

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

[Click Here](#)

[Home](#)

This Is a Game/ I'm Your Specimen The Substance of Truth By Tolu Olorunda BlackCommentator.com Columnist

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"If one is continually surviving the worst that life can bring, one eventually ceases to be controlled by a fear of what life can bring; whatever it brings must be borne. And at this level of experience one's bitterness begins to be palatable, and hatred becomes too heavy a sack to carry. The apprehension of life here so briefly and inadequately sketched has been the experience of generations of Negroes, and it helps to explain how they have endured and how they have been able to produce children of kindergarten age who can walk through mobs to get to school."

-Baldwin, James. [The Fire Next Time](#). New York: Modern Library, 1995, pp. 98.

"... A skin not considered equal/ A meteor has more right than my people/"

-De La Soul, [Stakes Is High](#) , Stakes Is High (1996).

"In contemporary society, white and black people alike believe that racism no longer exists. This erasure, however mythic, diffuses the representation of whiteness as terror in the black imagination. It allows for assimilation and forgetfulness. The eagerness with which contemporary society does away with racism, replacing this recognition with evocations of pluralism and diversity that further masks reality, is a response to the terror, but it has

also become a way to perpetuate the terror by providing a cover, a hiding place."

-hooks, bell. [Killing rage: Ending Racism](#) . New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996, pp. 47.

So it seems that in the *Age of Obama*, the invincibility Ralph Ellison ascribed to Blackness might be losing its sting. Barack Obama is a hot commodity, and news channels, perpetually addicted to popularity, are scrambling to find avenues through which Black males can become the sources of unwarranted attention and unsatisfactory analysis. CNN wore that outfit last summer (*Black in America*), therefore MSNBC, right on cue, does likewise.

In "[A Father's Promise](#)," a documentary intent on "explor[ing]" the "crisis" of "boys and girls... growing up without a father," MSNBC let the dogs out. Omitting the racial specificity CNN employed, the cable-news channel considers this an "American" problem. *Strange*. If MSNBC is to be taken by its word, one wonders why the main characters in the documentary are Black, and the panelists afterward - Tiki Barber, Mayor Cory Booker, Rev. Eugene Rivers, Princeton's Melissa Harris-Lacewell, and Principal Marni McKoy - are all African-American.

With [Al Roker moderating](#), the sky was limitless. Newark's corporate Mayor, Cory Booker has a solution - mentoring! As he sees it, bombard children with mentors, and the obstacles of racism, classism and sexism will be automatically lifted from the road to empowerment. Booker, distraught with what a fellow panelist has to say, channels his inner George Bush: "*In Newark, New Jersey, I don't have time to waste. Either you're with me, or you're against where our city is going,*" he declares. "*Core values - responsibility, respect, doing your best, caring,*" would keep Black kids away from becoming fodder for the Prison Industrial Complex, says Principal Marni McKoy, who runs an independent school. "*On the report cards, we give kids grades for living these values,*" she explains. These "values" would keep the demons of oppression, police brutality, and discrimination at bay! Princeton Professor, Melissa Harris Lacewell sees it differently: "*I think we're not being sufficiently radical... I think we need to provide universal healthcare,*" for the "*Black middle class,*" she suggests. "*Black middle class families... are not the same middle class as the white middle class,*" Dr. Lacewell remarks.

By doing this, the sky would open, and angelic voices would announce the dawn of a new era of prosperity for the Black poor, which received little-to-no mention. "*That's such a painfully old excuse - that all we need is more money,*" Booker rails. "*I can save the state money, if we make investments when it comes to the criminal justice system,*" he adds. "Alternative" programs should do the work. The panelists end with an agreement that (Black) Fathers must enact more commitment in the lives of their children. They talk a big game, but play quite lousily. At this, [the elephants](#) in the room, once again, remain untouched.

This phenomenon of Black people being brought under the microscopic lens of a White media company - though packaged by Black faces - is anything but new to the global Black Community. Black people in Africa, initially deemed senseless monkeys who swung from trees (a perception which persists to this very day), have never been

presented with the respect, dignity, and responsibility they deserve. Looked upon to be pitied (ridiculed) and helped out, African brothers and sisters on the continent are relegated to the same one-dimensional role of peasants, that makes it easy to demonize, denigrate and dehumanize their existence. This is done, essentially, in the name of extending a hand of uplift to these countries and communities - the need to *"pity a thing before they could like it,"* as Toni Morrison once put it.

This *Feed-the-Children* characterization of Black people is also used to excuse the selective "military intervention" (exploitation) western countries engage in African countries. In 2006, the *Be a Witness* campaign, a progressive agenda, was structured on the premise of telling "major American TV networks that genocide is news." The campaign [noted how major networks](#) were more interested in Michael Jackson's bizarre court appearances, a Runaway Bride's disappearance, Tom Cruise's marital engagement, than covering the ongoing Darfurian genocide. The same networks who, thereafter, dedicated around-the-clock coverage to Britney Spears' many meltdowns, and Paris Hilton's incarceration, now feign concern for Black people - in the form of condescending documentaries that do little justice to the concerns of the global Black Community.

In other news, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) [seem to have lost](#) their collective minds in a dog house. Dressed in KKK garbs, recently, they paraded the streets, handing out leaflets to passersby, to draw a comparison between the domestic terrorism visited upon Black people, and artificial rearing of dogs. Whilst an "uncomfortable comparison," PETA's spokesman accuses its targets of attempts at creating a "master race" of pure-bred dogs - which, according to their logic, is akin to the Ku Klux Klan's values. One wonders why PETA wouldn't just publicly simulate lynching and get it over with.

In 2009, as a Black family ascends to international prominence, an MSNBC - the same network discussed above - anchor [still hasn't gotten the wording](#) quite right. Congratulating the NAACP on its 100th anniversary, he extends his greetings to Muhammad Ali, and other recipients of the [President's Award](#), "as the president honors this country's colored people." He apologized, shortly after, "if any of my words in that conversation were of any offense." Righting this wrong, on behalf of MSNBC, he still "want[s] to congratulate all the people of color today."

The pathetic MSNBC anchor cannot be unilaterally blamed for his anachronistic rhetoric. Some say the NAACP needs a reorientation (rebranding), themselves. Others, me included, contend the assumed difference in "colored people," and "people of color." In any event, the long-predicted *falling apart* of mainstream media, in the *Age of Obama*, is coming into fruition. With a disproportionate representation of Black/Brown journalists, White journalists are inevitably susceptible to the kind of unprocessed comments the anchor made. The Black Press, which remains at the service of Obama, must step up to the plate, and direct the traffic of racial analysis, at a time of unprecedented confusion and bewilderment.

In President Obama's first primetime Press Conference, the Black Press [played an irreducible role](#) - window dressers. Given the best seats in the room - front row - it came as a surprise to them when Obama's staffers had omitted the names of all reporters from the *Black Press of America*, out of his prepared list. Opting for the

Huffington Post, and other unorthodox news sources, Obama sent a direct message to the Black Press. "This was like Reagan, when he'd put all the blacks up front," an irate Black reporter cried. "He oughta' be ashamed." For one who has [consistently hailed the great conservative god](#), as a model of governorship, Obama's antics shouldn't arouse any expressions of anger or shock. One surely hopes this would mark the turn of a new conviction, vis-à-vis Obama, but judging by the performance of the Black journalists who were called upon, such a proposition might be carved on an unreachable rock.

Michael Fletcher, of the *Washington Post*, was one of the few Black reporters Obama called upon - roughly two - in his press-conference. Fletcher stood up, and [sputtered his way](#) through eight seconds of fame: "What is your reaction to Alex Rodriguez's admission, that he used steroids as a member of the *Texas Rangers*?" Of all the more pertinent issues confronting the Black Community, and the world at-large, Fletcher would rather ask about a sports scandal. This *Black Man*, unlike forerunners before him, made a convincing case against the intelligence and competence of fellow Black journalists. Given the plethora of alternative causes before him, he clearly chose the safest, and dumbest.

He could have asked about the plight of a Black Woman, who was [punched in the face](#), four times, for the crimes of "riding" a bicycle "on the sidewalk;" he could have questioned the president on the lawfulness of two sisters [rotting away in Mississippi's prison bastion](#), for crimes uncommitted; he could have asked if the notion of "race-transcendence" comes at the expense of 12-year-old Black girls [illegally arrested](#), and assaulted, in *mistaken* prostitution stings; he could have invoked the spirit of Oscar Grant, a Black man [punched](#), and [shot in the back](#) - executed! - for [trying to be Christ-like](#). But, no! He chose not to ask those questions - those questions which would have put a broad smile on Malcolm's face, and a chuckle on Harriet's lips. Mr. Fletcher would rather serve empire, and spit on the legacy of those whose tireless missions enable him to drink from the cup of success, in his endeavors. The antics of Michael Fletcher makes one wonder whether our long-gone warriors would have remained unfettered, with dignity, if they could foresee what future their struggle bore in its loins.

The kind of deadly misinformation about Blackness Michael Fletcher displayed is becoming accepted curriculum in the public school system. In Mississippi, a place known for its unwillingness to let go of the Jim Crow past, an [Elementary School declared](#) Feb. 5th, "Cotton Picking Day." In honor of *Black History Month*, students were invited to dress up as slaves, and reenact the African-American slave experience, on the plantation fields. In substitute for teaching the true history of Black folks, in public/private schools, teachers and administrators are employing useless, meaningless, offensive, and humiliating practices in their classrooms.

Early last December, a suburban middle school white teacher [made headlines](#) for binding "the hands and feet of two black girls," after which she made them "crawl under desks representing slave ships" - an exercise which brought tears of embarrassment to one of the girls involved. Some schools don't even find any appeal in skirting around their interests. Last month, a St. Louis Elementary School [sent schoolchildren home](#) with fliers bearing the headline, "Why I hate Black History Month." Meant to promote an upcoming *Parent Teacher Organization* meeting on the concept of *Black History Month*, its organizers argued that they were only trying to indoctrinate

the kids with the importance of cultivating a year-long appreciation for Black History. Following a barrage of criticism, the school, reportedly with a 3/4th Black population, mildly tweaked it to reflect their original intention. The new headline: *"Why I LOVE Black History Month."*

In Chicago, [according to CBS2](#), Black kids are treated much differently. Rather than being fed misinformation, lies, and distortions about their history, teachers and coaches prefer using them as professional punching bags, and receptacles for rage and frustration. In an investigative report filed by CBS2, *"Hundreds of students have allegedly been beaten by teachers, coaches and staff at Chicago Public Schools."* The students, under the watch of Arne Duncan (the new Sec. of Education), were *"threatened," "slammed,"* beaten with *"broomsticks, whipped with belts, yard sticks, struck with staplers, choked, stomped on and pushed down stairs."* The report revealed a severe lack of accountability in the Chicago public school system, over which Duncan presided over at the time: *"... [E]ven more alarming, in the vast majority of cases, teachers found guilty were only given a slap on the wrist. [CBS 2 informed former Chicago Public School CEO Arne Duncan of our investigative findings shortly before he was promoted to U.S. Secretary of Education.](#)"* Duncan, walking with a big stick, assured that, *"If someone hits a student, they are going to be fired. It's very, very simple."* He continued: *"Any founded allegation where an adult is hitting a child, hitting a student - they're going to be gone."*

CBS2, however, revealed Duncan's inactions, even with evidences and substantiated reports: *"But that's not what happened under Duncan's watch. Of the 568 verified cases, only 24 led to termination. Records show one teacher who, quote, 'battered students for several years' was simply given a 'warning' by the Board of Education. And another student was given '100 licks with a belt.' The abuse was substantiated, but the records show the teacher was not terminated."* It's hard to believe this man, at this moment, possesses, within his authority, full control over the national school system, and the minds of tomorrow's leaders.


Lord, help us all.

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[Contents of Issue Menu](#)
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