

April 25, 2011

The Inhumanity of Calling Human Beings Non-Human

Recently, governing member of the Orange County California Republican Central Committee, Marilyn Davenport, circulated an email which included a picture in which President Obama was depicted as a chimpanzee, sitting on the lap of his chimpanzee parents. The accompanying caption read, "Now you know why no birth certificate." After receiving wide criticism, Ms. Davenport issued an email saying in part,

"In no way did I even consider the fact he's half black when I sent out the email. In fact, the thought never entered my mind until one or two other people tried to make this about race. We all know a double standard applies regarding this president. I received plenty of emails about George Bush that I didn't particularly like, yet there was no 'cry' in the media about them."

She characterized the criticism as, "much ado about nothing."

Ms. Davenport's circulation of the email and her denial that it was racist, comprise the first two parts of an historic, very familiar trinity or three-legged stool of a very specific set of racial beliefs and practices that continues to plague a significant proportion of the human psyche even today in 2011, about an imagined human hierarchy

The first leg of the stool is the act of referring to and depicting African-Americans as chimpanzees, monkeys, apes, gorillas and other non-human primates. I wrote about this practice in my May 2007 essay: "The Double Insult Phenomenon.....Will it Ever End? A Consideration of the Don Imus Controversy." In it, I chronicle some of the most public examples of the practice:

1980's incident reported on **August 4, 2006**, www.nationalist.org/alt/2006/080401.html, "Oprah Winfrey journeyed to Forsyth County, Georgia, to do a show on resistance to 'black-power', in which Nationalists conveyed a determined and attractive image. Winfrey was so taken aback that she commented, 'I couldn't wait to get out of there.' The last Nationalist that Winfrey had on her show called her a monkey and stomped off the stage."

July, 31, 2006, (same report referenced above) WorldNet Daily-----"U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice has been in the Middle East.....A cartoon last week in the PA (Palestinian Authority) controlled Al Quds depicted Rice pregnant with a monkey. A caption read, 'Rice speaks about birth of a new Middle East'."

January 16, 2000, Washington Post....."John Rocker, the Atlanta Braves' closing pitcher....referred to a black teammate as a 'fat monkey'."

July 19, 1999, Jet magazine..... "A lawsuit recently was filed accusing Microsoft of including a 'racially charged' message linking Black people to monkeys. The message was included in the company's Publisher 98 software, the lawsuit says. The suit.....claims that people will see an image of a Black couple sitting on monkey bars when they type the word 'monkey' to get access to pictures of the animals."

November, 1997, Essence Magazine....."Tiger Woods....got teased as a child----was even called a monkey-----and couldn't play at some golf courses because of his color."

March 3, 1996, Washington Post....CBS Sports basketball analyst Billy Packerreferred to Georgetown guard Allen Iverson as 'a tough monkey' during the nationally televised game between the Hoyas and Villanova. Phone calls quickly flooded the switchboards at the television stations and the university. Packer issued an on-air apology.....The comment came as Packer was describing a replay in which Iverson drove to the basket, switched the ball from his right hand to his left hand, was fouled by Villanova's Alvin Williams and still made the shot. "You're talking about a tough monkey here", Packer said. The late Howard Cosell made a similar gaffe during ABC's 'Monday Night Football' telecast of a Washington Redskins-Dallas Cowboys game on Sept. 5, 1983. When Redskins wide receiver Alvin Garrett made a darting run after a catch, Cosell remarked: 'That little monkey gets loose, doesn't he?'"

March 6, 1996, Washington Post commentary by Courtland Milloy.... "Packer's monkey slur is particularly egregious because of a centuries-old effort to dehumanize African Americans by linking them genetically with primates. The near-successful campaign for governor of Louisiana by former Klansman David Duke was replete with literature depicting blacks as apes.....It wasn't other coaches calling to complain, it was people in the audience, some of whom have been called monkeys or chimpanzees because of their race."

January 18, 1994, Washington Post....." _____ is the first of seven skinheads scheduled to be tried on charges of harassing and attacking the Americans on Oct. 29 at a bar in Oberhof, where the U.S. (luge) team was practicing for next month's Winter Olympics. An estimated 15 skinheads allegedly made monkey noises and shouted 'nigger out' to athlete Robert Pipkins, who is black, and then pummeled teammate Duncan Kennedy, who is white, when he came to Pipkins' aid.....(Judge) Feld-Gerdes read from a statement Eschrich made to police in November in which he said: 'Negroes come from Africa. They come from the bushes. We wanted to show him he was an ape.'

September 17, 1993, Washington Post, "AT & T, the nation's largest long-distance telephone company, yesterday apologized for a cartoon printed in an employee magazine that company officials characterized as a racist illustration. Complaints arose earlier this week when employees received the magazine with the drawing, which shows people on various continents making telephone calls. The caller in Africa is depicted as a gorilla."

July 29, 1992, Washington Post commentary by Dorothy Gilliam - " 'There are no known genetic factors in crime' said Peter Greggin, director of Bethesda's Center for the Study of Psychiatry. The sensitivity to this issue, and the government's role in it, heightened several months ago when Frederick K. Goodwin-then head of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration-spoke of parallels between the violent behavior of young male rhesus monkeys and young inner-city men. He compared the inner city to a jungle, saying that the people who live there often abandoned 'civilizing' social structures."

July 10, 1991, Washington Post....."Los Angeles, July 9----An independent commission asked to investigate the police beating of motorist Rodney G. King reported today

that.....computer messages such as 'sounds like monkey slapping time'.....have been exchanged with little review or objection from department supervisors.”

April 21, 1991, Washington Post....The Washington Post’s African-American reporter Gary Lee was asked by a policeman in Svirdlosk, Russia if he lived in a zoo.

April 1, 1991, Time Magazine.....”March 3, 12:39 A.M. After breaking up a quarrel that reportedly involved blacks, Los Angeles policemen Laurence M. Powell and Timothy E. Wind use their portable communications computer to contact a team of officers on a burglary stakeout: ‘Sounds almost exciting as our last call...It was right out of Gorillas in the Mist.’ The stakeout team replies: ‘Hahahaha...let me guess who be the parties’.”

Of course, one of the most egregious, tragic examples of the dehumanization of a human being of African descent in this context is the story of Ota Benga. December 13, 1992, Washington Post....”In October 1903, Samuel Phillips Verner, a missionary, scientist and explorer, was commissioned by the director of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of the St. Louis World’s Fair to go to Congolese Africa and ‘bring the Pygmies.’ The exposition was to offer what no other exposition had: an anthropology exhibit that would ‘prove’ the intellectual and technological superiority of European civilization by gathering for display, ‘types and freaks from every land.’ The most exotic ‘type’ would be the Pygmy, rumored to be a race of semi-humans, barely evolved from the ape. Among Verner’s Pygmy cargo was Ota Benga, (a boy from the Pygmy tribe), who was exhibited for several months at the (World’s) fair and then, later, at the Bronx Zoo; afterwards he was sent to an orphanage, eventually found himself in Lynchburg, VA., and finally committed suicide.

That, my friends, is a mere snapshot of the specific emotional abuse suffered by African Americans of being told that we are not as human as others and specifically, that we are not as human as people of European descent.

I stopped collecting those articles years ago. It was just too painful. My guess is that had I continued, I'd now have dozens more. President Obama's campaign was filled throughout, with images of both the president and the first lady as monkeys and chimpanzees. The circulation of those images continued after he took office and became the most powerful person on the planet. One year ago, for example, Walt Baker, CEO of the Tennessee Hospitality Association, sent an e-mail to several people, including members of the press and a public official, comparing Michelle Obama to the Cheetah chimpanzee in the Tarzan movies. The depiction was of the First Lady with her lips in a certain position, placed next to a picture of a chimpanzee with its lips in a similar position. Part of Baker's response to the widespread disapproval of the email was, "I am saddened that anyone misinterpreted the sentiments behind the e-mail."

As previously stated, the first leg of the above-mentioned three-legged stool is the practice of comparing human beings of African descent to non-human primates. The second leg is the practice of consistently claiming that, "It had nothing to do with race." ¹ The third leg,

¹ That denial, in the face of the well-documented historical practice engaged in by a certain segment of Europeans and European Americans of likening Africans and African Americans to monkeys, apes and chimpanzees, is no less than ludicrous. No other people on Earth

which I have experienced many, many times in twenty-eight years of diversity training, is the practice of asserting that it is the critics of those actions who are really the racists since they are the ones who made what was innocent political humor into a racial issue.

Being dehumanized by being likened to non-human primates, a practice which is engaged in primarily against African Americans, is so painful that I believe that unless one is African American, it is impossible to truly understand the depth of this pain.

I have spent over twenty-five years researching our human origins, and through that work, have learned the science that supports the profound truth that all human beings, Pygmies from Central Africa, Scandinavians from Norway, Sweden and Finland, Native Americans from the Americas, Asians from the many countries of Asia, native Australians, people from the middle East, the millions of the Earth's island inhabitants, and all of the Earth's many other culturesare all equally human, and are indeed, one very intricately genetically related species.

It is utterly inhumane to tell a group human beings that they are closer to monkeys and apes than are other human beings. I am tired of thinking about this issue. I am tired of talking about it. I am tired of writing about it. At this point, I have but one response - to sincerely ask the following questions: When will our human intelligence prevail over our human ignorance? When will our innate compassion triumph over our racism? When will our collective madness end? When will we mature?

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Update: News Report of **November 16, 2016**:

Pamela Ramsey Taylor, director of the Clay County West Virginia Development Corporation, made a comment on her Facebook page about the transition from Michelle Obama to Melania Trump as First Lady. Beverly Whaling, mayor of Clay Virginia, responded to the post saying, "Just made my day, Pam." As a result of the post, Ms. Taylor was removed from her job, and the mayor resigned. The post:

"It will be so refreshing to have a classy, beautiful, dignified First Lady back in the White House. I'm tired of seeing an Ape in heels."

have been associated with monkeys as much as African people and their descendants. It's not even close. The engagement in that racism, followed by the swift assertion that "race had nothing to do with it", is like the Doublemint twins - always together.