

William Bennett's 'hypothetical' on racial genocide

A spreading stench of fascism

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The statement of former Republican education secretary and “drug czar” William Bennett that the crime rate could be reduced through the abortion of all African-American children has touched off a political firestorm in the US.

Democratic lawmakers and civil rights organizations have demanded he apologize, while some have called for the termination of his syndicated radio program “Morning in America.” In Philadelphia, parents and education advocates responded by demanding the city’s school district—two-thirds of whose students are black—cancel a \$3 million contract it awarded earlier this year to K12 Inc., a for-profit company chaired by Bennett.

Bennett is a key player in Republican politics and a leading neoconservative ideologue. In spite of revelations two years ago concerning his own multimillion-dollar gambling habit, he still postures as a moral instructor to the nation. It is a lucrative calling, bringing in money from right-wing foundations like those of Richard Mellon Scaife and John M. Olin, as well as retainers from broadcast news networks anxious to air his reactionary opinions.

On his radio broadcast Wednesday, he said:

“I do know that it’s true that if you wanted to reduce crime, you could—if that were your sole purpose—you could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down.”

He continued: “That would be an impossibly ridiculous and morally reprehensible thing to do, but your crime rate would go down.”

Bush’s press secretary issued a terse statement declaring, “The president believes the comments were not appropriate.” The Republican Party responded in almost identical terms.

Bennett himself defended his remarks, calling them “a thought experiment about public policy.”

“I was putting forward a hypothetical proposition,” he said.

Such “thought experiments” and “hypothetical

propositions” have a long and repellent history. Theories about “racial hygiene” and eugenics as a means of curing social problems were widely discussed in right-wing political and academic circles before they were implemented as a policy of mass extermination in Nazi Germany.

Significantly, Bennett in his defense tied his comments directly to the social catastrophe unleashed upon New Orleans and its predominantly black and poor population in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

“There was a lot of discussion about race and crime in New Orleans,” he told ABC news. “There was discussion—a lot of it wrong—but nevertheless, media jumping on stories about looting and shooting, and roving gangs and so on.

“There’s no question this is on our minds,” he continued. “What I do on our show is talk about things that people are thinking.... I’m sorry if people are hurt, I really am. But we can’t say this is an area of American life [and] public policy that we’re not allowed to talk about—race and crime.”

Whose minds—in the aftermath of Katrina—are preoccupied with exterminating black babies? Who are the people who are “thinking” about the fascist policy that Bennett put into words on his radio show?

For most who watched as tens of thousands in New Orleans were left to suffer—and many hundreds left to die—without food, water, medical aid or means of evacuation, the reaction was one of horror and anger over the abject failure of the American government and American society as a whole.

But a significant element within the American ruling elite and among its political representatives saw the chaos in New Orleans as the fault of the victims themselves, and drew the most reactionary conclusions. Just a day after Bennett’s radio remarks, the *Wall Street Journal* published a lengthy editorial comment by Charles Murray, author of the infamous pseudo-scientific and racist tract, *The Bell Curve*. The thrust of the book, published a decade ago, is an unabashed defense of social inequality, attributing wealth

and poverty to superior versus inferior genetically determined intellectual abilities. Its political conclusion is a rejection of all policies aimed at ameliorating social injustice and furthering democratic values.

Responding to the indelible images of human suffering that emerged from the Katrina disaster, Murray's *Journal* article, entitled "The Hallmark of the Underclass," declared that the hurricane merely demonstrated that "the underclass has been growing during all the years that people were ignoring it."

The images from New Orleans, he wrote, "show us the face of the hard problem: those of the looters and thugs, and those of inert women doing nothing to help themselves or their children. They are the underclass."

Murray's arguments, all designed to portray a layer of society that is beyond redemption, are internally inconsistent and based on grotesque distortions of reality. He claims, for instance, that even though the crime rate has dropped for more than a decade, "criminality has continued to rise." Why? Because the rate of incarceration has skyrocketed over the past 25 years. That the bulk of this increase results from nonviolent crimes and the imposition of draconian sentencing for minor drug offenses is not worth Murray's notice.

He then points to what he terms "unsocialized" young males, based upon an increase in the number of those who are not actively looking for work. That the rate of pay for new jobs has fallen even more precipitously is, again, not worth mentioning.

He then delves into a favorite topic of right-wing ideologues and pseudo-moralists like himself and Bennett—the "illegitimacy rate" among blacks and "low-income groups" generally.

Other statistical data doesn't interest Murray. He makes no mention of the new US Census Bureau data showing a sharp increase in poverty for the fourth year in a row. More than 13 million American children now live in poverty, a 12.8 percent rise in the last four years. More than seven out of ten of these children had at least one parent working, many at a minimum wage that has not increased by a penny in the last eight years.

Based on his selectively culled statistics, Murray concludes that no government programs can ameliorate the conditions of life confronting the tens of millions of Americans below the ridiculously low official poverty line.

He writes: "Job training? Unemployment in the underclass is not caused by lack of jobs or of job skill, but by the inability to get up every morning and go to work. A homesteading act? The lack of home ownership is not caused by the inability to save money from meager earnings, but because the concept of thrift is alien. You name it,

we've tried it. It doesn't work with the underclass."

His conclusion: Nothing can be done, because poverty, unemployment, homelessness, the lack of health insurance and all the social ills that befall large sections of American working people are merely manifestations of their own "self-destructive" behavior.

The connection between the theories of Murray and Bennett's "thought experiment" is obvious. If an entire layer of the population is a permanent, genetically determined "underclass," beyond redemption and an unending source of crime and social chaos, who can be surprised that within the ruling elite "final solutions" involving genocide are seriously discussed as "hypothetical propositions"?

The reality is that Hurricane Katrina exposed the crisis and decay of an entire social system based on private profit and the accumulation of personal wealth at the expense of society as a whole. It likewise laid bare the immense social polarization between wealth and poverty in America—a chasm that has widened over the course of decades.

These grim social and class realities have inescapable revolutionary implications that have not been lost on America's ruling plutocracy. Its response will not be one of renewed social reformism or increased concern for a new generation of "forgotten Americans." On the contrary, it is turning even more sharply to the right, embracing the most noxiously reactionary ideologies and relying ever more heavily on the police and military powers of the state.

The resurgence of such fascistic conceptions as those of Bennett and Murray in the wake of Hurricane Katrina's devastation constitutes a grave warning to the American people. Class antagonisms and social conflicts between the super-wealthy oligarchy and the broad mass of working people have become so sharp that they cannot be contained within the traditional political and constitutional framework.



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