

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

An independent weekly internet magazine  
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,  
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,  
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**Nov 9, 2012 - Issue 493**

## **The Nonexistent, Toothless Middle Nafsi ya Jamii By Wilson Riles BC Columnist**

Not even a newly invigorated Obama will be able to find and activate the nonexistent, toothless middle. He and any who follow him are looking in the wrong place if they believe that the solutions to U.S. problems can be found in "the middle." The so-called middle or compromises cannot be well identified, constructed, or sustained because there are vanishingly few principles or values held by living people underpinning the in-between positions; almost no crucial, decisive action can be taken on "shifting sands" of "measured" negotiations or calculations. But, more importantly, the concept of a one dimensional human politic that stretches from the far Right to the far Left is totally false; it is manufactured illusion.

Both the Obama and Romney presidential campaigns attempted to paint the picture of a choice between two "roads" to the prosperous future of the country, while at the same time indicating their own ability to reach out to "the other side" to find viable solutions to our problems. Romney pointed to his single term as Governor where he vetoed a historic number of the Democratic state legislators' measures (most of which vetoes were overridden) and where otherwise, but for his here-it-is-here-it-isn't state health plan, he accepted what these Democrats sent him. Obama, who in his first term underestimated the racially motivated vehemence of the Republican opposition, is again holding out the false hope that, now with his victory, they are going to be willing to compromise with him. He is not listening to the depth of existential fear contained in their blind hatred of him - regardless of what the electorate might say about who should be President.

Barack's victory might be decisive in the popular vote and in the electoral college but other than a few shifts on the edges, his opposition was also reelected and is able to also point to that as a mandate to continue their refusal to engage any serious change of direction. It was obviously the change of demographics - in other words the "coloring" of the U.S. electorate - that gave Obama his victory. That is a fundamental change with which the bulk of the Republican Party cannot compromise; they were hoping to have four years in power in which to figure it out and do something. As E. J. Dionne Jr. says in his book, \*\*\**Our Divided Political Heart*, these Republicans are now left with the kind of irrational, Israeli-like, existential fear where "when your adversary's goals are deemed to be dishonorable [by dint of changing the power structure even slightly over your objections], it's better to court chaos, win the fight, and pick up the pieces later."

A vanishing few of the major differences in the U.S. has a viable middle ground. There is no middle ground on abortion. The so-called middle ground on tax increases has been curtailed by Grover Norquist and his No Tax Increase Pledge signed by almost every member of the Republican Party. The Democrats have already conceded on so many things: real Defense Department cuts (rather than the slowing down of the rate of increase), insurance companies continued exploitation of our ill health, and abandonment of any concern for the poor. There is very little - that will make a real difference - to negotiate about. Even the current fear about the debt and deficit is manufactured; it is more about perception than it is about reality. During W's time, even rightwing economists were pooh-poohing that concern. It could be immediately eliminated if the U.S. took the power to create money from the Federal Reserve and did what the Constitution gives the government the power to do, created its own money. Lincoln did it to pay for the Civil War; it is how we got the "greenbacks." It is also how he helped finance the Transcontinental Railroads. But this is outside the ken of both the Democratic and Republican Parties. For these guys there is no viable middle that could stand.

In the U.S., we function with the illusion that politics is **one** dimensional: a line with a left end and a right end that connects somewhere in a supposed middle. In truth, politics is multidimensional and many layered. The same person can be a conservative on some issues and a liberal on others; he/she can change their positions on the same issue depending on time and circumstances. I am reminded of when presidential candidate, Michael Dukakis, was asked in a presidential debate what his feeling would be toward the person who

might have just raped and killed his wife; would he then be a supporter of the death penalty? Few believed him when he stumbled out a "no."

In his book, E. J. Dionne approaches the historical roots of many of our differences and talks about two sometimes conflicting values within the U.S.'s social psychological psyche: individualism and communalism. These values have existed in some form on both the left and the right. Fear of extinction in how some on the right define who is in their community is the upwelling difference that charges the irrational actions of the Tea Party activists on the right. They are racists and people-of-color should never be more than functionaries in their community. There is no compromise Obama can make with this.

My question is "has Obama realized yet that he is seen as a black man?" It takes careful work to overcome racism. Is he up for the job? The first hurdle that must be overcome is denial - both on the part of the recipient of racism and the perpetrator. Systemic racism needs to be separated out as does unconscious racism. All forms must be addressed to even begin the elimination of this slippery devil. Is newly reelected President Obama - elected by people-of-color - ready for this?

*[Note: Nafsi ya Jamii is the Swahili phrase that translates in English to "The Soul Community"]*

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