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**Good-bye, "Uncle Larry," Hello (Again) "Uncle Clarence:"
Are Black Conservatives Still Relevant?
Between the Lines
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The announcement that syndicated talk radio host, Larry Elder, was leaving his daily radio "squawk show" shouldn't go without notice. Elder is a major remnant of the "colorblind" conservative movement that allowed race and race-based disparities to be subjugated through senseless rationale of relative truths - that made no sense when Elder's show was launched in the early 1990s and still makes no sense today.

The only difference is that Elder's colorblind rhetoric served a purpose in the 1990s as the conservative talk movement defined anti-taxation, family values (moral rights movement), reverse discrimination (white's rights), and new patriotism (anti-immigration) ideologies forged a new political agenda called "Contract With America" and ushered in a Republican takeover of Congress. It makes no sense today, which is why talk radio no longer needs him. Rush Limbaugh was called the 101st Senator for his role in the ideological shift as he sold America a bill of goods that only created the largest budget deficit in the history of the world. Republicans never met a tax they didn't hate, but they'll float a bond for future generations to pay in a minute. Rush could never sell the race bit without sounding like the racist that he is. Talk radio needed a Rush in blackface, a Sambo to sell the message that race no longer mattered. Enter Larry Elder.

Using contradictory rhetoric that sought to mimic and minimize racial disparities, Elder adopted the "personal responsibility" mantra of the Republicans, first under the

façade of being a Libertarian - and not a very good one, at that. Then, Larry finally came out of the closet and disclosed that he was in fact a Republican lackey. Of course, by then the Republicans had made Larry a very wealthy man. Putting your people down on a daily basis has its rewards, and no one did it better than Larry. And he lived to tell about it.

Larry Elder and Supreme Court Justice, Clarence Thomas, were both part of the inaugural class of the so-called new Black Conservative. Together, they tagged-teamed the system, one from within, the other from without, to marginalize the race discussion in America. Together, with Chief Sambo, Ward Connerly, they carried the "colorblind" banner while dismantling affirmative action. Connerly questioned the need for it. Elder used the radio airwaves to publicly mock anyone that tried to defend it. Thomas used the courts to uphold its banishment. And white folk stood by and watched it happen. Why wouldn't they? They and their children would be (and still are) the primary beneficiary of their anti-equality movement.

Elder, more than the others, legitimized the conversation on largely irrational premises. Elder wouldn't hesitate to attack anyone who challenged his false premise, and he'd do it in the most cowardly way - by inviting you on his show and then not letting you talk. He'd hit a green button every time it was your turn to talk, making your statement incoherent. Then he'd turn his ideologues loose on you while blocking any callers that supported your point of view. More than a few well-intentioned scholars and activists were ambushed in this way.

Elder would put public challenges out, provoking people to take the (race)bait. Then, he'd publicly rake them over the coals. I was one of his favorite targets, largely because I never took the bait. The one time I came close was when I moderated a debate between him and conspiracy theorist, Steve Cokely. Cokely put to Larry so bad that I nearly handed him a white flag of surrender. When Larry got back on the air the following Monday, of course it was a different story - so I wrote about it. Larry was so pissed he talked about me for two weeks, but I was not going in his studio.

This last campaign cycle proved to be the undoing of Larry Elder. Conservative talk radio unleashed an all-out attack on President-elect, Barack Obama, and it had its number one Sambo out front, doing what he had done for 15 years. But nobody was listening to Larry Elder. In the midst of the first real social change movement in nearly 50 years, Larry Elder and his colorblind non-sense had become irrelevant. America saw race in Barack Obama, America voted race in Barack Obama and America overcame some of its racial baggage to elect Barack Obama. In the aftermath, Larry Elder sounded just like all the other conservative ideologues without race on his tongue. If he can't refute race anymore, why did they need him? The "jig" was finally up for Larry.

In the meantime, another Sambo surrogate raised his head. Clarence Thomas, who had become as irrelevant as the law itself (to the Republicans) decided that he was going to be the one to request that the United States Supreme Court hear arguments challenging Obama's birth status. Of course, the white justices couldn't do it. It would look too racial. Let's call Clarence. When's the last time they called Uncle Clarence for anything? Last time they needed to deflect race. That's the race game in America these days. Let Sambo now do what only others once did.

It seems like that cycle is never going to stop. But at least we can say good-bye to one Sambo symbol, even if another one is raising his head again, and a few more are in the making.

Good-bye, "Uncle Larry." I, for one, am not sorry to see you go. Could you take Uncle Clarence with you?

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