

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

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African Americans and the African world.

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## **When School Kids Sing Obama's Praises: Education and the Politics of Critical Thinking**

### **The Substance of Truth**

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They went to school expecting to learn the wonders of the world and acquire the academic skills requisite for a successful career; instead, they were "indoctrinated" into the Cult of Obama, brainwashed into praising the politics of Hitler's reincarnation. These are the [howling cries](#) of a few New Jersey elementary school parents whose children were caught on tape last week extolling the "great accomplishments" of "Barack Hussein Obama."

The lyrics to both songs have been fully reprinted below in hopes of providing necessary context (courtesy, FOXNews.com):

#### Song 1:

Mm, mmm, mm!

Barack Hussein Obama

He said that all must lend a hand  
To make this country strong again

Mmm, mmm, mm!

Barack Hussein Obama

He said we must be fair today  
Equal work means equal pay

Mmm, mmm, mm!

Barack Hussein Obama

He said that we must take a stand  
To make sure everyone gets a chance  
Mmm, mmm, mm!  
Barack Hussein Obama

He said red, yellow, black or white  
All are equal in his sight  
Mmm, mmm, mm!  
Barack Hussein Obama

Yes!  
Mmm, mmm, mm  
Barack Hussein Obama

### Song 2:

Hello, Mr. President we honor you today!  
For all your great accomplishments, we all doth say "hooray!"

Hooray, Mr. President! You're number one!  
The first black American to lead this great nation!

Hooray, Mr. President we honor your great plans  
To make this country's economy number one again!

Hooray Mr. President, we're really proud of you!  
And we stand for all Americans under the great Red, White, and Blue!

So continue ---- Mr. President we know you'll do the trick  
So here's a hearty hip-hooray ----

Hip, hip hooray!  
Hip, hip hooray!  
Hip, hip hooray!

Ever since, Bernice Young Elementary administrators have been pummeled by right-wing critics who lift this high as validation for their suspicions of Nazi-esque brainwashing tactics Obama's administration is using to control the minds of young people. The school even underwent a temporary lockdown two Thursdays ago, due to death threats from livid culture warriors.

Details concerning this controversy are sketchy at best. The teacher involved in the activity is said to have retired last year to a full pension. And the distribution of the video was "unauthorized," a written statement revealed. It took place as part of a "Father's Day tribute" to Barack Obama - not a Black History Month event (as earlier reported), an involved party noted.

Suffice to say school officials haven't been exactly adept in fanning out the simmering plume of hot lava brewing within neo-conservative circles. History shows this bunch would latch onto anything - [anything!](#) - to strengthen their paranoia about the nation's first Black president - and the *secret agendas of agitprop* he abhors. So, it's not only deficient but also dangerous to afford them any opportunity through which they can spread their hostile gospel.

And it's obvious this class activity was the brainchild of a naïve, though not entirely innocent, teacher.

Moments like this are principal in validating the inconvenient truth that not all teachers are educators. No offense.

Right on cue, the Republican Party has flipped the coin of opportunism, landing on tail, to indirectly incriminate President Obama for all wrongdoings under the sun.

"Friend, this is the type of propaganda you would see in Stalin's Russia or Kim Jong Il's North Korea," Republican Chairman Michael Steele [wrote in an e-mail to supporters](#). "I never thought the day would come when I'd see it here in America."

The "see it here" reference Michael Steele coyly appropriated was also echoed by the father of two Bernice Young Elementary students, who complained it was "reminiscent of 1930s Germany, and the indoctrination of children to worship their leader." With Minnesota Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann [insisting earlier in April](#) that Obama's Teach for America program, a non-for-profit offshoot of AmeriCorps, brings back to flesh the dry bones of "re-education camps," one can see the GOP seizing upon this opportunity to rebrand themselves as modern day Ezekiels - prophets placed by God to warn against the emerging evil empire of idolatry.

[Trivia: In this passage, guess who the *idol* is?]

"Please watch the video of young school children literally singing the praises of Barack Obama that their teachers have taught them," Steel wrote in his e-mail. Also, "Share it with your friends, family, neighbors or anyone you think may be concerned by this." Having completed the listed tasks, "make a donation of \$10, \$25, \$50 or \$100 to support the RNC's efforts to fight this leftist propaganda and elect more Republicans this year and next."

As renowned social critic Henry Giroux has written in the previous weeks, this hoopla, this collection of stupidity, this fabricated outrage, is nothing but the by-product of a "[culture of cruelty](#)" and the "[spectacle of illiteracy](#)." This coupling, he writes, enhances a "powerful set of political, economic and educational forces at work in miseducating the American public," moving it "from a culture of questioning to a culture of shouting, and in doing so have restaged politics and power in both unproductive and anti-democratic ways." I agree.

It is also true, however, that although the Republican Party and its many affiliated fringe movements are bent on establishing the failure of President Obama, and that although some members of the conservative faction [wouldn't skip a step](#) if some tragedy befell him, the mere fact that schoolchildren are being asked to sing songs in praise of their president strips naked the rugged realities many scholars have written passionately about for decades - an education system which has made inconsequential the essential skills of critical thinking, intellectual freedom, and creative learning.

In response to the New Jersey incident, democratic groups have [rushed to reveal](#) that some Southern schoolchildren also sang the out-gone George W. Bush's praises in 2006 - and for FEMA's response to the [Katrina debacle](#) of all things!

At the annual White House Easter Egg Roll, the lads serenaded former First Lady Laura Bush by singing (oh, the irony!):

Our country stood beside us  
People have sent us aid  
Katrina could not stop us, our hopes will never fade  
Congress, Bush, and FEMA

People across our land  
Together have come to rebuild us and we join them hand-in-hand!

So, in their eyes, the rising tide of criticism is just as unwarranted as it is artificially constructed. Made up.

But I feel differently. Although I agree this is political opportunism at its finest - and ugliest - I think parents have every right to be upset by the video clip they watched of their children being told to accept blindly, and celebrate, the "great accomplishments" of their president. Unfortunately, Dr. Denise King, principal of Bernice Young Elementary, [feels differently](#). According to [FOXNews.com](#) (though I'm not guaranteed it qualifies as a reputable, "fair and balanced" source), Dr. King informed parents "she would allow the performance again if she could."

I'm not sure why Dr. King is taking such a hard-line stance at this point, but if my child happened to be in that classroom that day, where a certified teacher led students in chants of, "He said we must be fair today/ Equal work means equal pay/," someone would have to pay. If my child happened to be in that classroom that day, where a certified teacher arrogantly remixed an old Sunday school chorus to bestow upon Barack Obama - a frail, flawed human being - Messiah-like qualities, "He said red, yellow, black or white/ All are equal in his sight/," Bernice Young would have one less student the next morning.

Of course, I congratulate President Obama for his swift and courageous move in [signing the Lilly Ledbetter Act](#). No doubt. And I couldn't be more reassured when I hear young students embracing a pedagogy of equality that goes beyond simplistic ideals like "Everybody's equal" or "God made all of us" or "Under the skin, we're all the same," as reported in a recent Newsweek cover story, "[See Baby Discriminate](#)." That's a milestone.

But even then, it fails to make the grade in terms of what education *really* means. It's not enough to tell a child that racial discrimination dehumanizes, or sexism still controls the gender domain which relegates women to statuses of subhumanity. It's a good start - though *not enough*.

Real education is structured upon a dialogical framework that involves - engages - both the pedagogue and the student - the speaker and the listener. And every educator knows that greatness is only achieved when *you* learn more from your students than they do from you.

A Black, female Fayetteville, North Carolina, teacher, Diantha Harris, [made headlines last year](#) when, in a class discussion about the presidential elections, she asked her students bluntly: "Who are you pulling for?" A couple of students raised their hands and proudly declared: "Obama!" - much to her satisfaction. But noticing the slight chagrin masking the faces of some *other* students, she interrupted: "And if you're pulling for John McCain, that's fine. Say him, as well."

At this, a young, White female mentioned the Arizona Senator's name, and the same teacher, who had just, a few seconds earlier, encouraged her students to freely espouse their political passions, blurted out: "Oh Jesus - John McCain. ... Why are you pulling for John McCain? It's ok, but why are you pulling for John McCain?" The intimidated student struggled to muster up an answer: "I think it's because my parents are going for him, too."

She proceeded to question other students why they were "pulling" for Barack Obama,

upon which one in particular mentioned the war in Iraq, which, taking the President at his word, he promised to "end." Ms. Harris then turned back to the lone-McCain supporter, stern with purpose: *"Talk, cause your daddy [is] in the military. Talk. It's a senseless war! And by the way, Cathy, the person that you're picking for president said that our troops could [stay in Iraq for another hundred years](#) - if they need to!"*

Her point was simple: "So that means that your daddy could stay in the military for another hundred years!"

I must confess I cracked up watching the video when it first surfaced late last year. It's obvious she - Ms. Harris - was well-meaning, politically savvy, and even compassionate in her worries that a child so young was being led down to the slaughterhouse of hypocrisy and incivility (maybe she saw in "Cathy" a future female [Jonathan Krohn](#)) - two hallmarks of the modern-day Republican Party. But the same can also be said of the Democratic Party; and there must be a fine line drawn between helping young students grapple with the political realities of their imperfect society, and telling them who to vote for, what policies to embrace, and which candidates have their best interests at heart.

I love Barack Obama's drive and diligence. I appreciate his candor concerning certain - limited - issues. I'm more comforted by the dignity, humanity, and elegance of the woman he chose to marry - First Lady Michelle Obama. But I also don't want my kids thinking one of Obama's "great accomplishments" is [appointing as Secretary of Education](#) a guy whose educational qualifications are yet to surpass a Bachelor's in Sociology.

I, myself, *bear the academic burden* of a mere High School Diploma (*I make no claims to being bell hooks!*), but I don't need a PhD in Education to [foresee the detrimental effects](#) school privatization, militarization, and corporatization would inevitably have on young, disposable populations of students.

I share Obama's passion for education, but I think he's dead wrong in [equating](#) non-for-profit pursuit of knowledge [with a mild mixture](#) of chauvinism and patriotism: "And even when you're struggling, even when you're discouraged, and you feel like other people have given up on you, don't ever give up on yourself, because when you give up on yourself, you give up on your country."

So, though, as a tribute to sanity, I refuse to take the same paths Republican talking heads and conservative town criers have walked the past week - intimating a national crisis of political mis-education that, they contend, calls into question the "freedoms" of young people (give me a break!) - I have just as many questions to ask of the teacher and principal and every other party involved in the Bernice Young brouhaha.

Children are our future, and it's imperative that teachers, politicians, parents, and educators come to terms with the consequences of that realization - [before it's too late](#).

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