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There must be some divine order to the fact that Eartha Kitt died on Christmas Day, since many of us associate Christmas both with the Christ child's birth and with those sultry and materialistic "Santa Baby" lyrics.

Though the "duplex and checks," "yacht" and furs that the songstress spoke of are out of the reach of many African American people, most of us appreciated every little thing about Eartha Kitt.

And if most folk didn't, I certainly did. I was an enthusiastic fan, almost groupie, who would savor seeing Eartha Kitt perform in person, and spend more money than I should have attending her shows when I lived in New York in the late seventies.
One day she happened into the squash club that I frequented, and I was stunned to find myself speechless as I attempted to greet her. Blessedly, the pro that was training her also gave me lessons and he made the introduction and patiently waited until I could tell Miss Kitt how much I admired her.

The music was "all that." But it wasn't just the music that made me appreciate Eartha Kitt. She was a woman who used her celebrity to speak truth to power, who paid the price for it, and who kept on ticking despite the exile that was imposed on her because she dared to tell the truth. Invited to the White House for a luncheon, and questioned by Lady Bird Johnson about the Vietnam War, Eartha Kitt threw down and told the First Lady, "You send the best of the country off to be shot and maimed. No wonder the kids rebel and take pot." According to some reports, she made Mrs. Johnson cry (give me a break)! And she had hell to pay for the next decade as she was investigated. Then work was hard to come by, and she ended up performing mostly abroad. President Jimmy Carter invited Eartha Kitt back to the White House and the rest was history. We can all learn, however, from this sister's courage.

Where are the actors and entertainers who live in the spirit of Eartha Kitt?

Who uses his or her celebrity to shine light on the ills that plague our nation? Where are the voices for social and economic justice, for world peace, for harmony? Who will raise her voice to support the 300 Palestinians who have been massacred during these holidays, or to decry the hundreds of thousands of foreclosures that may take place in the next few months?

People pay attention to celebrity. It is a gift and an honor. Where are the celebrities who will lift their voices, as Eartha Kitt did, to say something is wrong?
“You send the best of the country off to be shot and maimed,” Eartha Kitt said in 1968. There has been significant national reflection on the Vietnam War and the mistakes it embodied, and the people who paid for the poor judgment of our leaders. While some have protested the war in Iraq, there has been an uncomfortable and stifling silence in the last eight years, partly because people have been made to feel unpatriotic if they seem to question issues of “national security” after September 11, 2001.

I think, though, we can all agree that there were no weapons of mass distraction in Iraq, and that our involvement there has been manufactured.

The election of Barack Obama is, in part, a response to people who are dissatisfied with the war and its consequences for our economy.

Is there an Eartha Kitt in the house, someone with the political courage to stand up and let the chips fall where they may?

To be sure, there are entertainers who speak their politics. Yet, Kitt displayed a courage that is similar to that of Paul Robeson, who lost his livelihood because he took a political stance. In our materialistic age, it seems that here are few who will put their principles on the line like Eartha Kitt did. Much as she crooned “Santa Baby”, she should be best known for speaking truth to power.

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