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When Being Silent Speaks Loudly – Part II
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In the March 23, 2006 issue of *BC*, the [CBC Monitor Report](#) discussed the deadly consequences of the Congressional Black Caucus' silence on the issues relevant to Black America. As promised, the CBC Monitor continues this discussion of the Caucus' willingness to submit to the dictates of a House Minority leader who is demonstrating that in holding the congressional leadership position, Rep. Nancy Pelosi has another agenda she plans on advancing, and it does *not* include Black America.

The CBC's silence in defending one of their own Caucus members, Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-GA) from slanderous and virulent attacks made against her by House colleagues, speaks volumes, with all the acoustics of the Harlem Boys' Choir. Additionally, it also speaks to an unwillingness on the part of the Caucus, especially the male leaders and membership, to defend their sister members of the Caucus against verbal, and now, physical attacks as well as [racial profiling](#) against their sister member by Capitol Hill police.

A Cynical Game of Peek-a-Boo

We spent the better part of Monday checking the Congressional Black Caucus website, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's website, and CBC Chair Mel Watt's site, for any statement, pro or con, regarding the McKinney incident. We found NOTHING.

Additionally, we called the communications' directors of both Watt and Pelosi, and we actually reached Pelosi's director, Brendan Daly. When I confirmed we were speaking to Mr. Daly, I identified myself as a columnist writing a piece for *BC* and wanted to ask if the Minority Leader had a statement regarding the McKinney incident. After being placed on hold for five minutes, another staffer picked up the phone and asked if he could take a message from me to pass on to Mr. Daly. When I replied that I *thought* I had been speaking to Mr. Daly, the staffer said he was to take a message and get a phone number. To date, I haven't heard back from Minority Leader Pelosi, nor do I expect to have my phone call returned as we go to print.



Mel Watt's Communication Director, Chris Johnson, wasn't available and I left a message, asking the same information as I had Pelosi's office. No dice, there, either, and that's no surprise, given his lack of defense of McKinney in previous matters. It appears that save for one or two male members of the CBC, the rest run from her like roaches scuttle for cover when you turn on the lights.

It is important to preface this piece with a discussion of the McKinney incident, as it will demonstrate how the CBC has become a caricature of its motto, the "conscience of the Congress."

The fact that Watt hasn't bothered to marshal the support of the Caucus for a sister member is shameful and borders on blasphemous. I wonder if any male member of the Caucus, had their wife, mother, sister, or grandmother been called a "bitch" by then-congressman Cass Ballenger (R-NC), would they hold their peace as Watt did when McKinney was maligned? I would go one step further and state that if Pelosi were called a "bitch" by Ballenger, all of them would be breaking their necks to defend Pelosi's honor. Instead, McKinney was allowed to be demeaned in the most horrific way possible.

The CBC Monitor conducted a search for evidence of any organized defense of McKinney or outrage at Ballenger, and found none – and believe me, it was a search that would make McGarrett proud.

The Price of Deference

Why does the CBC bend to Minority Leader Pelosi's will to the point that issues relevant to African-Americans get no presentation. It's not as if her track record in holding the Democratic side of the House of Representatives together on tough issues grants her such deference, because if it did, legislation such as the egregious Bankruptcy Bill, or continued funding into the Black Hole known as the Iraq War, would not have become the current law on the books. The 73 Democratic defectors on bankruptcy, which included 10 CBC members, should have been penalized far more seriously than Pelosi merely calling them out in a press conference. And they had the good nerve to whine about her calling them out on that vote, too.

Nancy Pelosi is shrewd, crafty and cunning. She knows how to create an appearance of inclusion. Those who are *not sure* of their inclusion learn about their status when they feel the cold wind of aloneness and isolation as they try to do the job their constituents sent them there to do, while she metaphorically slings them under a speeding political bus driven by the GOP thugs.



Take Rep. John "Jack" Murtha (D-PA), a conservative Democrat who was once probably the biggest supporter for the Iraq war in the House. Murtha is also a 37-year Marine veteran who did two tours in Vietnam, and goes to Walter Reed Army Hospital quite frequently to visit soldiers coming back from Iraq with missing limbs, or psychologically damaged. Murtha is also reported to be the ear for military officials when they can't get an audience with anyone in the Administration that can appreciate discussion of viable combat strategy. So, when Congressman Murtha began to see, hear and appreciate the reports he received about the quagmire that has become the Iraq war – that the war was unwinnable – he decided to introduce a resolution on the House floor, calling for an immediate withdrawal of the troops in Iraq.

You would be forgiven if you thought that Murtha had the support of House Minority Leader Pelosi. Here's the timeline: Murtha introduced his resolution on November 17, 2005. House Minority leader Pelosi didn't back the resolution until December 16, 2005, after indicating she didn't discuss it with Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) or DNC Chairman Howard Dean, *and after 70% of Americans demonstrated they supported Murtha's resolution.* However, during the 30 day period between Murtha's introduction of the resolution and Pelosi's endorsement, Murtha was subjected to verbal attacks, including being called a "coward" by Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-OH), on the House floor. It was one of the rare times the truly cowardly CBC member and wanna-be Senator, Rep. Harold Ford, Jr. (D-TN), grew a pair and charged the floor in Murtha's defense.

Or, take Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-New York), who wrote a comprehensive report detailing how Congress has become "rent-a-lawmaker" titled, "America for Sale," first introduced as a diary on the political weblog, DailyKos, on February 22, 2006

The Capitol Hill Newspaper, Roll Call, reported on March 13, 2006 that the Slaughter report had been "scrubbed" from the Democrats' website, and the GOP put their own "spin" on it. The diarist at MyDD.com implied that Pelosi ordered Slaughter's report be scrubbed from the website, and that Pelosi not only *failed* to support Slaughter's attempt to call attention to a corrupt Congress, but *prevented* Slaughter from presenting factual evidence to support the report. If you are in the opposition party in Congress, why would your Minority Leader *oppose* you trying to do your job, as Pelosi did with Murtha and Slaughter?

We at CBC Monitor don't often play the race card, but when we do, we play it for maximum effect. Therefore, given the examples of what Pelosi has done as leader of the Democratic caucus (and Murtha and Slaughter are *White* members of the Democratic caucus), we will ask the question again: *Why does the CBC leadership continue to defer to Nancy Pelosi's leadership, even to the detriment of addressing the issues relevant to African-Americans?*



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Perhaps Chairman Watt defers to Pelosi's leadership because in so doing, neither he, nor the rest of the CBC has to actually be made to give an account of their performance in the House of Representatives (and in Barack Obama's case, the U. S. Senate). They can say they couldn't address issues, such as the effects of the Bankruptcy Bill, because Pelosi assured them those issues would be addressed. They may even rely on Pelosi providing *cover* for their dereliction of duty as lawmakers. They certainly have hidden behind the "we're in the Minority Party in the House" excuse long enough. Look, if Pelosi can sling her own White members of the House under a bus for doing their jobs as House Members, why would Watt and the CBC think that Pelosi is going to treat them any *better* than she did Murtha and Slaughter?

Besides, we have developed a methodology for facilitating an accounting of their abysmal performance as lawmakers, save for the Honor Roll Society as listed on the [CBC Report Cards](#). Hopefully, Watt and crew aren't entertaining the thought that they aren't being watched, because we're taking our watchdog efforts to a whole 'nother level beginning in June of this year.

Perhaps, one needs to take a look at demographics of Pelosi's district to get an understanding of why it is imperative that the CBC carve their own path on the issues of relevance to African-Americans, and stop deferring to Pelosi. If the representation of African-Americans in Pelosi's district is any indication, the CBC will soon join, if they haven't already, the growing number of people being left behind and soon forgotten under the Bush juggernaut.

Pelosi's district consists of 8% African-Americans, and that number is *shrinking*. Therefore, the issues of African-Americans in her own district do not command her attention on a local scale, much less a larger scale, and are most certainly not a high priority for the congresswoman. Since the African-Americans in Pelosi's district do not appear to have Pelosi's ear, the rest of the Congressional Black Caucus must "take up the slack," so to speak, on their behalf, in making their concerns known to the person representing them in Congress. Yet, given Watt's performance as CBC Chair, not to mention his predecessors (Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Maryland and Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald, D-California), this is highly unlikely, considering that the effectiveness of the caucus has been in steady decline since 1994, when the GOP took over both Houses of Congress, and Black former Rep. Floyd Flake (D-New York) decided he'd rather switch than fight.

Take a Stand, Man!

Finally, we come back to Cynthia McKinney. It is not enough for white media to vilify this most courageous

member of Congress and label her as "loony"; both Pelosi and Watt exacerbate the problem by *remaining silent*, even in the face of an equally execrable radio talk show host, Neal Boortz, referencing McKinney's natural hairstyle as making her look "like a ghetto slut" and "like Tina Turner peeing on an electric fence." However, the odious Boortz must have gotten an earful from somewhere, because he's now issued an apology to McKinney. Nevertheless, nothing excuses the silence of Mel Watt or Nancy Pelosi in defending McKinney on *principle*. It does not matter if you are diametrically opposed to her political positions; she is an elected official and is entitled to the deference from the public that both Pelosi and Watt would scream about if they were treated in like fashion.

Regarding McKinney, the CBC Monitor will go a step further and play the gender card as well, because there appears to be an element of sexism in the lack of effective leadership within the Caucus. Male Caucus members who fail to voice their indignation at the many aggressions against McKinney seem to have forgotten the fundamentals of being real men.



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McKinney has demonstrated that she is a genuine *leader*. She fearlessly stands on principle, on what is right; she stands for the underdog and lends them her voice. Could it be that the men in the Caucus (with rare exceptions, such as Detroit Rep. John Conyers) are intimidated by McKinney's bravery because they have none themselves, and since they have no bravery, they believe she can fight her own battles? It doesn't matter that she can, and continues to fight her own battles. The fact remains that there should be real men in the Congressional Black Caucus that are man enough to stand up for her, or any other female member of the CBC. What man allows a woman to fight for what is moral, just and right, without being in the trenches *with* her, if not leading the charge? And protecting and defending her when it matters?

And what *real* man leaves Black women alone to fight, while deferring to the leadership of a White female whose agenda does not include other ethnicities, *especially* African-Americans? Face it, Nancy Pelosi has been labeled as a "liberal" member of Congress since her arrival in 1986, and for a majority of that time, she truly was liberal in her politics, and her voting record reads like that of any member of the House Progressive Caucus. Since becoming Minority Leader, that has changed, to the point that we at CBC Monitor have often wondered what condition would the Democratic Caucus be in if Harold Ford had won the contest for Minority Leader? Surely, he would have done no *worse* than Pelosi, because Ford hasn't acquired Pelosi's skills at stealth.

For the umpteenth time, we at CBC Monitor continue to lament the irreparable fractures in the Congressional Black Caucus. We have begun the process of demanding accountability. We take no pleasure in pointing out the lack of leadership on the part of the CBC Chair, or in pointing out the possibility that the Minority Leader has allowed what little power she has go to her head. As mentioned in the September 22, 2005 issue of *BC*, splits are painful, but in the case of the CBC, splitting from Nancy Pelosi may be necessary until Ms. Pelosi realizes that the issues of Black America are just as relevant as the ones facing her San Francisco constituency. In fact, in many instances, they are horrifically *similar*, but until Ms. Pelosi has come to realize that, the CBC needs to forge their own path away from her leadership for the time being. The coherence of the Caucus and the urgent needs of their constituents depends on it.

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