

Point of View

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United Church of Christ • Commission for Racial Justice

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN ENGULFED IN UNJUST WAR

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

The sight of an African American mother in her Desert Storm combat fatigues tearfully saying goodbye to her young child before she is shipped off to the Persian Gulf War is the growing reality in the African American community. Recently on the front page of USA TODAY a large color photograph of Ms. Belinda Holyfield appeared to illustrate the pain involved in a mother leaving her young son for participation in an unjust war.

Our position is that no man and no woman should be made or called to fight for the control of oil in the Persian Gulf. We certainly support and demand the equal rights of women in our society. But the issue here is the war itself and not the sex of the soldiers.

The issue is the immorality of the Persian Gulf War and the gross injustices that continue to be committed on women, men and children in this so-called

"theater of war."

But there is the issue of the racially disproportionate and discriminatory impact this war is having, in particular, on the African American community. Tragically, African Americans are deployed on the front lines more than three times the African American percentage of the U.S. population.

Shockingly African American women are 48.7 percent of the U.S. Army and too many African American mothers now find themselves in the death-threatening situation of being called to fight in the Persian Gulf. There are 32,700 women presently serving in the U.S. military in the Gulf. Many of these women are mothers whose children now wonder and ponder why their mothers are fighting in this unjust war.

In Montgomery, Alabama, Belinda Holyfield is in the U.S. Army Reserves. Her unit is now being deployed. Ms. Holyfield

and thousands of other African American women joined the Army Reserves to get the benefits. Now she and thousands of others are being directed to the war front. The fundamental issue is the unequal burden and disproportionate sacrifice that African American women are being ordered to share. Put this in the context of the immorality of the war and the injustice is compounded.

The African American community before the war was already reeling from devastating poverty, unemployment and health crises. Now, thousands of African American children are being unduly traumatized by the fact that their mothers are caught up in the violence and injustice of the Persian Gulf War.

We will continue to express our opposition to this war. The African American community and all communities of conscience in this nation must demand an end to the war and

the initiation of a more effective social justice movement here at home. We will not be silent. Bring all of the troops home now and let the peoples of the Middle East resolve their conflicts with-

out military intervention.

This is not a "high tech," sanitized, clear war. This war is dirty and another ugly testimony to inhumanity disguised in geopolitical greed and military vice.

No soldier should be engaged in this senseless human destruction. Stop the war! No blood for oil! We are all challenged to prevent the continuation of this tragedy.

TO BE EQUAL

CITIES IN TROUBLE

By John E. Jacob

Are Americans really willing to let the cities go down the drain? It's crazy to let that happen, but there's no sign of even the vaguest sort of national urban policy that could avert such a disaster.

Many of our biggest cities have sections that look as if Scud missiles dropped on them, and the human devastation is even worse.

But the country just rolls along, ignoring its urban centers and forgetting that if the cities

don't make it, America won't make it.

It's time the powers-that-be started seeing the urban mess as a national security issue every bit as important as other aspects of national defense.

If America is split into two—one, suburban white and affluent, the other urban, black and poor—then this nation hasn't a hope of competing in a diverse world.

Many of our urban miseries today are seen at their harshest in the plight of the homeless—many of whom are Vietnam war veterans.

Are they telling us that's what today's inadequate health services, lack of affordable housing, joblessness, and despair?

They'd better not, because the last thing America needs is to find itself enmeshed in civil hostilities and deepening hatreds



JOHN E. JACOB

between the haves and the have-nots.

The federal government needs to stop playing Russian roulette with people's lives and the nation's future by adopting policies to rebuild viable cities.

After all, the cities' core problems are the result of being disproportionately affected by national problems like drugs, poverty, inadequate health care and unemployment, among many others.

(See To Be Equal, Page 17)

PRIORITIES IN THE U.S.

by Augustus F. Hawkins, M/C ret.

January, 1991, has been a watershed month in the world's history and a critical period in our lives as we have attempted to adjust to an uncertain future in a troubled world and to fully understand just what the world is all about.

Hardly mentioned on the home front is the undeniable fact—long neglected—long neglected—that we are now in the second quarter of a recession with over eleven million persons already unemployed and more lay-offs expected.

And not plainly as clear, but bearing down on us are many other domestic problems crying for solutions long delayed; in health, education, housing, and

crumbling infra-structure, including unsafe bridges, congested streets, deteriorating communities; complicated by the festering curses of poverty, drugs and crime.

In conflict with pressing ahead on facing these issues is the old cry "we can't afford to spend," except for military purposes. This argument has been around since 1980, long before the current conflict in the Persian Gulf and even during the Reagan era when tax cuts were being handed out as gifts to the privileged few.

The best answer however, was given by an Army General, President Dwight Eisenhower who admonished us in these words: "The problem in defense is how far you can go without

destroying from within what you are trying to defend from without."

Furthermore, the logic is bad. The money we spend on education and health, for example, are wise investments that return huge dividends in productivity, added resources, and rising standards of living. In addition the savings in welfare payments, unemployment benefits, and crime are incalculable.

A sound approach was suggested by David Kearnes, Chief Executive Officer of the Xerox Corporation who in referring to education said it "should not compete with national defense, the trade deficit, drugs, or Aids. Think of it as a solution to these problems."

If we make war a priority, we

should at least pay the cost. Since we are already at war this is what I suggest:

We should increase taxation to pay for the war on those most able to pay, perhaps a modest surcharge on high incomes; and begin to turn our attention and funding to urgent domestic problems that we have short-changed for over a decade.

also we must pursue a war at home, against ignorance, intolerance, and poverty financed on an equitable basis by fair taxation but basically out of the revenues we derive from a fully employed people and prosperous businesses.

All of this, then, would be in consonance with our national ideals of democracy, equality, and justice.

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