

Attacks on Islam more divisive than good

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I was in the airport the other day awaiting my flight and decided to go into a bookstore. In a prominent position sat a book called "Religion of Peace?" by a Robert Spencer. Intrigued by the title, I examined the copy only to discover that it is one of the crudest and blatantly ahistorical attacks on Islam that I have seen in a quite a while.

Essentially, the author attempts to argue that Christianity is the religion of peace and Islam is not.

My purpose in writing this commentary is not to engage in an attack on any religion. Within both Christianity and Islam, not to mention other religions, there have been strong tendencies to support justice, as well as tendencies towards intolerance and aggression.

Each person has a right to believe and worship as they see fit.

Yet for writers, such as Spencer, to act as if the historical record is clear and decisive against one religion-Islam-is as outrageous as it is ignorant. Anyone remember the role of Christianity in the Crusades; the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain; the African slave trade; the invasion of the Western Hemisphere; or the silence of the Pope on the Holocaust against the Jews?

Okay, now that we have that out of the way, it is worth asking what lies behind such attacks. It is this that I would like to focus

upon for the rest of this commentary.

A section of the ruling group in the USA has decided that in order to ensure U.S. world dominance there must be enemies that we can focus upon. During the Cold War against the Soviet Union (and, to some extent against China), the enemies were the Communists, or anyone who resembled a communist.

The perpetual enemy found itself in all facets of our culture. In science fiction, for instance, the classic "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" — along with a host of other science fiction films and literature — was a metaphor for alleged "creeping communism."

The "Red Menace" was everywhere, or at least so we were told. The Red Menace ensured that allies of the USA stayed in line and that dissent within the USA remained in check; thus, anyone questioning anything concerning the established order became a "communist" or a "communist sympathizer." Case in point: Martin Luther King.

Though communism and socialism have not disappeared, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR did change the world and present significant problems for both those sections of the US ruling group intent on keeping military budgets in the



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stratosphere and those who wanted to make sure that the nations of this planet marched in line after the USA.

The alleged threat of political Islam and Islamic terrorism was then introduced as a substitute for the Red Menace, though this held very little credibility until the ugliness of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

From that moment on, the demonization of the Arab world — such demonization having a long history in U.S. political and cultural circles — and that of Islam went into overdrive. Despite protests by President Bush that he was not attacking Islam and Muslims, the repression that followed 9/11, unmatched by any U.S. response to other forms of domestic terrorism, e.g., the Ku Klux Klan, or the Oklahoma City bombings, clearly targeted and profiled Arabs, Muslims and anyone who "resembled" an Arab, North African and/or Central Asian. Therefore, the new enemy became "the evil Muslim," the "evil Arab," etc. And we were led to believe that they shared nothing in common with our alleged humanity.

It is in this context that ridiculous and insulting tirades against Islam have emerged.

Rather than a critical examination of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, for instance, we are treated — and on a regular basis, too

— to assaults on anything not Judeo-Christian (and often enough, anything not Christian!). History is tossed to the wind and we are led to believe that the 21st century is to be a clash of civilizations, to borrow from the notorious Samuel P. Huntington.

While it is absolutely the case that there are fascist and other extreme elements within the Muslim world, it is also quite obvious that hiding behind the Cross are often extreme right-wing elements. The name Timothy McVeigh should, of course, ring a bell here.

The demonization of Islam and the Arab World serves as a frenzied means to avoid examining U.S. foreign policy and the motivations for various actions that the U.S. has conducted over the years throughout the globe.

What we are witnessing has nothing to do with appreciating a real threat, but instead with instilling fear among all of us regarding an alleged creeping, unknown menace that purportedly seeks to conquer the world.

What these hysterics do, however, are silence those who wish to ask some very basic questions; such as, if these fundamentalists are so bad, why did the USA cozy up to them from the late 1960s on?

I'm sorry. That's right. We are not supposed to ask questions, but rather get in line for the next Crusade.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is a labor and international activist, and is the past President of TransAfrica Forum.

A summer of Blacks' 'dog days' problems

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The recent hullabaloo surrounding dogs has given new meaning to the "dog days of summer."

This year's dog days, just like the unbearable heat in many parts of the country, especially in my neck of the woods, Cincinnati, Ohio, were thrust upon us like an albatross around our collective neck.

With no relief in sight, for weeks we had to suffer the dog days while looking forward to the cool breezes of autumn. I don't know about you, but I grew quite weary of the dog days. Because the dogs themselves had risen to such a high level of prominence and priority, I was afraid the dog days would continue for months.

During August, the dog days were in full effect. Michael Vick's dogfighting case took over the airwaves. I got so sick of seeing the

films of his football practice sessions, his daunting walk into the courthouse, and his home in Virginia with all of the dog paraphernalia.

I hated to watch the news shows that led with the Vick story, especially the ones with enraged commentators who called for Vick's head every day and night. They even brought their dogs on the set while they discussed the Vick case.

Protestors in Atlanta seeking Vick's removal from the Falcons, PETA's demonstrations, and the endless discussions about his future, how much money he makes and how much he will lose, went on ad nauseam.

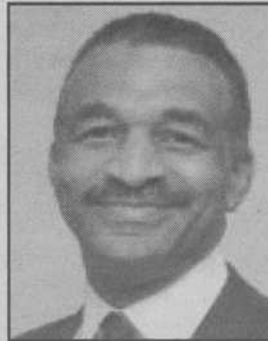
If I hadn't known better, I would have thought we loved the dog days and wanted them to stay around longer than just a few weeks in August.

All of a sudden, it seemed other dog stories cropped up from across the country. In Arizona, sheriff's deputies raided the home of rapper, DMX, and found 12 pit bulls tied up on the property.

They also found buried dogs in his backyard, one of which had apparently been burned. No charges were filed.

This isn't the first time police had taken an interest in DMX's dogs, according to an MTV news website. Back in 2002, the rapper pleaded guilty in New Jersey to charges of animal cruelty, stemming from a 1998 raid of his home.

Police claimed he had neglected 13 pit bulls. DMX eventually plea bargained down to fines, probation and community service, and he even starred in a public-service announcement against animal abuse.



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Here in Cincinnati, a couple was arrested and charged with organizing and running a dog fighting ring. And in another case, a Black woman was arrested and charged with cruelty to a dog that was found dead in her backyard. Her nephew said the dog followed him home, so he tied the dog to the fence without his aunt's knowledge.

The dog choked to death, and the woman was hauled off to jail, tried and convicted, and is currently incarcerated, without bail, awaiting her sentence, which will not be given until sometime in September. Did I say she was denied bail?

We have child molesters running around the streets free on bail, and this sister is denied bail on a dead-dog charge.

Then there is the White woman, an assistant principal of a school, who left her child in the back seat of her Mercedes for eight hours.

The temperature was reported to have reached as high 140 degrees. Of course, the poor little 2-year-old was dead when discovered by someone other than her mother. Also, of course, this White woman is not in jail, but the Black woman with the dead dog is in jail.

By the way, Cincinnati says it needs more jail cells, but maybe we just need fewer dogs.

The most bizarre case of the dog days of summer is that of the "Queen of Mean," Leona Helmsley, who died and left \$12 million to her dog, Trouble, who actually abuses people by biting them. Leona, ever the control-freak, in life and now in death, left specific instructions in her will regarding the dog's care. Did I say \$12 million?

She even left two of her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren out of her will. Her estimated worth was in the billions. How stupid is that? But as they say, "It's a dog's life."

We even saw the dog days of summer in the U.S. Senate Chamber when Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia went on a rant about Michael Vick.

Byrd waved some papers in the air and yelled at the top of his lungs, "Lord help him (Vick) if he is proven guilty; God created the dog to be man's companion; dogfighting is 'inhuman'; it is brutal, sadistic, cannibalistic, and cruelty of the worst kind; 'barbaric, barbaric,' let that word resound across the country; what a sin! I don't understand how human beings can be so cruel to man's best friend."

Byrd's tirade reminded me of a few other barbaric acts, such as, policemen shoving a stick into Abner Louima's rectum and shooting Black men down in the streets with 50 bullets, 40 bullets, or a few less than that.

It reminded me of Nathaniel Jones, here in Cincinnati, who was beaten and suffocated by police officers, and Roger Owensby, who was choked to death by police officers, and Kenneth Walker in Georgia, who was shot by a police officer, and Tyisha Miller, shot some 14 times while sitting in her car, and of all kinds of "barbaric" acts by humans against other humans. Sad to say, we never hear Senators ranting about those "barbaric" acts.

I have said it before: Black life has never been valued in this country, but now it has really gone to the dogs. I don't know "who let the dogs out," but I sure am glad the "dog days of summer" are coming to an end.

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This is so all because the Petraeus set-up will give Bush the legitimacy to continue to dump resources into Iraq, rather than deal with these domestic problems.

Democrats have to come to grips with the fact that it is better to pull the plug on Iraq spending now when it is clearly Bush's war than later when it is their war.

If they wait, not only will their leaders be the targets of media criticism that could savage future election victories, but the damage to the domestic issues referenced above will be much greater that they will have to undo.

Where is the courage?

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