

# **The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r**

An independent weekly internet magazine  
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,  
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,  
analysis and investigations on issues affecting  
African Americans and the African world.

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## **Healthcare Reform Is America's Anti-Theft Device Color of Law**

**By David A. Love, JD**

**BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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James Baldwin warned: "It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have."

These poignant words come to mind when I think about that freak show, that hot mess that has passed for a dialogue on healthcare reform this past summer. On the one hand, the Obama administration - overlearning from the heavy-handed mistakes the Clintons made on healthcare reform - wasted time and lost control of the narrative. Seemingly unsure of what it wanted in terms of policy, this White House stood on the sidelines and allowed Congress to draft the legislation and create a huge mess. Fixing the healthcare system was the cornerstone of the President's election campaign. Nonetheless, he has appeared too lackadaisical and too indifferent - too eager to compromise with Republicans too early in the game, and for little or nothing in return. In the end, Obama's team came off looking like amateurs, the high school debate team, or student body president.

On the other hand, with a vacuum of leadership created by Obama, the health insurance lobby was given the opportunity to spread their street money and run amok. [Over three-quarters of the American people](#) want a public option, that is, a choice between private health insurance and a government-run insurance plan that would create competition and lower costs. But the lawmakers who were purchased by the insurance companies - Democrats and Republicans - say there will be no public option. These senators and representatives get their money from one group and their votes from another. We know which group really counts. We're not talking about democracy, but rather American-style capitalism. Money talks, and, well, you know the rest.

And the insurance companies have tapped into the anger of the unwashed fringes, and harnessed their rage at the town hall meetings - the tea-baggers and the militias, the birthers and the white nationalists, the jingoists and the secessionists. These folks don't know the first thing about healthcare, but they do know that they hate government, they hate Obama, and they believe he is a foreigner and an illegitimate leader. And a communist Nazi Muslim terrorist. They won't allow a black man to indoctrinate their children, nor will they allow one of them to take over *their* country.

Once again, moneyed interests use regular common folk - suckers that they are - to act against their own best interests. Rich Southerners had poor whites fight and die to maintain a system of slavery that rendered their labor unnecessary. During the struggles of the labor movement, corporations hired hooligans to beat up and shoot workers who attempted to organize. Appeals to white-skin privilege kept white workers from organizing with workers of color to better everyone's station in life. And today, particularly in states with the lowest educational and health standards, working class people who constitute the Republican party "base" fight alongside the corporations to keep healthcare expensive and inaccessible. Billy Bob is as dumb as bricks, and proud of it.

The mobilization against healthcare reform has taught us several things:

**First of all, the Republican Party is, collectively, coo coo for cocoa puffs.** The moderates, the reasonable people, the intelligent ones who are fond of book-learnin', and those free of mental defect bolted from the GOP. The Southern Strategy (a raw political appeal to white racist voters, which was perfected by the late GOP operative Lee Atwater) turned a reliable election-winning formula into a liability when Obama came on the scene. The base of the party is now mostly white, Southern, Christian fundamentalist and uneducated, and apparently delusional and unstable. A shrinking demographic, there aren't enough of them to win a national election. Yet, the Republicans cling to their base. Rather than repudiate the people who believe Obama is a foreign citizen and an illegitimate leader who should be stopped if not killed (yes I said it), the Republicans encourage these gun-toting thugs, these brown shirts with their threats of violence. The decisive issue for them didn't necessarily have to be healthcare, but healthcare did the trick. The main point is that for the radical conservatives, government is the enemy they treat with utter contempt. And they hate government so much that they try to destroy the country whenever they get into office. Enactment of real health reform will further marginalize the GOP, and render them irrelevant for generations.

**Second, President Obama might not be up to the task, at least as things stand.** I say this as someone who believes he must succeed if this nation is to succeed. But if the President cannot put up a good fight on the primary issue that put him in office - his mother died of cancer from a lack of medical coverage - when will he? What about future battles? Obama was elected on promises of bold change, not tweaking around the edges of pernicious institutions, or a willingness to comfort those forces that are hurting the public. On the campaign trail, he said himself that if he were to start from scratch, he would create a single-payer health insurance system, which would eliminate private insurers. So why protect those insurers now?

In 2008, the people did not vote for a Rodney King, can't-we-all-just-get-along-for-the-sake-of-bipartisanship approach to government. Roosevelt didn't get the New Deal passed that way, and Johnson surely didn't pass the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act that way. These presidents prevailed because they got all the troops in line, and they moved forward without trying to butter up their adversaries, whose votes they would

never hope to get.

To be sure, Obama got his start as a community organizer. Yet, most of Obama's crew in the White House seems to consist of Wall Street hacks, apologists and enablers. Lots of bailout funds for banks. And "Green Jobs" czar [Van Jones](#) (one of the few [movement progressives](#) in the White House with authentic community bona fides) [resigned](#) in the face of attacks from Fox News jester Glenn Beck. Jones apparently was provided with no backup from the administration. One must wonder if the administration thinks it can throw all progressives under the bus the way it just did to Van Jones.

**Third, never underestimate the depths of American greed.** With plans afoot to place one-sixth of the nation's economy back into the hands of ordinary people, we should expect a fight. Private health insurance companies serve no legitimate purpose. About fifty million people cannot afford them. If you can afford them, you give them your money for the sole purpose of medical care. And when you need medical treatment, they decide whether that money should go towards your treatment. In effect, they make their money by preventing you from getting the care you need. They profit from your continued agony, and in many cases, your imminent death. Only in America will people justify the continued existence of private healthcare insurers, and making a buck over what should be the guaranteed right of access to healthcare. As [Bill Moyers](#) recently noted about America's dysfunctional behavior, "we should be treating health as a condition, not a commodity." American-style, predatory capitalism is built upon winners and losers, a survival of the fittest mentality. That approach is incompatible with the best interests of society as far as health and social welfare are concerned.

Once again we are witnessing, firsthand, the conflicting American impulses of expanding rights to the people on the one hand, and robbing them blind on the other. America fell because of greed, the bottom line, and the eternal quest for profits above all else. We are witnessing the greatest upward redistribution of wealth in American history, with the greatest gap between rich and poor since the Great Depression. Official unemployment flirts with the 10% mark. Meanwhile, the real unemployment rate, which includes those who stopped looking for jobs, and the underemployed who are forced to settle for part-time work, is [close to 17%](#). Wages and benefits are decreasing. More than [35 million people](#) are on food stamps, and [40% of recipients are working families](#). [More than 1 million schoolchildren](#) in the land of plenty are homeless. And even [the most creditworthy borrowers](#) are falling behind on their credit card and mortgage payments.

A primary reason for this economic suffering is that corporations, particularly health insurance companies, are stealing our money. They have more of it because we have less. Unregulated and emboldened, they became far too powerful, just like the 1920s. Insurance companies are enjoying record profits because of ever-increasing premiums, and families are going bankrupt because they cannot afford to get sick.

If healthcare reform is to succeed, its proponents must reframe the issue as one of nationwide criminality. The current health insurance system is a recurring act of national theft. These corporations are feeding off America like vultures, robbing from common people and crippling us in our ability to live our lives with happiness, security and dignity. Reform of the system, with a public option, is like an anti-theft device for the country, pure and simple.

And this time, we cannot blame the sideshow that is the Republican Party. We know about their agitation at the town hall meetings. Plus, they're greedy and care little about the needs of everyday people, or using government as a tool for positive social change.

But most of all, the GOP is not in power. The Democrats control the White House, a huge majority in the House of Representatives, and a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate. The Democrats' problem is that they do not have the will. As a corporatist party like the Republicans, they depend on the sponsorship and patronage of those financial interests that are causing our collective suffering. The will of the people be damned. If Obama refuses to change this reality in the party which he leads, then he is just another politician who, as Hillary Clinton once said, gives good speeches.

And yet, it was predictable that this day would come at some point, that the base would have to hold the President's feet to the fire, and show that they are for real. Perhaps he is begging the base to provide the cover he needs to "make me do it", as F.D.R. once said.

One thing is for sure: If the Democratic base does not force the Democrats to pass real deal health reform as they promised, then the Democrats will be finished. And maybe that is the price we must pay for progressive ideals to survive.

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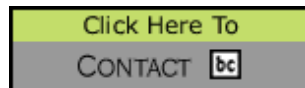
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