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**Sabotage, Division, or Sedition**  
**By Brother Bede, Institute for Advanced Cultural Studies**  
**BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

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Now is the winter of our discontent;  
made glorious summer by this son of York;  
And all the clouds that low'r'd upon our house;  
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.

-Richard III

After his sermon at the National Press Club in April, there was renewed uproar in my parish about Rev. Wright, based on the belief, asserted no doubt in many other circles, that Jeremiah Wright was now egotistically upstaging his former parishioner. Reverend Wright was accused of selfishly chasing the media so as to effectively sabotage Senator Obama's candidacy. There was Obama, working like the sorcerer's apprentice to get the Democratic nomination - remember Mickey Mouse in the Disney version - and his Christian broom had taken on a life of its own. Much to the chagrin of Obama and his supporters, that attempt to counter the Muslim associations of his name by actively embracing his Christian church has now turned into a media challenge to put down that very Christian pastor who, according to Obama, actually drew him into the Church.

The attack on Obama, using Wright's outspokenness, did not originate with his statements to Bill Moyer or the National Press Club. For decades, US Americans have been conditioned to believe that one third - and in some parts of the US one half - of the population constitute a "special interest" because of their skin color. This has perverted the country's political culture - just like the 19th century Supreme Court decision granting corporations more civil rights than ex-slaves. Rev. Wright probably would not have drawn much attention in the first place had the Right not thought his old sermons would be good ammunition against Senator Obama. He was thrust into the limelight by the campaign - not the other way around. Reverend Wright was correct to see and say that the attack on him and indirectly the challenge to Obama was not even an ad hominem but an attack on the Black Church and on African-American culture itself. In short, it was an attack on the validity of the prophetic voice of the African-American religious experience in a country which itself has no political culture divorced from the Church. In a secular society like some in Europe this would be relatively unimportant. However in a country whose entire socio-political culture is church driven, to attack the validity of the Black Church (by no means a monolith) is even more vile than to attack the polling stations. No white candidate would have been forced to distance himself from the obnoxious pronouncements of New York's John Cardinal O'Connor in order to establish his right to candidacy. Even when the US elected its first Catholic president, there was no serious talk of Kennedy renouncing Cardinal Cushing.

With all respect to Obama's Philadelphia speech in March - truly an excellent piece of oratory - the senator from Illinois is responsible for at least two serious weaknesses which had nothing to do with Wright - his soft-jingoism in aligning himself with Israel and disregarding the truly catastrophic consequences of US policy both for Palestine and for Muslims everywhere - and his failure to address the fact that the majority of people who are going to war for the US are the poor, a substantial number of whom are Black Americans. The same was true of the military in Reverend Wright's day, forty years ago, when US soldiers were being recruited to kill "gooks" instead of "rag-heads." These poor are being made even poorer by the wars the US has been fighting for decades against what used to be the Third World (and is now merely the lower half of an increasingly polarized economic system).

You just have to look at the current on-line recruiting material of the US Army today to see that the US armed forces still fill most of the enlisted ranks with people who are simply glad the military gave them a job or an education - an indication of just how difficult it still is to get either in civilian life if one is not deemed white and/or rich. It is a disgrace to this country when a man or woman has to become a trained killer in order to enjoy a monthly salary and a college education. A presidential candidate who cannot or will not make the connection between the suffering in Iraq (or elsewhere) and the portion of the population who only have the military as an employment option, is irresponsible. If Obama cannot say that because his campaign strategy prohibits it, then he should have the courage to leave those who do not run for president to say what needs to be said.

Now, even black nationalism has been resurrected as a straw man to blame Wright's vocal and independent criticism of yes - the rich, white male rulers of the US - for being "racially closed-ended and culturally closed-ended." Wright's polemic must be like a nightmare for those who currently run the US government since nearly all the

top jobs of the Bush regime have been held by people who were starting their careers when King and Malcolm were assassinated. Their attempts to discredit Obama using Wright rely on pervasive media-maintained amnesia. In Philadelphia, Obama tried to cast another spell which would return his "broom" to an inert state, by associating Wright's preaching with the experience of some prior angry generation, as if a disproportionate share of prison "chain gangs" today were not comprised of African-Americans, as in those bad old days. Was Obama saying that Black Americans today do not have a right to be angry? By accusing Wright of sowing division, he was calling for a return, not to the spirit of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but to the Booker T. Washington tradition.

It is not black liberation theology or Black Nationalism that causes division in the US, but rich, white minority and corporate rule. Even Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. found that just before he was murdered there was a point at which Christian faith required speaking the truth and not only talking about justice but naming the sources of injustice. People cannot fight "injustice", they have to fight those whose actions cause or maintain it (not mythical terrorists or Saddam Hussein, but the upper 10 percent of the US that controls most of the country's wealth). King was shredded for his Riverside Church sermon, especially by his middle-class supporters. Soon after that, he was dead. Reverend Wright preached the sermon that should have reminded Americans of Oscar Romero, the Catholic archbishop of Salvador, murdered in 1980 by people supported by the US government, of US religious workers throughout Latin America also murdered with the tacit consent of the US government in the name of their "peculiar institutions." Reverend Wright's sermons should have reminded even Senator Obama that God did not anoint the US as the divine wielders of lethal nuclear force.

However, to talk today requires a different and perhaps deeper courage when confronted with so many mirages of equality. It is tempting to be confused by these oases of opportunity and forget the desert of inequality through which most people are still struggling.

For nearly thirty years now, the US has had open season on Black Americans in the media - whether talk radio (most of it Right wing) or the decisions of courts and legislatures throughout the country, not to mention the executive. There was no righteous indignation and still is none when whites malign the other half of the Mayflower and Jamestown heritage. If the blood count for "negroes" had the same validity as the pedigree of the Mayflower and DAR descendants, then most African Americans would be colonial bluebloods in the US. But instead, whites were imported with greater intensity after the US civil war to neutralize the impact of slavery's abolition. (Apartheid South Africa was less successful with this strategy.) These immigrants from Europe were given "letters patent" while African-Americans were still being lynched.

In a year which may make the difference between potential peace or another decade of war, a candidate who does not have the knowledge of US history to campaign for justice in your country or the courage to withstand strong opinions, will have no chance - even if elected - in suppressing the demonic forces by which the military-industrial-financial complex dominates the US.

There is nothing flattering to say about the history of the US. On the other hand, that unpleasant odor when the US sits at the table of the United Nations can only be ignored with the strongest perfume or the greatest mendacity. It strains the imagination to believe that a presidential candidate can spend a year campaigning for hope and at the same time not have the courage to speak with a passion for justice. Justice cannot come from ignorance. It behooves a polite and respectful host to ask his disagreeable guest to wash before dining with the rest of us. Or to put it another way, true humility before God means washing one's feet before prayer. That means that a presidential candidate for justice has to educate or if he cannot, then he should allow and encourage others who do.

There is no "Southern Strategy" for Obama to win over the whites who are not already on his side. He has to hope for a fair election (and after two fraudulent presidential elections that will take a lot of hope.) Obama has to deliver not only an end to the trillion dollar war but a way of putting that trillion back into the living conditions of over half the US population from which it has been robbed and which is getting poorer every day.

This is a dangerous road to follow. King and Malcolm were run off that road. But the lesson is not that somehow public speech has to be toned to flatter rich whites and their corporations. People will have to start shouting very loudly to be heard over the din of lies that appear in all the mass media everyday. Not only are Black Americans still getting poorer, there is going to be a steady stream of Black Americans coming back in uniform, psychologically damaged if not destroyed, who will find that just as King said, they will have killed for a "freedom" abroad that eludes them at home - to this very day.

If Obama is the great hope, then the African-American clergy and for that matter any other true patriots should be urging Obama to speak for justice and not only for hope. If people like Wright do not use their exposure to push the agenda of justice and Obama cannot, then who will? The demand for justice is divisive and culturally closed; it divides those who seek justice from the unjust. It rejects a culture that promotes individual or corporate profit at any cost.

Until white Americans have a practical, lived notion of justice, based on recognition of their country's history of systemic injustice maintained to this day by those who rule the US, how will they ever get beyond the empty phrases of that pledge each school child is supposed to take? This means naming names. It is not so long ago in the history of the US that cars could be found with bumper stickers saying, "Kill an Indian, save a walleye". Sins are not committed in the abstract and crimes are not theoretical. Jesus may have asked God to forgive his crucifiers because "they know not what they do." However, "not knowing what they do" is no excuse for the rest.

The problem with Reverend Jeremiah Wright is that there are too few like him who are speaking for justice and truth first - instead of branding the truth sedition. Only when there has been truth and justice can there be reconciliation. Too many people want to take the short cut. They want African-Americans to reconcile themselves to a government which does not represent them, actively disenfranchises them, destroys their homes (and whole cities if need be), imprisons their children and ships the rest off to war, and never ask why or who is responsible. This is the reconciliation "on the

cheap" - cheap for white and corporate America, that is. Reverend Wright offers Obama an opportunity, it is a shame he has declared himself unwilling to take it. That is not Wright's problem. That is America's problem. It is America that is the embarrassment, not Wright - who merely points out what the country still has not deigned to admit, let alone correct.


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