

US Congressional Black Caucus Endorses Israeli Apartheid and Current War Crimes in Gaza

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Only 2 of over 40 Congressional Black Caucus members voted against legitimizing the 2009 Israeli massacre of 1400 mostly civilians in Gaza, with seven CBC members abstaining. Last week, with the Gaza death toll climbing toward 1,000 not a single CBC member could be bothered to lift a voice against Israel's genocidal assault of the moment or its ongoing apartheid state in general. Black America should hang our collective heads in shame.

Back in the 1970s, when the Congressional Black Caucus began calling itself "the conscience of the Congress," that was almost literally true. CBC members could be relied upon not just to reliably vote for raising wages and expenditures on housing, health care and education, but to keep the issues of full employment and opposition to unjust war near the front of their public agendas.

By the late 1980s, a gaggle of former CBC staffers had moved through the revolving doors of elite affirmative action to become corporate lobbyists, with the same ethics and table manners as their white colleagues, but with black faces. Thanks in large part to their efforts, by 2000 a tsunami of corporate cash began filling up the coffers of incumbent CBC members, their black replacements, or in the cases of Alabama's Earl Hilliard and Georgia's Cynthia McKinney, their black opponents.

Only a single member of the CBC, Rep. Barabra Lee opposed President Bush's blank check for invading anywhere he pleased in September of 2001, and by the 2003 invasion of Iraq, four CBC members, some of them swimming in donations from military contractors, raced down to the White House to have their pictures taken with Bush as the bombs were about to explode over Baghdad.

By the 109th Congress of 2005-2006 the CBC's political compass had been decisively reset. 2005 was the year of Katrina. For decades there had been predictions that whenever "the big one" hit New Orleans, a city where a majority of residents didn't even own cars, thousands or tens of thousands would perish. I lived in Chicago and read those predictions in the papers there several times during the 80s and 90s. Katrina ultimately proved to be [the excuse for authorities to permanently expel more than a hundred thousand African Americans](#), mostly renters but also entire neighborhoods of black homeowners and black owned local businesses as well. As the highest ranking black politicians in the nation, the Congressional Black Caucus could have demanded and held federal hearings on every aspect of the Katrina disaster and its aftermath, ensuring a real public debate on how the region would be rebuilt and for whom.

But House Democrats were focused narrowly on winning the 2006 election, and in their

political calculus, having Democrats identified as the party of black people was not a winning strategy. Democratic House leader Nancy Pelosi forbade the Congressional Black Caucus from demanding or holding hearings. Only Georgia's Cynthia McKinney defied her, and was forced to partner with House Republicans for the hearings to take place at all. The only CBC member Pelosi allowed to take part in the [Katrina hearings](#) was the lazy and corrupt "Dollar Bill" Jefferson who nominally represented black New Orleans. The rest of the supposedly powerful and influential CBC, from its deans Conyers and Rangel on down stayed away.

If they were still the conscience of the Congress the CBC would have called together some of the nation's black civil engineers, architects, urban planners and others to articulate a vision of a rebuilt Gulf Coast for the people who lived there before. Instead the vision of the Heritage Foundation prevailed. A hundred thousand black New Orleans residents were deported to the four corners of the continental US, their public school system privatized, their rental apartments razed, their health care systems shut down, and the water, electric and gas grids not reactivated for the entire sections of town where they once lived. Thanks to the hands-off attitude of the CBC, President Bush was even able to exclude all journalists from the teams which recovered bodies or the places where remains were assembled, so there is no independent verification of the government's [suspiciously small count](#) of fatalities.

That was when Democrats were still the minority in Congress. We're always told how important it is for Democrats to gain or maintain control of the House. They got that in the 2006 elections, and Democrats have had the White House since the 2008 election as well, though they handed the House back at the end of 2010. Has all that extra power made them bolder in the pursuit of justice? Sadly, no.

Israel's vicious apartheid regime celebrated Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration with the massacre of 1400 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, and the destruction of a great part of the enclave's infrastructure, down to chicken farms and water systems. The new Congress called it righteous self-defense, [with 390 yeas, 5 nays and 22 "present"](#). The CBC was 2 of those nays, Gwen Moore (WI) and Maxine Waters (CA), and 7 of the "presents", Edwards (MD), Ellison (MN), Johnson (GA), Lee (TX), Payne (NJ), Kilpatrick (MI), and Watson (CA).

This month, as the civilian death toll in the latest Israeli criminal orgy of collective punishment mounted toward 1,000, the US House passed a nearly identical resolution, calling this massacre legitimate "self-defense" as well. This time the House vote, including that of the Congressional Black Caucus was [unanimous](#). Not a single member of the CBC, despite their much heralded brand of standing for civil rights and against apartheid here and around the world, bothered to publicly question the racist ethnocracy that is the Israeli state. After signing the blank check with the rest of their colleagues, CBC members Conyers (MI), Lee (CA), Johnson (GA) and Ellison (MN) [tried to cover their shame](#) with a letter to Secretary of State Kerry urging a cease-fire, something which Kerry claims to have been doing anyway.

All CBC members absolutely know that Israel is an apartheid society, with one set of laws applying to Jews, a second to Israeli Arabs and a third to Palestinians. Congressional Black Caucus members know that Israel requires different colored license plates for non-Jews so their vehicles can be profiled at a distance, and Jewish-only roads between settlements carved from the villages of Palestinians and watched over by military garrisons. They know

that Israel refuses to recognize mixed marriages, or even marriages between Palestinians in Gaza and those on the West Bank. Black members of Congress know what an ethnocracy is, and even though they claim to have opposed it in South Africa and here at home, they choose to endorse it in Israel, out of greed and subservience.

As we wrote in BAR [back in 2012...](#)

“Whatever its root cause, the current support of the black political class for Israel’s maintenance of a colonial settler state constitutes a massive, hypocritical hole in their collective souls. Most of the world backed our own struggle against Jim Crow, and we congratulated ourselves for contributing to the downfall of the old regime in South Africa. And now, when our turn comes round again, when the United States is the only government capable of restraining the vicious Israeli onslaught, just by the threat of its disapproval, its non-renewal of loan guarantees or weapons giveaways or military contracts — we are silent.

“For African Americans, our hypocrisy goes deeper and further than our leaders. It filters all the way down to ordinary people whose attachment to their First Black President is so uncritical that they decouple their FBP from any responsibility for his policies. Many Obama supporters say they oppose Israeli aggression and wring their hands wishing the president they voted for and hustled others into voting for would do something different. In the eyes of the rest of the world, as Margaret Kimberley points out, they are as guilty of abetting Israeli atrocities as the rabid partisans of AIPAC...”

What would one of our glittering and supposedly powerful members of the Congressional Black Caucus tell a child in Gaza today? What would they tell a parent whose children have been maimed or murdered, with weaponry probably designed and/or manufactured in the US?

Our nation is the armorer, financier and protector of Israel’s savage ethnocracy. We are all compromised, we are all implicated in its crimes. It’s time to call our black political class, and each other to account. In the coming week, Black Agenda Report will reach out to our friends and colleagues and try to find some new ways to do exactly that.

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