

# What's it mean when Bush can't hear?

By Bill Fletcher Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In the last couple of months, there have been some disturbing developments that tell us a great deal about the Bush administration and the danger that it poses to the world.

A bipartisan commission — the "Iraq Study Group" — came out with a series of recommendations on how the USA can deal with the disastrous situation unfolding in Iraq. Drawing from noted Democratic and Republican officials, the study group's recommendations did not go as far as I happen to think that they should. What they did suggest, however, was putting an emphasis on a political resolution of the Iraq crisis. The Bush administration and its allies not only ignored the recommendations, but mocked them as not serious.

We were then treated to the surreal "State of the Union Address," where a very frightened and frightening President Bush essentially told the people he was going to pursue the war his way and his way alone. Following the State of the Union Address, when his speech was treated to the widespread criticism it deserved, he and his allies had the au-

dacity to argue that if there are any who did not like their plan of increasing U.S. troops in Iraq and provoking a war with Iran, that they should come up with another plan.

Well, Mr. President, a bipartisan commission did come up with another plan after months of study, and you disregarded each and every aspect of that proposal, so what sort of plan are you looking for?

The answer, of course, is that there is no other plan than the one that the Bush administration wishes to advance, a plan that shows little chance of success and, even in the words of many of its own supporters, is nothing short of more of the same. Well, except for one thing: Bush's current plans may result in an expansion of the war in Iraq to a war with Iran, and from there, who knows?

So, given that we are dealing with a president who is convinced that he and only he knows what to do, what should people of conscience do?

The first thing that we have to accept is



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that we truly are in a situation of no more business as usual. In other words, it is not enough to express outrage through occasional national demonstrations and then go home and expect that things will improve. Don't get me wrong, national demonstrations are not only important but they are essential. It is just that they are not enough.

We must combine national and local actions, including local demonstrations, letters and calls to local media to express our opinions, resolutions against the war signed by institutions with which we are affiliated, and one very big thing: an African-American Day of Respect and Opposition to the War.

I have raised this in the past, and I will raise it again. African-Americans need to stand up in opposition to policies that led to the Katrina catastrophe and the ongoing catastrophe in Iraq. They are intimately related. The same administration that is prepared to put billions into an illegal war and occupation of Iraq was prepared to ignore all the

warning signs leading to the Katrina disaster and pay precious little attention to the recovery. To add insult to injury, President Bush could not find the time or the willpower to include any mention at all of the ongoing Katrina disaster in his State of the Union Speech.

Dissed once again Black America!

We must take the lead and call a national day where we withdraw our services and funds in protest over what has been taking place. There is no better way to make a political point than through our opponent's pocket book.

In having a president who completely ignores the will of the people, including the views of some of his most trusted allies and advisors, we are dealing with a situation of arrogance bordering on tyranny. In such situations, pretending as if conditions are normal is absurd. If the president cannot hear our concerns, then we must shake things up in such a way that even he can no longer ignore them.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is a long-time labor and international activist and professor at Brooklyn College-CUNY.

# For Blacks, is it boys to men or boys to boys?

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

We have all probably heard of the singing group, Boyz to Men, right? Sounds like a logical sequence of growth, don't you agree? Well, it seems we have another trend going for our Black males today, and that is growing from "men" back to "babies." While they physically grow in stature, instead of growing in mentality as well, many Black men are regressing into children, even as they reach physical maturity.

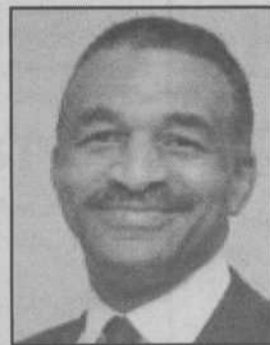
Physically, grown men — especially fathers, who dress, talk and act like teenagers — and even younger boys, are misguided at best. Check them out as they walk along with their sons; both have their caps turned to the side, both are wearing those short pants, which remind me of the little boy with the snotty nose that Martin Lawrence used to portray, and they wear the obligatory basketball or football jersey. If it were not for their physical size, you wouldn't be able to tell father from son.

Of course, we know that many of today's parents are really children themselves, not having shaken off the "street" mentality. They are still ensconced in partying and hangin' out. They have not yet "put away childish things." In addition, a trend that has, in my opinion,

done more harm than good to our Black men is the power of words. Historically, Black men have been called "boys" by White folks, which in the 1960s was like signing their own beat-down warrant, at least in my neck of the woods.

I remember the first day I reported for duty in the Navy. I walked out on deck for morning muster and the Boatswain Mate said, "Where you been, boy?" I was already 21 years old; it was 1966; he was a southern racist; and I was angry about being there anyway. Not a great way to have started my career in the U.S. Navy. I was immediately put on report because I responded by saying, "Who are you calling a 'boy'? I am a grown man." From that day forward, for the next two years I spent on that ship, all the White guys knew the boundaries they could not cross when it came to the words they used to address me.

Out of 750 men on that ship, there were only about 50 Blacks. We knew we had to stand up for ourselves, especially in the mid-60s when many of the men in the Navy were really White "boys" themselves, that mostly



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came from the southern states and had no respect for Black people and the skills we brought to the table. During that period, the Navy was not many years removed from Blacks only being allowed to work as cooks and stewards.

The main thing was our willingness to stand up for ourselves and be men rather than boys, even in the face of sure and swift punishment from the captain of the ship, who was just below God in status. We were willing to fight, against the odds, when someone said the magic word we now call the n-word. We were unwilling to be defined by someone else, especially a bunch of rednecks who found pleasure in ordering us around like we were still enslaved to their fathers.

Today, as I have stated many times, we allow others to define us, and as grown men, many of us have become nothing more than little boys, in our dress, our language, and in our demeanor. I assert that some of what we see is the long-term result of our parents, especially our mothers, referring to baby boys as "my little man." We dress them in adult clothing, and when they hurt, we tell them to

"take it like a man."

In the later years, when boys are supposed to put away childish things and start acting like men, the mothers start calling them "my baby." The girlfriends and the wives refer to their mates as "baby." When grown men hurt, they are held and hugged by their ladies and mothers who comfort them by saying such things as, "It will be all right, baby," or "I know, baby," or "What's wrong with my baby?"

Grown men being called "baby" may seem innocent enough, and you may be asking, "What's the big deal?" But I think we are seeing the negative results of the misuse of a word, just like the other words we have been called and have called ourselves, to the degree that a whole generation of parents and children are really confused about who they are and what their proper roles are.

That confusion has turned us around, put us in reverse, and caused many of our Black males to end up as boys rather than men. Rather than going from "Boyz to Men," they have gone from "Little men" to "Big Baby Boyz."

So what, you say? Words create imagery followed by action. We must teach our male children who and what they are, as early in life as possible, so that as they physically grow into "men," they will also grow mentally. They will no longer speak, act, and think as a child. They will define themselves and speak up for themselves and their children.

Let's start calling our children, especially male children, "babies" rather than "men." And ladies, stop referring to your grown men as "babies." Maybe they will stop spending their money on all of the ridiculous things other folks are selling, turn their caps from sideways, stop wearing those droopy short pants that resemble knickers, make better choices, be real Black men, conscious Black men, proud of who they are and not intimidated by others, and stop committing acts of violence against one another.

James E. Clingman is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African American Studies department.

## Morial

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done. I'm asking for the development of a 12 month to 24 month action plan to reinvigorate recovery and rebuilding as well as ensure greater coordination and collaboration going forward than there has been in the past.

I must say that I am encouraged that the Congressional Black Caucus called upon U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to create a select House committee on Katrina. Maybe this will light a fire in Washington under efforts to bring New Orleans back to life.

I am making a call for the collective leadership on the federal, state and local levels to ensure the survival of one of our nation's greatest cities. Instead of finding fault and

pointing fingers, I'd rather get our collective wits around the table to address this debacle before it becomes our nation's greatest shame. As Sen. Joseph Lieberman, who chaired the recent Katrina hearing, said, the days of playing "gotcha" over the Katrina recovery are over.

The wealthiest nation in the world can spend unprecedented amounts of money to rebuild Iraq but cannot save one of its greatest and most colorful cities? That's downright pathetic.

In a recent editorial, *The New York Times* observed that the current state of New Orleans is a "sad monument to impotence" of the world's last surviving superpower. We've

got plenty of resources for a war in Iraq, but when it comes to helping our own people, they're off the radar screen. What does that say about our nation's priorities? We must act now or risk allowing New Orleans to become an ugly footnote in history.

Shudder to think that in a decade from now when assessing the Katrina tragedy, we realize, that as noted in the editorial, "our grand plans were never laid, our brightest minds were never assembled, our nation's muscle and ingenuity were never brought to bear in any concerted way to overcome the crisis of the Gulf."

Marc C. Morial is president and CEO, National Urban League.