

Soldiers have the right to refuse illegal war.

All in service to this country swear an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, both foreign and domestic. However, they are prosecuted if they object to serve in a war they see as illegal under our Constitution. As such, our brothers and sisters are paying the price for political incompetence, forced to fight in a war instead of having been sufficiently trained to carry out the task of nation-building.

Service members are facing serious health consequences due to our Government's negligence.

Many of our troops have already been deployed to Iraq for two, three, and even four tours of duty averaging eleven months each. Combat stress, exhaustion, and bearing witness to the horrors of war contribute to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a serious set of symptoms that can lead to depression, illness, violent behavior, and even suicide. Additionally, depleted uranium, Lariam, insufficient body armor and infectious diseases are just a few of the health risks which accompany an immorally planned and incompetently executed war. Finally, upon a soldier's release, the Veterans Administration is far too under-funded to fully deal with the magnitude of veterans in need.

The war in Iraq is tearing our families apart.

The use of stop-loss on active duty troops and the unnecessarily lengthy and repeat active tours by Guard and Reserve troops place enough strain on our military families, even without being forced to sacrifice their loved ones for this ongoing political experiment in the Middle East.

The Iraq war is robbing us of funding sorely needed here at home.

\$5.8 billion per month is spent on a war which could have aided the victims of Hurricane Katrina, gone to impoverished schools, the construction of hospitals and health care systems, tax cut initiatives, and a host of domestic programs that have all been gutted in the wake of the war in Iraq.

The war dehumanizes Iraqis and denies them their right to self-determination.

Iraqis are subjected to humiliating and violent checkpoints, searches and home raids on a daily basis. The current Iraqi government is in place solely because of the U.S. military occupation. The Iraqi government doesn't have the popular support of the Iraqi people, nor does it have power or authority. For many Iraqis the current government is seen as a puppet regime for the U.S. occupation. It is undemocratic and in violation of Iraq's own right to self-governance.

Our military is being exhausted by repeated deployments, involuntary extensions, and activations of the Reserve and National Guard.

The majority of troops in Iraq right now are there for at least their second tour. Deployments to Iraq are becoming longer and many of our service members are facing involuntary extensions and recalls to active duty. Longstanding policies to limit the duration and frequency of deployments for our part-time National

Guard troops are now being overthrown to allow for repeated, back-to-back tours in Iraq. These repeated, extended combat tours are taking a huge toll on our troops, their families, and their communities.

Sources: (1) "Barbara Lee's Stand," *The Nation* (October 8, 2001), p. 5. (2) "Iraq Veterans against the War," www.iwaw.org/about.

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The "Personal Responsibility vs. Institutional Racism Debate"

Bill Cosby vs. Michael Eric Dyson

In the early twentieth-first century, a national debate erupted between social policy researchers and educators over the escalating crisis of the "criminalization of black youth." Statistical evidence mounted across the country that African-American young people, as a group, had become stigmatized as antisocial, delinquent, and potentially violent. Such stereotypes profoundly effected the administrative treatment of black youth inside educational institutions. For example, in Oakland, California, during the 2004-2005 school year, black males comprised 28 percent of the city's public school students but accounted for 53 percent of all suspensions. Nationwide that same year, black youth were 17.1 percent of all public school students, but 32.7 percent of expulsions. As of 2000, black youth comprised only 15 percent of their national age cohort, but represented 29 percent of all youth arrested, and 44 percent of all youth in juvenile correctional facilities.

Social conservatives and some religious leaders in the black community began to argue that such social devastation was the result of irresponsible behavior by African-American young people. They criticized the bawdy language of hip-hop music and other elements of black popular culture as socially destructive and nihilistic.

COSBY SUMMARY

It was from this perspective that comedian and philanthropist Bill Cosby addressed an NAACP-sponsored event celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the May 19, 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, outlawing the legal racial segregation of public schools. Cosby recognized the accomplishment of that legal victory, but he was far more concerned with what he considered social deviance and violence by young blacks who comprised a post-*Brown* generation.

Cosby attributed the socioeconomic inequalities and problems that were devastating the national black community to antisocial behaviors, criminality and the absence of parental control in African-American households. He ridiculed the clothing, language and hip-hop cultural style of black young people. "Are you not paying attention, people with their hat on backwards, pants down around the crack. Isn't that a sign of something?" Inner-city blacks who claim that their cultural values are drawn from Africa, Cosby implied, were simply fooling themselves. "What part of Africa did this come from? We are not Africans. Those people are not Africans, they don't know a damned thing about Africa." Cosby made fun of the African and Islamic names many young blacks have. "With names like Shaniqua, Shaliqua, Mohammed, and all that crap and all of them are in jail . . . What's the point of giving them strong names if there is not parenting and values backing it up."

Cosby's rant was laced with humorous asides, but his core message was profoundly conservative, and critical of African-American young people and their popular culture. It said virtually nothing about factors such as racial discrimination within educational institutions and the criminal justice system that have negatively affected black youth. Nevertheless, the national media eagerly picked up Cosby's anti-hip-hop polemic and media pundits debated the implications of his arguments. Many suggested that affirmative action was not only no longer necessary, but for criminalized black youths it was undeserved. In the preparation of this anthology, Cosby's representatives refused to extend permission to reprint the entire text of the comedian's remarks. However, due to the significance of the (above) and, to accompany it, a critical response by cultural critic and religious studies scholar Michael Eric Dyson.

DYSON RESPONSE

Cosby's overemphasis on personal responsibility, not structural features, wrongly locates the source of poor black suffering—and by implication its remedy—in the lives of the poor. When you think the problems are personal, you think the

solutions are the same. If only the poor were willing to work harder, act better, get educated, stay out of jail and parent more effectively, their problems would go away. It's hard to argue against any of these things in the abstract; in principle such suggestions sound just fine. But one could do all of these things and still be in bad shape at home, work or school. For instance, Cosby completely ignores shifts in the economy that give value to some work while other work, in the words of William Julius Wilson, "disappears." In our high-tech, high-skilled economy where low-skilled work is being scaled back, phased out, exported, or severely under-compensated, all the right behavior in the world won't create better jobs with more pay. And without such support, all the goals that Cosby expresses for the black poor are not likely to become reality. If the rigidly segregated educational system continues to miserably fail poor blacks by failing to prepare their children for the world of work, then admonitions to "stay in school" may ring hollow.

In this light, the imprisonment of black people takes on political consequence. Cosby may be right that most black folk in jail are not "political prisoners," but it doesn't mean that their imprisonment has not been politicized. Given the vicious way blacks have been targeted for incarceration, Cosby's comments about poor blacks who end up in jail are dangerously naïve and empirically wrong. Cosby's critique of criminal behavior among poor blacks neglects the massive body of work that catalogs the unjust imprisonment of young blacks. This is not to suggest an apologia for black thugs; instead, it suggests that a disproportionate number of black (men) are incarcerated for nonviolent drug offenses. Moreover, Cosby seems to offer justification for the police killing a young black for a trivial offense (the theft of a Coca-Cola or pound cake), neglecting the heinous injustices of the police against blacks across the land. Further, Cosby neglects to mention that crime occurs in all classes and races, though it is not equally judged and prosecuted.

Cosby also slights the economic, social, political and other structural barriers that poor black parents are up against: welfare reform, dwindling resources, export of jobs and ongoing racial stigma. And then there are the problems of the working poor: folk who rise up early every day and often work more than forty hours a week, and yet barely, if ever, make it above the poverty level. We must acknowledge the plight of both poor black (single) mothers and poor black fathers, and the lack of social support they confront. Hence, it is incredibly difficult to spend as much time with children as poor black parents might like, especially since they will be demonized if they fail to provide for their children's basic needs. But doing so deflects critical attention and time from child-rearing duties—duties that are difficult enough for two-parent, two-income, intact middle-class families.² The characteristics Cosby cites are typical of all families that confront poverty: the world over. They are not indigenous to the black poor; they are symptomatic of the predicament of poor people in general. And Cosby's mean-spirited characterizations of the black poor as licentious, sexually promiscuous, materialistic and wan- only irresponsible can be made of all classes in the nation. . . .

Cosby's views on education have in some respects changed for the worse. His earlier take on the prospects of schooling for the poor was more humane and balanced. In his 1976 dissertation, Cosby argued against "institutional racism" and maintained that school systems failed the poorest and most vulnerable black students. It is necessary as well to acknowledge the resegregation of American education (when in truth it was hardly desegregated to begin with). The failure of *Brown v. Board* to instigate sufficient change in the nation's schools suggests that the greatest burden and responsibility—should be on crumbling educational infrastructures. In suburban neighborhoods, there are \$60-million schools with state-of-the-art technology, while inner city schools fight desperately for funding for their students. And anti-intellectualism, despite Cosby's claims, is hardly a black phenomenon; it is endemic to the culture. Cosby also spies the critical deficiency of the black poor in their linguistic habits, displaying his ignorance about "black English" and "Ebonics." But the intent of Ebonics, according to its advocates, is to help poor black youth speak "standard" English while retaining an appreciation for their dialects and "native tongues." All of this suggests that structural barriers, much more than personal desire, shape the educational experiences of poor blacks. In fact, *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*, Cosby's lauded '70s television cartoon series, won greater acceptance for a new cast of black identities and vernacular language styles. Cosby has made money and gained further influence from using forms of Black English he now violently detests. . .

Cosby also contends that black folk can't blame white folk for our plight. His discounting of structural forces and his exclusive focus on personal responsibility, and black self-help, ignore the persistence of the institutional racism Cosby lamented in his dissertation. To be sure, even when black folk argued for social justice, we never neglected the simultaneous pursuit of personal responsibility and self-help, since that's often the only help we had. In the end, Cosby's views may make white and black liberal fence-sitters unfairly critical of the black poor. Cosby may even convince them that personal behavior will help the poor more than social programs, thus letting white and black elites off the hook. . .

Sources: Dr. Bill Cosby speaks at the 50th anniversary commemoration of the *Brown v. Topoka Board of Education* Supreme Court Decision, May 17, 2004.
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U.S. Senate Resolution Against Lynching, 2005

Between 1880 and 1940, nearly five thousand Americans, most of whom were black, were lynched in the United States. For many decades, the NAACP pressured the U.S. Congress to pass federal legislation outlawing the crime of lynching. Southern white opposition repeatedly blocked these efforts in Congress. Scholars contend that lynching was a form of social control and domination for "uppy" blacks, thus asserting white supremacy throughout the South. On June 13, 2005, the 109th Congress passed Senate Resolution 39, "apologizing to the victims of lynching and the descendants of those lynchings for the failure of the Senate to enact anti-lynching legislation." After the passage of the resolution, eight white senators, all Republicans, refused to sign the document. Although the resolution was an unprecedented occasion, scholars have noted that despite the passage of the resolution black people continue to experience incidents of extreme brutality and extra legal terrorism in the United States.

109th CONGRESS

1st Session

S. RES. 39

Apologizing to the victims of lynching and the descendants of those victims for the failure of the Senate to enact anti-lynching legislation.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES February 7, 2005

Ms. LANDRIEU (for herself, Mr. ALLEN, Mr. LEVIN, Mr. FRIST, Mr. REID, Mr. ALLARD, Mr. AKAKA, Mr. BROWNBACK, Mr. BAYH, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. BIDEN, Mr. ENSIGN, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. HAGEL, Mr. CORZINE, Mr. LUGAR, Mr. DATTON, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. DODD, Ms. SNOWE, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. SPECTER, Mr. FEINGOLD, Mr. STEVENS, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. TALENT, Mr. HARKIN, Mr. JEFFORDS, Mr. JOHNSON, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. KOHL, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. LIEBERMAN, Mr. NELSON of Florida, Mr. PRIOR, Mr. SCHUMER, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. SALAZAR, Mr. VITTER, Mr. OBAMA, Mrs. LINCOLN, Mr. SANTORUM, Mr. SARBANES, Mr. KERRY,