

**The
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*Bruce's Beat
Spineless minions of the Democratic Party
Preying on the vulnerability of the poor
Losing moral courage to corporate bag men
e-Mail from readers
by BC Associate Editor Bruce Dixon*

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Near the end of his November 22 speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, Senator Barack Obama sagely noted that "Those of us in Washington are falling behind the debate that is taking place across America on Iraq. We are failing to provide leadership on this issue..." After 4,000 words of proving his own point, Obama was a man who knew what he was talking about. Last week's **BC** cover article, "Obama Mouths Mush on War," explored the senator's agreement with himself, as well as his detachment from facts on the ground both in the unjust and unwinnable Iraqi war, and at home where public opinion has begun to shift against the president's crew and their war, in a decisive way.

A number of discerning **BC** readers weighed in on Obama's attempt to number himself among prominent pro-war Democrats who proclaim their respect for the personal courage of Pennsylvania Congressman John Murtha, but who lack his guts and honesty.

Great article. I agree with its contents entirely. Yes, Obama is the latest, glitzy packaged example of the crisis in Black leadership. He reminds me of the title of a book currently in print entitled, "We have no Leaders." To hear liberal Whites fawn over him is both comical and revealing. The spineless minions of the Democratic Party will, as you predict, piss away the changing political tide, swim upstream with the Neocon illusionists and ultimately keep the right wingers in power. I have taken the same stance as the editorial staff of The Nation magazine, I will not support any candidate who supports this war and fails to advocate for a swift withdrawal of troops and an abdication of imperial designs on Iraqi oil and natural resources. Keep up the critical analysis. Lord knows we need it.

L. Starks

Martin Luther King used to say that leaders ought to be less like thermometers, reflecting where their

constituents are, and more like thermostats that act to set the moral temperature. Senator Obama fails both these tests miserably, the former by failing to reflect the views that speak for the large progressive and anti-war constituency that catapulted him to the national stage, and the latter by his refusal to lead the rest of America in that direction.

Obama's emerging strategy seems to be steadfastly to ignore and disparage his prior electoral base in the quest for corporate cash and a hoped-for 2008 vice presidential run with another pro-war Democrat. Inasmuch as US campaign laws virtually prohibit the emergence of viable third parties on the state and national levels, Obama's disappointed former base voters will be left the choice of deluding themselves, of holding their noses while voting for him, or staying home.

Reader Daniel Bell recommends a history lesson for Senator Obama:

Obama and others need to review the history and outcomes of recent attempts to occupy and establish "puppet" governments in Vietnam, Somalia, Algeria, etc. The results in Iraq will be the same – the occupation will end – it can be voluntary or over many years at a tremendous and unnecessary cost in lives and money.

The dynamics have changed since the "colonial days." Now there are organized cultural, religious, and tribal alliances that provide capability for regular communications between people within common borders and geographical areas. There are no tactics which can make occupations successful anymore – those days are gone – thank goodness.

Daniel Bell

Mr. Bell makes a very good point. You'll look a long time before finding an example of a "successful" occupation or a "successfully" quashed insurgency, regardless of the level of force applied by the occupier. Think Northern Ireland. Think Palestine.

Thank you for your brilliantly incisive dissection of Barack Obama's speech on Iraq... writes reader Chris Lowe.

...What a disappointment that speech was. Your analysis of Obama's manner and mode of rhetoric is particularly important because his mush is a paradigm of a growing type of self-delusory evasion. This self-delusion is already widespread -- Obama himself notes in his speech that the ideas he expresses are not original to him... Such self-delusion of course is an extension of the delusions used to justify the war (apart from the simple lies) and to justify votes for the war powers resolution. Your connection of Obama's new rhetoric to John Kerry is thus especially apt.

What your analysis shows is that Obama's approach relies essentially on Americans bargaining with themselves over what sounds good to them, rather than dealing with Iraqi reality. In helping us see the delusion for what it is, you help us demand better, especially from those who should know better, or do know better but peddle the mush anyway.

We agree with Mr. Lowe that Barack Obama has every reason to know better. Here is the rotten heart of the senator's mush mouthing on the war.

I believe that U.S. forces are still a part of the solution in Iraq. The strategic goals should be to allow for a limited drawdown of U.S. troops, coupled with a shift to a more effective counter-insurgency strategy that puts the Iraqi security forces in the lead and intensifies our

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efforts to train Iraqi forces.

At the same time, sufficient numbers of U.S. troops should be left in place to prevent Iraq from exploding into civil war, ethnic cleansing, and a haven for terrorism."

How long? When if ever, does Obama's limited drawdown become withdrawal?

We need not a time-table, in the sense of a precise date for U.S. troop pull-outs... We need to say that there will be no bases in Iraq a decade from now."

Compare that to the un-spun truth from Congressman Murtha:

"The US cannot accomplish anything further in Iraq militarily. It is time to bring them home. Our troops have become the primary target of the insurgency. We have become a catalyst for violence."

Murtha, who is widely believed to be a closer confidante of more generals than the good senator from Illinois, suggested on C-SPAN November 30 that a withdrawal can be well underway in under six months and nearly complete in a year "...or sooner if I had my way...". Compare this to Obama's something less than a decade. The divide among Democrats now is between those who think the occupation is a "solution" that they can somehow make "smarter" or "more effective" and those who know the American presence in Iraq is itself the problem.

Reader A. Caesar writes with a question:

Why is this the only place I can get some straightforward, plain talk about this war? OK, Counterpunch will pick apart Kerry and sometimes Obama, but no one does with such a sharp instrument, peeling away the BS and squishy mushy, disgusting crap.... Your hardnosedness is the best. And this is one of the best and most timely and accurate depiction of the state of the mainstream of the Democratic party: a bunch of mush-mouthed f'in losers.

Thanks and keep it up.

A Mr. Padnos expresses his disappointment with the junior senator from Illinois thusly:

On your piece on Obama: YES YES YES YES YES YES YES!!

Superb piece; thank you SO MUCH for detailing the indictment against this most cruelly disappointing of all new Democratic senators. I hope your piece gets the wide circulation throughout the net and even in the MSM it so richly deserves. Thank you again for taking the time to write this careful, detailed and cosmically damning – piece.

Reader Helen C. weighs in with trenchant observations about costs, courage and leadership

Just read Obama Mouths Mush on War. One with the intellect, just lost moral courage and sold out to the bag men for the corporations and banks who are benefiting from this war while the children are dying.

Obama and Edwards might have made a good ticket, but both might just as well start digging a canal in New Orleans for all the good their leadership is doing for the country.

It is break out time, who has the guts to break out of the pack?

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We at *BC* have met Barack Obama and have a high opinion of his intellectual and human gifts. Unlike the president and his crew we are certain the senator is quite sane, though deeply mistaken on the war and issues of leadership in general. Some of our readers, however, are not so sure.

J. Hutton writes:

Mr. Ford and Mr. Gamble are "spot on" in their critique of Senator Obama's speech. "Reality based benchmarks" indeed. The very sad and very dangerous fact is that people of Obama's ilk have become so divorced from any reality that their mental processes can only be described as a meandering of the mind. They have, most of them, wandered outside the confines of sanity. They now truly believe their own ravings, and that others should take them seriously.

If you have ever worked with insane people, and I do, the characteristics are evident. Unfortunately, for the rest of us, tradition prevents anyone publicly describing a politician's character as it really is. Thus, Bush, a pathological liar, is never called a liar in the press or to his face by an interviewer. So the pretence is validated, and very soon we, like they, forget what is real.

Sometime, somewhere, these pretenses have to be paid for by someone; someone real.

We can understand how someone who works daily with the clinically insane might experience difficulty discerning the difference between a day at the office and a Sunday morning watching Senator Obama, or Nancy Pelosi from home on CNN, CBS, Fox or MSNBC on a Sunday morning.

Sadly, the antics of Democrats who'd rather follow their corporate constituencies than lead their electoral ones have very real consequences. Their refusal to make impeachment of the president a major mid-term issue in congressional elections will suppress their own base turnouts and help guarantee the continuance of the Bush regime and Republican dominance of Congress. And of course, hundreds of Iraqi and American lives are lost every month as the illegal war and unjust occupation drag on.

For a chilling vision of the future course of the war consistent with both the Bush Administration's "strategy for victory" and Senator Obama's "limited draw-down" over some period "less than a decade", we refer our readers to Seymour Hersh's current article in the New Yorker. Hersh, the celebrated journalist who brought the news of the massacre at My Lai to public attention, forecasts a partial withdrawal of American troops into even more fortified bases, combined with an increased reliance on manned and unmanned American planes to bomb the heck out of "insurgent" Iraqi military, and inevitably, civilian targets. Supposedly this will buy time for Iraqis to fight "their war". Hersh points out that if nobody is counting Iraqi dead with American boots on the ground, or numbers of missions flown or tons of bombs dropped either, we can expect the uncounted corpses to pile up even faster with less accountability in the next phase of this war.

For those of us with adult memories stretching back 35 years, this sounds identical to the Nixon strategy of Vietnamization. It didn't work there either.

Are 'Hispanics' an Ethnicity?

Last week's Radio *BC* commentary pointing out the fallacy of designating Hispanics in the US as an "ethnic group" generated some reader response, too.

H. Paul. Brown writes:

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This is a response to your piece of Dec. 1st entitled "Are Hispanics an Ethnic Group?" In the face of increased elite resistance to minority achievement, isn't this just helping that very resistance along, playing into the hands of that elite? The statement, "There is no doubt that Black Americans are an ethnic group" of course, proves its own falsehood. "There is no doubt," proves that there, in fact, is real genuine doubt. To wield such narrow and uncritical rhetoric around, again, serves the ends of the cultural elite, by dividing us in their face. Americans, even European identifying Americans, all need to be working together, showing a united front, as it were, for the betterment of all of us all, or the cultural elite wins. Your piece plays right into their hands.

While we thank Mr. Brown for writing, we do not believe that stating a fact disproves that fact. Africans of many religions, stations and nations were forged into one people on these shores by half a millennium of slavery, of Jim Crow, of *defacto* segregation. Hispanics come from many nations and many ethnicities. What do a white Argentine, a native American from southern Mexico, and a black Dominican have in common? Whatever it is, it ain't ethnicity.

Reader Mal Dixon offers another contribution:

Are Hispanics an Ethnic or Racial Group? No! So-called Hispanics/Latinos are simply a language group! Though they collectively may be of different races and/or ethnic groups, they unite around what they have in common – the Spanish language.

Black people in America are a racial group point blank and so for any of us to compare their plight to ours, is to put us at a grand disadvantage. We catch hell because of our complexion and physical features, they for the language they speak and the fact that they're illegal immigrants.

This should explain why Sammy Sossa, who otherwise would be considered a Black man in America, identifies first and foremost as a Latino. Many Afro-Latinos don't believe in identifying themselves by a race; and if they do choose to, they'll say "I'm Brown." Even white European descendants, who've lived in parts of Latin America for centuries and never mixed in with the "natives," will identify themselves as "Brown" or a "minority" upon becoming a U.S. citizen simply because of the language they speak.

This is how they've become designated as the nation's new largest "minority" group – eclipsing our numbers in just a 30-year period. And as you've suggested the trend will continue so long as their numbers continue to surge based on an artificial premise – they're an ethnic or racial group as Black Americans are.

The touting of Hispanics as the next big thing replacing and supplanting African America has both marketing and political subtexts. There is a Black Consensus, a collective political will, a distinct polity, the scope and broad unity of which was displayed recently in the Millions More March. Since no such Hispanic political consensus exists, all that white national political observers are telling us is that it's more OK than it used to be to ignore the perceptions, the demands, the political will of black America

Michael Dawson, author of the very insightful book *The Consumer Trap: Big Business Marketing in American Life*, calls marketing "class struggle from above." Just as media monopolies tend to suppress expression of uniquely black political sentiment, the chief value of both blacks and Hispanics to the powers that be, are as consumer markets and cultural gold mines from which they can extract the occasional commercially viable nugget. Think hip-hop.

Al the Sharpty

Readers B. Gleason and M. Dupree wrote to us about this matter of urgent concern.

I came across your publication while searching for contact info for Reverend Al Sharpton in order to express my absolute dismay and disbelief of his paid endorsement of a local predatory lending organization in Virginia, and thought I'd pass on the info before I continued my search.

In a television commercial, he has endorsed LoanMax Title Loans, a predatory lending company that preys on the financially insecure, the poor, the uneducated. While expressing his high regard for this shameful usury, he had the audacity to mention this paid endorsement as part of his ongoing "fight for the little guy!"

I don't know if these "businesses" are an issue where you reside, but in Southwest Virginia it has become an absolute epidemic. These companies prey upon the vulnerability of our local poor, uneducated and those in already difficult financial situations, and here this undo weight falls disproportionately upon African-Americans, though these companies make no distinction whose fiscal lives they destroy. They contribute to the further oppression of those in our community who already have it the hardest, and are perhaps the singularly most destructive economic force in this region, speeding the gentrification of our small cities and rural countryside by disenfranchising and forcing out those who struggle the hardest in the first place to be included in the "ownership society."

Reverend Sharpton would have been at the top of the list of people whom one would consider motivating to fight against these companies and help educate people to avoid these financial pitfalls, and now he has crossed over, becoming a promoter of the destruction of the very groups he claims to protect. I still simply cannot believe it.

We did notice this item on [Playhata](#), one of our favorite sites, last week, and thank Gleason and Dupree for bringing it to our attention and that of our audience. The sight of Reverend Al fronting for these bottom feeders is as appalling and indefensible to us as it is to anybody. The reverend's excuse is about as original as his hairstyle. Back in 1999, according to the consumer blog of [PIRG](#), the Public Interest Research Group, he had no trouble knowing and telling what predatory lending was.

The reverend ought to remember that he is who he is and where he is because people watch and listen to what he's says and does. It's important that we keep on watching. Critically.

Finally Norm Dyer, wrote us about one of our favorite **BC** pieces, *The End of American Thanksgivings*, published in November of 2003. The full text of all **BC** issues is available by clicking the "past issues" link on the left side of most of our pages.

At UIC campus, I was waiting for my math class last Wednesday, standing out in the hall. An English class was finishing up the hour in that room. The professor had noticed the many bills posted around campus: "the crime of Thanksgiving". The last 15 minutes of his class addressed the fallacy: That because some one or more persons defined the word Thanksgiving to mean genocide, that therefore all persons celebrating Thanksgiving must be in support of genocide. The empirics and theories of semantics and the evolution of languages into so many distinct forms are "facts on the ground" that indeed it is a fallacy to project one's own carefully chosen definition onto some other person's usage.

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"I am thankful to you for the history lesson. I surely agree with you that no one should celebrate a crime, nor ever desire doing so. But what you are "suggesting" implicitly, if not explicitly, is a fallacy: That people celebrating a human trait of gratitude must also be celebrating crimes. That is easy to prove false – just ask *them*: "What are you celebrating?" I'd be very, very surprised if as many as one in a million replied with "I'm celebrating the elimination of Native Americans."

A discussion about the meaning of Thanksgiving should not be reduced to one about the mere meanings of words.

"It's our job", like Native American scholar and historian Ward Churchill says, "to poke holes in the domes of false reality that the dominant culture constructs to protect itself from the truth about itself". The myth of Thanksgiving is one of those false realities that obscures a central truth about America: that the project of its founding was a genocidal project of epic proportions. In his book, [A Little Matter of Genocide](#) he recounts how scholars have pegged the American population north of the Rio Grande at anywhere from twelve to twenty million souls. The 1890 census counted a mere 236 thousand and change survivors. That's a 96 to 98 per cent extinction rate. Match that up against the classic case which springs to everyone's lips when the word "genocide" is mentioned – efforts of 20th century Nazis attempt to exterminate European Jewry, where they only managed to murder 75%, and the enormity of both the primary crime and of the secondary one of obscuring and covering up its traces, is as plain as the nose on your face.

You can download a [27 minute MP3](#) audio file of Ward Churchill discussing exactly these points, or if that link does not work for you, try <http://tinyurl.com/7mghj>.

In popular discourse, there are special and justifiable places in rhetorical hell reserved for those who would deny the fact of the 20th century European Holocaust – they are called "Holocaust deniers," and I will note here that the spell checker in Microsoft Word insists that "Holocaust" is a proper noun. What is it again that we call those who minimize or deny the near extinction of this continent's native inhabitants? Good Americans? Thanksgivers? University professors?

Holidays are public, consensual affairs, part of the stuff that binds us together as a society. The notion that everybody gets to decide for themselves what they are celebrating on a Thursday in November, is a fallback position from celebrating the racist lie of Thanksgiving that we were all taught as schoolchildren, but it is no less a deceitful obfuscation. It renders invisible and irrelevant the millions of innocent dead upon whose bones America is built, and thus serves the same purpose as the original lie of Thanksgiving.

BC really does appreciate the correspondence of its readers, and we welcome even more the news that young people are still reading and finding relevant our observations in the Thanksgiving 2003 issue, and forcing their professors to justify the unjustifiable. It warms our middle-aged hearts and reaffirms our belief that the best young people of every age are the least patient with injustice – something at last, for which we can be thankful.

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