

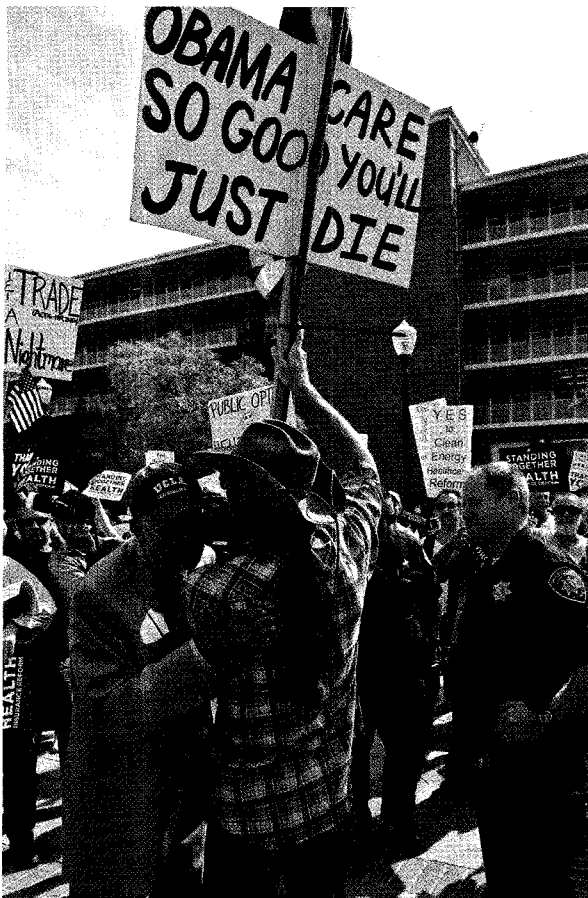


Race to the Finish

by John H. Fund

I RECENTLY ATTENDED NETROOTS NATION, the annual gathering of America's liberal bloggers, to see how they were reacting to the first 200 days of the Obama administration and Democratic dominance of Congress.

As I wandered the hallways of the cavernous Pittsburgh Convention Center, I expected to find liberals happy that their political dream of complete control of the federal government had been realized.



But I was wrong. Over and over again, I heard complaints that President Obama was retreating on their key issues, and where he was pursuing a liberal agenda it was being blocked by "reactionary throwbacks to a darker time in America." "Howling mobs" were showing up at town-hall meetings and attacking the president's health care plan. "They may cloak their rhetoric using anti-government and anti-tax rhetoric but racial concerns are at the heart of their objection to Obama," said James Rucker, the executive director of Color of Change.

No matter how opposition to ObamaCare is framed, liberals will find a racial subtext. Princeton professor Melissa Harris-Lacewell decried those who complained that government-run health care would result in fewer Americans "taking responsibility" for their own well-being. "What we know over the past 25 years," she said, "is that language of personal responsibility is often a code language used against poor and minority communities."

Oh, so much has changed since "hope" triumphed last November! As the columnist Jonah Goldberg notes, "It was Obama's supporters who hinted, teased, promised, and prophesied that Obama would help America 'transcend race?... [But since then] Obama's supporters have tirelessly cultivated the idea that anything inconvenient for the first black president just might be terribly, terribly racist."

It's certainly true that rude and obnoxious people showed up at the town-hall meetings. But the worst examples of bad behavior had little to do with conservatives. The only person I know about who was beaten at a town-hall meeting was a black conservative who was put in the hospital by union thugs. The pictures of Obama sporting a Hitlerian mustache were the work of Lyndon LaRouche, a conspiracy theorist whose roots are in the 1970s Paranoid

Left. Similarly, the poster depicting Obama as the Joker from *Batman* (the *LA Weekly* denounced it, saying “[t]he only thing missing is a noose”) was the Photoshop work of a Palestinian-American supporter of left-wing UFO enthusiast Dennis Kucinich who didn’t vote for Obama.

But all of that is a set of “inconvenient facts” to liberals looking for an explanation of why ObamaCare is sinking. Actress Janeane Garofalo had this cogent summary of why so many people were turning up at town-hall meetings: “This is about hating a black man in the White House. This is racism straight up.” *Newsweek’s* Eleanor Clift was more sophisticated, telling NPR that opposition to ObamaCare was an expression of the “racism” that was “latent” during the 2008 presidential campaign.

Even E. J. Dionne, a normally sober *Washington Post* columnist, played the race card. He noted after some people were spotted bearing legal firearms outside town-hall meetings that “guns were used on election days in the Deep South during and after Reconstruction to intimidate black voters and take control of state governments.” The point apparently was that the Long Night of Jim Crow was about to descend on the country again.

Liberal hysteria about guns being carried near town halls knew no bounds. Inconveniently, the most widely reported example of someone carrying an assault weapon to a rally involved a black man. That didn’t stop MSNBC from hyping the story. It carefully cropped the man’s head and arms from the image it ran so as to obscure his race.

When my *Journal* colleague Steve Moore tried to offer a counter-explanation on MSNBC’s *Hardball*, it didn’t fly with host Chris Matthews. “This is still a pretty conservative country and people are upset about the policies in Washington and they don’t think the politicians are listening,” Moore told Matthews, who in that way of his immediately countered: “I think some of the people are upset because we have a black president.”

Liberals are looking for racists behind every corner in the same manner they used to accuse supporters of Joe McCarthy of hunting for Communists under every bed. In an ABC News story about how racist white militias might somehow be linked to the town-hall protests, Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center warned that Obama has “triggered fears among fairly large numbers of white people in this country that they are somehow losing their country.”

TO ITS CREDIT, the Obama Administration has avoided falling into the trap of accusing its critics of racial motives. Since Obama’s July stumble in which he sided with a black Harvard professor friend in his dispute with a white policeman (Obama said the policeman was “acting stupidly”) the White House has steered clear of race.

In November, New York Governor David Paterson,

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the state’s first black governor, blamed his own low poll numbers on the “white-controlled media.” He went on to warn that “[t]he next victim on the list—and you see it coming—is President Barack Obama.”

The White House swiftly sent a message to Governor Paterson knocking down his suggestion and sharply criticizing his remarks. But it chose not to make the criticism public. The administration doesn’t want to play the race card, but neither does it want to explicitly repudiate those who do.

Shortly after Paterson made his ill-chosen remarks, President Obama got another expression of sympathy he must not have welcomed. Retired Cuban dictator Fidel Castro wrote a newspaper article saying he had positive feelings about the changes Obama was trying to bring to America, even as the U.S. president was being thwarted by evil right-wingers. “The extreme right hates him for being African-American,” Castro wrote. “I don’t have the slightest doubt that the racist right will do everything possible to wear him down, blocking his program to get him out of the game one way or another, at the least political cost.”

So far as we know, the Obama administration didn’t communicate any displeasure to Castro over those remarks. As for Fidel, no word yet on how his negotiations with MSNBC are going. Presumably his new show would air in between Chris Matthews and Keith Olbermann. ❁

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America's Second-Best Idea

Documentarian Ken Burns takes us on a lovely stroll through our national parks and their history.

by Bill Croke

KEN BURNS MUST BE RUNNING OUT OF GOOD IDEAS. The documentary filmmaker has famously done the Civil War, Lewis and Clark, baseball, jazz, Mark Twain, the Statue of Liberty, and the Brooklyn Bridge, among other subjects. What's left?

The answer is, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, running on most PBS stations nightly from September 27 to October 2. It might be Burns's most ambitious effort yet, considering the outdoor cinematography from Acadia to Grand Canyon to Denali: a gorgeous tableau of cloud shadows drifting over red-walled canyons, rusty sunsets, waves crashing upon rocky shores, storms assailing craggy peaks, and cascading waterfalls. A feast for the eyes in high definition. Add the usual assortment of knowledgeable talking heads and Burns's signature use of nar-

ration and still photographs, and you have a dazzling 12-hour infomercial for this "empire of grandeur." But the history of the parks is one of personalities as much as landscapes, and it is riveting.

Yellowstone was America's first national park, but Burns starts with Yosemite as a way to introduce the national parks' patron saint: John Muir. Born in Scotland in 1838, Muir left the Wisconsin farm of his strict Calvinist youth to indulge a nature-absorbed wanderlust. He arrived in California in 1868, where he found employment building a sawmill for the first innkeeper to settle in Yosemite Valley. Here the "nature-struck pantheist" found his calling as an amateur naturalist, spending his free time indefatigably wandering in the Sierra Nevada. He slept in the open and could hike 25 miles a day while subsisting on a pocketful of crackers. And the "Thoreau of Yosemite" wrote about it all, however difficult that was. The man who closely studied 65 glaciers in the Sierra high country once wrote that "Writing is like the life of a glacier; one eternal grind."

Muir helped found the Sierra Club in 1892, devoting much of his later life to writing in support of conservation. The Sierra Club famously fought—and lost—the Hetch Hetchy battle in 1918 (Muir had died in 1914), when the post-1906 earthquake water demands of San Francisco caused the Tuolumne River in that beautiful valley inside Yosemite National Park to be dammed. The fight marked the birth of the modern American conservation movement, singularly inspired by Muir's life and work. Muir's phrase describing his first glimpse of Yosemite is nicely illustrated by Burns: "The morning of creation" is the filmmaker's main theme, a distinct

