

From Baghdad to New Orleans

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We are facing an important historical moment and this moment must be confronted with clarity, vision, and purposeful action. Events in the world are rapidly changing and our ability to put them in a political context is critical. This political context and analysis must allow us to make connections among events that, on the surface, appear not to be connected. The occupation of Iraq and the devastation in New Orleans, for example, are deeply linked and unless we understand these connections we will be lost.

We must confront the ugly reality that we all live in a society and under a system that is willing to spend 300 billion dollars to occupy and destroy Iraq and kill thousands of Iraqis and at the same time ignore its own citizens, leaving them to drown to death, forcibly expelling and dislocating them, and essentially ethnically cleansing the gulf coast of its African-American population.

And I ask you: who is the real terrorist here?

We must confront the ugly reality that our government is willing to invest its massive economic and military resources in the colonial exploitation and imperial thievery of indigenous people of color all over the world and continue its profound neglect, disregard, and subjugation of people of color and people without resources here in the United States.

And I ask you: who is the real looter?

Is than black brother taking milk and diapers for his family the looter? I imagine the media someday showing a picture of George Bush in Iraq with the caption: "Savage looter in Iraq stealing the natural resources of the people of Iraq".

How do we confront the ugly reality that our government is willing underwrite and pay a quarter of a million US dollars to each of 8000 illegal Israeli settlers who left land that was stolen and colonized 40 years ago from Palestine, yet they refuse to give a penny to US citizens who have lost everything and have been forcibly displaced from their own land on the Gulf Coast.

And I ask you: who is real criminal here?

The so-called war on terror and occupations of Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine are in reality a racist war against Arabs, Muslims, Latinos, Blacks, Asians and all oppressed people and it is having a devastating effect on our communities here and in our home countries. Wealth and resources are being consolidated into the hands of the few and oppressed people are being displaced, dislocated, and disconnected by the brutal colonizing juggernaut called "American Democracy".

And this is the beautiful vision of democracy that we are imposing on the people of the Arab

World and beyond.

We are all complicit in this travesty of justice and we must share some of the responsibility. We cannot rely on platitudes and slogans as the sole form of our activism and resistance to these injustices.

Seeing bumper stickers that say "Anybody but Bush" are very disturbing because they simplify the analysis of very complex problems to a single person. Are Cheney, Rumsfeld, Perle, or Wolfowitz really better than Bush? The feckless Democrats are no better; they do not have the spine or the will to stand clearly against the brutalities of occupation in Baghdad or New Orleans.

I would argue that Bush is not the problem. Bush is the symptom. Bush is a symptom of a larger, deeper, systemic problem rooted in a system that believes in the domination and control of people, resources, and markets. It is a system that believes in profits and not in justice and equality for all people. The occupation of Iraq and lack of response in New Orleans have lifted the veil to the vastness of the lies, racism and contradictions of our society and so-called democracy. We need a deeper and more complex political analysis and goes beyond the platitude of the day and that can make the connections between Iraq and Louisiana.

So when we say, "Bring the Troops Home Now", we also mean "Bring Haliburton Home Now", "Bring Kellogg, Brown and Root Home Now", and "Bring the IMF and the World Bank Home Now".

When we say "End the occupation of Iraq", we are also saying, "End all occupations- end the occupation of Afghanistan, of Palestine, of Haiti, of the Philippines, and end the economic occupations of Cuba, Venezuela and Latin America". We are also saying end the occupation of Bayview Hunters Point, Oakland and New Orleans because they are occupied too.

When we say "Collage Not Combat", we are also saying "Jobs Not Combat", "Healthcare Not Combat", "Justice Not Combat", "Dignity and Respect, Not Combat" and "Freedom Not Combat"

And when we say "Free Palestine", we are demanding freedom for all oppressed and occupied people, where ever they may be. When we demand the right of return for all Palestinian refugees, we are also demanding the right of return for all displaced and dislocated people of Louisiana, Mississippi, and the Gulf Coast.

Finally, unless the people of Iraq, Palestine, BayView and New Orleans are free, no one is free.

This is the text of a speech given at Mission High School on September 21st, 2005 for the George Galloway National Tour.

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Dr. Ghannam travels every three months to Palestine where, over the past 12 years, he has established clinics in Gaza City, Jabaliyah, Khan Younis and Deir al-Balah under the auspices of the Gaza Community Mental Health program. The writings of Dr. Ghannam and other friends of Palestine are listed below.

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