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Cover Story
The 'Most Corrupt' Congress Ever
Including Elements of the Black Caucus
by BC Publishers Glen Ford and Peter Gamble

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It is not often that we wholeheartedly agree with a "centrist," white Democratic political leader, but these are disturbing times. Harry Reid (NV), leader of U.S. Senate Democrats, recently blasted the current Congress as "the most corrupt in history." Based on the sheer, gross volume of billions diverted to congressional friends and benefactors during this and previous sessions of the Bush Republican Congress, Reid was undoubtedly correct. The fact that Reid made his outburst in response to allegations that he might also be involved in the mighty tide of corruption, does not mitigate the fact of wholesale auctioneering of the public treasure. Rather, the damnation is made more powerful.

But the term "corruption" is vague, as is "theft" and "fraud" and other crimes. The "pork" that seems to be the princely meal savored by American legislative gluttons, is but one aspect of corruption. Putting aside the bid to fund "bridges to nowhere" in Alaska, the most gruesome (and lucrative) manifestation of endemic corruption is the Iraq war and occupation – a cash cow for favored corporations, and even companies that did not exist previous to the war and the promise of "reconstruction" of Iraq. However, even the rip-off of billions in this scam (and the theft of billions in Iraqi oil revenues) does not come close to describing the enormity of the crime: an attempt to steal the resources of a vast swath of the Earth, far beyond the boundaries of Iraq, and to transfer the proceeds to private hands, all the while billing the American public for the military muscle required.

Now, that's corruption, by anybody's definition.

To measure the scale of corruption in the current congressional and executive branches, and to put the "most corrupt Congress in history" in perspective, we must take at least a glancing look at history.

The Black Commentator – Cover Story: The 'Most Corrupt' Congress Ever

Following the American Civil War – which saw such profiteering, fraud and faulty weapons production by military contractors that it may have prolonged the conflict by months or years – financial speculators in the North set their eyes on the West, to build a continental railroad. They became known as the "Robber Barons," because they built enormous fortunes by billing the federal government for every mile of transcontinental railroad laid and demanded ownership of millions of acres on both sides of the tracks, as well. Cities sprang up, which filled the coffers of the "Robber Barons" and others who flocked to the new developments. (The Native Americans were erased from this equation, literally.) Thus, the development of the West was accomplished.

Most school history books mark this period as rife with corruption – as it was. But they did build a railroad, and commerce commenced, and cities sprang up.

In other words, the "Robber Barons" stole a lot, killed a lot, and built a lot. The same can be said for their corporate contemporaries in manufacturing, and those who followed. They committed vast crimes against working people – and excluded and exploited Black workers to their own advantage – but jobs appeared, and smokestacks rose, like a pain against the sky. Lives and families became rooted. Detroit was born. American manufacturing was king of the world, and a portion of the trinkets trickled down – even to some Black folks.

The manufacturing "Barons" had contributed something to society. Or, at least, the society had become richer, in gross terms, as a by-product of their insatiable self-aggrandizement, which involved *real enterprise* as well as fraud, extortion, subornation of public officials, and manifold corruption. People got jobs, and the prospect of fighting for better working conditions and remuneration.

They were "Robber Barons," too. But at least they built something. (Or rather, caused things to be built by their workers.)

This class no longer exists. They have been supplanted for at least the last three decades by finance capital, which moves money around, and commands manufacturers to do their bidding. They pick and choose the manufacturers, and countries, that are most hospitable to their monetary needs of the moment – to get a higher return on their capital, which is the only asset they have. They decided that the United States was not a good investment for manufacturing, and demanded that it be emptied of its factories. Dream lost.

We at BC call them the Pirate Class. They sail the world, looking for raiding targets of opportunity, and acknowledging no law. However, this class cannot operate without the backing of the U.S. military – the ultimate force of coercion, which can impose the terms of the conversation. Big fat bankers with Hawkeye missiles backing them up, and unlimited U.S. funding for death squads in the targeted country, waiting for contracts on those who disagree.

The Pirates climbed to the cockpit of power with the election of George W. Bush, although they had been in ascendance for decades. They were now in full flower. A class that produces nothing, except through plunder, would demand that the Middle East be transformed into a market they could exploit to the fullest – which is why they have failed so badly in Iraq. It was too complicated for big fat white bankers to deal with.

However, in the United States, the hegemony of the Pirates is all but complete – as was necessary in order to harness the American military machine to their specific projects, and to otherwise loot the U.S. treasury to fund themselves and their class. The conquest of U.S. society was the first priority, and they have achieved it: big capital owns all the corporate media, and thereby controls the national conversation. Their think tanks set the agenda for the discourse, mega-phoned by the monopoly media.

It is in this context that we should discuss the issue of "corruption."

The Depths of Corruption

One definition of "corruption" is the stealing of the people's resources for private gain. The Bush regime – and its Congress – is certainly guilty of that on a monumental scale.

However, there is another version of "corruption" – just as lethal and ugly: the theft of a people's trust, and vested interest. In this regard, the infestation of corruption has spread into the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). For example, ten members of the CBC voted for the Republican bankruptcy bill that was passed in April of 2005. In doing so, they violated their own constituent's trust and vote. As the most targeted consumers of predatory lenders, and as the group that has the least employment security, African Americans are the most likely to face financial crisis. These are the aspiring Black middle class: the same people that form the backbone of Black elected officials' support. Yet, ten Black congresspersons betrayed them, by voting for the Republican bankruptcy bill. Here are the perpetrators' names:

William Jefferson (LA)

Artur Davis (AL)

Sanford Bishop (GA)

Kendrick Meek (FL)

Al Green (TX)

David Scott (GA)

Gregory Meeks (NY)

Harold Ford, Jr. (TN)

Albert Wynn (MD)

Emanuel Cleaver (MO)

Corruption comes in many forms. However, the main root of the current corruption is corporate money, which has subverted the entire politics and *culture* of the United States. It is not necessary to trace every noxious vote to a specific payoff. Television, radio and print media also reward politicians with favorable coverage – and nearly all of these outlets are components of corporate mega-media, all of them Wall Street denizens answerable to finance capital. There dwell the Pirates.

The Pirates have found that it is efficacious to enlist Black lieutenants in their predatory ventures. Some – too many – are signing on aboard ship. The names cited above are among the Black buccaneers, who have made common cause with the same people who are exporting the jobs of their own constituents, making them more vulnerable to predatory lenders, and waging endless war across the globe. These Black opportunists seek a good life for themselves, while the life of the community is being sucked out.

It is a deep corruption. They must be expelled.

Glen Ford and Peter Gamble are writing a book, entitled "Barack Obama and the Crisis in Black Political Leadership."

