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**Lobbyist Money + Right-Wing Extremists = Tea Party
Color of Law
By David A. Love, JD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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The tea parties that recently took place around the country were billed as a grassroots, bottom-up groundswell against taxes, big government and bailouts. Fox News, apparently promoting itself as the official teabag network, hopes to grab ratings by embracing the pseudo-populist protests as their own.

Republican politicians tried to hitch onto the mean-spirited tea party bandwagon, replete with anti-Obama and racist protest signs. That the GOP wants to associate itself with extremist groups tells you the political party has officially fallen off the deep end. White supremacists, militias, secessionists, conspiracy theorists and wingnuts—the subjects of a new Department of Homeland Security report— apparently have a seat at the table of the Republican Party. With the moderates and even the reasonable, book learning-oriented conservatives driven from the GOP, the extremists are now the base, the mainstream conservatives. They are all that is left of a party in tatters, of what is now a regional political organization— Southern, Christian and almost exclusively white.

No more of this going through the motions about diversity, about the big tent. And I think that is fine, because there is no love lost. Many political observers always looked at their overtures to people of color with a jaundiced eye. But the Republicans are playing with fire now as they court the angry lynch mob. And we have been down this road before.

I speak of a time, during Jim Crow segregation, when opportunistic politicians— the White Citizens Council, or the white-collar Klan— appealed to their unwashed racist brethren by standing against desegregation and voting against civil rights. The white-collar Klan gave a good talk. They stood in front of the schoolhouse door to block the Black students from attending class, but they kept their hands clean. Meanwhile, the angry mob, Klansmen and other domestic terrorists, did the dirty work. They acted with a wink and a nod from the respectable White-collar Klan, and took matters into

their own hands by burning crosses, lynching civil rights workers, and bombing Black churches. And this is the arrangement that the GOP appears to be establishing with their base today.

From an organizational point of view, the tea parties are a prime example of “astroturfing”, top-down machinations operating under the guise of a faux grassroots movement—like a phony, conservative version of [MoveOn.org](#), but operated by a corporate puppetmaster. In this case, as was reported in [The Atlantic](#) and [ThinkProgress](#), they are being led by corporate lobbyist-run, Republican-affiliated front groups and think-tanks: [FreedomWorks](#), a conservative action group led by former U.S. House Majority Leader Dick Armey; the free-market group [Americans For Prosperity](#), and the online-oriented, free-market group [DontGo Movement](#), which was born out of last year’s offshore drilling debate in Congress. These organizations are writing the press releases and talking points, thinking up the ideas for the signs, setting up the conference calls, you name it.

Americans For Prosperity operates through the generosity of philanthropies such as the ultra-conservative [Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation](#) (which bankrolled [Ward Connerly’s anti-affirmative action](#) ballot initiatives, and *The Bell Curve* author Charles Murray), and the pro-oil drilling Koch Family foundations.

In accordance with [the interests of Armey’s client base](#), FreedomWorks has lobbied for the privatization of Social Security, and the deregulation of the life insurance industry. It supports the status quo in America’s use of fossil fuels, and has lobbied against healthcare reform. Further, FreedomWorks has received [funding from telephone giants Verizon and AT&T](#), and has opposed net neutrality legislation that would keep the Internet democratic and open. One FreedomWorks funder is the Scaife Foundation, from Richard Mellon Scaife, key patron of the American Right.

So, these are the White-collar interests behind the tea parties. But what of the angry, disgruntled masses, the violent ones that’ll “git ‘er done”? Well, the Department of Homeland Security just issued a report called [“Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment.”](#) According to the report, the current economic downturn and the election of an African American president have provided recruitment opportunities for White supremacist and radical right-wing groups. As the report warns, “the consequences of a prolonged economic downturn—including real estate foreclosures, unemployment, and an inability to obtain credit—could create a fertile recruiting environment for rightwing extremists and even result in confrontations between such groups and government authorities similar to those in the past.”

The current situation is not unlike the 1990s, when angst over a recession fed paranoia, and conspiracy theories about the end times, martial law and the suspension of the U.S. Constitution. The environment led to the targeting of government buildings and law enforcement, and resulted in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. It was the largest terrorist attack on U.S. soil before September 11, 2001, in which a bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building claimed 168 lives and left over 800 people injured.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, in 2008 there were 926 hate groups in the U.S.— more than a 4 percent increase from 888 groups in 2007, and an over 50 percent increase since 2000, when 602 groups were active.

The DHS report notes that disgruntled veterans from the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are recruited by white supremacist groups, exploited for the training and skills they acquire in the military. Let’s not forget that Oklahoma City bomber Timothy

McVeigh was a veteran of Operation Desert Storm in 1990-1991.

These right-wing groups are united by their hatred of immigration and a frustration over perceived government inaction on the issue, and they perpetrate hate crimes against Latinos. And in their hostility towards gun control legislation—such as assault weapons bans and proposed universal handgun registration—they stockpile weapons and ammunition, and engage in paramilitary training.

These extremist organizations are also united by their concern over the election of President Obama, which has translated into new recruits. Can we forget the blood-lust at the McCain-Palin rallies, in which crowd participants called Obama a terrorist and a traitor, carried around Obama monkey dolls and called for his death? During the 2008 presidential campaign, then-candidate Obama received more threats than any other candidate in recent memory, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. Moreover, several white supremacists were arrested for plotting to assassinate him or threatening to do so.

And the tea parties represent another venue, another outlet for racist and extremist sentiment, all funded by right-wing corporate interests. Consider some of the signs that were held by teabag protestors:

- At a Madison, Wisconsin teabag rally: "Obama is the anti-Christ!" "Obama's Plan – White Slavery."
- In Chicago: "The American Taxpayers Are The Jews For Obama's Ovens."
- Philadelphia: "Barack Hussein Obama – The New Face of Hitler."
- Fresno, California: "Impeach Osama Obama a.k.a. Hussein."
- In Columbia, S.C., an elderly man held a large sign which read "Barack Obama supports Abortion, Sodomy, Socialism and The New World Order."
- At a Washington, DC protest, one man held a sign which read "Stand idly by while some Kenyan tries to destroy America? WAP!! I don't think so!!! Homey don't play dat!!!"

Sadly, under this economic and political climate, some elected officials try to tap into this extremist and racist anger with calls for secession and states' rights, time-tested racist code words for the suppression of civil rights of African Americans. And the half-baked [rejection of the stimulus money](#) by some Republican governors, particularly in Southern states with considerable poverty and large populations of color, smacks of traditional conservative opposition to social programs on the grounds that they'll help Black and Brown people. It's funny until somebody gets hurt, as they always say.

So, the white-collar Klan and the regular Klan have entered the 21st century, and what the government intends to do about it this time around remains to be seen. But it is certain that we can't sleep on this one.

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