

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

## Al Qaeda Plays the Malcolm Card



**W**HEN MEDIA REPORTS emerged that al Qaeda's second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, disparaged President-elect Barack Hussein Obama as a "house negro," it angered many in the black community. However, it also struck a chord.

The Egyptian physician—who is reportedly Osama bin Laden's confidant—actual-

ly used the phrase "house slave," but it was later translated as "house negro."

Al-Zawahiri said, "You [Obama] represent the direct opposite of honorable black Americans like Malik al-Shabazz or Malcolm X," who "condemned the crimes of the Crusader West against the weak and oppressed, and he declared his support for peoples resisting American occupation."

The al Qaeda leader said Obama, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice "confirmed" Malcolm X's definition of a "house slave." He was referring to Malcolm X's distinction between slave-era "house Negroes," who lived comfortably in the big house abetting white supremacy, and "field negroes," who toiled in the fields under the whip, plotting resistance.

But his metaphor was wrong about Obama: If anything, he would now be the housemaster, not the slave.

What's more, Al Qaeda is deploying this particular metaphor to offset Obama's global popularity, particularly in East Africa. Many of these Islamist groups fear the election of a black American president with explicit African roots and symbolic Islamic connections will lessen the anti-American fervor among their recruitment targets.

Although al-Zawahiri overplayed his hand with such a transparent racial ploy, he did manage to draw attention to what could be a troublesome issue for many progressive activists, particular for those who are African-American.

Many advocates of progressive international policies see the United States as "imperialism central." And for good reason. Stephen Kinzer's 2006 book, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*, makes clear this nation's ignoble history in subverting and deposing foreign governments. Kinzer concludes, "No nation in modern history has done this so often, in so many places

so far from its own shores."

The response to al-Zawahiri's comments also revealed African-American Muslims have little love for radicalized Islamists. At a news conference in New York City at the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial, Educational and Cultural Center, a gathering of African-American Muslim leaders denounced al-Zawahiri's remarks as "insulting." The group added, "As Muslims and as Americans, we will never let terrorist groups or terror leaders falsely claim to represent us or our faith."

The statement also noted that radicalized Islamists have, "historically been disconnected from the African-American community generally, and Muslim African-Americans in particular."

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This was a veiled shot at Arabs' historic role in the slave trade and the racism still blemishing some Arab nations, such as in Sudan.

Minister Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of

Islam—which is generally separate from other African-American Islamic groups—has been effusive in his praise for Obama. And Farrakhan has made clear his disdain for groups that employ terrorism.

Despite Farrakhan's aversion to al Qaeda's tactics, his foreign policy prescriptions probably would please al-Zawahiri and "condemn the crimes of the Crusader West against the weak and oppressed." With their man Obama now leading the "Crusader West," where will the Nation of Islam stand when the crusade inevitably continues?

More generally, where will black progressives stand?

No doubt, there will be strong black critics of the Obama administration who will keep the first black president's feet to the fire.

Others may find more to love about America. If the Obama administration decides to bomb Pakistan's tribal territories, for example, these supporters, who once may have questioned the wisdom of unilateral bombing, now will urge critics to "understand the bigger picture."

In October 2002, actor and activist Harry Belafonte called Powell and Rice "house negroes" for their subservience to the Bush administration. He was condemned in the media, but the black community had his back. If Belafonte said the same about Obama today, he would have to take a banana boat back to Jamaica. ■

BY JOHN IRELAND

## Prop Hate and My Family



**L**AST LABOR DAY, my partner and I were legally married in California. Two months later, 52 percent of Californians voted to take our marriage rights away.

Between June and November, more than 18,000 same-sex couples were married in the state. The legal validity of those unions is now in question.

The majority of voters in Arizona and Florida also chose to deny marriage equality to same-sex couples, but one of the most egregious decisions came in Arkansas, where voters banned unmarried couples from fostering or adopting children.

My partner of 15 years and I adopted our son in 2005. More than 500,000 American children languish in our foster system, and gay and lesbian people are increasingly playing a crucial role as caregivers and as parents.

Laws that seek to prevent gays and lesbians from parenting are cruel. First, they harm children who are growing up in foster homes or orphanages, many with little hope for a stable home life. Second, such legislation disenfranchises families that are already being led by gay and lesbian parents. By making it hard for us to legally protect our families, these laws stigmatize our children.

Children who come into “the system” need consistency and love. Skilled and dedicated foster parents are the child’s best bet for stability, but a shortage of qualified foster parents imperils this reality. By excluding gays and lesbians, our most vulnerable children suffer.

Opponents of marriage equality do not want gays and lesbians to become parents, but they are too late. According to the National Adoption Clearinghouse, gay and lesbian parents in America are raising an estimated 8 million to 10 million children.

Raising kids is difficult. All parents want to explain the world to their children and teach them how to contribute as productive citizens.

Many parents tell their children they can grow up to be president some day. We are thrilled that our son will grow up with President-elect Obama as a positive black role model.

But this recent election has also left us with mixed mes-

sages for our son. Through the statewide referendums, society is telling him that we are not a family.

Obama has pledged to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and enact legislation that would, “ensure that the 1,100-plus federal legal rights and benefits currently provided on the basis of marital status are extended to same-sex couples in civil unions and other legally recognized unions.”

Most of the rights, benefits and responsibilities that come from marriage include family and medical leave, Social Security and tax benefits, and equal access to a spouse’s health insurance coverage. With marriage, gay and lesbian partners are guaranteed hospital visitation and next-of-kin status for emergency medical decisions or wrongful death suits. These rights also allow for joint parenting rights, including access

to school records and, in the case of separation, custody and visitation.

No matter what individual states offer, these rights and responsibilities are conveyed on a national level only by the

federal recognition of same-sex marriages.

Massachusetts has offered same-sex couples the right to marry since 2004, and Connecticut began doing so in November. Nine states and the District of Columbia offer civil unions or domestic partnerships. And the sky hasn’t fallen.

Two days after California’s Proposition 8 passed, I marched with a few thousand other Californians to protest the decision. I hadn’t planned on marching, but I needed an outlet for my frustration. We marched through the streets, carrying signs, chanting, smiling and waving. Some commuters honked their horns in support. Others, not so much.

It was heartening to see our many allies, and almost as gratifying to see eye to eye—for a change—those who oppose our equal rights.

The next morning at work, a colleague said to me, “I support your rights, but my husband was caught in traffic for an hour. We didn’t even have dinner as a family until 8:30 p.m.!”

The phrase “as a family” stuck with me. This is a reasonable person, a friend, who does not see my life—the fight for my family—the same as I do.

Absent federal action, we cannot win equal protection for our families. Like with so many crises in our nation’s history, I have faith that there is a uniquely American solution. I have to believe that, with our new leadership, we will find it together. ■

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