

# Who will tell the American people truth about Iraq?

My frustration with the Democratic Party grows day by day, as the leadership squanders its responsibility to its constituency and to the American people.

So, who had to step up? Rep. Jack Murtha, a Democratic member of Congress from Pennsylvania, and a decorated ex-Marine, called for a pullout of American troops not only because of his view that no plan exists for how to pursue victory, but because the American people are way out ahead of their leadership.

In late August, a Gallup poll asked about troop withdrawal, and a majority felt that "the U.S. should withdraw some troops (27 percent), or all of them (26 percent) from Iraq. In the most recent polls, a majority now believes that going into Iraq was a mistake and that the troops should come home.

But the position of Democratic Party leaders sounds like it's coming out of the White House. Hillary Clinton believes that it would be a mistake to pull out American troops because Iraq could dissolve into a civil war, creating a situation "where terrorists are free to basically set up camp and launch attacks against us."

Let me get this straight: terrorists need Iraq to launch attacks against the U.S.? They didn't need Iraq to bring down the Twin Towers in New York City, so why would they need Iraq now? I guess Clinton's argument is that it would be easier for them to do so. Yes, but we are also making it easier by staying there: killing innocent civilians as well as combatants, rousting families out of bed in the middle of the night, taking away their men, torturing them for information, in a scenario geared for them to love us for a long, long time.

A 10 year-old could figure how why they hate us, and will continue to do so, but a town full of Harvard, Princeton and Yale Ph.Ds. in Washington, D.C. are stumped.

Black folks love Bill Clinton, and he has been critical of the war saying to an audience sponsored by the Ladies Home Journal that it can't succeed. But more recently, he said in upstate New York that Bush's strategy could. Which is it? His former aide, Dick Morris thinks it's a case of "good cop, bad cop" they are playing.

I'm more worried about Hillary, because if she runs in 2008, black people will be out there laying down the red carpet. But that doesn't make sense because black support for George Bush is the lowest of any president in modern history and much of that is driven by black opposition to the war in Iraq.

A recent, widely-cited NBC/Wall Street Journal poll found that only 2 percent of blacks approved of Bush, while a Pew poll, appearing about the same time, had blacks at a 12 percent approval rate. I tend to favor the latter as the more accurate one, but either way, this is really low and black opposition to the Iraq war, along with Katrina, account for most of it.

In one poll this year, blacks were twice as negative as whites about the American involvement in this war. Furthermore, blacks account for 25 percent of the entire military, but so turned off are they about the war that they are a big reason why the Army, for example, is not achieving its recruiting goals. Five years ago, one in four recruits was black, but now one in seven are black.

Hillary is not the only Democratic leader who has a "me-too" position. Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader in the House has parted company with Murtha, and in a vote where the Republicans forced the hand of Democrats to put up or shut up on their view of whether the troops should be immediately yanked - you guessed it - they shut up. Rep. Murtha's non-binding resolution that U.S. troops leave Iraq as soon as is practicable went down to a massive defeat (403-3), with only three Democrats, Rep. Robert Wexler (Fla.), Rep. Cynthia McKinney (Ga), and Rep. Jose Serrano (NY), the only holdouts. They alone had the guts to tell the people the war should stop.

The administration is gambling to buy time for Iraqi troops to take hold and provide security, and for a real government will come into existence. Nothing we have seen suggests that will happen. So, the American people question whether our resources will be devoted to the extension of democracy and the rebuilding of the material infrastructure in the American Gulf or the Persian Gulf. The Republican-controlled Congress has the audacity to question who will rebuild the American disaster in New Orleans, Mississippi and Florida.

The answer is obvious. Show the troops you love them by bringing them home; spend the money taking care of your own; and stop the illusion that it is possible to win a military victory in a global "war on terror." Tell the people the truth.

RON WALTERS is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Institute, Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.



RON WALTERS

# Criminalization of children continues

The increasing criminalization of children has become a major crisis. Children are being suspended and expelled from school and incarcerated in the juvenile and adult justice systems at alarming rates and at younger and younger ages.

This increased incarceration is not due to an increase in serious delinquent or violent criminal behavior by young people. Juvenile arrests for violent crimes grew rapidly in the late 1980s and peaked in 1994, but then began falling. Between 1994 and 2003, the juvenile arrest rate for Violent Crime Index offenses - murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault - fell 48 percent to its lowest level since 1980. So if actual crime is not the cause for the rise in incarceration rates, what is?

One piece of the puzzle is the rise of "zero tolerance" policies in schools. Institutions began adopting these policies in the late 1980s, taking the term from the war on drugs. Amidst debate in Congress over "super predators" and predictions of a coming and dramatic surge in juvenile crime that never materialized, these policies hit the national level when President Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, requiring a one-calendar year expulsion for possession of a firearm and referral of law-violating students to the juvenile or criminal justice systems. Most states and local school districts responded to the new law by broadening the mandate of zero tolerance beyond the federal mandate of weapons to include drugs, alcohol, fighting, threats, or swearing.

Many school boards continue to toughen their policies, experimenting with permanent expulsion for certain offenses. Others have begun to apply school suspensions and expulsions to behavior that occurs outside of school. While zero tolerance once applied to serious offenses involving safety, it is now an overarching and catch-all disciplinary approach for real, perceived, and imaginary weapons and misbehavior that is defined by highly subjective terms like "disruption" and "disrespect." Aspirin, Certs, and Midol are considered drugs. Paper clips, nail files, scissors, and spitballs are considered weapons.

Punishment through exclusion is the overwhelming response. From 1974 to 2000, the number of students suspended from school increased from 1.7 to 3.1 million. While zero tolerance has a place as a response to truly dangerous behavior, it has become a danger to children and a potential way to exclude any student who may need individualized help. Children should not be put out of school for any reason other than posing a real threat to themselves or others. Child behaviors that used to be handled at school are now being handled by police. Five, eight, and nine-year-olds are being arrested, creating stains on their records that blot their future.

Another disturbing piece of the increased criminalization of children is the growing numbers of children sent into the adult criminal justice system. Approximately 250,000 teens under 18 enter the adult criminal justice system every year. More than half have been charged with nonviolent drug or property offenses. The idea of youth serving "adult time for adult crime" grew in popularity in response to a sharp increase in drug and firearms violations. But the vast majority of teens tried and sentenced in adult court are not the serious, violent, chronic offenders who might have been subject to the juvenile death penalty, a feature the U.S. Supreme Court recently struck down in the Simmons case involving a juvenile from Missouri.

In many states, laws now require prosecutors to file certain cases in adult court - even if it is against their better judgment - simply because of the nature of the offense or the age of the youth. Nearly 90 percent of youth who are transferred to the adult system fall under a lowered age of adulthood in 13 states. In these states any youth accused of an offense who is 17 years old (or 16 years old in three of the 13 states) will be sent into the adult criminal justice system for any offense, whether serious or not.

Another huge factor in the increased criminalization of children stems from untreated mental health problems among children. Seventy-five percent of children in the juvenile justice system have mental health problems. Children as young as seven are incarcerated in juvenile facilities around the country not because of pending charges for a crime but because of untreated mental health needs for which no treatment is available in their communities.

Finally, a key piece of the increase stems from the disparate treatment of black and brown children in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Minority youths make up 34 percent of the adolescent population and 62 percent of juveniles confined to public facilities. In 1999, blacks outnumbered whites nearly two to one in the number of youth under 18 admitted to adult state prisons. For drug charges, the ratio was more than 8 to 1. A black youth is 48 times more likely than a white youth to be incarcerated for comparable drug offenses. Data from 18 of the largest court jurisdictions showed that 82 percent of juvenile cases filed in adult court involved youth of color. School suspensions are similarly imbalanced: in 2000, black students were suspended at a rate almost three times higher than white students.

The road that has been taking more and more of our children to prison and away from their homes and schools and communities and off the path to college and productive futures is long and twisted. But we don't have to keep allowing our children to be led astray.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.



MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

# From colored people to people of color

By John McCann  
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Remember these playground lyrics? I'm not a nigger, I'm a Negro. When I become a nigger, I'll let you know.

It's an oldie-but-not-so-goodie based on response from folks upset that "60 Minutes" commentator Andy Rooney believes nothing's wrong with calling us Negroes.

So here we go again. Black people - man, we have the toughest time with semantics. We can't figure out what to call ourselves. It's like a science. You almost need an advanced degree to figure it out.

I mean, if I'm at work, where there're only three other black people in the entire newsroom, then, let's see, I better not use the n-word. But if my black co-workers and I are riding to lunch in the same car, then I'm free to let the n-bombs flow.

But Negro's not an n-bomb. However, Rooney's remarks show us just how explosive the word is when a white guy wields it.

Here's another song for you. Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring. Ring with...

OK, you get the idea. Now, tell me, what's the name of that song? Come again? A little bit louder? Gotcha! Made you say it. Made you say Negro - "The Negro National Anthem."

But if it wasn't a bad word when James Weldon Johnson wrote the song, then what makes it so wrong rolling off the lips of a white guy like Rooney?

Dig what I'm saying: Jackie Robinson and Satchel Paige and all those cats didn't have a problem playing baseball in the Negro Leagues. There's no shame in Lou Rawls' game when he gets down for the United Negro College Fund.

I'm reminded of an editorial cartoon by a University of Florida student. It showed Kanye West holding a race card, playing off the rapper's comments about President Bush's slow response toward black hurricane survivors along the Gulf Coast.

But the cartoon also depicted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice retorting, "Nigga please!"

Granted, I'm no fan of the n-word. But when you think about prim and proper Condoleezza Rice saying it, you have to laugh. So don't trip just because a white boy drew the cartoon. Chris Rock could say the same thing and you'd just about pee in your pants from laughing so hard.

I'm telling you, be careful what you ask for. Remember the Texas congresswoman two years ago wanting more black-sounding hurricane names? Don't you wonder how she felt when Katrina blew through?

And speaking of what we call ourselves, if we're going to get all huffy with Andy Rooney about the word Negro, then answer this: What's up with a pre-historic name like National Association for the Advancement of... Colored People?

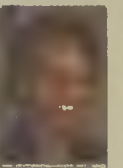
Don't sit there and say you wouldn't get mad if a white person called you colored.

And if you deny it, know what I'd tell you? "Negro please!!"

JOHN MCCANN is a columnist for The Herald-Sun in Durham.



Robinson



Rice

Granted, I'm no fan of the n-word. But when you think about prim and proper Condoleezza Rice saying it, you have to laugh.

