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on issues affecting African Americans
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**Breaking Down the Far Right's Attacks on Michelle Obama
Color of Law**

By David A. Love, JD

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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Are the spouses of the presidential candidates fair game? Republican presidential candidate John McCain - as well as McCain surrogates at Fox News and elsewhere - seems to think they are open for attack, particularly when they are Black.

The Far Right decided to wage warfare against [Michelle Obama](#) after she stated in a Feb. 18, 2008 speech in Wisconsin that "for the first time in my adult lifetime I am really proud of my country. And not just because Barack has done well, but because I think people are hungry for change."

The next day, Cindy McCain, wife of John McCain, took time from her busy schedule of [plagiarizing recipes](#) to attack Michelle Obama's statement. This, despite the rule that [people who live in glass houses](#) should not [throw stones](#). "I am proud of my country. I don't know about you? If you heard those words earlier, I am very proud of my country," Mrs. McCain said while introducing her husband to a crowd in Wisconsin. Sen. McCain reiterated, "I just wanted to make the statement that I have and always will be proud of my country."

Taking cues from their candidate, McCain's shadow campaign staff at Fox News fell in

line and proceeded with racist and sexist attacks against Michelle Obama.

The attacks have relied on three stereotypes about African Americans. The first is the image of the angry, uppity Black woman. Fox host [Bill O'Reilly](#), in a discussion with a listener about Mrs. Obama as an angry and militant woman, suggested that Mrs. Obama should be lynched:

O'REILLY: I don't want to go on a lynching party against Michelle Obama unless there's evidence, hard facts, that say this is how the woman really feels. If that's how she really feels - that America is a bad country or a flawed nation, whatever - then that's legit. We'll track it down.

During a June 14, 2008 discussion about Michelle Obama, Fox News commentator [Cal Thomas](#) said:

THOMAS: Look at the image of angry black women on television. Politically you have Maxine Waters of California, liberal Democrat. She's always angry every time she gets on television. Cynthia McKinney, another angry black woman. And who are the black women you see on the local news at night in cities all over the country. They're usually angry about something. They've had a son who has been shot in a drive-by shooting. They are angry at Bush. So you don't really have a profile of non-angry black women.

The second component of the McCain-GOP-Fox race card strategy against Michelle Obama is the offensive image of the "baby mama." On June 11, [Fox News displayed the words](#) "OUTRAGED LIBERALS: STOP PICKING ON OBAMA'S BABY MAMA" several times while on-air. I decided to consult [Urban Dictionary](#) for a definition of baby mama. The primary definition of the term is:

The mother of your child(ren), whom you did not marry and with whom you are not currently involved.

The secondary definition is more telling:

A term used to define an unmarried young woman (but can be a woman of any age) who has had a child. As mentioned before in another definition, most of the time it is used for when it was simply a sexual relationship, compared to ex-wife or girlfriend. Usually this has a negative connotation, a lot of baby mamas are seen as desperate, gold digging, emotionally starved, shady women who had a baby out of spite or to keep a man. Sometimes they may act like this because of missed child support payments, unfulfilled promises by the father, or convenient sex by the father. Either or both may exist in any situation.

So, to use this term against anyone, in this case a dignified woman from the south side of Chicago with a Princeton and Harvard Law pedigree, the people at Fox know what they are doing.

Finally, the third racist stereotype that McCain's people are utilizing is that of the unpatriotic and un-American Black person. Unveiled characterizations of Barack Obama in the Neanderthal conservative media as a Muslim terrorist who refuses to wear a flag lapel pin or place his hand over his heart during the pledge of allegiance have been plentiful. And when Michelle and Barack Obama pounded each other's fists during a campaign event in St. Paul, Minnesota, one Fox commentator described the harmless and popular hand gesture as a "[terrorist fist jab](#)."

It is common to characterize African Americans as un-American and unpatriotic (translation: ungrateful). And what exactly is patriotism? Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) said that "Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel." In the case of John McCain, perhaps patriotism is endorsing the use of torture, although he was a torture victim, or voting against the G.I. bill, or voting against women's reproductive rights, or hoping to continue an immoral war in Iraq that has claimed thousands of lives and will certainly claim many more.

And McCain and the GOP have surrounded themselves with "patriotic" Americans such as Rev. Rod Parsley of the World Harvest Church in Columbus, Ohio, who said that America was founded to destroy Islam, which he calls a false religion; Pastor John Hagee of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, who said in a late 1990s sermon that Adolph Hitler was sent by God to hunt the Jews and carry out the Holocaust; fundraiser [Clayton Williams](#), who made a comparison between rape and weather, saying that "As long as it's inevitable, you might as well lie back and enjoy it"; and ex-Hillary Clinton supporter turned McCain democrat [Paula Abeles](#). Abeles, who facilitated a conference call between McCain and disgruntled Clinton supporters, led an effort by White descendants of Thomas Jefferson to exclude the Black descendants of Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemings from family gatherings. We won't even get into [Sen. Joe Lieberman](#).

And while McCain may not be able to control all of the statements and actions made by his surrogates or by independent organizations, this belies the point. McCain is the beneficiary of the attacks on Michelle Obama, and he can play good cop while the right-wing slime machine does the only thing it knows - sow the seeds of racial division. The conservative movement has employed this tactic, known as the Southern Strategy, for years, in order to win elections. (McCain knows what they are capable of doing. In the 2000 South Carolina primary, the Bush campaign spread rumors that rival McCain had fathered a Black child.) This time around, unencumbered by morality, ethics, scruples or good taste, it is literally all that they have left. They had the opportunity to rule, and they have turned the nation into a shambles. All out of ideas, and faced with major losses in the Senate, the House of Representatives, and possibly the presidency, they cannot run on the issues, the economy, or their energy policy, or domestic policy, or Iraq, or the environment.

Meanwhile, those who are members of political, cultural and ethnic minorities have every right to be angry at a nation which has for years locked them out of the mainstream, humiliated them, promulgated unjust laws against them, and treated them like anything but a child of God. Yet, these folks, shut out, have emerged as the greatest patriots of all - those who are angry because they see a nation that does not live up to its promise, and who decide to fight to make that promise a reality for all people.

Fannie Lou Hamer was one of those angry Black women that Fox News hates so much, as were Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Barbara Jordan, Shirley Chisolm, Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Audre Lorde, and many others. In their day, they would have received a far better reception from the conservative White men, had they known their place, stayed at home, baked some biscuits and shut the hell up. I do not know if they wore flag lapel pins, although I am inclined to believe many did not.

I do know, however, that these women could have taught John and Cindy McCain, Bill O'Reilly and Cal Thomas a great deal about patriotism.

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journalist based in Philadelphia, and a contributor to the [Progressive Media Project](#), [McClatchy-Tribune News Service](#), [In These Times](#) and [Philadelphia Independent Media Center](#). He contributed to the book, [States of Confinement: Policing, Detention, and Prisons](#) (St. Martin's Press, 2000). Love is a former Amnesty International UK spokesperson, organized the first national police brutality conference as a staff member with the Center for Constitutional Rights, and served as a law clerk to two Black federal judges. His blog is [davidalove.com](#). Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Love.

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