

THE ECONOMICS OF THE BLACK FAMILY

Archon John Hope Franklin



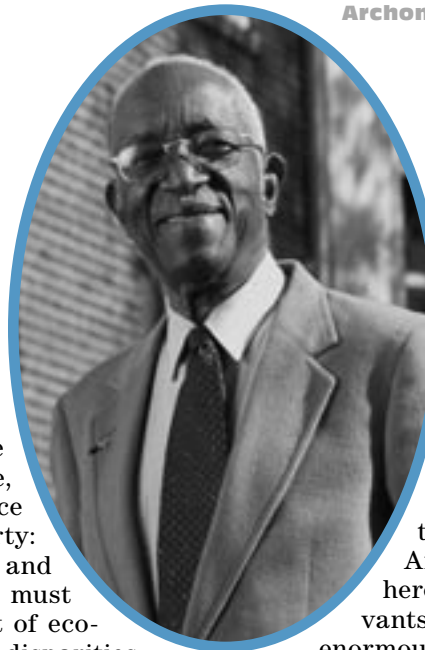
By Archon James A. Hefner, Ph.D.

On March 31, Archon James A. Hefner of Chi Boulé, Nashville, was invited to the University of Georgia to deliver the keynote address at the Eighth Annual African American Families Conference, sponsored by the university's School of Social Work. Archon Hefner is president emeritus of Tennessee State University and currently a fellow in the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard. Following is an excerpt of his speech.

Examining the economics of the black family from four perspectives, in light of the theme of the conference, "The Politics of Race and Persistent Poverty: Impact on Families and Communities," we must consider the impact of economic and racial disparities and offer strategies to reduce such disparities. Sadly, we live in a society in which there has been a retreat from social welfare programs; where "liberal" is a bad word and "socialism" is even worse; where there are few resources to address the ills of the poor; where the case loads of social workers are growing by leaps and bounds; where the cries of children in need of foster care are going unanswered; where mental health hospitals are closing; and where our streets are filled with wanderers and the homeless. There is a feeling that society is unraveling, that the social net has been shredded.

In reviewing the American economy, the unavoidable fact is that African Americans continue to be restricted from gaining access to resources made available to whites. These resources, which economists refer to as land, labor, capital and entrepreneurship, are the principal determinants of economic well-being and status in a system which espouses individualism. Hence, when African Americans enter the marketplace known as capitalism without access to the factors of production, they are at a considerable disadvantage.

John Hope Franklin, in his essay "The Two Worlds of Race," written for *Daedalus* in 1965, observed that "measured by universal standards, the history of the United States is indeed brief. But during the brief span of three and one half centuries of co-



lonial and national history Americans developed traditions and prejudices, which created the two worlds of race in modern America." And it was during this period, when the Africans were brought here as indentured servants in 1619, that "the enormous task of rationalizing

and justifying forced labor of peoples on the basis of racial differences was begun." Forty years later Franklin writes in his autobiography *Mirror to America*: "The longer I live I am inclined to question the capability of the human race to be consistent in its judgment and unswerving in its commitment to lofty, constructive principles. We point with pride to the historic congressional legislation and Supreme Court decisions against racial discrimination. But racial discrimination and even racial segregation continue in blatant as well as subtle forms."

With regard to those blatant and subtle forms, consider the economic circumstances of the African American family from four perspectives: income, economic security, self-determination and economic freedom. By income I mean the quantity and quality of goods and services consumed and the change in one's wealth-holdings within a specified time period. This concept transcends that of money income because it is important to recognize the fact that what one's money can actually purchase is determined by the absolute prices of the goods and services that one consumes. The concept of income is concerned not only with those goods provided by private business firms, but also with services provided by government. Furthermore, a change in one's wealth-holdings is important because it determines one's present

and future consumption in a period of uncertainty. A wealth-owner can always maintain current consumption should his current source of income falter. But changes in the economic circumstances of the African American family also affect its degree of economic security. The economic security of an individual is endangered by a loss of income, by activities that injure health and, in general, by those occurrences that lower the quality of life. More important, the forces that weaken community security overall endanger the security of every family within the community. Programs such as social security, welfare, veterans' benefits and other forms of income maintenance are means of improving economic security, but they do so only if they are administered justly.

The general economic circumstances of the African American family can also be evaluated by ascertaining the degree of self-determination enjoyed by members of a household unit within the larger society. Self-determination refers to the extent to which people have influence on decisions made that affect them. In this age of increasing interdependence among nations as well as among individuals, what Thomas Friedman, author of *The World is Flat* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), refers to as "flattening the world," complete control by any community of all of those matters which affect it, is impossible.

However, some communities and organizations have more influence than others. This imbalance can be readily observed in the area of policy formation, in the access to various types of information, and in the markets of basic industrial goods. When unequal influence exists, self-determination is weakened.

Finally, another criterion for evaluating the economic circumstances of the African American family is the degree to which economic freedom exists. In this context relative freedom is a measure of the ability of individuals to make their own choices about occupation, consumption and residence without consideration of race, color, sex or religion. The income gap between African American and white families is roughly sixty-two percent. In historical terms the gap is the same as when the median income of

black families rose for a short period of time in the late 1960s to a peak ratio of sixty-two percent of that of white families in 1976. The fact that the gap has not narrowed from its 1976 ratio is cause for alarm and should be a priority item for the black community despite the fact that the median family income of black families is at a record high of \$34,369.

It should be noted that the African American middle class has not increased significantly in proportionate size since the late 1970s. It has maintained its current size primarily because of the upgrading of African Americans in blue- and white-collar jobs (especially among craftsmen, professionals and managers), employment gains in high-wage industries, increased quantity and quality of schooling, greater penetration of African Americans into the seniority ranks and benefits accrued from collective bargaining.

The fact that the proportionate size of the African American middle class has remained the same or increased slightly while other African American families have become worse off economically has exacerbated an already disturbing problem within the African American community. The gap in the distribution of income between the black under class and the upper class is widening, and this gap is even larger than the one separating black families from white families. According to the United States

Bureau of Census, the total number of Americans living in poverty in 2004 was 37 million. As Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League, said in *The State of Black America: Prescriptions for Change 2005*: "It is, of course, the responsibility of African Americans, individuals as well as groups, to forge a new more economically secure status for black America, especially for the forty percent of black Americans whose annual incomes hover at or below the poverty line."

According to the Children's Defense Fund, for every five children since 2000 that fell into poverty, more than three fell into extreme poverty; extreme poverty is defined as half the poverty line and in 2001 was \$7,064 a year for



How They Fail (Pantheon Books, 1977), point out that the black Civil Rights Movement had a positive effect: "In appraisal of the postwar black movement, much is made of the fact that the main economic beneficiaries were members of the black middle class... But in fact the black poor also made economic gains, although not through the occupational system. One major expression of the

have the greatest impact on the African American family. We continue to see the need to close the employment and wealth gaps between blacks and whites and address the economic security of the African American family that has been devastated by unemployment and inflation. The black community has limited economic freedom, limited self-determination and tenuous economic security.

However, such suggestions as shifting income redistribution to asset redistribution, building unions and rebuilding cities have been espoused with little results. I am a proponent of the negative income tax (which has not been implemented), which provides the poor with an incentive to work for wages beyond the poverty line and to live in households.

So, what should be the role of social workers in reducing poverty? I don't have a comprehensive answer, but let us suppose that social workers start a welfare rights movement similar to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, whereby through their agencies and the National Association of Social Workers they raise the social consciousness of America to the plight of the poor. Who is better equipped to champion the poor? Who is both an advocate for the family and for the child? Only through solidarity can a group maximize political influence. But even a well-organized, solidly supported welfare movement can fail in the current political environment. Witness how the economic conditions of the poor are obfuscated using "family values" to pit Christians against gays and abortion, and conservatives against welfare reform. In this political community the role of ideology is used abundantly: "no child left behind" deflects attention away from the fact that children continue to be born into poverty, eventually fall prey to a life of crime, and are served by social workers who have unmanageable case loads.

Social workers can learn much from "spin," the preeminent language used today to express ideas, whether true or false, by relentlessly repeating them until they are believed to be true. Social workers should use spin to lobby all groups regardless of political affiliation in the need to join together to engage in social and political action to reduce poverty.

What strategies are needed to reduce the disparities between blacks and whites and their impact on the African American family?

postwar black movement was the rise in demands for relief, especially after 1960 and particularly in the large urban centers of the North."

A retreat of social welfare is often attributed to the Reagan administration, and dramatic reductions in poverty and unemployment to the Clinton administration. There has been a reversal of this trend in the Bush administration. Thus, the mere holding of an elected office does not guarantee economic parity for blacks or even movement toward that goal. Such evidence is reflected in the wealth and employment gaps, and in the inordinate black poverty. The fact is self-determination, like income and economic security, is a weak suit in the black community. The African American family has limited flexibility to select any pattern of consumption, and family members have limited opportunity to choose an occupation or reside in a desired location. Moreover, they are not evaluated without regard to race.

In conclusion, racism and economics remain the societal forces that

What strategies are needed to reduce the disparities between blacks and whites and their impact on the African American family? The first step is to admit that racism directed against African Americans is the American way of life. In the 2005 National Urban League Equality Index, which was created to measure the gap between the status of blacks and whites in the areas of economics, health, education, social justice and civic engagement, the value of the index was 0.73, prompting the report to note: "That figure, drawn from examining the status of African Americans in the five areas of economics, health, education, social justice and civic engagement, was a stunning indication of the glacial pace of the Civil War, the emancipation of blacks from slavery, and the constitutional correction, via the Thirteenth Amendment, of the wrong of the three-fifths clause."

Economists have various remedies for the unprecedented inequality of wealth, income and wages, which in recent years has become ominous.

WHAT LIFE WILL ASK OF YOU

*By Archon Bernard E. Anderson
Alpha Boulé*

Remarks delivered at the Annual Scholarship Convocation, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama, October 16, 2005.

Mr. President, Chairman Andrew Brimmer and members of the board of trustees, faculty, staff, parents, guests and, especially, students of Tuskegee University:

I am highly honored to be invited to join you today for the annual scholarship convocation. Tuskegee University is one of our nation's most distinguished institutions of higher learning – one that has made a great contribution to the education, social and economic advancement of the African American community.

The 125-year history of Tuskegee University and the pathbreaking leadership role played by Mr. Booker T. Washington is one of the most inspiring and compelling stories in the long journey of our nation toward the fulfillment of the American creed. The university has continued to distinguish itself under the brilliant and effective leadership of President Benjamin F. Payton.

In preparing for my appearance here, I asked myself what I might say on an occasion for celebrating scholarship and academic achievement. I concluded that I should direct my remarks to an age-old problem that continues to plaque our nation as we move into the twenty-first century. A problem that was vividly demonstrated by the federal government's delayed response to the recent Katrina hurricane tragedy in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast area. I refer, of course, to racial inequality in American life.

Given the history of this institution, with its deep roots in Mr. Washington's philosophy of education, I want to comment upon the role academic preparation and a commitment to excellence must play in the elimination of racial inequality.

Let me begin with a broad overview of how far our nation stands from



Archon Bernard E. Anderson

full and equal opportunity for all in American society.

Virtually every measure of social and economic well being shows evidence of racial inequality.

African Americans are 12 percent of the civilian workforce, 11 percent of the employed, but more than twice that ratio, 22 percent, of the unemployed.

The black youth unemployment rate remains above 25 percent, and has remained at that level, or higher, for 38 of the last 41 years.

The median income of black families is \$30,000, which means most black families have 65 cents for every dollar enjoyed by a white family.

Nine million African Americans live in poverty. That's nearly one of every four of us. In comparison, fewer than one in ten white Americans lives in poverty.

Economic inequality is also reflected in wealth. The net worth of African American families rose to \$76 thousand dollars during the last decade, but black families still have only 16 percent of the wealth enjoyed by white families.

There are only one third as many black-owned as white-owned businesses, a disparity Mr. Washington spent most of his life working to eliminate.

There are broad disparities in health care that show significantly higher death rates, and shorter life expectancy among black families compared with others in the American population.

There are disparities in education, with wide gaps in academic attainment, the quality of schools and enrollment in higher education between the African American and other communities.

Finally, racial disparities remain in the administration of justice. We simply do not have equal treatment of African Americans and others before the law. Whether we look at the frequency of being stopped while driving, average jail sentences, probation, or prisoners as a percent of arrests, as Professor Cornel West would say, "race matters."

I believe these disparities will be eliminated only when those who are fortunate enough to get a college education, "the talented tenth," bestir themselves and play a larger role in finding ways to address the American dilemma.

There are engineering and technology majors among you, who will study mathematics, physics, chemistry and other natural sciences. You will become acquainted with the work of Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, George Ohm and other classic scholars in your field.

But as students at Tuskegee University, I know you also will become acquainted with the contributions of African American leaders in the field such as Guion Bluford (a native son of my home city, Philadelphia) the first black astronaut, and Dr. Mae Jemison, the first black female astronaut. You should also learn about the work of Dr. Ernest Just, the microbiologist; Dr. Shirley Jackson, the nuclear physicist, and other African American achievers in science.

But as you acquire knowledge and master the fields of applied science



Booker T. Washington

Albert Einstein

Isaac Newton

George Ohm

Guion S. Bluford, Jr.

Dr. Mae C. Jemison

and technology, know that is not all life will ask of you. Life will ask what you will do to apply that knowledge in any way you can to distinguish yourself in the field, and promote equal opportunity for all.

There are humanities majors among you, who will read the work of William Wordsworth, D. H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. But as students at Tuskegee University, I know you will also read the dramatic, sometimes humorous poems of Langston Hughes, the apocalyptic musings of Sonya Sanchez, the rhythmic images of Niki Giovanni and the work of Countee Cullen, once considered the poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance.

You will also become acquainted with *Native Son*, the autobiography of Richard Wright; with James Baldwin's searing, trenchant criticism of America's treatment of black people; and Toni Morrison's portrayal of the black woman slave experience in her 1987 novel, *Beloved*.

But a broad acquaintance with literature and the arts is not all life will ask of you. Life will ask what you will do with your knowledge and appreciation of the literary arts to deepen and enrich our understanding of the

black experience in America and tell our story to all who need to know our aspirations and demand for full and equal opportunity to live the American dream.

There are economics and business majors among you, who will study the work of Alfred Marshall, David Ricardo, John Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman. You might also be introduced to Karl Marx, but I suggest that you not spend much time with him.

At Tuskegee University you will surely become acquainted with the work of African American economists, starting with the writings on financial institutions and economic performance by your chairman and my former professor, Dr. Andrew F. Brimmer.

But you should also read the work on consumer behavior by Dr. Marcus Alexis of Northwestern University, the work on equilibrium analysis by Dr. William Darity at the University of North Carolina and the studies of women and minorities in the labor market by Dr. Phyllis A. Wallace of MIT.

But knowledge of economics and business is not all life will ask of you. Life will ask what you will do with

your knowledge to help eliminate racial inequality in American economic life, and to pursue entrepreneurship to develop and expand black-owned businesses.

No matter what your field of academic concentration, you should strive for excellence in the field and not be satisfied with anything but your very best. Listen to the words of Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, former president of Morehouse College and a mentor to your president, Dr. Payton. Dr. Benjamin Mays said:

"You must remember (and understand) that the tragedy of life does not lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach.

It is not a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled; but it is a calamity not to dream.

It is not a disaster to be unable to capture your ideal, but it is a disaster to have no ideal to capture.

It is not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim is a sin."

To get where we need to be in America, we must begin with a vision of what America can be and a determination to do all we can to make that vision a reality. Let me share with you a personal experience.



Dr. Ernest Just

Dr. Shirley A. Jackson

William Wordsworth

D.H. Lawrence

Ernest Hemingway

William Faulkner



Langston Hughes



Sonya Sanchez



Niki Giovanni



Countee Cullen



Richard Wright



James Baldwin

I grew up in South Philadelphia, which at the time was a racially mixed neighborhood in the nation's third largest city. In grade school we sang the song "America the Beautiful." I'm sure you remember the words. "O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain; for purple mountains' majesty above the fruited plain."

But it was difficult for me and my schoolmates to relate to the song. The only mountains and plains we saw were poster images on the bulletin board.

A good friend, Charles Bowser, now a prominent lawyer in Philadelphia, decided to alter the words of the song to make it a more realistic expression of the vision we hoped America would be. I'd like to share his thoughts with you.

"O' beautiful for spacious skies
For asphalt streets of joy
For decent homes and decent schools
For every girl and boy.
O' beautiful for spacious skies
For jobs and health and hope
For an end to crime, and end to lies,
And an end to devil dope.

O' beautiful for spacious skies
For justice fair and true
For an equal chance for all who try
To make their dreams come true,
America, America, God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea."

As I close, let me suggest that as you approach your studies you might gain inspiration, encouragement and resolve from the words of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 54: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtain of thine habitation. Spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes."

This is a critical time in your life. You must have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and a commitment to excel. Your experience at Tuskegee should be characterized by the joy of learning and the commitment to use the knowledge you acquire not only for personal economic and social advancement, but also for helping to make the promise of America the practice of America.

Continue to be inspired by the words of the Negro national anthem:

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us
Facing the rising sun of a new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.

Thank you and God bless you.



Bernard E. Anderson
Sire Archon of Alpha Boulé
Whitney M. Young, Jr.
Professor of Management at
The Wharton School
University of Pennsylvania



Toni Morrison



Alfred Marshall



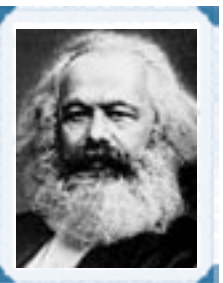
David Ricardo



John Maynard Keynes



Milton Friedman



Karl Marx

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO SOLVING THE TERRORISM PROBLEM



*By Archon Rufus W. McKinney
Epsilon Boulé*

Since the tragedy of September 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center in New York City, the U.S. government finally recognized our vulnerability to random acts of violence perpetrated by individuals and small groups using primitive or very low-tech methods. We now know that such persons can cause massive damage to property and symbols of power as well as human casualties on a scale almost equal to the destruction that can be delivered by the military arm of a powerful nation-state.

So far the response of United States government leaders to this new challenge has been first to demonize the individuals and groups that would use suicide bombs and other low-tech means to attack vulnerable targets here and around the world. It has declared total war on those who would commit such acts of violence against “innocent” civilian populations. It has imposed on its own people restraints and procedures it says will help to protect the population against the threats. The government has undertaken other measures, such as heightened alert levels, more police and military patrols, exclusion zones and physical barriers, all with the intended purpose of making the public feel safer and more secure in their daily lives.

Soon after the attack brought down the World Trade Center and caused great damage to the Pentagon, Congress enacted, and the President gave his approval to, a law that many believe seriously impinges on individual rights heretofore presumed to be protected by the U.S. Constitution. The President now asserts the right to arrest and detain suspects without providing access to counsel or the courts. And prosecutors now bring criminal charges against persons for uttering words considered threatening or dangerous, whether or not such speech is accompanied by specific unlawful acts. In a general atmosphere of public fear and apprehension it is not too hard to find a jury willing to convict. Most polls indicate that many Americans are willing to accept significant curtailment of their personal liberty if that is the price for achieving greater security.

All of these changes are taking place without much public debate as to whether our own behavior as a nation towards others may be a contributing factor in engendering the enmity of people of other cultures or religious beliefs. No significant public figures in government or other institutions in society have called for a serious reexamination of American foreign policy with respect to the Middle East or other areas of the world. What little criticism of our foreign policy that is voiced by leaders in the Democratic Party basically takes the form of claims of being able to do a better job of implementing the policy that already has been established by the government. Our political leaders do not question whether it is wise for America to establish permanent military bases in countries throughout the world. Congress routinely continues to appropriate the money necessary to maintain the bases. And decisions about locating new bases in foreign countries are largely left to officials at the Pentagon. American armed forces now occupy bases in several states that once were a part of the Soviet Union. For decades the United States thought it unwise to seek bases for its military forces in predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East. Now our forces are present in large numbers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and several other nations in the heart of Islam.

The American public appears to accept at face value our leaders’ claims that these foreign bases make us more secure here at home. Saying we were invited or that governments of the host nations voluntarily accept our presence fails to take into account or dismisses any suggestion that people living in areas surrounded by American military power may resent that. Asserting that we have no aggressive intent in being there hardly allays the concerns and fears of the people living in the area. Americans have little capacity to understand that others may be as upset as we were forty years ago when the Soviet Union put missiles and other military forces only ninety miles from our shores. We were prepared to start a nuclear war if those

foreign forces were not removed. Americans are so consumed with the myth of our nation's divine purpose that we are unable to see ourselves as others may see us.

The presence of American forces in Muslim countries naturally arouses suspicions as to what our real purposes are for being there. This administration has made it clear that the American presence is planned to be a long term one. The President has also said our purpose is to change the long established political and cultural status quo of the indigenous people. We want to establish American-style democracy in the place of the traditional ways in which these countries organized their governments and their lives. We want to establish political and other rights for women, contrary to the roles women played in these societies for centuries. We want to extend American-style commerce to these parts of the world. We seek to control access to Middle East oil resources either directly or indirectly. We wish to provide new markets for American businesses and extend to peoples everywhere the "benefits" of globalization. In other words, it is fairly clear that our policy is to impose American or so-called western values and ways of doing things on parts of the world where such values may not be locally acceptable to a great majority of people.

None of the Islamic nations affected by our policies is strong enough militarily to challenge American policy or its power by traditional means. The United Nations, the international institution that some may have expected to try to curb America's efforts to impose its will on other sovereign nations, instead largely has become the tool of U.S. foreign policy. Moreover, America (together with its western European allies) has overwhelming economic and financial power through other international organizations it controls, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It uses such institutions whenever it sees fit to "persuade" governments of lesser-developed nations to act in ways that may be contrary to the fundamental rights and interests of their own people. Often this means protecting American business and financial in-



terests at the expense of the native populations.

The collapse of the Soviet Union left the U.S. in position to project its power anywhere in the world without fear of serious military challenge. The only real constraint on the use of our power is self-imposed – i.e., domestic political concerns or the intelligence, quality and character of our own leaders. Unfortunately, the quality of American political leadership in Congress and in the executive branch in the post Cold War era has not lived up to the high standard set by leaders in earlier times. Our current President has no vision and surrounds himself with small, limited and mediocre minds. They display little curiosity and even less understanding about other peoples or cultures. They prey upon the fears of the American people and rely on those fears to acquire and sustain political power. These conditions are reminiscent of those that propelled Hitler to power in Germany in the 1930s.

In the post Cold War era the realistic options available to governments or people who object to American foreign policy are very few. Respect for national sovereignty has been seriously eroded, if not entirely abandoned, in America's quest to protect "human rights" without regard to national boundaries. Our leaders routinely assert the right to intervene in the affairs of other nations in the name of protecting human rights or conferring the blessings of freedom and democracy in other lands. Elements in some other societies have chosen to wage a form of resistance that is quite unsettling not just to America, but also to governments of other nation-states that cannot protect their people from the encroachment of American money and western values. The tactics used by individuals and non-governmental groups to resist powerful nation-states is called "terrorism." And those against whom it is used like to claim that it is random violence aimed at so-called innocent civilians.

The truth, however, is that the violence is not random. America refuses to acknowledge that the aim of so-called terrorists is to change our foreign policy and our behavior in other parts of the world. Our govern-

ment leaders prefer to say that we are being attacked because “they” hate us and hate the freedoms we enjoy. We continue to insist that the “terrorists” can be defeated by conventional military means. We believe what we do in the world is just and right and cannot be challenged by anyone. Because we are a superpower, our leaders apparently believe that we have the right to project America’s power anywhere in the world. It is not unusual to hear U.S. government leaders refer to this country as “the indispensable” nation, or asserting the right to impose law and order in the world. We indeed have become imperial in attitude and behavior toward other nations.

It is obvious that this nation is blind to what really is behind the so-called terrorist attacks that have been experienced in many parts of the world in recent years. There seems to be a fear that if we acknowledge that political purposes motivate the attacks on us, somehow that confers legitimacy on those attacks. It would expose also the equivalence of “terrorist” methods with those we frequently use to subdue an enemy or to cause an adversary to change course. That is what carpet bombing of

cities in WWII, free fire zones in Viet Nam and dropping “the bomb” on cities in Japan in 1945 were all about.

The President has stated that the so-called war of terror is likely to last a very long time. The truth is that under the current rules of engagement it is highly unlikely that this war will ever end in a manner where one side capitulates. What we have is a clash of ideas and cultures. The current American political leadership thinks it can overcome societies and cultures that hold fundamentally different beliefs by force of arms. It seeks to make the modalities that may have been appropriate in past wars

between nations fit a new paradigm. The enemies we face often are not governments, but scattered individuals and small groups largely without structure or the means of centralized control. No matter how much we may wish it were otherwise, the enemies we now face acknowledge no national boundaries, may exist anywhere and

have no way of knowing for sure what the particular grievances are, but we can be certain that they involve deep resentment of America’s hegemonic status in the world and the arrogance displayed by our leaders in dealing with other nations. I suspect also that many people object to the displacement of local businesses by American-based conglomerates

and iconic institutions such as McDonalds and Coca Cola. Most importantly, however, natives abhor the influence and control America asserts over Third World governments and their leaders. Many see the drive for democracy and elections as mere cover for American business interests to operate freely in other countries.

It would be interesting to see what would happen if American troops were withdrawn from Islamic nations and the U.S. began demonstrating respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all other nations. Suppose the United Nations and other international bodies ceased to be mere tools of U.S. foreign policy. What if we accepted the notion that international law applies to great powers as well as to smaller nations; that we no less than other nations must

be accountable before legitimate, duly established international tribunals.

Until we understand that America is led by fallible human beings, just like all other nations; that its leaders are no more righteous nor less inclined to do evil to “the other” than leaders in other nations; that it has no greater moral authority or insights into the purposes of the Almighty than leaders of other nations; until a measure of humility and modesty return to public discourse about our leadership role in the world, it is unlikely that we will see the elimination or defeat of terrorism.

No surrender,
no armistice,
no peace treaty.
No territory
gained,
no territory lost.
No people
conquered or
subdued.

strike in totally unpredictable ways at any time. Clearly, they have demonstrated this capacity many times since 9/11. It seems unrealistic to envision any agreed upon method of ending hostilities. No surrender, no armistice, no peace treaty. No territory gained, no territory lost. No people conquered or subdued. The “war” therefore may be endless and perpetual if there is no plan ever to address or even acknowledge the enemy’s underlying grievances.

What are the grievances that “terrorists” have against the west that might lead to 9/11-type acts against America and its allies? Of course, we

THE ROOTS OF SUICIDE TERRORISM

By Archon Khephra Burns
Alpha Sigma Boulé

Suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation and not Islamic fundamentalism. This is the thesis advanced by Robert Pape, associate professor of political science at the University of Chicago and author *Dying to Win: The Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, based on analysis of the 462 suicide terrorists attacks that have taken place since 1980. Professor Pape has, in fact, compiled the first

His conclusion: Suicide terrorist attacks are driven, not by religion, but by a clear strategic objective: “to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland. From Lebanon to Sri Lanka to Chechnya to Kashmir to the West Bank,” Pape observed in an issue of *The American Conservative*, “every major suicide terrorist campaign – over ninety-five percent of all the incidents – has had as its central objective to compel a democratic state to withdraw.”

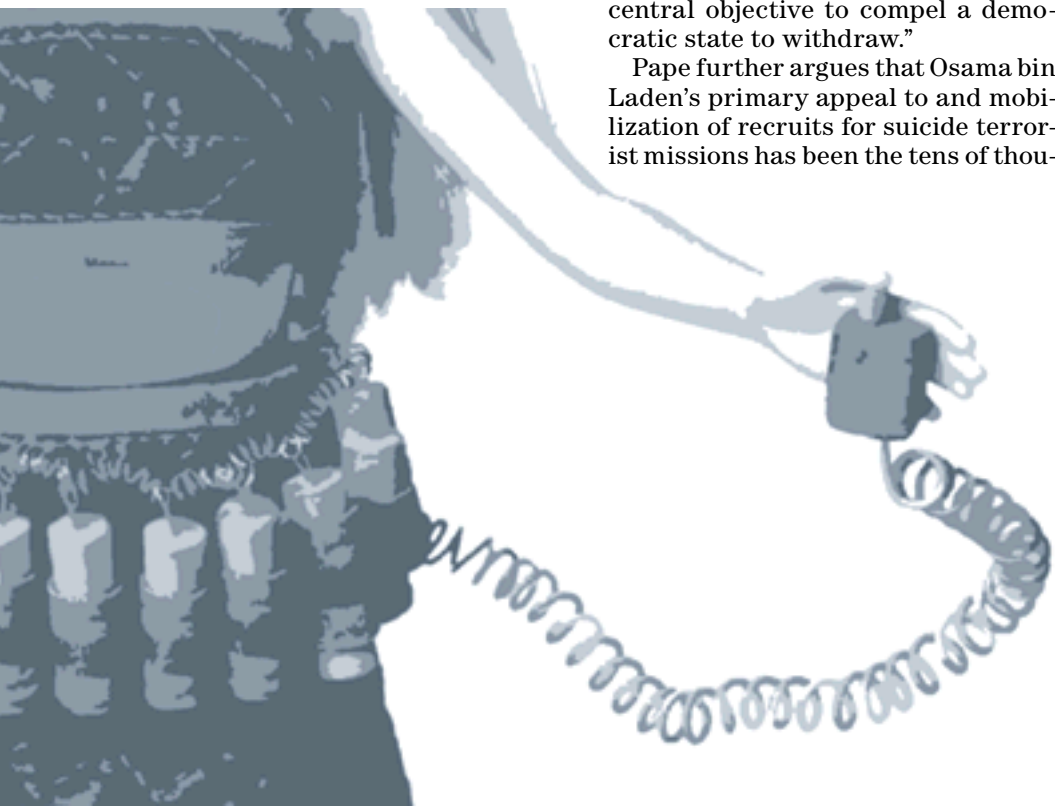
Pape further argues that Osama bin Laden’s primary appeal to and mobilization of recruits for suicide terrorist missions has been the tens of thou-

for Saudi Arabia. The fact that the U.S. seems to be fulfilling that prophecy has been the primary aid to bin Laden and to al-Qaeda as well in their recruitment efforts.

The conventional wisdom (or propaganda, depending on one’s point of view) argues that it is better to have them attacking us over there, in their country, than to have them attacking us here in ours. But Pape says that such reasoning misses the fact that suicide terrorism is driven by the presence of foreign forces over there in the first place; that U.S. operations in Iraq have stimulated suicide terrorism and given it “a new lease on life. Today we have 150,000 troops on the Arabian Peninsula,” he adds, “and are more in control of the Arabian Peninsula than ever before. But the use of heavy military force to transform Muslim societies...is only likely to increase the number of suicide terrorists coming at us.”

So the presence of American troops, not a rejection of American culture (player hatin’ on account of the freedoms we enjoy, as the current administration would have us believe) is the root cause. If Islamic fundamentalism were the driving force, we would expect to see some of the most active anti-American suicide terrorist groups coming out of countries like Iran, which has seventy million people – three times the population of Iraq and three times the population of Saudi Arabia. But, as Pape notes, there has never been an al-Qaeda suicide terrorist from Iran, nor any evidence that there are any suicide terrorists in Iraq from Iran.

Similarly, there has never been an al-Qaeda suicide terrorist from Sudan, despite its 21 million people and Islamic fundamentalist government; despite even the fact that Osama bin Laden spent three years there in the 1990s. Rather, working from the first complete set of data on every al-Qaeda suicide terrorist from 1995 to early 2004, Pape concluded



complete database of every suicide terrorist attack around the world from 1980 to 2004. His research, conducted in native languages – including Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, Tamil and others – as well as in English, has yielded information and insights not only from newspapers, but also from such products of the “terrorist” community as albums, posters, tracts and other commemorative and recruitment materials.

sands of U.S. ground troops stationed on the Arabian Peninsula since 1990. Bin Laden’s speeches and sermons all begin by calling attention to the presence of tens of thousands of American combat forces on the Arabian Peninsula. In 1996 bin Laden warned of a master plan by the United States to use combat forces to conquer Iraq, breaking it up and, ultimately, giving a portion of it to Israel. The U.S., he asserted further, had a similar plan



that two thirds of them were from countries where the United States has, since 1990, stationed heavy combat troops.

Further illustrating his point is the fact that, prior to the U.S. invasion, Iraq had never had a single suicide terrorist attack in its history. "There is no evidence there were any suicide terrorist organizations lying in wait in Iraq before our invasion," Pape writes. Since the U.S. invasion, however, suicide terrorism has emerged, and the number of attacks has doubled each year, with 20 attacks in 2003, 48 in 2004, and more than 50 in just the first five months of 2005. "The suicide terrorists," he says, "have been produced by the invasion.

The demographic data collected suggest that most of these terrorists were "walk-in volunteers," says Pape. "Few are actually longtime members of a terrorist group. For most suicide terrorists, their first experience with violence is their very own suicide-terrorist attack."

"Our best information at the moment is that the Iraqi suicide terrorists are coming from two groups - Iraqi Sunnis and Saudis - the two populations most vulnerable to transformation by the large presence of American combat troops on the Arabian Peninsula."

Not every foreign occupation, however, has produced suicide terrorism. Looking both at patterns of where it has occurred and where it hasn't, Pape found that in virtually every instance where an occupation has produced a suicide-terrorist campaign, there has been a religious difference between the occupier and the occupied community. "That is true not only in places such as Lebanon and in Iraq today, but also in Sri Lanka, where it is the Sinhala Buddhists who are having a dispute with the Hindu Tamils." While occupation invariably engenders some level of resistance, it is the "religious difference that enables terrorist leaders to demonize the occupier in especially vicious ways." But the occupier must be there. Without the presence of foreign troops in the Arabian Peninsula, Osama bin Laden might still rail against the U.S., but his arguments would likely seem remote and abstract in the face of the reality of the day-to-day lives of Iraqis and Saudis.

President Bush has cautioned the American people that the "war on terror" may have to be waged for many years, and some have wondered whether it may not in fact be perpetual - that we have opened a Pandora's Box and released terrors that can't be put back again. But, according to

Pape, the history of the last twenty years shows that, once the occupying forces have withdrawn from the homeland territory of the terrorists, the terrorist activity stops - "often on a dime." Pape cites Lebanon, where there were forty-one suicide terrorist attacks between 1982 and 1986. After the withdrawal of U.S. and French forces, and then Israeli forces to the six-mile buffer zone, the suicide terrorist attacks virtually ceased.

Pape does not suggest that the existing suicide terrorists will not persist in completing their mission; only that terrorist leaders will find it difficult to enlist new recruits. "The issue," he says, "is not whether Osama bin Laden exists. It is whether anybody listens to him." The goal of suicide terrorism is to compel the target society to put pressure on its government to change its policy. And nothing short of a change in U.S. policy and, ultimately, American outlook will reduce the threat of terrorism at home and abroad. Ω

Research gleaned from *Dying to Win: The Logic of Suicide Terrorism* by Robert Pape and from the July 18, 2005, issue of *The American Conservative*.