

young African-Americans.

Justifications for War

The above explanation for the overrepresentation of African-Americans in Operation Desert Storm highlights racial inequality in career and life options, but it dodges the question of whether the war is just and thus worth fighting. Let us examine the typical reasons used to justify war against Iraq.

The first thing a supporter of the war might tell you is that we are fighting to liberate Kuwait. Although Kuwait is not a democracy and less than 10% of its people have full civil rights (the rest are largely foreign-born workers), it is widely accepted that all countries have a right to self-determination. Some people have a different perspective on this issue. Rukiyah, a high school teacher in Raleigh, points out, "We have to

the U.S. considered Hussein an ally until the invasion of Kuwait and sold him weapons throughout the 80s during the Iran-Iraq War, despite oppressing and gassing Kurds. Finally, the qualities used to prove the evil of Saddam Hussein can largely also be applied to George Bush, who has ordered the invasion of at least one nation (Panama) and has put out a fair share of macho rhetoric himself. While Bush has not used chemical weapons on American minorities, the U.S. has the largest stock of chemical weapons in the world, and past presidents have certainly used force to suppress people of color in America.

It seems if we consider Saddam Hussein a threat, perhaps we should have not been involved in selling him weapons in the first place. We continue to supply arms to many nations with questionable leaders and human rights practices. Which

and, in fact, was a fabrication used to justify using military force.

Iraqi attempts to avoid war focused on linking an Iraqi pullout from Kuwait to an Israeli pullout from Palestine (the occupied West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip on the Israel-Egypt border). American diplomacy was to refuse negotiations until Iraq left Kuwait and to refuse connecting the occupations listed above. Since both occupations are unjust, it seems fair to say both should happen at once, especially considering many Arabs are more upset by the occupation of downtrodden Palestine than they are by the occupation of oil-rich Kuwait. But it was actually the U.S. who refused to negotiate and, in fact, was seen by many to be eager for war.

In examining the reasons given for this war, I have found only two do not seem to be contradictory, based on the evidence of world politics. What is it that makes an Iraqi pullout from Kuwait so important to our government that they would go to extreme measures to achieve it and use double standards to justify it? I believe, again, that the reason is based on economics. If Iraq were to annex Kuwait, Hussein would have major control over oil and oil prices. As our nation (with about 4 percent of humanity) uses 25% of the world's oil, this could result in higher oil prices for you and me and a loss in oil corporation profits.

This explanation does not fully answer the choice of swift military action over slower sanctions. I believe the answer to this lies in the changing times leading up to this conflict. After the end of the Cold War and the crumbling of the Soviet bloc, our military and defense industry found itself without justification for the enormous amount of our national budget (about 70%) spent on it. Now, once again, it has such a justification.

George Bush's "new world order" will involve the U.S. as the world's police force, a hired gun who will stop any tinpot tyrant anywhere as long as the price is right. This war will be followed by others. But at least the Pentagon and the defense contractors will continue to get paid at the expense of social programs. With that, I leave it to the reader to decide if these reasons for war are morally justifiable.

Seeing war with a "Black eye"

The issues raised above are

being debated across the nation by all nationalities. Polls have suggested that African-Americans are almost twice as likely as whites to oppose the war. In places like Chapel Hill, where the anti-war movement has been overwhelmingly white, issues particular to African-Americans are sometimes overlooked.

Many African-Americans who oppose the war point to the lack of equal attention paid to problems within the U.S. Dara, an undergraduate at N.C. Central, says: "Issues in America such as homelessness, unemployment, education, illiteracy and drugs in our communities are being ignored. Billions are being spent on war and weapons when they should be spent here to clean up our streets. Kuwait can wait. Let's get the U.S. straight."

Some African-Americans say that it is hypocrisy for George Bush and Colin Powell to encourage black support for the war when the Bush administration has helped to turn back the gains made by people of color. Says Jamaal, an undergraduate from St. Augustine's College: "I oppose this war as an African-American man who sees one fourth of African-Americans males in jail or under court control. I may be drafted by an administration who wants to cut minority scholarships to college. If George Bush expects me to support a way of life that perpetuates these things, he can kiss my black ass twice." Indeed, it must be pointed out that while this country sends more black people to jail than South Africa, and while Bush moves to restrict minority access to universities and promote minority access to the military, Bush has become the only president in

history to veto a civil rights bill.

Some say that the war, for African-Americans, is here at home. "Some people in the African-American communities have been saying for years that oppression is not coincidental and spontaneous, but is the result of conscious policy-making," says Ajamu, a Raleigh postal worker. "To the extent that it is planned, it can be considered a declaration of war." In fact, the Black Belt Youth Brigade, an organization of students and non-student youth from the Triangle, has taken up the slogan "Our war is at home" referring to this idea.

The anti-war movement has been criticized by some for not supporting U.S. troops. But all the anti-war activists interviewed for this article said they did support the troops. "There is a high number of our African-American and Latino brothers and sisters fighting in the Middle East, especially on the front lines," says Dara. "We should support the troops by bringing them home now." The anti-war movement defines "supporting the troops" by calling for their return, as opposed to sending them into battle.

The key question of what we should do remains. If you support this war, can you hold your views with conviction, knowing all that you know? If you oppose this war, can you allow it to continue unchallenged without adding your voice to the protests? The students and members of the community interviewed for this article would certainly urge everyone to get involved in some way. The final decision can only be made by the African-American students at UNC.

