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White Men Can Jump - to Conclusions
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In the recent confirmation hearings with Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor, the Senate Judiciary Committee Republican members demonstrated that white men can jump - *to conclusions*. They concluded that Sotomayor lacked the required judicial impartiality because she told a Latino audience in a 2001 cultural diversity lecture, "I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life." (Text of, "Lecture: 'A Latina Judge's Voice,'" *The New York Times*, May 14, 2009). The white Republican Committee members became so "troubled" by and fixated on her apparently perceived "racist" comment that Sotomayor apologized for it, and reassured them that her "judicial philosophy" was guided by "fidelity to the law" and not her Latina life experiences. (*The New York Times*, July 16, 2009). These white Senators' negative reactions to "a wise Latina woman" reveal much about them and the inequitable racial status quo they represent and of which they are guardians.

"A wise Latina woman" judge is likely to be more knowledgeable of and thus more impartial and fair in dealing with America's white-controlled hierarchy of access to economic and political power, than men whose whiteness is their invisible means into the mainstream's inequitable pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. The real issue is that these white Republican Senators are oblivious to and threatened by "*the richness* [italics added] of a wise Latina woman's experiences."

"The richness of a wise Latina woman's experiences" includes her personal encounters with America's racial inequities. Consider the "richness" of Judge Sotomayor's own reported "experiences." Poverty led her parents to leave Puerto Rico and come to America as immigrants. She grew up in a Bronx housing project. At age 8 she

developed juvenile diabetes, for which she took insulin injections. When she was 9, her father died, and her mother was forced to work two jobs to make ends meet. As an Hispanic woman, Sotomayor said she has experienced demeaning "gender and ethnic stereotypes" of her ability and work. ("Sonia Sotomayor Biography," *New York News and Tri State News*, May 26, 2009) And in her now "controversial" 2001 memorial lecture on cultural diversity, she stated, "Each day on the bench I learned something new about the judicial process and about being a professional Latina woman in a world that sometimes looks at me with suspicion."

The white Republican male members of the Senate Judiciary Committee looked at Judge Sotomayor with considerable "suspicion," because she dared to compare "a wise Latina woman" favorably with "a white male." The facts about America's recession-widening inequitable racial realities support Sotomayor's assumption and are instructive here.

Consider the following findings of the Applied Research Center's (ARC) May 2009 55-page report on "Race and Recession":

The country is facing an economic crisis and many are experiencing unprecedented instability... Individual Americans of all races are facing dire situations - losing their jobs, homes and security. For communities of color, the crisis is intensified... This report tells the story of what the recession - now the deepest and most devastating since the Great Depression - means in the lives of ordinary people of color in this country...

Through extensive interviews with dozens of individuals around the country and data analysis, this report shows that... Black, Latino, Asian and American Indian communities face barriers to employment, including discrimination in hires and promotions, unfair criminal background checks and the lack of protections for immigrant workers. As a result, communities of color on the whole, relative to whites, face higher rates of poverty, are less likely to have health care and consistently face recessionary levels of unemployment and underemployment... Because people of color have less income and less wealth, they have less to fall back on in hard times, and yet the safety net for poor families has been eroded over the past dozen years."

Who "would more often than not reach a better conclusion" about such recession-intensifying racial inequities in America? "A wise Latina woman?" Or, "a white male?"

Below are specific employment findings of ARC's report:

Rates of employment are a central measure of economic wellbeing, and an extended increase in unemployment is one signifier of recession... In March of this year, unemployment reached 8.5% nationally, up from 5.1% in March 2008. And, the structural disparity remains: 7.9% of whites were unemployed in March, while 13.3% of black workers had no job, and 11.4% of Latinos were out of work... While recessions increase unemployment for everyone, disparate unemployment rates for whites and people of color are a longstanding feature of the U.S. economy... Low-wage jobs are likely to pay below the poverty line. Poverty in Black and Latino families in 2007 was

22.1% and 19% respectively. This compared to 5.9% among whites.

Job segregation persists in the United States, and people of color are relegated to more precarious low-wage jobs. Workers of color are heavily concentrated in the service sector, according to ARC's analysis of the Current Population Survey. Meanwhile whites are disproportionately represented in the most stable constellation of occupations, including management and professional jobs. More than 38% of whites work in management, professional and related occupations. This is flexible and creative work that pays well and is reserved for a small fraction of workers in the new global economy.

Who "would more often than not reach a better conclusion" about the historic and present inequitable employment realities of people of color?

Would "a wise Latina woman" or "a white male... more often than not reach a better conclusion" about the ARC report's commentary?:

The country is firmly rooted in the ideal of fairness and opportunity. But real and persistent institutional barriers turn the ideal into an empty idea. Discrimination, inadequate worker protections, barriers to employment for people with criminal records, de-unionization, insufficient educational opportunities and an inadequate safety net contribute to levels of racial inequality that fly in the face of our national self-image.

Which person "would more often than not reach a better conclusion" about the following key recommendations of ARC's report:

- Expand the use of Racial Equality Impact Assessments for public planning and policy so that racial inequities can be anticipated and prevented prior to the adoption of new policies and practices...

- Over the next several months, the federal government should begin to address major regulatory and structural flaws in the economy. Communities should be protected from Wall Street's "reverse Robin Hoods" who have been stealing from the poor in order to increase their own wealth, and racial equity must be a core component of financial policymaking...

- Raise the Minimum Wage and attach a COLA...

- Ensure fair treatment and full rights for immigrants by supporting legalization... The perpetual presence of an exploitable category of workers who are often paid sub-minimum wages and denied labor protections is catastrophic for both immigrants and all workers...

- Expand educational access and job training for people who are unemployed and underemployed, with support and services for finding good jobs...

- Enact health care reform that meets the needs of everyone in the United States... It must also address persistent inequities within the healthcare system, such as inadequate healthcare infrastructure in communities of color,

gaps in language access and lack of culturally competent and culturally appropriate care...

-Expunge criminal records... [and] pass *Ban the Box* initiatives that remove questions about applicants' criminal records from all applications for public and publicly contracted employment...

-States and the federal government should impose extended moratoria on foreclosures...

The intense reaction of Republican Senators to Sonia Sotomayor's judicial favoring of the "richness" of "a wise Latina woman's . . . experiences" over those of "a white male" reveal just how high white men can jump to conclusions about racism. She herself was quoted as being astounded by the extent to which they leaped: "No words I have ever spoken nor written have received so much attention." ("Sotomayor seeks to explain her wise Latina' comment," by David Lightman and Michael Doyle, *McClatchy Newspapers, The Sun Times*, July 14, 2009)

The white Republican Senators' overreaction to "a wise Latina woman" is a telling sign that, rather than entering a "post-racial" era, America remains in denial of its continuing and recession-deepening racial inequities. Other such overreactions also reveal the racially inequitable handwriting on America's white-controlled hierarchical walls.

Michelle Obama touched the explosive nerve of America's embedded inequitable racial reality during the 2008 election campaign. She felt the racial heat and quickly backtracked after an honest expression about the "richness" of her history: "For the first time in my adult life I am proud of my country." ("Michelle Obama Takes Heat for Saying She's 'Proud of My Country' for the First Time," *Fox News.com*, Feb. 18, 2008)

Rev. Jeremiah Wright was editorially lynched by mainstream media, also guardians of the racial status quo, after preaching the truth about America's ingrained white-controlled "separate and unequal" societies and our government's crimes against humanity abroad in our name. (See Alberts, "Jeremiah Wright and America's Continuing 'Separate and Unequal' Societies," *Counterpunch*, Apr. 19/20, 2008) Barack Obama's successful run for the presidency depended greatly on distancing himself from and renouncing the minister who baptized his two daughters.

And President Obama created a national racial firestorm when he said the apparently obvious about the arrest of Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr.: "The Cambridge police acted stupidly in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home." (*The Boston Globe*, July 24, 2009). An assumed example of the power of a white police officer to arrest a black man *in his own home*, not for "disorderly conduct," but for *disrespectful conduct* toward the one who apparently became the real intruder.

The continuing front page- and electronic media-fanned national uproar forced President Obama to say he did not say what he said: "I want to make clear that in my choice of words, I unfortunately gave the impression that I was maligning the Cambridge Police Department and Sergeant Crowley specifically." (*The Boston Globe*, July 25, 2009)

As Judge Sotomayor, Michelle Obama, Rev. Wright, President Obama, and untold other persons of color reveal, honesty and truthfulness are very dangerous when dealing with America's ingrained racial inequalities. The strong denial of those realities betrays their very existence.

Why such intense denial of America's racial realities? Many white people individualize and interpersonalize racism and thus obscure and deny its historical, institutional and white-controlled dimensions including its power base. White persons, no matter how erudite, can internalize and remain under the influence of an institutionalized - and "democratized" - racial hierarchy in which they are born, reared in privilege and conditioned to be oblivious to and thus deny - at the risk of losing their "birthright" of invisible benefits.

Resolving America's recession-widening racial inequities in the 21st Century calls for an understanding of the white-controlled racial hierarchy: the ways in which it still permeates society, the degree to which it is unconsciously identified with and internalized by people, how it is denied, disguised and made to disappear by its guardians, apologists and "colorblind" magicians. The bottom line in 2050 will not be which race has the most people but which has the most power. To understand this reality is to go to the heart of the racial hierarchy's inequities and to what constitutes a level playing field. It is believed that "a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion" about what the level playing field should be.

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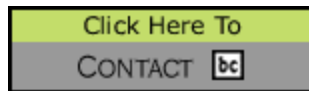
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