



**BEYOND THE RUINS OF WAR:
THE WORK AND PROMISE OF PEACE**

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It is the fundamental teachings of our Yoruba ancestors in the sacred *Odu Ifa* that “War ruins the world” (96:2), not only because of the terrible toll it takes in human life and physical and psychic injury, but also because of the way it lays waste to the whole world in both a natural and social sense. Nowhere is this more apparent at this moment of history than in the now much-discussed destruction in Iraq. It is not that we have forgotten or minimize the meaning and measure of destruction in Afghanistan, Haiti, Palestine, Darfur and other places of war, occupation, suppression and suffering. But the U.S. is now making such a point of discussing Iraq, although in controlled and calculated ways. First, it discussed Iraq as the centerpiece of its self-granted “pirate right” to preemptive aggression and its premature and wishful claim of victory. Then, it put forth its pathetic public and self-deceptions about exporting democracy, and now it offers its dirty laundry list of lies and illusions about why it is losing and can’t leave its victims to self-repair and self-determination.

The White House line is a mixture of political madness, excused under ruling race/class privilege, and a racial and religious arrogance made more intoxicating with a dizzying amount of unbelievable ignorance. Moreover, it has an eerie ring of Post-Orwellian pig-farm speakese in which invasion is salvation, destruction is deliverance, military dictatorship is democracy, corporate robbery is reconstruction, and occupation is health insurance against the horror of Iraqi self-determination.

But then, as if such everyday insanity in the White House had become airborne and infectious, one hears congressional and candidate echoes of this made-for-TV-movie madness. After all, what else can we call it

when a cowboy president and party, courage-deflated Democrats and morally flexible candidates and fellow congresspersons brazenly tell Iraq to “get its act together or else we are going to leave.” And this is said after a decade of U.S. and British bombing and criminal sanctions against the Iraqi people after the Gulf War and the death, disease, destruction, disruption and suffering this caused. It is said also after the pre-invasion bombing, the invasion and current occupation which have killed over 600,000 persons and wounded and displaced millions, further destroyed and continue to disrupt systems of power, water, food delivery, communications, health, housing, sanitation, roads, transportation, education and normal ways of worship—in a word, the Iraqi world and way of life.

On this fourth anniversary of the beginning of the war against Iraq and Iraqi people, people of conscience, must begin a new discussion of it by first conceding the wrongness, immorality and illegality of the invasion of Iraq and the callous and catastrophic damage it has done to the people and the country. And we should maintain that the U.S. should withdraw, not simply because it’s losing now, but because it was wrong in the first place. Unless we do this, we collaborate in blaming the Iraqis for not meekly accepting the U.S. invasion and occupation and for the casualties, chaos and destruction the U.S. created.

We must insist that Congress respect the voice of the people, not only by voting to end the war immediately, but also by cutting funds for the continuing carnage. We must not let Bush exploit the country’s concern for the troops by equating withdrawal with abandonment, but we must reaffirm our position from the beginning that the best way to support the troops is to bring them

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home and honor the unfulfilled promise of essential benefits and adequate health care.

We must reject the current U.S. approach to the Middle East and world with its racial and religious chauvinism, resource robbery, unilateralism and worship of weapons as the gateway to playing God. If there's anything history has taught us in Haiti, Vietnam, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and elsewhere, it is that superior weapons can be overcome by the superior will of the people, who refuse to be defeated and deny the oppressor any real claim of victory or security, even where they most expect and want it. Also, we must uphold the right of self-determination and freedom from occupation by the U.S. or Israel whether in Iraq, Afghanistan or Palestine and support meaningful exchange with the countries of the area and the end of demonization of people we must work with.

As Africans, we have been most opposed to this war for interrelated moral and social reasons and we have a continuing special role to play in ending the war and in working with other progressive groups and peoples to create a new paradigm of U.S. international policy. It will of necessity be informed and undergirded by an ethics of sharing with rightful stress on human rights and dignity, and an equitable sharing of the goods of the world.

In the sacred *Husia*, Ramses III, pharaoh of Egypt, talks of his work of peace and mentions several good deeds that remain

unavoidable requirements for peace in our time. He begins by saying he repaired the earth, "planted the whole land with trees and vegetation so that the people might dwell in their shade." War ruins the world, both nature and society, and we must repair each simultaneously and substantively. Ramses III goes on to say he made the streets and roads safe for women and men, demobilized the soldiers and sent them home to be with their wives and children, and put the weapons of war away. Moreover, he provided security and sustenance for the people. Indeed, he says, "I was the defense and protection of their persons. And I sustained the whole land whether strangers, the masses, the nobles or the sun people—male and female." Also, he freed the captive and the oppressed and again restored the earth. He says, "I pardoned persons for their wrongdoing and gave them the breath (of freedom). I freed people from the oppressor who weighed down hard on them. I caused everyone to be secure in their towns. I restored the land to good order in the place where it was ruined. The land was well-satisfied during my reign. For I did good for the Divine as well as for the people and I did not take anything belonging to anyone else."

May this legacy be a lesson for our lives and for the work we must do to transform ourselves and society, repair the world and open the way to peace, justice, freedom, security, sustenance and flourishing for all people now and future generations.