

C O M M E N T A R Y

More Blacks saying, 'Hell no, we won't go'

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Hell no, we won't go! That was a popular chant of protesters during the Vietnam War. Although there were scattered anti-war protests over the weekend to mark the second anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, military-age African-Americans have been protesting over the past five years in a quieter, more profound way — fewer are enlisting in the Army.

Blacks have bravely served in every American War, even unpopular ones such as the one in Vietnam. Unlike many of their elders, however, an increasing number of young African-Americans are no longer willing to risk being shipped into a war zone to fight for a cause they do not support.

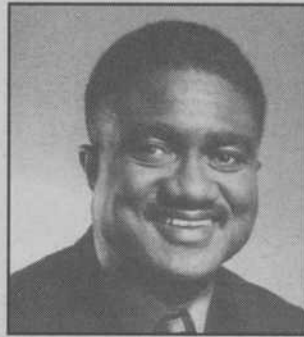
Department of Defense Youth and Influencer Polls conducted last May concluded, "...Black youth were less supportive of U.S. troops' presence in Iraq, less likely to feel the war was justified, more disapproving of the Bush administration's handling of foreign affairs and more disapproving of its use of U.S. military forces than were Whites or Hispanics."

The war in Iraq exacerbated a downward trend among Black Army recruits. In fiscal

2000, African-Americans represented nearly a quarter of Army recruits. That figure fell to 22.7 percent in 2001, 19.9 percent in 2002, 16.4 percent in 2003, 15.9 percent in 2004 and 13.9 percent through the first four months of fiscal 2005.

The steady dip in recruitment does not mean there aren't thousands of African-Americans being deployed to Iraq. I got a chance to speak to about a dozen of them last month when I gave the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. address at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif. The sprawling Army base, sandwiched between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, is 37 miles northeast of Barstow, Calif., and 100 miles from nowhere.

As soldiers lined up to complete papers before leaving for Iraq, they told me of their fears and aspirations. Even those who gave the impression that they had reservations about the war were intent on keeping their end of the bargain. They recalled in matter-of-fact tones the personal toll the war was exacting on their families. Many were sending their wives and kids back home to live



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with their parents or in-laws. A few would leave their families at Fort Irwin.

Last year, on the opposite end of the country — Fort Bragg, N.C. — and the opposite end of the age spectrum, I had witnessed many members of the National Guard about to be deployed to Iraq. Many were in their 40s and 50s and were being recalled to fight in what many call a young man's (and woman's) war. Most of these men and women had served earlier but their lives were interrupted when their National Guard units were activated. In addition to speaking with soldiers on both coasts just before they left, I also visited with some of the troops in the Persian Gulf. Two years ago, just before the fall of Baghdad, the NNPA News Service sent me to Dohar, Qatar to cover the daily briefings of Army Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks. There, too, I found service men and women who had been to Iraq and Afghanistan. They had risked their lives at a time when some elected officials back home were talking about cutting their benefits.

It would later be disclosed that if any of

them had been killed during the war their families would have received death benefits of only \$12,420. Administration officials promised to increase that lump sum payment to \$100,000, but that provision was not included in the Pentagon's 2006 proposed budget. Congress will be asked to make a separate appropriation.

When I think back on the past two years, having looked into the eyes of departing soldiers in California, North Carolina and those stationed in the Persian Gulf, I keep asking myself: Was it worth it? Was it worth disrupting the lives of middle-aged citizens who had already served their time? Was it worth it to launch a war based on lies? Was it worth it to be led to war by a group of "chicken hawks" who talk tough but avoided military service themselves? When talking about rebuilding Iraq, shouldn't we also be talking about rebuilding urban America?

It is not surprising that a growing number of young Black men and women are asking these same questions. Would-be recruits are saying that they love their country, they don't mind fighting in a just war, but when it comes to fighting in Iraq: Hell no, we won't go!

George E. Curry is editor of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

Center recalls triumph, tragedy of Oklahoma city

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

On February 25, 2005, I had the privilege and honor of visiting a place about which I have read, taught and written. The emotions I experienced during my visit, as I walked through the corridors of the commemorative Cultural Center reading the information and viewing the historical photos, was nearly overwhelming.

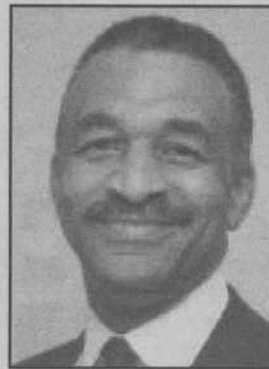
So many faces, so many memories, so much property, so many businesses, and so many lives, all lost in one of America's holocausts. The photos — Black men lying dead in the streets, a Black woman and her son lynched and still hanging from a bridge over the river, and Black people being herded off to concentration camps — were nearly too much to absorb.

I did absorb it though. I took it all in. And although I have spent many hours studying this tragic event, I learned much more in far fewer hours as I toured the Greenwood Cultural Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A feeling of anger, followed by remorse, and that followed by pride, as I stood on that hallowed

ground and remembered — through the news clippings, photos, videotapes, and personal accounts of the survivors — what took place in the Greenwood District of Tulsa, on May 31, 1921.

I wondered how something so heinous, something so dastardly and cowardly, something so blatantly illegal was not only suppressed by the media but also never prosecuted by the authorities. The Greenwood holocaust was the worst tragedy to take place on American soil since the Civil War, the worst riot in our history, and the largest case of destruction and theft of personal property.

The Greenwood District was a bastion of economic success where Black dollars circulated: from the local barber shops, to the restaurants, to the newspaper, to the grocery stores, to the doctors, to the nightclubs, to the drug stores, to the hotels, to the taxicabs, to the theaters, and to many more essential Black owned businesses. After all of that



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circulating, those dollars finally found their way to the funeral homes.

More than 80 years later, Black people are trying to get our dollars to circulate just once — and with Black funeral homes being bought out (or should I say, sold out?) by White conglomerates, even those dollars are less likely to end up in Black cash registers.

That tragic event in Tulsa shows how important it is for Black people to own their communities, to own self-sustaining businesses and to support one another economically. If White folks were willing to go into Greenwood and set fire to the buildings; steal the belongings of Black citizens before torching their homes; conspire with the rich oil barons to use their airplanes to drop nitroglycerin bombs on the district; shoot down men, women and children, even as they surrendered; and then dig mass graves to hide hundreds of bodies, Black business ownership and self-sufficiency must be important in this country.

Although Greenwood was ravaged by a jealous, envious, bloodthirsty mob of White folks bent on destroying the economic success of Black citizens and was literally burned to the ground, it was rebuilt and then, once again, suffered from upheaval by a new destroyer: urban renewal.

Every Black person in this country who has an ounce of consciousness and pride, everyone who values history and anyone who acknowledges the horrendous treatment of Black people in this country, from slavery even to this day in some areas, should visit the Greenwood Cultural Center in Tulsa. You will see and feel the history of a city built and sustained by determined brothers and sisters who understood what economic empowerment was all about. Yes, they absolutely had

to buy and sell among themselves because of segregation; they had no choice.

Today we have a choice, and we choose to do just the opposite. How can Black people in this country, after all we have been through, after all of the suffering our elders endured, not make the choice — the right choice — of mutual support? Maybe it should be mandatory for all of our school-aged children to take a trip to the Greenwood District and study the Greenwood model. If we don't teach them what happened there, who will?

You know our schools will not do it. Maybe we should have annual pilgrimages there, just as we do to Selma, Birmingham, Atlanta, and to other historic sites.

We must etch in our minds and in the minds of our children, the memory of Greenwood and, as other folks say, "Never Forget" what took place there. And we must not only concentrate on the negative things that took place: hundreds of businesses and homes completely destroyed and hundreds of people slaughtered.

We must always remember the very positive things that took place there prior to and after the riot. Memories of our past are already filled with negative issues; the Greenwood District and other Black economic enclaves across this country speak to the positive characteristics of our people vis-à-vis economic empowerment. We must tell that story too.

I strongly encourage you to plan a trip to Tulsa, to walk on the hallowed ground of the Greenwood District; and I urge you to do whatever you can to support the Greenwood Cultural Center — that's right, with your dollars. Add the center to your annual donations list, and let's keep the hallowed ground on which the center was built forever in our hearts and minds. Peace.

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business. CAAN recognizes that the men and women elected to the executive and legislative branches of government are who holds the key to decision-making for development priorities, planning and expenditure and they are largely unaware of African-Americans' needs and the ways in which these relate to socioeconomic development at the community, local and national levels.

This is why it is very important that as we forge ahead full speed with our involvement in the political process we select our best to compete against their best. Recognizing that roughly 80 percent of Nevada's White elected officials are business owners or attorneys, people who thoroughly understand the process and the laws, people who can do or say what they want to because no one is paying them a paycheck or has anything they can hold over their heads, which renders them more effective in getting legislation passed that adequately represents their constituency.

Look to hear from CAAN as we continue to work towards the betterment of our community.