

An American exit strategy for Iraq

No matter the politics, the USA can't turncoat and run from Iraq. To leave before that nation is able to defend itself is to set up another rogue nation for terrorist. The USA must stay the course with a different mind-set, which respects Islamic principles and virtues and focuses on rapid deployment of change agents, which will bring about the economic relief necessary to add stability to that nation.

First, though, the president states no weapons of mass destruction were found, we must talk about the fact that we did find and remove a major weapon of mass destruction-Sadam Hussein who inflicted genocide on hundreds of thousands of his own people. It is this action of genocide, which is probably one of two internationally acceptable indications for a pre-emptive strike or unilateral involvement in the affairs of a sovereign nation. The other being the proven potential to annihilate a substantial portion of the world.

Second, we must acknowledge and accept that not everyone is Christian in his or her orientation nor do we have a right to make it so. In all the praying and fretting over the founding of this nation, forgotten is the fact that it was the concept of religious freedom (First Amendment), the need for individual rights and the concept of property rights which are the strong reasons for this country's defection from Europe. As President Bush acknowledged, no one enjoys being occupied and neither do men and women of faith appreciate being told who is their God and how that God is to be worshipped.

Thirdly, prisoner abuse must be exorcized. Islam to be understood must first be respected for it surpasses Christianity in its members and converts. Islam is a patri-lineal religion with authority placed in the hands of men who exercise authoritarian control over women in the eyes of some. The humiliation of Iraqi prisoners by showing men naked, reportedly attacked by dogs, posed in sexually degrading postures, is bad enough but to have them splayed before an American woman in their minds is the insult of insults. If civilian Iraqi women have been raped and children molested by those acting on this nation's behalf, under no conditions will this be tolerated or forgiven by many in the Middle East, nor should it be tolerated by this nation.

Heads will and must roll for our national security is being further threatened. To not understand this means looking over your shoulder constantly for we can never be secure against people who are known to carry on wars for ages. We must support our troops but be mindful that privates, corporals and the like who are underlings are responsible through a chain of command which must be cleansed of this foolishness as well.

Fourth, this nation must understand what the VFW notes, the price of freedom is not free.

Fifth, the use of private contractors not accountable to the U.S. government and US Congress for its actions is something that must be seriously examined. We need a military where all citizens share in the responsibility for the protection and security of the nation against enemies domestic and foreign. We may be at that juncture where volunteers alone may not be sufficient to meet our nation's needs and commitments. If we required national service of our citizens, we would have more accountability for our involvements and our foreign policies.

Had Oakwood International from Richland, N.C. been given the housing contract instead of non-competitive bids by Halliburton or political cronies, we could have had substantial concrete housing up in 16 days, which can be adapted by the concrete involved as well as finished with the labor and contributory products from citizens of that country. This housing would have employed and still can employ hundreds in Iraq as well as N.C. where so many of our jobs have been removed. This housing would give Iraq the economic development needed to quiet the disaffected.

Six, Iraq's oil isn't the spoil of the victors nor will it be sufficient to pay debts. It's past time that this nation had a reasonable energy policy, which looks at new sources of fuel and energy as well as conservation of resources. If 10-15 mile per gallon cars is to be continually used, oil wars will be in the foreseeable future.

Ex-Secretary of State Colin Powell's public voice has never wavered in his support of the president, nor has his compassion for the people and estimate of the nature of the problems of the troubled Middle East been more on target. Maybe it's time to let Secretary Powell do what he has done well, be a top military man for this nation or a United Nations envoy to the Middle East.

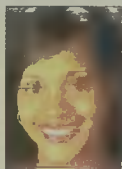
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Understanding why we have so many 'Crash' moments

In the star-studded, quietly released movie, Crash, the causes and effects of our society's most common racial stereotypes are relentlessly splashed across the screen with vivid, unapologetic ferocity.



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From a Persian family being mistaken as Arab and berated for terrorism to a white LAPD officer bogusly pulling over a black couple and violating the wife as her husband helplessly watched. These images are her husband the minds of the audience long after the movie is over, no doubt because of their unrepentant nature and the fact that many of them were probably already embedded in our psyches long before the opening credits began.

Last year, a restaurant owner in Miami was sued by a black couple for adding gratuity to their bill without doing the same to a white couple dining nearby. As justification, the restaurant owner allegedly stated, "You black people do not tip well." In that same vein, in one of the opening scenes of the movie, two black youth stroll out of a restaurant, one of them spewing a seething tirade over the poor service he says they received because of their race. His assumption was that the waitress was operating under the notion that black people do not tip well and, therefore, gave him poor service. He, therefore, did not leave her a tip.

It is an example of art imitating life or vice versa. However you choose to explain it, these fallacies continue to manifest themselves in our daily lives. Allowed to continue, they can eventually evolve into self-fulfilling prophecies and cyclical truths for both the victims and the perpetrators of the assumptions.

For instance, a Cornell University study on the ethnic differences and the tipping issue revealed that blacks, Hispanics and Asians overall tended to tip less than whites. But the study also concluded that many of the reasons for poor tipping were based on discriminatory practices by the wait staff and the fact that those in lower income brackets, regardless of race, tended to tip less than those with more disposable income. Blacks and Hispanics tend to be disproportionately poor. The research also found that the reason behind the poorer tipping could be due to minority groups being less familiar with the tipping norm of 15 to 20 percent. Regardless, many of the waiters and waitresses who delivered inferior service to ethnic minorities routinely did so based on preconceived notions that ethnic minorities are poor tipplers.

We know that it is not the case that all minorities tip poorly and, since gratuity is an incentive and should be commensurate with the level of service received, all patrons under normal circumstances should be given equally good service. But it shows how easily belief in certain stereotypes can manifest and the causes and effects because of it. It is also an example of how self-fulfilling prophecies can unnecessarily come to be.

The tipping issue is, of course, only a single example in a wide array of judgments and misconceptions that we attach to people everyday. Most of us have been guilty of drawing conclusions about a group of people based on what we have heard or what we may have witnessed one member of that group do. Racism? Possibly. But this type of reaction is also the result of mass perceptions generated by our society.

We consume a daily diet of overwhelming and often irresponsible images and discourse that allows us easily, albeit erroneously, to lump individuals, even our 'own kind' sometimes, into superficial categories without knowing the person behind the exterior and his/her personal situation.

Though it is not realistic to be able to get to know each person with whom we come in contact on an individual basis, the movie made it clear how important it is that we all take personal responsibility for our perceptions. One of the goals of the tipping study was to keep wait staff from unnecessarily demeaning a customer group by helping them understand and address the underlying cause of the ethnic differences. It is a universal lesson that could be applied on a much broader social scale, though, any beneficial change in how we view and interact with each other will be much more difficult to accomplish than simply bringing someone an extra glass of water.

Since life does not occur in a vacuum, realistically it will take more than a movie, a study, or a social commentary to provide solutions for such weighty issues, but Crash hopefully gave the fifty or so people in the theater something to think about on the way home. It did for one person.

And it made me wonder if we will ever get to the point where we will not have to crash into each other in order to interact.

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Ignoring root of discipline problem

For the love of money is the root of all evil," proclaimed the biblical writer (1 Timothy 6:10). And this same root has many branches and leaves that I have depicted graphically in Chapter IV of my first book, "The Real-Holocaust: A Wholistic Analysis of the African American Experience, 1441-1994."

But let us be reminded that "Truth, crushed to the ground, will rise again," in those profound words of that great slave abolitionist, William C. Bryant. Indeed, we have a very ugly example of such truth in the problem of school discipline within Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, always known by many teachers, but only recently admitted by the school board, top administrators and The Charlotte Observer - "Disturber."



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Alas, and unfortunately, all of these "Johnny-come-lately" confessors to this ugly truth are continuing to ignore the major root of this apparently unacceptable misbehavior of far too many students within CMS - most often blaming students, parents and any other favorite scapegoat for this despicable condition. Therefore, let us briefly examine at least two of the often ignored, more systemic, metaphoric branches or leaves of this problem.

1. Cumulative dehumanization-racism: If we choose to look historically and honestly at this disciplinary problem, we may observe that the overwhelming majority of students who are suspended or expelled from school are African Americans-a fact that we do not need a "rocket scientist" to understand.

For we have, unquestionably, a distinctly spiritual or "race problem" within Charlotte-Mecklenburg that, consistently, has been ignored, minimized, circumvented and/or "pacified," the latter through "The Charlotte way" of providing Band-aid gestures, "divide-and conquer" or "Willie Lynch"-type token rewards, financial or psychological, to a few "kneegro" mis-leaders who collaborate in the systemic oppression-suppression of the masses of their people.

In essence, black Americans have suffered major, under-estimated damages, economic and psychological, as a result of cumulative racism, nearly 400 years of anti-black policies-practices, both public and private, including massive lynching and other forms of domestic terrorism.

2. The polyglot factor: School board members and our over-paid top administrators either do not understand or choose to ignore the critically important reality of our unique "black experience" as described too briefly above, i.e., that they must implement unique and/or special strategies to address unique damages that have been inflicted upon us.

And these strategies, with specific programs, involve a creative synthesis of two failed systems of mis-education-the old segregated order, where we blacks had no significant disciplinary problems with our students, and the present desegregated-re-segregated order.

Indeed, to reiterate, the present school system is a disaster for our black students, reflecting "academic genocide" as accurately noted by Superior Court Judge Howard Manning, with his comments limited unfortunately to only several of our high schools. Of course, we have already delineated and reported to the school board some of those factors that contribute to the present failed system. For example:

(A) A Euro-centric curriculum that, subconsciously, teaches black students to worship white people, while hating themselves;

(B) Predominantly white teachers (mostly female) with almost inexorable, subconscious, systemic racial biases against blacks;

(C) Mis-educated black or "kneegro" teachers-professionals who have been "educated" in Euro-centric systems of "higher education" (sic).

In essence, school discipline problems are, metaphorically, some of the "bitter fruit" from "The Money Tree" of greed and related ignorance in American society, i.e., "the chickens coming home to roost." As one white student, reportedly, asked his parent, "Mother why do some black students act like animals in class?" And his mother replied, "Perhaps it is because for 400 years we have treated them like animals."

Bingo!

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