

The Democrats' Twisted Morality

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Revelations of an extra-marital affair two years ago by former North Carolina senator John Edwards has led the [Democratic Party](#) to not only reject the possibility of him running again for vice-president but to rule out allowing him to give his widely-anticipated address before the national convention. According to former Democratic National Committee chair Don Fowler, Edwards no longer meets the "high moral standards" expected of those given such a prominent role in the party's quadrennial gathering.

At the 2004 convention, however, the party leadership apparently saw no violations of its "high moral standards" in Edwards' decision less than two years earlier to co-sponsor the resolution authorizing the U.S. invasion of Iraq on the false grounds that that country still had "weapons of mass destruction" and posed a threat to U.S. national security, a decision he was still steadfastly defending at that time.

In fact, despite Edwards' key role in making possible an illegal and immoral war of aggression, the Democratic Party not only provided him with a prime time address at their convention that year, he was rewarded with their nomination for vice-president of the United States.

In other words, the Democratic Party apparently believes that leading our country into a disastrous war on false pretenses, a decision which has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and has brought untold suffering to millions, is of significantly less moral consequence than committing adultery.

Rewarding Edwards' Earlier Moral Lapses

In September 2002, in the face of growing public skepticism over the Bush administration's calls for an invasion of Iraq, Senator Edwards rushed to the defense of the White House in an op-ed article published in the *Washington Post*. In his commentary, Edwards claimed that Iraq was "a grave and growing threat" and that Congress should therefore "endorse the use of all necessary means to eliminate the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction."

In reality, as was widely assumed by most independent strategic analysts based upon available data at that time and has subsequently been acknowledged by Edwards himself, Saddam Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction" and offensive delivery systems had been eliminated years earlier, he no longer had the capacity to produce new WMDs, and was therefore no longer a threat.

Furthermore, in support of the Bush administration's efforts to repudiate the United States' obligations under international law and to undermine the United Nations and the post-1945 international legal order, Edwards also insisted in his *Washington Post* article that "We must not tie our own hands by requiring Security Council action."

Following the invasion, despite the absence of the WMDs, the WMD programs, and the WMD delivery systems he falsely insisted Iraq still possessed, Edwards defended his support for the U.S. conquest anyway, indicating that these ostensible security concerns were simply the excuse, rather than the actual reason, for his support of a U.S. invasion and occupation of that oil-rich country. In an interview on *Meet the Press* that November, Tim Russert asked the North Carolina senator whether he regretted having given Bush "in effect a blank check for the war in Iraq." Edwards replied by saying, "I still believe it was right."

During his first run for the presidency in 2004, amid growing reports of widespread and systematic violations of international humanitarian law by U.S. forces and increasing public opposition to the war, Edwards continued to defend the occupation and supported a series of resolutions sending hundreds of billions of taxpayers' dollars to support Bush's military conquest.

Virtually every mainline Protestant denomination in the country, as well as the Catholic Church, had already gone on record declaring that the U.S. invasion of Iraq did not constitute a just war, was not morally defensible, and that the country's resources should be redirected toward meeting human needs. Indeed, the vast majority of both religious and secular ethicists in this country weighed in against the very policies so vigorously supported by John Edwards during the 2002-2004 period.

As a result of all this, if the Democratic Party was really concerned about a politician's sense of morality, there would have been plenty of grounds to have marginalized John Edwards at the 2004 Democratic convention.

Yet, despite all this, he was rewarded with the nomination for vice-president over scores of qualified and experienced Democratic leaders who took more principled and moral stands on these and other critical policy issues.

Punishing Edwards' Turn to the Left

Since stepping down from the Senate in 2005 and launching his second bid for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, Edwards appears to have undergone a genuine moral reawakening. Not only did he call for a withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, he -- unlike Senator Hillary Clinton -- formally apologized for his support for the invasion. He called for greater U.S. support for international humanitarian law and a major re-evaluation of U.S. foreign policy. Most notably, he rejected the neo-liberal international economic policies of the Clintons and the Democratic Party establishment, condemned the economic and political abuses of corporate elites, and came to champion the interests of the poor and middle class in ways few serious candidates for president in this country have done for decades.

This became a problem for the Democratic Party establishment, which has long had close relations with the Pentagon and major corporations. There was a clear discomfort over the prospects of Edwards becoming Obama's running mate or even just giving a major address before a nationally-televised audience where he would likely stress the moral imperative of America's social responsibility to its poor and the need to challenge powerful corporate interests.

Revelations of Edwards sexual indiscretion -- which had been rumored for many months but mysteriously became public just two weeks before the convention -- have provided the Democratic Party with the excuse they were looking for to rule out Edwards running as their vice-presidential nominee for a second time as well as to deny Edwards a podium for his populist message at the convention.

The *Washington Post* reported that top aides to presumptive presidential nominee [Barack Obama](#) acknowledged that, in addition to having already dropped Edwards from the short list of possible running mates, "they had been moving to avoid having Edwards speak at this month's national party convention even before his admission."

The recent revelations have also given an excuse for the [Democrats](#) to deny the increasingly progressive former senator any policy-making position in the foreseeable future. The *Post* article quotes Fowler as insisting that "any role for Edwards in a potential Obama administration is 'dead'."

Ironically, former president Bill Clinton, whose marital infidelities by most accounts far surpass those of the more left-leaning Edwards, has been offered a major prime time speech before the convention. In addition, Obama has publicly declared that Clinton, a strident backer of neo-liberal economic policies, will play an important advisory role in his administration.

Yet what is perhaps most revealing in the contrast between the Democratic Party leadership's treatment of John Edwards in 2004 and in 2008 is their apparent belief that having an extra-marital affair is significantly worse than being, as a result of his role as an enthusiastic co-sponsor of the Iraq war resolution, an accessory to mass murder.

It is also profoundly disappointing that Obama -- who, despite the North Carolina senator's earlier war-mongering, praised Edwards in his 2004 keynote address before the Democratic National Convention -- apparently agrees with these distorted priorities.

One cannot help but wonder whether a party and a candidate with such a twisted sense of morality really deserves to win in November.