

Condoleezza's crimes

By Glen Ford & Peter Gamble

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Although the 9/11 Commission will not lay a glove on her, Condoleezza Rice is finished as a Black political asset of the White Man's (War) Party. Colin Powell, a much smarter and cagier opportunist, will likely escape this administration still clutching his devalued aura, having hoarded some small measure of political capital for himself. This is not true for Condoleezza Rice. Her complete and abject identification with her master leaves Rice with nothing of her own to claim.

"Don't write her political epitaph yet," says commentator Earl Ofari Hutchinson. If Hutchinson means that Rice will always have a job with the Bush family (she served the father, too) or with Chevron-Texaco Oil (where she worked between Bushes), then we agree. Rice's selfless renderings to the white and wealthy have earned her a lifetime of... more of the same. Should she crack under the weight of her own and her masters' lies – as sometimes seems imminent – there is a commodious attic in one of the Bush domiciles where "Condi" can be safely stored.

However, gone are the heady days when rich rightwing society floated cocktail dreams of Condoleezza for the Senate or Vice President in 2004, and even Condi for President in '08. "Hollywood couldn't come up with a candidate as good as she is," said California GOP Chairman Shawn Steele, back in May 2001. "She's emerging as the most popular and most admired woman in America right now." Rice has since rumbled in the heat, no longer Best In Sho. In the false glow of their delusions, Republicans truly believed that Condoleezza Rice was the ultimate political asset – a Black woman who could by her presence wash them clean of racist stench, and then perform the same ablution the next day, and the next. Rice made it easy for the super-privileged to love themselves. Unlike coy Colin Powell, Rice did not bargain or seek her own space, but settled into the very fabric of Bushness. In so doing, however, Rice lost all power of personal agency. Having surrendered everything to the Bushes, her Blackness gradually lost its value as a cloak for her patrons' racism. The affirmative action opinions of a loyal Black servant carry little weight, as Rice discovered in January of last year when Colin Powell's pronouncements on the subject totally eclipsed her own. Her benefactors noticed that, too. That's when the talk of high office, stopped.

Rice's rich white admirers hugged and squeezed her too tightly – until there was nothing

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left but them all over her. It is common in African American circles to speak of “lost” Black souls, but in Rice’s case it is almost literally true that she doesn’t know where she stands and to whom she is speaking.

“[K]nowing what we know about the difficulties of our own history, knowing what we know about how hard it is to build democracy, we need to be humble in singing freedom’s praises,” Rice told the convention of the National Association of Black Journalists, last August. “We” need to be humble about singing freedom’s praises? We Black people, who still tingle to Dr. Martin Luther King’s joyous, boundlessly exuberant “Free at last...thank God Almighty, we’re free at last!” are supposed to be humble about freedoms so dearly won? Rice’s speech was an appropriately cautionary message to privileged white Americans, that they should not so boastfully lecture other nations on America’s democratic credentials. But for a Black gathering, Rice’s words were more than strange – they were evidence of profound personal disorientation. A Black woman who doesn’t know how to talk to Black people is of limited political use to an administration that has few African American allies.

Rice has mused aloud that segregation would have faded away in time without the intervention of the Civil Rights Movement. This is no doubt what rich racists say over drinks in Texas – and what George Bush might have said to Rice back at the ranch in the days when they were both young and he still drank – but it is not what the “most powerful” Black woman in the world says in public if she has a brain in her head.

But Rice is brilliant, we were told. Millions of Black people fervently wished that were true, that Bush’s tenure would at least provide an icon or role model or two, as a consolation prize. Then the esteemed Dr. Rice revealed that she is as stupid as anyone in the White House – with the possible exception of George. “I don’t think anybody could have predicted ... that they would try to use an airplane as a missile,” said the National Security Advisor in the spring of 2002, when Congress finally began delving into how 9/11 could have happened.

Two years later, even Fox news viewers know that al-Qaida’s martyrdom-seekers talked and plotted about little else than using airplanes as weapons against the United States in the years and months before 9/11 – facts known at the time even to serious newspaper readers as well as the world’s intelligence services. Rice marinates in the putrid stew, and even the helping hands of the 9/11 Commissioners – who have repeatedly said they are not seeking to assign blame to anyone – cannot save the last threads of her reputation as an intellect. Politically, Rice is burnt.

We know that Rice was, by virtue of her position, the person most culpable for dismissing the threat from al-Qaida: “I asked, on January 24 in writing to Condi, urgently for a meeting

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on cabinet level – the principal's committee – to review the [anti-terror] plan and I was told I can't have that. It had to go to the deputies. They had a principals meeting on September 4. Contrast that with the principal's meeting on Iraq, on February 1. So what was urgent for them was Iraq. Al-Qaida was not important to them." – Former anti-terror czar Richard Clark, The Guardian.

And, thanks to former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill and others, we know that Rice and the rest of the oil-slicks at the White House chose to spend their pre-9/11 quality time studying petro-maps of Iraq.

When Rice faces the 9/11 Commission, as early as next week, she will hold the administration in her not too capable hands. Unlike George Bush and Vice President Cheney, who will have each other for company, Rice will speak alone and under oath. In ways that she never expected, "Dr. Rice's appearance before the commission will set the stage for the most dramatic testimony since the Senate confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas," said the March 30 issue of NorthStar Network. There is a big difference, however. The Senate enabled the gruesome Justice Thomas to plague Black people for the rest of his lifetime. Condoleezza Rice's 9/11 testimony will seal her political fate. Whether she sticks around for the remainder of the Bush term(s) or not, there will never again be websites and bumper stickers promoting "Condi" for high office. After her testimony is done, she will have outlived her public usefulness to her adopted household. Rice's "political epitaph" is all but written.

History will judge Rice infinitely more harshly than the 9/11 Commission, which is concerned only with harms done to Americans. Rice, Colin Powell and a cellblock full of Bush Pirates deserve to be tried for the highest crimes yet delineated by mankind: crimes against peace (i.e., waging a "war of aggression"), war crimes and crimes against humanity. So, let's hear no more about Condoleezza Rice being unfairly made a scapegoat.