During this time, I was one of six African American students in a class of

just over thirty students and an entire school of fewer than fifteen African American students out of a student body of about one hundred and twenty-five students. During this time of turmoil in Africa and attacks on the Catholic Church constituency, the Irish nun who taught us Latin used the class each morning to vent her anger and frustrations over the violence in Africa in general and the killing of nuns in particular. The African American students, under other circumstances had pegged this particular nun as a racist and her constant attention to "Black savages killing nuns" served to validated this group perception. Both the public and private schools in (North Carolina) had only been integrated a few years and the White and Black students were just beginning to develop a common understanding about the do's and don'ts of racial etiquette in the South. A lull always came over the room when this nun used the Latin class to verbalize her anger about backwards Africans hurting and killing other individuals who were self-sacrificing and went to Africa to help improve the quality of life and the "morals of the uncivilized"—those killing nuns who were responding to a religious calling by making lifelong sacrifices. While none of the Black students condoned violent attacks and killing,

this nun's open expression of outrage and anger in this manner served to make all the African American students feel rage against the Catholic church,

When I read Biehl's narrative, I had an immediate flashback to my high school days and I could not help but wonder where the missing rage was in this narrative. The shock and grief over the violent death of Amy Biehl in the South African town of Guguletu are evident in the manuscript, but the anger and rage are conspicuously absent and unexpressed. Residents, were stunned and there was a sense of terror, but I can't help but wonder how Amy's family really felt about their loss under these circumstance of terror when Amy was in South Africa to do good?

My second reaction is to the repeated use of the word *Mamas* when describing the Black women activists. While this may be an internal community term of endearment, I have mixed emotions about the use of the term by those who are not members of that Black community. Adopting the term *Mama* by others for continuous usage feels like patronization to me and I'm just not comfortable hearing the term from a White person who has adopted it as a continuous pattern of expression. While I am not a believer in cultural relativism and I do not condone the abuse of other women anywhere, I also react negatively to an "outsider" characterizing the "traditions of paternalistic tribalism" among Black South African men. I don't doubt for a moment the good that Amy Biehl did to improve social conditions and the quality of life

during her time in South Africa and her attempts to extricate women who were victims of abuse. I also believe that the Amy Biehl Foundation is an admirable response to Amy's 's violent death. However, the attitudes which I perceive when reading this manuscript come across as paternalistic and patronizing.

'The formation of MOSAIC — Training, Service, and Healing Centre for Women is one of those examples of efforts associated with interracial cooperation which lead to community development and improved social conditions. However, one wonders what is happening in the South African education institutions serving the Black population and training them to be social workers. Where are those social workers who are being trained in South African Schools of Social Work and what are they doing?

The human degradation and other atrocities suffered by the Black people of South Africa under the conditions of apartheid have been depicted by such writers as Alan Paton in *Cry the Beloved Country* and the world knows that violent struggle has led to the current Mandela's South Africa. The Black community was involved in its own self and community development to extricate itself from White South Africans who lived lavish lifestyles at the expense of the Black community, where Black women left their own children to care for the children of the White community and Black men worked to extract the natural resources from the land to support the high standard of living of a White minority. In this regard, we

also recall the earlier social change activities for women initiated by Winnie Mandela. While Black communities in South Africa are still developing and the social revolution regrettably has not been benign, there has been dramatic self-directed social change which has transpired over many decades. The South African Black community has demonstrated its own strength and capacity for continued self-development and social change. □

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