

COMMENTARY

State of Blacks in America — 2003

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Two years ago last week, I raised a series of questions about religion, race relations, and the state of Blacks in America.

Given current and recent news stories, repeating and updating what I wrote in April 2001 should cause you to ponder what life in these



LOUIE OVERSTREET

good old United States is going to be like during the coming years, if we cannot find answers to a number of troubling questions.

Questions about religion from 2001. Given that organized religion has been around for thousands of years, why can't it provide answers to four simple questions?

If there is only one God, then why are there so many different religions?

In the "birthplace" of religion, why are "Holy Wars" fought century after century?

Why are eight of the Ten Commandments so hard to honor?

If one of the basic tenets of Christian doctrine is to "love thy neighbor," then why do so many racists (whites) and bigots (persons of color) attend church on a regular basis and profess themselves to be Christians?

Here are a few additional questions to add to the list in 2003.

Does using the phrase "regime change" or "evil doer" allow us, as a nation, to purge any religious guilt feelings we should experience over the taking of innocent lives halfway around the world?

Why is child molestation more pronounced among Catholic priests than other religious leaders?

In a nation that practices the separation of church and state, how could our local school board of trustees vote to have prayers recited at graduation ceremonies?

Questions about race relations from 2001. In the ever-changing lexicon of the United States, why do benign sounding words or phrases often serve as "fronts" for hidden agendas?

What does "reverse discrimination" really mean?

What is an "unfair advantage"? Do you know any "compassionate conservatives"?

Why are politicians afraid to be called liberals nowadays?

Questions to be added in 2003.

How can a number of members of the majority culture believe that it is okay to grant admissions to college based on a legacy (a parent attended the college) criterion, yet oppose the concept of affirmative action admissions?

Do the above persons, who are usually rich as well as conservative and contribute to a university's endowment fund, really believe that their offspring — who are admitted to law school (read to be the University of Michigan) under a legacy criterion — after graduation are going to accept a low-paying job defending the rights of poor people?

I am going to take the liberty of answering this one.

The answer is, hell no! They are sending their kids to professional graduate schools in order that they may continue to perpetuate

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Black soldiers in Iraq bear disproportionate burden

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

For weeks now I have fielded calls from journalists asking why public opinion polls show that African-Americans don't support the war effort in Iraq. One reason that I gave is that Blacks have always had to endure a disproportionate sacrifice in war and then face ill treatment at home.

In fact, Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) proposed to re-institute the draft in order to foster a more equitable representation in military service for all after he learned that only five of his colleagues in the U.S. Congress had children serving in the military.

This proposal caused a brouhaha among Republicans who like the current "all-volunteer" military service.

Now comes the death casualty figures from the Iraq war showing that of the 108 deaths, 20 are Black and 18 have Spanish surnames, a result which means that 19 percent are Blacks and 16 percent are Hispanic, a total of 35 percent deaths total that are either Black or Brown. This in a country where the Black and Brown population each are 12 percent of the total U.S. population, so that the total of 24 percent means that their deaths in Iraq were slightly more than 10 percent over their proportion in the American population.

Before the war, when it was pointed out that Black troops in the military averaged 22 percent in all services, military officials rushed to say that there were only 15 percent of Blacks in the infantry, but 36 percent in support services.

In fact, they tried to create the picture that the concern about possible disproportionate casualties among Blacks was overdrawn. But these figures speak for themselves and this casualty rate among Blacks

was much higher than that in the 1991 Gulf war at about 12 percent, because that wasn't much of a war.

David Segal, director of the Center for Research on Military Organization at the University of Maryland, attributes the casualty figures in the current war to the so-called military plan used in fighting in Iraq. Pentagon planners wanted to create the element of surprise, so they started with a ground assault and planned to move quickly over land to Baghdad.

The problem, as everyone saw, was that the plan didn't work very well. The "shock" portion of it bogged down when the troops ran away from the supply lines and had to stop fighting. And when this happened, they became sitting ducks for Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard in some places.

Critics of the war plan said that the Pentagon planners not only had failed to use logistics effectively, but fielded too few troops. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld railed against what he called "arm-chair generals" embedded in TV studios, who were criticizing the plan for fighting the war. Now we know that one casualty of this battle plan is infantry, which was too exposed, and that Blacks suffered more than others because of their role in the infantry.

This is one of the highest casualty rates of any war but it won't matter. Blacks have always served honorably in war, hoping that by giving their "last full measure of devotion" they would be creating the conditions for equality and justice at home. But this administration, like others, just isn't paying any attention.

Ron Walters is a professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland-College Park.

Bush administration threats could make Syria next Iraq

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Hold onto your hats! We may be walking into yet another war. That's right. Barely had the war in Iraq begun to subside when the Bush administration began making very ominous threats to Syria. It is starting to sound a lot like spring 2002, in fact.

Various U.S. administrations have had a contentious relationship with Syria, which has, at various times, supported anti-Israeli military groups, including some accused of terrorism. Yet, after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States, the Syrian government—by the admission of the Central Intelligence Agency—cooperated with the United States in opposition to the Al Qaeda clerical fascist/terrorist organization.

Nevertheless, various representatives of the Bush administration, including the president, have made threatening sounds about the alleged activities of the Syrian regime. We need to watch this carefully and not get suckered again.

Consider: The Bush administration is alleging that the Syrians have supplied Saddam Hussein with weapons and volunteers; that the Syrians may have allowed Iraqi leaders to flee to Syria; and most unsettling, that the Iraqis may have moved alleged weapons of mass destruction into Syria. The problem with all of this is the same problem that we confronted prior to the invasion of Iraq: Where is the proof?

There is every reason to be suspicious of these allegations by the Bush administration.

Just as with the alleged ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, allegations of an Iraqi/Syrian connection lack any accurate historical context. There has been a long and very tense relationship between the Syrian and Iraqi governments. In the Iran/Iraq War, Syria sided with Iran. In 1991, Syria stood against Iraq. In the lead up to the war with Iraq, Syria last fall voted in favor of the U.N. resolution, though they have been on record as against a military attack on Iraq.

What the Bush administration seems to have learned from the Iraqi crisis, however, is that a U.S. president need not prove anything; it is sufficient to assert and reassert a basic point—regardless of its validity—in order for it to be treated as truth. After a while the U.S. media

will simply treat the assertion as an undisputed fact and ridicule anyone who takes an alternative point of view, or even asks a question. The lead up to the war with Iraq had all the pomp and circumstance of a stage play, but little substantive evidence. In fact, Hans Blix, the United Nations' chief weapons inspector, just recently noted that the United States and Britain had quite apparently decided a long time ago to start a war with Iraq, with little interest in letting the inspections process work. I wish that Blix had stated this publicly prior to start of the war. Blix's comment confirms that the lead up to the war was about show, rather than substance.

Thus, in the aftermath of the defeat of the organized Iraqi military, we find ourselves in an atmosphere of

triumphalism, with the Bush administration threatening Syria, slightly more subtly threatening Iran, and who knows what is happening with North Korea. For the people of the United States, we must continue to ask questions and resist the impulse to simply march lock step in support of whatever the administration advances. In the lead up to the invasion of Iraq, the majority of the people of the United States had obvious doubts about the sanity of an invasion, yet they held those doubts and gave their support, despite the fact that the majority of the world's nations and peoples openly opposed the planned aggression.

Does it not matter to us that billions of voices were raised in opposition to the policies of this government?

Are we so gullible that we will allow the cynical use of the U.S. flag and the notion of patriotism to blind us to the actual and long-term consequences of the actions of this reckless administration?

The situation in Iraq is far from resolved, but the test of our own sanity and humanity may be fast upon us if it is up to this administration. Rest assured that this administration will find a multitude of ways to describe real and perceived threats, as well as to disingenuously use the name of "human rights" to grab our attention and gain our support for further acts of aggression.

How does the saying go? Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me...

Bill Fletcher Jr. is president of TransAfrica Forum.