



**BLAMING WHITE ANXIETY ON OBAMA:  
PROXY PROTESTS AND RACIAL RAGE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

No one who is honest, serious or sane, can truthfully deny that President Obama has done all he can do, without irreparable damage to his dignity and sense of self, to put Whites at ease about him, his patriotism, his plans and his dedication to a post-racial, post-partisan and truly just America. Not since Dr. Martin Luther King's initiative to reassure and involve Whites in creating a just and good society, and to offer possibilities and opportunities for redemption of even the most unrepentant racists, have we witnessed such an effort, even given the obvious differences.

During the campaign and after his election, Obama has practiced a judicious racial self-concealment and an office-based distancing from his community at given times to make Whites feel more a part of his project for the country. Moreover, he put aside the expansive multicultural model of government promised, at least for now, and surrounded himself with an abundance and variety of Whites. And he has bowed out and backtracked when they have questioned the text, tone, and appropriateness of his statements, especially where they could be racially misread as an expression of Black anger or "a Black thing" Whites might not understand or appreciate.

And yet there are some Whites who for clear or closeted racial "reasons" will not give him rest, relief or credit and who, as one of their favorite talk-show hosts and heroes has said, are dedicated to discrediting him and making him fail. Thus, in spite of a litany of denials and labored alternative explanations about the intense and aggressive rage and racial rant against his health care proposal, they bear serious signs of proxy protests against him, reflecting the racial antipathy some Whites feel concerning him, and the

racial anxiety they have about themselves, current conditions and the future.

There is no need to deny the complex source of their anxiety and rage, i.e., the state of the economy, disinformation, misinformation, self-cultivated unawareness, fear of an uncertain future, real disagreement, "democracy at work", prior similar patterns of other major policy proposals, and manipulation by Republicans, insurance and pharmaceutical companies and an assortment of right-wing groups. But the essential character of this confrontation and conversation is its rootedness in racial anxiety and antipathy.

Thus, the racial slurs on their signs, their hateful words, and their aggressive behavior are directed not so much against Obama's health care proposal, but against him. There is a continuing racial rage which began during the campaign and rises out of a sense of loss of power and position to one and others less worthy, a reversal of the social, even natural, order in racialized thinking. Therefore, it is not simply a town hall rage, but one which is rooted in a larger societal anger and anxiety. It is in the media and the political culture itself—residual, recurrent and continuing racism.

It is in the general criticism of him as "a joker with a chip on his shoulder, creating chaos and crisis, wearing a mask to fool White people". Others burn Obama in effigy at the rallies, wear guns openly and suggest "the trees of liberty must be watered" with someone's (?) blood. In this miasmatic mix emerge so-called "birthers", fixated on proving, against all evidence, that Obama is "foreign-born" and thus ineligible and unworthy of being President. Then, too, there are those who ask, as if it had real merit or sensible meaning, "can we still call the White

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House White with a Black man, indeed a Black family in residence in it?"

I'm not sure what more Obama can do to deal with White anxiety and antipathy. In addition to the things mentioned above, he has assured them of their greatness, generosity and capacity for kindness and offered beer for racial bonding at the White House. And he has committed himself and asked us not to remind them of past racial injustice or call current racial injustice by its real name. Furthermore, Obama has spared them the public lectures on personal and communal responsibility he has given us. Indeed, he refuses to engage racial discourse, except on ceremonious occasions to note how far we, as a country, have moved from it. But race still matters and has developed a life of its own, as a social and psychological virus resistant to reason or any remedy, except the struggle for and achievement of deep-rooted social change.

The left and liberals have not been as assertive as needed in this debate. This is partially due to a sense that Obama has not fulfilled and even gone back on some of his campaign promises. But as Paul Robeson said, "the battlefront is everywhere. There is no sheltered rear". Thus, even if we can't, for good reasons, support Obama in some areas, there are still other areas in which he takes and maintains a progressive stand and there progressives should stand with him in defense and struggle for what is just, good and right in this country and the world.

Such a site of rightful support and struggle is the issue of universal health care.

President Obama's health care proposal carries within it stipulations to alter ways that the insurance companies do business negative to human life and well-being. It would, among other things, bar them from denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions; dropping a patient if s/he gets ill; reducing coverage at critical times; increasing without limit out-of-pocket expenses; and placing a cap on the amount of coverage one can have in a year or a lifetime. And it would also cover preventive care, routine check-ups, screening and tests to insure ongoing health and well-being.

Moreover, Obama's "public option", i.e., government-provided insurance, must remain a part of his proposal. He must not cave in to corporate and right-wing campaigns to discredit it and convince the majority of American Whites, even poor and needy ones, this proposal is bad for them. But it's White racialized thinking that makes them susceptible to this discrediting. For many, who already have and benefit from Medicare and Medicaid, government sponsored programs, feel compelled to go against their own interests, if it means sharing with the less worthy, the poor and/or people of color.

Again, we must realize the health care struggle is linked to a larger one, the struggle against racial or class dominance of any group, against racialized conceptions and approaches to human life. And it is a struggle to insure the health and well-being of all, and to open up the horizons of history and human possibility in new, elevated and ever-expansive ways.

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