

## Justspeak: "Who Let the Dogs Out?" Romney and the Republican Party

Written by Dr. Irma McClaurin, Culture and Education Editor  
Monday, 05 November 2012 11:01

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Alexis Charles Henri Clérel de Tocqueville, Gunnar Myrdal, Governor Otto Kerner, Jr. What do they all have in common, besides being deceased and white men? Alexis de Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America*

published in two volumes (1835 and 1840) in which he made observations about the impact of slavery on the newly-formed American society; Gunnar Myrdal ( a Swedish economist) wrote *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*

(1944) on U.S. race relations; and Governor Otto Kerner, Jr. was chair of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder established by President Lyndon Johnson after the 1967 race riots. The Kerner Commission (as the report was called) prophesized "... Our nation is moving towards two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."

In their critical analysis (beginning in the mid-19th century) of the most germane social problem facing the United States of America at the time they were writing, all concluded that America's racial division was its Achilles heel. That is to say, as Black intellectual and global activist, W.E.B. Du Bois so eloquently stated in his seminal 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, "...the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."

Du Bois echoed de Tocqueville's 19th century conclusions and anticipated what Myrdal and the Kerner Commission would confirm forty to sixty years after he had published *The Souls of Black Folk* . Although Du Bois referenced the 20th century, his prophetic statement (and the observations and conclusions of de Tocqueville, Myrdal and the Kerner Commission) are still apropos today.

The U.S.A. that had the "audacity" to elect a Black man as President of the United States is still haunted by the specter of race, and shackled by a structural system of racism that consistently disadvantages non-whites as a group. We still live in a society, which continues to more separate and unequal, despite the gains of individuals from the group, legislation, and attempts like Affirmative Action to level the playing field.

With the decline in the economy, some members of the majority group (whites) as represented by the Republican Party and Tea Party dilettantes long for a return to a nostalgic past in which racial/cultural minorities and women were subordinate (and knew their place in society; and that place was not at the top, and certainly not in the most significantly leadership role of President of the United States of America).

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Historically Blacks, Native Americans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Alaskan Natives and Pacific Islanders comprised the "protected groups" who were to benefit from the Civil Rights Acts and Affirmative Action measures. Today, the category non-white or "people of color" encompasses anyone who is not white. Also, the protected categories have expanded to include the disabled, women, GLBT, and the elderly, who often model their narratives of oppression on the examples and practices crafted by racial/ethnic minorities.

Unfortunately, sometimes in the process of being all inclusive, we have lost sight of some of the HISTORIC and long-standing nature of racism in the United States. Historic racial/ethnic minority groups have a very different experience of oppression than that of immigrants who are newly arrived or of individuals with white-skin privilege who face oppression because of gender, sexual preference, ageism, or disabilities.

Those immigrants who resemble native-born racial/ethnic minorities have a better understanding of this distinction (like Afro-Latinos or foreign-born Chinese) because they are often lumped together and assumed to be a native-born racial/ethnic minority. They experience what we do.

This statement is not a call to establish some hierarchy of oppression, or to pit those facing new formations of discrimination and exclusion against those who face the long-standing and historic formations of racism. This is not an attempt to diminish the challenges faced by newly-arrived immigrants who seek to become citizens and contributing members of American society regardless of how they arrived. It is an attempt to clarify that all forms of oppression cannot be treated monolithically as if they have the same outcomes. They do not. Some who face discrimination have opportunities to "pass," once they have achieved a certain economic and social status, and are able to blend in. Karen Brodtkin, sister anthropologist, described this transformation of the Jewish "ethnic" into a "white person" in her book, *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says About Race in America* (1998).

A similar phenomenon of white-skin passing can be observed in the differences between the experiences of light-skinned Latin's vs those of African descent with darker skin.

Yes, there have been numerous examples of upward mobility among individuals who are members of these historic underserved and disadvantaged populations. There are pockets of Black folk like myself who have achieved a modicum of economic and educational upward mobility. Yet, we also still find ourselves judged by the color of our skin rather than the content of our character and our abilities. And don't get me started on what the additional layer of being a woman adds to the mix—but that is another story.

For now, the recent ramblings of Mitt Romney's national campaign co-chair John Sununu are a throwback to the racist and white supremacy politics and language of post-Reconstruction when Black politicians were systematically disenfranchised and removed from their democratically elected offices. Suffice it to say that if a person of color accused white men of voting their race—which historically is precisely what they have done---there would be a huge outcry of reverse racism (an oxymoron in my mind).

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The problem is that whiteness is considered the normal state of existence. So when whites operate within what Black economist William Darity, Jr calls their "racial preference" and vote white or hire white, no one accuses them of anything unusual, but they are expressing the same preference of which Sununu accuses former Secretary of State General Colin Powell. While Darity describes it as an expression of racial preference, I prefer to call it "the rolodex of inequality."

Throughout my forty-year administrative career, I have observed innumerable times that when opportunities are available, people who have power (and who historically have been disproportionately white) open up their rolodex. The problem is that their files are filled with people who look like them—which means they are more often than not white, and usually male, though white women, including feminists, display the same tendency towards racial/gender preference.

So where is the media dissection of presidential candidate Mitt Romney's refusal to denounce his national campaign co-chair's characterization of former Secretary of Defense General Colin Powell's endorsement of President Barack Hussain Obama for a second term?

"Who let the dogs out?" Romney, his campaign crew, and the Republican Party did, and the big Chihuahua is John Sununu. In Sununu's own words: " Well, I think when you have somebody of your own race that you're proud of being President of the United States,...I applaud Colin for standing with him." This is the same Sununu who also has characterized the President as "lazy and disengaged," after the first debate.

Racial politics have been in full swing since the second debate and escalating but in terms that fall under "political correct." Republicans don't say they don't directly say that it is precisely because Obama is a Black man and an "Other" that whites should not vote for him. Instead they use coded language: "Welfare President," "lazy and disengaged," etc., etc., etc. These are nuanced ways of calling President Obama the "N" word without using the term.

### **The Great White Hope**

The media, with the exception of msnbc's cast of commentator's, have failed the American public. They have not called a spade a spade, unless it is in reference to President Obama. And, they particularly have avoided calling Romney supporters' characterization of the President as racist—which is what it is.

Romney is presenting himself as America's last hope. Let's be clear, he is campaigning as a champion of normativity—returning America to its great past. I don't know about you, but I find that language scary. Because in the "before time" and the past to which they allude, segregation, Jim Crow laws, racial oppression, gender oppression, and homophobia were in full swing, and people who looked like me were politically and economically disenfranchised and subject to unprovoked violence.

Further, Romney as a political candidate for President has failed to demonstrate that he sufficiently understands the need to maintain the separation between church and state, and he

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and his followers seem intent upon moving the United States of America closer to the same kind of religious political rule that is rampant in the Middle East in the form of the Taliban and Islamic law. They just simply want their religious beliefs and Christian law to rule. Is there any difference between the two—opposite ends of the religious spectrum? Maybe not.

It doesn't matter whether the motivation are scriptures about Jesus or Allah. When Thomas Jefferson wrote these words, "I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State."

We seem to have forgotten this in the last several decades. Increasingly politicians are running on religious platforms in which they wish to control the choices women can make over reproduction and in which they wish to legislate who can and cannot marry.

As we travel down this stony path, we are not too far removed from such religiously influenced politicians eventually trying to convince us that slavery was a good thing and that there are fundamental differences between the "races."

Americans should be cautious of the path down which the religious right and its political puppets wish to lead us as a country. Their divisiveness is reflected in their refusal to cooperate with President Obama simply because he is Black. The disrespect with which they have spoken of the President over the last four years, and these recent ramblings are abhorrent.

### **Fight of the Century**

The final days to the election are winding down. And instead of desperate housewives, we have desperate Republican politicians. What other way can one describe Romney's campaign, if not an appeal to whiteness as normal? It is a deliberate nod to racial politics and to racist/white supremacy ideologies and sentiments. The underlying message I imagine is this: "hey white guys, we let him (the black guy) slip into the White House four years ago. Ok, it was a kumbaya moment. What were we thinking? Now we must restore the past—take things back to way they were."

So here we are again. They say history repeats itself. We've just survived the storm of the century, and now we are about to witness the political fight of the century. It's Jack Johnson again in the form of President Obama and his 1908 knockout of Jim Jeffries, billed as "The Great White Hope"—now reincarnated in Mitt Romney.

### **American Cultural Attentional Deficit Disorder Syndrome (ACADDS)**

Attentional Deficit Disorder is no laughing matter. As a professional who worked with students with learning disabilities for over a decade and who has family members affected by ADDS, I know that it is serious stuff in terms of our lack of understanding and our cookie cutter approach to education that does not recognize that ADDS children simply march to the tune of a different drummer. Their timing is different than what we are comfortable with, recognize, and value.

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Society loses when it can't accommodate all of its citizens in all their diversity.

However, the characteristics of ADDS serve as useful metaphors for describing American culture and how we deal (or don't deal) with historical memory. The main characteristics of ADDS/ADHD are " inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity."

As we follow the ups and downs of the polls in which Romney appears to be gaining on President Obama, you have wonder if the American public is paying attention. Do they not recall that President Obama inherited a mess and has done more than a yeoman's in trying to solicit bipartisan support to little avail?

Our capacity to switch sides so quickly as a society may be evidence of a cultural hyperactivity, and finally, when have we ever expected a President to perform the kind of miracles that everyone seems to expect President Obama to do? We are impulsive, almost finicky in our willingness to cast the President aside. Why not hold our Senators and Representatives responsible for their failure to support the President in his plans and legislation? President Obama has encountered political roadblocks against his ideas and exertion of power every step of the way over the last four years.

I have always contended as an anthropologist that America is a culture with an enormous capacity for historical amnesia. We are quite content to forget too much so easily whereas other cultures and societies pride themselves on remembering. The Holocaust is fixed in the world's historical memory. Yet it has taken almost 400 years to create a national African American Museum and to recognize slavery as a form of cultural and social genocide and a holocaust. Go figure.

### **Desperate Agenda: Calling All White Working Class Men ( oops, I mean Voters)....and Anti-Communists Too**

Desperate MEN (since most of those who are the 'faces' of Romney's campaign are male) say and do desperate things. This was true when George Bush invoked "Willie Horton" to appeal to the white fear of a dangerous Black man. It was true when Sarah Palin began her Cold War era character assassination of presidential candidate Barack Hussain Obama as a socialist. And it is true with the on-going blithering of Romney's HDICRBS (Head Dog in Charge of Racial BS) John Sununu.

As citizens, let us not be misled or fooled. These inflammatory pronouncements are not accidental. Sununu, because of his sullied reputation and history as someone noted for making inane comments, is the perfect fall guy to say what Romney and his campaign companions are truly thinking. He says the unsayable, and can get away with it because of his reputation. Why would Romney appoint such a person as co-chair of his campaign, if not as his "gotcha dog?"

### **Vote Forward and Vote for Hope**

And so, the clock is ticking as we enter the last day before the election. Notwithstanding the devastation, delays, and inconveniences caused by notwithstanding Storm Sandy, we have a

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choice to make that may forever shift the future of this country.

We must choose between an incumbent President who has tried his best to lead us to recover from the economic mess he inherited from President George W. Bush; restored global respect for the country; and attempted to achieve bipartisan political cooperation and the contender, Mitt Romney, a trust-fund baby, who appears to be nothing more than a political chameleon. Whatever his party wants him to be, Mitt Romney changes his position. He is the master of business obstifucation. This country deserves better.

### Vote for Hope and the Future

I can't tell you what to do, but I intend to cast my vote for four more years of strong leadership in the form of President Barack Hussain Obama. I don't agree with everything he has done, and he has some corrective measures to make—like paying greater attention to the continuing disenfranchisement of Blacks and other underserved communities who have been even more affected by the economic down spiral of the last six years. The poor in this country deserve as much attention as the middle class. Some of them once were middle class.

President Obama also can't keep straddling the fence on the continuing persistence and pervasiveness of structural racism and its ongoing impact on Black Americans and others groups, including women, in the arenas of employment, access to loans, political enfranchisement, and economic upward mobility.

He must become as passionate about reforming and dismantling the prison system that is more successful at destroying the lives of young Black and Latino men ( and an increasing cadre of young Black and Latina girls) than the educational system is at teaching them the rudiments of reading, writing, and mathematics.

But let's give him the chance. Let's vote to give the opportunity to keep America on a steady path of change and transformation, and keep the Republican dogs at bay for another four years.

Read More:

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation\\_of\\_church\\_and\\_state\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_church_and_state_in_the_United_States) ; accessed 11/1/2012

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