

**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

Issue 163 – December 15, 2005

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Hispanic Ethnicity: What Do Blacks Have To Say About It?
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by BC Associate Editor Bruce Dixon

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The **BC** readers who take the time to write us sustain the dialogue essential to the maintenance of community, and we are always grateful for their contributions.

Few questions vex our readership more than those revolving around the question of black leadership. Who elects or selects them? How do we evaluate their performance and ours? Who or what are they leading or following, and to what end? In a world where most people get most of their impressions of reality from the electronic media, careful public analysis of the words and deeds of the black faces in high places thrown at us on screens and through speakers is a vitally important activity.

Here is a representative selection of reader email on two of those black faces, Senator Barack Obama and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The Senator's Mushy Mouth On War

The following is from BC's December 1, 2005, [Cover Story](#), "Obama Mouths Mush on War."

Obama's speech had the Democratic Leadership Council's (DLC) brand stamped all over it. Triangulating expertly, Obama first praised the war record of Rep. John Murtha (D-PA), who has called for immediate steps towards U.S. military redeployment out of Iraq, hopefully in six months, then dismissed both Murtha's bill and any hint of "timetables" for withdrawal. In essence, all Obama wants from the Bush regime is that it fess up to having launched the war based on false information, and to henceforth come clean with the Senate

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on how it plans to proceed in the future. Those Democrats who want to dwell on the past – the actual genesis and rationale for the war, and the real reasons for its continuation – should be quiet.

Rashad Umrani was quick to respond:

I am glad that you are not infatuated with the senator. He is financed by the same interest who financed Majette (GA), Mel Reynolds (IL) and several other candidates that ran against incumbent members of the CBC who have antagonized powerful interests.

I truly resent outsiders dictating who the leadership should be. I am truly upset about not being able to play a more substantive role in the political process.

Rashad Umran

Brother Rashad,

Senator Obama's career is really not all that similar to either of the two congressional miscreants you name. Majette was elected by an abnormally large white turnout in a district with a thin black majority and fled after a single term. Reynolds drifted into office with a big boost from Chicago Mayor Daley when the longtime incumbent became incurably lazy or senile, and was gone in four years. Senator Obama is serious in ways neither of these two could ever have been, and early in his career did much of what one might have expected of an authentic progressive. His personal gifts and compelling personal story, along with the early support of progressive forces in Illinois put him on the national stage.

Once on that stage, the senator has appeared intent on breaking free of his former progressive base to follow the lead of corporate cash. Obama will be around for a while, but so will you and so will we.

We got another letter, from Chuck Dupree, who lives in Louisiana. We respect his opinion, but Mr. Dupree is certainly off balance.

I have to admit, I was hoping for something a little bit, I dunno, less knee-jerk. "Raw racism fueled the initial U.S. policy." No. At the most expansive definition of racism, which I agree is a controlling issue in US domestic policy, it's third on the list of reasons BushCo invaded Iraq. Oil. Currency. Control, which can certainly be interpreted broadly in terms of racism. But really, read Karen Kwiatkowski. Racism is not high on the list of issues for the neo-cons, unless by "racism" you mean Israelis versus the rest of the world.

I love your writing, but I'm disappointed that you react in terms of racism as the number-one issue. In the US, true, racism is critical. But for the neo-cons, racism means something entirely different. It's not the issue in Iraq, and those of us who agree on the corrosive influence of racism in the US should be agreeing on the irrelevance of that issue in this context. Iraq is, among other things, a method of dividing the egalitarian opposition by providing issues to debate that are important, but not in this context.

Best wishes,

Chuck Dupree

Racism is not just a controlling issue in domestic policy. It has been at the heart of America's foreign policy for its entire history. From the 1898 invasion of the Philippines, in which 900,000 perished to the uncounted dead in Iraq it is racism among the white American public that makes these bloodthirsty adventures palatable and possible. Why, if not for racism is it that every school child knows 57,000 Americans died in Viet Nam

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and nobody knows that 2 or 3 million Vietnamese perished? Why is it that Cheney and Wolfowitz expected to be able to reorganize Iraqi society at gunpoint and that they would appreciate the favor? Why, if not for racism, does the public imagine it is an American right to invade when and wherever it chooses?

The white Left has failed to deal with this problem, and left us all in a world of crap. It is this reluctance to recognize the racism that fuels the imperial exercise that allows the corporate Pirates to get away with their crimes, every time.

Let us be clear: U.S. racism allows the killing to continue in Iraq, without the counting of any bodies – because those bodies don't count. Black folks understand the syndrome. Apparently, Mr. Dupree, you do not.

Respectfully,

Bruce

Condi Rice: The Torture Tour

James Thindwa, of Chicago via Africa, wrote a scintillating piece for our October 13, 2005, issue, titled, "How Black Conservatives Hurt Their Cause." The article traveled all across the Internet, and apparently caused alarm in Condoleezza-loving circles that want a Black face in a high place, at any cost.

Dear Sirs:

I was scanning articles in the news today and read the above referenced article written by you and wanted to comment. Along with reading this article I also read articles about Condi Rice in Europe talking with NATO leaders on many issues, including prisoners. So here I sit with your article along with articles and pictures from Europe. Rice standing front and center with Europe's white leaders. A single black woman, standing side by side with white European leaders and she is the one that led. From the articles to the pictures, it is obvious that this black woman is the leader of this group. We have become blind in the black community, when we can see these images and read these articles and not see pictures or understand the truth.

Your article shows that you, like most of us have become blind, we see what we want to see and dismiss the obvious, simply because it does not fit our understanding. Rice may be the next President of the USA. The first black person to hold that office and she is a Republican, the same party that was founded to end slavery, how fitting would that be for us all. So while I and many other blacks will rejoice in this moment in history, many will languish in the past, you being one of those.

Your friend,

Sam Baldwin

Tennessee, USA

Dear Sam,

Stop looking at the color of her skin. Start looking at her job, her character, and ours. The "single black woman standing side by side with white European leaders" is the US Secretary of State on her "Torture Tour," neither confirming nor denying what we all know to be a fact – that tentacles of an illegal and secret US gulag stretch through and operate in a dozen European nations. This black woman, is torturing the truth

and the law not just of this country, but of every nation she passes through. Rice's lies provide cover for those complicit governments who can now assure their outraged publics that they demanded and received assurances that nothing of the sort is passing through their airports or airspace, or in the law-free zones of US military bases in those countries.

Nobody on either side of the water believes a word of it, not even you. This is the wave of the future, and in your eyes, cause for rejoicing? We may live on the same planet, sir, but we inhabit different worlds.

Respectfully,

Bruce

A More General Conversation About Our Condition

It is a truism that people who live and work daily in abusive and dysfunctional homes and other settings are among the last to see anything wrong. Some of the truths about America and the world we live are easiest seen from other shores. BC has a large and influential audience overseas, and we value their input. Mandla Maseko is among them:

Dear BC Editors:

I don't want to sound patronizing, but as an outsider I have always been puzzled by the American paradox: a state of the art 21st century country and a troglodyte leadership (intent on solving every problem by bashing others and things with brute force) and masses who seem to have barely made it through the dark ages (a credulous pathologically trusting population). Another paradox is America's simultaneous nurturing of neo-nazi culture and an irrational support of atrocities by the state of Israel. It is a dangerous mixture of split personality syndrome that one day is bound to explode and bring the whole world down with it.

I have no doubt that America will never relent on Iraq but it is a path that with every passing second makes America more in the image and personality of the bogeyman it is supposed to save humanity from. The irony of it all is that it has sucked in very naive and innocent people like Condoleezza Rice who seem not aware that within a decade their names will go down in history as architects of the greatest and bloodiest blunder of modern history. Like a Greek tragedy, America marches towards its own downfall, oblivious of every warning. The most singular achievement of Bin Ladin has been the bequeathing of his personality on a modern Christian state (because that is how George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld see themselves) in our part of the world. We say he who pursues the devil with a vengeful heart must be careful that he does not become a devil himself, or worse still, out-devils the devil.

Imagine a South Africa where Mandela would come up with a better and more secure and more cruel Robben Island for his perceived enemies. America's pursuit of misplaced revenge is the surest guarantee that very soon she shall fall from her pinnacle; not at the hands of terrorists as Rice was stupefying and blackmailing European leaders for their complicity but through her failing moral vision. In South Africa we have our own problems but the most valuable lesson we have learnt was the bestowing of true humanity on our all our people without the help of Judeo-Christian morality. Mandela did not have people lay hands on him and neither did he see visions of God.

Today I ask myself will the ex-Austrian actor rise above politics and grant Mr. Williams a

stay of execution? But I tell myself who has written the actor's script now? Because surely this man is but acting another role and this time it is reality TV. Chances are he won't. What is Mr. Williams life worth in the multi trillion dollar farce called American politics? America represents the worst in our selves: childish, insecure, petulant, clutching expensive toys, begrudging others, and throwing tantrums, navel-gazing, selfish and failing to rise up to expectations, and cloying oneself with the sweetness of life and unaware that a stomach ache is just minutes away. In Africa these attitudes have produced a blighted landscape with leaders who hoard the marbles of wealth for themselves and a population that generally thinks of escaping and could sell its very soul for a chance of a lifetime in the West.

Maybe it is times like these that a publication like BC is indeed important to help us through the painful process of thinking; of sowing the seeds of change; of conceptualizing a world beyond the nightmare of the present civilization.

Mandla Maseko
South Africa

An Imperfect Understanding

Some of the black faces in high places do take seriously what Cornel West has named the call to prophetic leadership. Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. (D. IL) is one of these. Last week's BC contribution by the congressman, Rosa Parks and the Theory of Constitutional Government, at the end of which his book, "A More Perfect Union" was cited, generated this reader's response:

Dear Editors:

The phrase, "a more perfect union", might prompt one to inquire wherein lay the first perfection of the "union"? And, since BC endorses the book, and presumably the phrase, I put the question to you. I will not, being the inquirer, expect you to explain the need for any of the subsequent amendments which address and adjust the perfect union; nor will I mention the Civil War (oops) or the state's rights provisions of the Constitution which allowed the creation and enforcement of Jim Crow laws (oops again), and I most certainly will not bring up the questions of past and present lynchings (oh, my God, I did it again). You can see where this would go if I were to continue not mentioning things.

Is this perfection? Do we really want 'mo better' of this? Or am I missing something? Perhaps I should read the book. I know I should but to tell you the truth, I am afraid to read it. I am afraid Rep. Jackson will either not mention such things as did(not) or he will gloss over them.

We Black Folk need to examine the Constitution of the United States for it's assumptions and presumptions with regard to the people its authors were addressing.

We really do need to do so.

It is a most interesting exercise, capable of yielding great insights into the root causes of our current condition, which condition we bemoan every time there is an execution or a hurricane Katrina. After that, we might profit from an examination of why we continue to believe anything of the Constitution apply to us.

Signed,

Tirandez

Dear Tirandez,

Sometimes we get captured and held hostage by our own arguments. We invite you to first free your mind, and secondly to read the book. It is a compelling piece of work and does answer all the questions you raise and a lot more besides. If you want a preview of its arguments you can find one streaming in RealAudio online here in a speech the congressman made at Harvard a couple years ago. We at **BC** have read the book, and we think so highly of it that we have bought and given away half a dozen copies. You, however, are too late and must get your own.

In *A More Perfect Union*, Congressman Jackson and Frank Watkins open the door to a uniquely powerful and useful framework within which to organize for human rights including the right to a job at a living wage, the right to decent housing, to universal health care, to a public education of equal and high quality, to a clean environment and the right to organize unions and bargain collectively, and several other rights. They propose organizing and fighting to add these rights to the US Constitution as amendments.

If, through whatever imaginable struggle, people in some city or state or nationwide actually won or even made substantial progress in the direction of winning any of these rights it is a slam-dunk certainty that some "original-intent-of-the-founding-fathers" judge would swiftly invalidate it. From a legal standpoint, Constitutional amendments are unanswerable, and thus are a vehicle to force, in whatever public spaces are available for debating such questions, frank discussions stripped of pretense or artifice of why we cannot achieve decent housing fit for the shelter of human beings, or universal health care, a clean environment, the right to organize and bargain collectively, and so on.

Again, we invite you and all our readers to check out this very useful book. Let us know what you think.

Respectfully,

Bruce

Is it Racist to Question Hispanic Ethnicity?

The **Radio BC** commentary by Co-Publisher Glen Ford on whether Hispanics were an ethnic group (see [December 1, 2005](#)) is one that readers are still writing us about. Here is a sample of what they reacted to:

Hispanic Americans come from many nations. In their ancestral countries, they often comprise many separate ethnicities. A Peruvian Indian is ethnically different than a member of the white elite of that country, and remains so when both groups of Peruvians emigrate to the United States, where both are ethnically different than Afro-Caribbean Hispanic immigrants. Calling all Hispanics in the U.S. one ethnic group in effect denies their actual, varied ethnicity. Hispanics in the U.S. are many people. Often, Hispanics in the U.S. who hail from the same country are ethnically different.

No, it is a stretch of social science to lump Hispanics together as one ethnicity, although it is certainly possible that at some time in the future a portion of the various Hispanic ethnicities will forge a common culture and worldview within the U.S., as have African Americans over the centuries. But that remains to be seen.

We think that the most important and incisive of these communications are the ones that came to us from Hispanics themselves, and so offer them for the inspection of our readers.

Dear Mr. Ford:

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"Hispanic" is a racist term invented by the US Census Bureau. Users of that term fall into a racist trap of ethnic homogenization, as evidenced by your failure to consider the differences between an "ethnic" group and a human group united by culture, language and common history. We are mixed people; "MESTIZOS," we are Native American, African American, Asian, and European, all in one. Please don't insult us calling us "Hispanics" – Hispanics are our former oppressors from Spain.

Warm regards,

Mario Lamo

We were pleased to get a letter from Mr. Joseph Puentes, who was good enough to both link to us and to provide us with a set of descriptions of the intricacies of inter-ethnic relationships among people who speak Spanish:

Coyote, Mulatto, Negro

The Indigenous community need go no further than the baptism records of the late 18th century and early 19th century to find that a significant percentage of the population was Black. The scribes had many terms to describe the percentages of a person's racial lineage:

1. Mestizo: Spanish father and Indian mother
2. Castizo: Spanish father and Mestizo mother
3. Espomolo: Spanish mother and Castizo father
4. Mulatto: Spanish and black African
5. Moor: Spanish and Mulatto
6. Albino: Spanish father and Moor mother
7. Throwback: Spanish father and Albino mother
8. Wolf: Throwback father and Indian mother
9. Zambigo: Wolf father and Indian mother
10. Cambujo: Zambigo father and Indian mother
11. Alvarazado: Cambujo father and Mulatto mother
12. Borquino: Alvarazado father and Mulatto mother
13. Coyote: Borquino father and Mulatto mother
14. Chamizo: Coyote father and Mulatto mother
15. Coyote-Mestizo: Cahmizo father and Mestizo mother

16. Ahi Te Estas: Coyote–Mestizo father and Mulatto mother

Read the [article](#) by Joseph Puentes.

From an Afro–Peruvian

And this also arrived in our email box, from an Afro–Peruvian who knows the difference that his own society makes, in terms of ethnicity. Mr. Verastegui was kind enough to respond to the [Inter Press](#) article we republished on November 24, 2005, titled, "In Peru, Afro–Descendants Fight Ingrained Racism, Invisibility."

Hello BC Editors:

Excellent article on Peruvian racial discrimination. As a Peruvian with some African origins, I have always felt that there exists racism and there is still lots to be done.

Thank you very much.

Nicolas Verastegui

BC Editor Glen Ford got to this one first, so we let him reply:

It is very clear that there are vast racial – and, therefore, ethnic – differences among Hispanics. It is also clear that Black Americans have not stepped up to the plate, to address these most important questions. It is a great failing of our polity. We at **BC** are most concerned with how Black people comport themselves in this changing world.

What we firmly believe, is that we must recognize the individuality of all people. It is not up to us to decide who people are, any more than it was up to white people to object to our mass declaration that we were Black, in 1968. "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud," was a political statement – and one that no white person could argue against.

In the same way, people who speak the Spanish language have a great project ahead of them. They may create a polity, or they may not. It is not our job to say yes or no; it is their job to do it.

Are They Taking Black Babies?

Dear BC Editors:

I have an interesting topic of discussion for "The Black Commentator." A New Orleans native currently displaced by Hurricane Katrina recently gave birth at a hospital in Mobile. Her baby was taken away from her because the mother tested positive for marijuana. It was a very small, almost undetectable amount. The mother says she smoked marijuana for the first time during the storm after learning her best friend died while trying to escape through an attic in New Orleans. The mother was also one of thousands trapped in the Louisiana Superdome. She doesn't feel she should be punished for what she says was a necessary evil to keep her sanity. The question now is should this mother be reunited with her kids? Hopefully you can use this as a springboard to the broader issue of babies being taken away at birth due to drugs found in either the children or their parents.

Sincerely,

Brian Johnson

Associate Editor Bruce Dixon replies:

Mr. Johnson,

We are certainly aware that many jurisdictions arbitrarily separate poor and mostly black families on the slightest excuse. Being convicted of a felony, having trace amounts of drugs on one's person, in one's home or automobile, or just being accused of a crime have all been grounds for unwarranted separation of children from parents, and sometimes the permanent loss of parental rights. The topic surely deserves wider discussion, in *BC* or elsewhere. If you or some other member of *BC*'s erudite and influential audience, writes a good article on the subject, we are ready to print it.

Respectfully,

Bruce

The Dogs of War: Who's Dogs Are They?

Many among our audience were stimulated to respond to the December 8, 2005 Radio BC recording, titled, "Iraq: Who Let the Dogs Loose?" Here is a sample:

The Americans think they can rule by decree. Apparently, that works here, in the United States. They say ridiculous things in the White House, and a slavish media treats their insane statements as if they make sense. Iraqis have no such obligation. They have their own society, and work by their own rules. What the United States has done is empower the Dawa and Sciri parties of Shi'ite Iraqis, and to arm them. These parties now control the Interior Ministry, which is the home of the Iraqi armed forces that President Bush constantly brags about. The Americans have also spent billions of dollars in training the Pesh Merga of Kurdish Iraq – the armed forces of the two major Kurdish political parties. Two parties that went to war with each other, and will again. Therefore, the Iraqi armed forces are, in fact, an amalgamation of Iraqi political parties. This is what the United States has wrought: they have armed the factions that will fight the civil war. It is not a war that will end in corporate America's favor.

A Mr. Mark Hope – who is a hopeful man – wrote to us:

I listened to and watched Saddam's trial on the BBC newspaper. I'm not surprised that this is not seen on American News. What I would like to know is why no one mentions that Saddam and President Bush were once friends? I understand that many times people obtain friends that they shouldn't have had as friends and they do things with these people that they shouldn't, but this is a question that troubles me and I'm sure it troubles other people. I don't personally know that these two were friends, so this maybe hearsay. But I think this is very interesting.

Mark Hope

Bruce replies:

Mr. Hope,

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BC publisher Glen Ford saw this email before I did, and answered it. I really don't think I can improve on his answer, so here it is.

Dear Mr. Hope:

Bush Sr. and Saddam were political allies. The Baath Party was enlisted by the CIA in the late Sixties to massacre the Iraqi Communist Party – which they accomplished. Then, after the Iranian revolution, Saddam was encouraged to commit aggression against that regime. Bush Sr. was a key player in that game, as CIA chief, later vice President under Reagan. Eight years of war consumed both societies. When it was finally over – because of mutual exhaustion – the Bush Sr. regime turned on Saddam.

There is no honor among these players.

But Bush the Younger is a different animal. He is not part of the club, as was his father. His mentors are the ideologues Karl Rove, who made young George governor of Texas and has been the most effective Republican strategist in a generation, and Vice President Dick Cheney, as evil a character as can be imagined – and the real ruler of the regime.

This is why the Bush Jr. White House is so dangerous. They are not part of the club, and recognize no rules. They are capable of, literally, anything.

Sincerely,

Glen Ford, **BC** Editor

We at **BC** treasure the communication with our readers, and encourage you to write. We intend to print a selection of the reader email we receive, along with sensible replies to them each week.

I'm Bruce Dixon. And I'm on your beat.

Please send your correspondence to Associate Editor Bruce A. Dixon at Bruce.Dixon@blackcommentator.com.