

## OUR VIEW

## Vietnam Redux

War is rarely a cut-and-dried endeavor. For example, a Google of "Iraq just like Vietnam" yielded the following headlines:

*Body counts in Iraq and Vietnam*

*Why Iraq and Vietnam have nothing in common*

*Echoes of Vietnam*

*Dexter Lehtinen on Iraq & Vietnam*

*Some veterans of Vietnam see Iraq parallel*

*Iraq Beginning to Look a Lot Like Vietnam*

*CNN.com - Hagel: Iraq growing more like Vietnam*

*Gulf of Tonkin Story Shows Vietnam Just Like Iraq*

*Ed Driscoll.com: Iraq is Just Like Vietnam*

Similarly, Googling "Iraq not like Vietnam" produces a number of articles disagreeing with the comparison:

*No Comparison: Iraq is Not Like Vietnam*

*Why Iraq is not like Vietnam*

*A Bunch of Reasons Why Iraq Is Not Like Vietnam*

*Why Iraq is not like Vietnam*

*Tony Karon: Iraq is Not Vietnam, But...*

*Recondite: Iraq's not like Vietnam at all...*

The truth is probably somewhere in between. Whether for the war or against, a pacifist diplomat or a war-hawking neocon, most people (according to polls) are disenchanted by the Iraq war and agree a dramatic change of course is needed. For some, it's an all-out pullout; bring the troops home and let the Iraqis make sense of the mess we've made. Others want a gradual pullback, one conditioned on gains made in training Iraqi security forces, empowering lawmakers, bolstering the economy and promoting democracy. And there are some, few in number, who say we can't—and won't—leave Iraq anytime soon.

As much as anything, the troop dilemma (some units are on third tours of Iraq and Afghanistan) is a dilemma within a dilemma. We need troops there to combat terrorists, keep the peace and protect American interests (themselves included). To get those troops, the military must recruit. And, increasingly, the armed forces are targeting youth. In that respect, Iraq and Vietnam are similar.

In Vietnam, you had scores of 19-year-olds fighting. That war physically bruised, psychologically battered, emotionally crippled and financially castrated an entire generation of American men. Soldiers returned home scorned and those without safety nets, internal wherewithal and outside help, found themselves sick, homeless, jobless and hopeless. We're seeing some of those same effects in Iraqi war veterans. Post traumatic stress disorder is high. Many soldiers have lost limbs. Some have committed suicide. Families have been torn apart. A growing number are joining homeless veterans from Vietnam.

Since the Iraq war begun, the military has struggled to meet recruitment goals. Armed with a newfound marketing savvy, however, recruiters fanned out over the country—to small towns, urban malls, Wal-Mart parking lots, high schools, colleges, sporting events, etc.—to talk up the benefits of a life in uniform. The military developed catchy slogans ("Army of One"), did Web promotion, beefed up the financial incentives and even deployed a video game to generate interest. So far this year, the plan is working. In July, the Army announced it was on track to meet its annual goal of 80,000 new recruits. Other branches are also doing better. This should concern all Americans. It should concern everyone because, like it or not, we'll be in Iraq for a while. In a story for slate.com, Phillip Carter and Owen West disputed assessments that the Iraq War is not like Vietnam.

"The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, for example, last July downplayed the intensity of the Iraq war on this basis, arguing that 'it would take over 73 years for U.S. forces to incur the level of combat deaths suffered in the Vietnam war.' But a comparative analysis of U.S. casualty statistics from Iraq tells a different story. After factoring in medical, doctrinal, and technological improvements, infantry duty in Iraq circa 2004 comes out just as intense as infantry duty in Vietnam circa 1966—and in some cases more lethal ... The casualty statistics make clear that our nation is involved in a war whose intensity on the ground matches that of previous American wars. Indeed, the proportional burden on the infantryman is at its highest level since World War I."



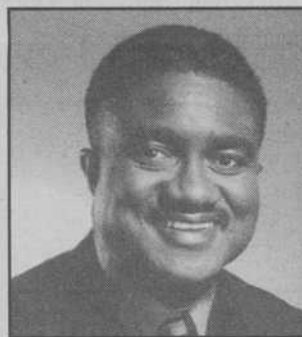
## Haiti more than just poverty

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

MILOT, Haiti - When Ron Daniels invited me to accompany his Haiti Support Project's pilgrimage to the cities of Milot, Cap-Haitien and Port-au-Prince last week, I had mixed feelings. I have traveled around the world, but my trips to the pyramids in Egypt and the Door of No Return on Goree Island in Senegal were the most memorable — and emotional. I had no doubt that a trip to Haiti would also strike a special chord.

Since childhood, my stepfather had told me how Toussaint L'Ouverture led a successful slave uprising against the French, paving the way in 1804 for Haiti to become the first independent slave nation in the Western hemisphere. The invitation to visit an island where Africans were dropped off before slave ships continued the journey north was irresistible. We are all Africans, whether living in Haiti or the U.S.

But that's not how we're labeled. Usually, when public officials or leaders mention Haiti, they invariably describe it as "the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere." With most Haitians earning only \$2 a day, I didn't



GEORGE E. CURRY

know how I would react to seeing such massive poverty. In talking with Joseph Leonard, executive director of the National Black Leadership Forum, I learned that he, too, was experiencing the same kind of conflicting emotions. We wanted to see Haiti, but we really didn't want to see the poverty.

After a four-hour flight from New York's John F. Kennedy Airport aboard American Airlines Flight #837 to Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport in Port-au-Prince, we transferred to a small puddle-jumper for the 30-minute trip north to Cap-Haitien. We attended a reception that night hosted by Minister of Tourism Patrick Delatour, a graduate of Howard University. The next morning, we were bussed 30 miles to Milot (pronounced Mi-lo) and that's when we really got a look at abject poverty.

Although the poverty may be more concentrated in Haiti, it is not noticeably different from the poverty I had observed in Senegal, Nigeria, Egypt or the back roads of Cuba. But seeing so many people — children in particular — being so poor prompted two immediate actions.

First, I realized that poor people back home — even those living in the South Bronx and the Mississippi Delta, the two poorest regions in the United States — seem wealthy when measured against the typical Haitian.

Second, as I looked into the innocent eyes of children, I couldn't help but think: Suppose I had been born here? What could I realistically expect from life? After

reflecting, you thank God for your blessings.

In general, children are the same regardless of where they live. Here, they are curious. They wave eagerly at the sight of tourists and, more than in the U.S., they run around in their bare birthday suits.

Also surprising was the age at which some kids are expected to carry out chores. I saw several girls who appeared to be no older than 5 years old, carrying buckets of water. I saw some, appearing to be 7 or 8 years, carrying large items from the market, balancing them on their heads.

Much has been written about the dire poverty in Haiti, but rarely are articles written about the creativity or

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**Contributing Writers:**  
Asmeret Asghedom  
Chelsi Cheatom  
Debbie Hall  
Lés Pierres Streater  
**Photographer:**  
Isaac Sawyer

**Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief**  
**Parker Philpot, Copy Editor**  
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