



## **Many Blacks Wary of Iraq War; See Hypocrisy in US Policy**

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### **Race and Religion Frame the Debate on Iraq**

There is no denying that Black Americans are the most loyal segment of our society. We have defended this nation dating back to the American Revolution, when we chose to fight for a freedom that was reserved for whites. And with each conflict it was our belief in the democratic principles espoused by the framers of the Constitution that sustained us. Still, Blacks fought on and in succeeding battles shed blood for a nation that did not recognize our humanity.

Many Blacks can point to a history of military service in their families. I know I can. My great-great grandfather was a Civil War veteran, a North Carolinian who crossed over to the Union Army. My father was a veteran of World War II. My aunt was a WAVE. My brother was a Marine and served in Operation Desert Storm. My family's history of military service is not unique. It is the experience of many Black families in our nation. I offer this tradition of service to make a point:

No one can deny the willingness of Blacks to take up arms in defense of this nation.

That is why the generally unfavorable opinion held by Blacks of President Bush's current position on Iraq should give the White House reason to pause. Blacks are not viewing the current crisis through rose-colored glasses. We, above any other group, have laid our lives on the line for Old Glory.

Yet, we also carry the memory of a nation that has too often been on the wrong side of the issue when our interests were at stake. As deplorable as the attacks of September 11, 2001 were, many of us look at conditions facing Blacks on US soil and seethe, as those calling for war remain silent to our suffering. We hear Saddam Hussein described as a dictator and a tyrant, yet we recall the manner in which our government sat on its hands during the bloody and oppressive regime of the apartheid government of South Africa. The manner in which Haitians are stopped on the high seas, and returned, while more favored immigrants are given access to these shores is taken as yet another example of the nation's indifference toward people of African descent. Our worldview is shaped by what we witness here at home. And it is not a pretty picture.

The growing presence of Islam in our community is also shaping Black public opinion on Iraq. No doubt many practicing Muslims see parallels in US attitudes toward Islam and the manner in which Black Christians were persecuted for practicing their faith during slavery. The imposition of spiritual and moral “values” was at the heart of white supremacy. During slavery and Jim Crow, Bible toting Christians, in the name of the Almighty, often committed the most vicious and violent acts against Blacks. We now see a “destiny” that our president has claimed to be divinely instructed and bequeathed to our nation. Meanwhile, Islam, and consequently many Blacks, face the wrath of many Americans.

We are at the nexus of a historical global realignment. And most of us don't have a clue. This is our moment. Our past, present, and future all wrapped into one. This is the last great stand for white hegemony in the western world.

Our nation is on the verge of a great transformation, transitioning from white majority rule to a nation where people of color will define America. While the Black population in America is not increasing at the rate of Latinos, the birthrate is outpacing whites. And when taking a more enlightened view, the differentiation between Black and Latino is meaningless when our common origin and the root of group oppression are acknowledged. Moreover, the complexion of America is being changed by new arrivals from sub Saharan Africa, Haiti, and the Caribbean.

At the same time immigration is changing the face of Europe. Unbeknownst to most African Americans, there are now some 20 million Blacks calling the “Old World” home, from the United Kingdom to Germany and France. When Africa, the Caribbean, and nations like Venezuela and Brazil are taken into account, the picture becomes much clearer. A global Black community is emerging.

Against this backdrop Blacks in the United States must come to the forefront in opposing military intervention in Iraq. We are not naïve. We know that Saddam Hussein has been a bad actor, a despot in his region. However, we also know the script, we have seen it before. Today's villain was yesterday's handmaiden. Before Hussein, it was bin Laden, Qaddafi, and Arafat. Earlier it was Noriega, “Baby Doc” Duvalier, and Idi Amin. And we can't leave out Castro. Time and again we have cozied up to alleged dictators when it served our interests, only to turn on them when our needs have been satisfied. This schizophrenia comes with a cost, the destabilization of world communities and the consumption of resources that could be put to better use domestically.

As the U.S military complex swings into full gear in anticipation of war, we should keep in mind just what this is costing all of us. Our nation's economy is on life support, teetering toward death as corporate America is being swallowed by its own greed and consumers' anxiety has everyone holding onto their dollars for dear life. Across the country states are in dire straights financially. Many are facing significant deficits and those that aren't will be if present circumstances persist. Americans from all walks of life

are without work, and many have simply given up, escaping official estimates of the unemployed. For African Americans this is particularly daunting since Black unemployment is generally twice that of whites.

Meanwhile, the price tag of one Stealth bomber or aircraft carrier could feed our nation's hungry, improve the life chances of children by providing proper health care and education, and house the homeless. The diversion of our nation's resources to a war effort means humanitarian efforts targeting people of color across the globe will be sacrificed in the name of national security. This is not about Iraq. It's about us.

Our silence will signal our acquiescence, by default. And history will not be kind.