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An independent weekly internet magazine
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Cover Story

Secesh 3.0: Fear of A Black President

Color of Law

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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When the Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) disrupted the President's healthcare address before a joint session of Congress, it was not the first time that a president from Illinois had trouble from a South Carolina lawmaker.

The first time, of course, was when the Palmetto State became the first to secede from the Union. South Carolina politicians such as John C. Calhoun and Preston Brooks stirred the pot and inflamed passions with talk of states' rights, limited government, nullification, and slavery. The other Southern states followed suit, forming the Confederate States of America and resulting in a Civil War that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

During the Civil War, which I will call **Secesh 1.0**, the issue was whether White Southerners had a right to kidnap Black people and keep them chained in their backyard. (Secesh means Secessionists, as in, "Colonel, we're gonna whup the Secesh!") The South lost, but was a sore loser. And President Lincoln was assassinated by a disgruntled fan of the losing team. Since that time, the losing side has continued its quest to shape the nation in its ignorant, regressive and repressively racist image.

Secesh 2.0 was Jim Crow segregation and the days of the civil rights movement. That was the era of conservative White resistance to equality and Black aspirations, under threat of violence and death. At issue was whether states had a right to treat "their" Black folk as they pleased. The federal government was the enemy, as were outside

agitators and carpetbaggers, civil rights workers, sympathetic Whites and uppity Blacks, Jews from up North, anyone from up North, Communists and other troublemakers.

And the white-collar Klan, represented by the White Citizens' Council and Democratic politicians, kept up the segregationist rhetoric to make the voter base happy. Meanwhile, the unwashed, down-and-dirty real-deal Klan mobilized in the streets and backwoods, with a regime of terror and murder against African Americans and proponents of constitutional democracy. Lynchings, church burnings, prison, and voter intimidation were some of the weapons of choice.

For Billy Bob, Bubba Lee and Skeeter (substitute your name of choice), the issue was whether there was a right to keep their children free from integrated classrooms and high school proms, and prevent young Black men from race-mixing with their daughters. For that "genteel" old white dude from *In The Heat of the Night* who slapped Mr. Tibbs in the face, the issue was whether he had a right to lynch Tibbs after Tibbs slapped him back— just like the good ol' days.

Well, now we're living under **Secesh 3.0**. The crazy and sometimes armed right-wing fringe groups of the 1990s—the militias, conspiracy theorists, domestic terrorists, and the like—became racialized in the 2000s. So now, these groups are crazy, armed and also racist. Whether they are militias, birthers, anti-immigration Minutemen, White nationalists, tea baggers, or others, they are united in their hatred of the government—and their hatred of a Black president they believe is foreign and illegitimate. They also believe he is a fascist, communist, terrorist, Kenyan citizen, Muslim, and so on.

The Republican Party's Southern Strategy—a raw appeal to racist White voters in order to win elections—led to a gradual party shift for the Dixiecrats. The White Citizens' Council changed its affiliation from Democratic to Republican, but the sentiment remained. And the extremist G.O.P. base that remains is now mostly an uneducated and ignorant regional party, led and fed by paranoia, jingoism and bigotry. The South helped the Republicans win elections, and the South (minus the red states that Obama turned blue) is nearly all they have left.

Under the current release, Secesh 3.0, some people say they want their country back. The issue for them is whether the states have a right to be free from Black rule in the form of Barack Obama. This includes real or symbolic rejection of the stimulus money; calls for secession from the U.S.; states' rejection of healthcare reform, a.k.a. "socialized medicine" or "Obamacare", and calls for investigations into the President's citizenship. And in this effort, a seamless coalition, a dangerous coalition has formed, consisting of: Republican lawmakers; corporate lobbyists; fringe groups and nut jobs off the street; right-wing talk radio hosts and mainstream cable news entertainers. Their efforts began with displays of racism at last year's McCain-Palin rallies and this year's tea parties and disruptions at the healthcare town hall meetings. And it has culminated in the recent "[Million Moron March](#)" on Washington, and Rep. Wilson's interruption of Obama's address by shouting "you lie!"

It is appropriate that Rep. Wilson—whose outburst has [energized support](#) for his Democratic opponent, [Rob Miller](#)—is the poster child for Secesh 3.0. After all, Wilson is a member of the [Sons of Confederate Veterans](#) (SCV), a radical White supremacist group that has been well-documented by the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#). "The slackers and the grannies have been purged from our ranks," as Kirk Lyons, an SCV operative announced, in a move to turn the group into "a modern, 21st century Christian war machine capable of uniting the Confederate community and leading it to

ultimate victory.”

As a state legislator, Wilson was [one of seven Republicans](#) to vote to keep the Confederate flag flying over the South Carolina state capitol. Moreover, he was forced to apologize to [Essie Mae Washington-Williams](#)— the African American daughter of the late Sen. Strom Thurmond and his Black maid— after she publicly revealed her father’s identity. Thurmond was, of course, the legendary segregationist and originator of the 1956 “[Southern Manifesto](#)”, a declaration against the 1954 Brown desegregation ruling. Calling Ms. Washington’s revelation an “unseemly” act that served to “diminish” one of his “heroes”, the former Thurmond page said “It’s a smear on the image that [Thurmond] has as a person of high integrity who has been so loyal to the people of South Carolina.” And no one had even questioned Washington’s veracity, as [Thurmond’s family acknowledged her](#), and she had received financial support from him for years.

So, the question that arises is, where is all of this foolishness leading us? To be sure, as in past releases, we are entering dangerous territory. One side won the 2008 election, while the other side has turned its radical fringe into the mainstream. And the ones who are crying fascism these days seem like the real fascists. In [a sobering report](#), Homeland Security had already sounded the alarm on the rise of violent right-wing extremist groups. Now is the time to watch your back, and someone else’s if you are able. And don’t forget to sleep with at least one eye open.

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
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