

## From Black to Worse

**W**hat the hell is happening to us?

This isn't your usual generic, geriatric "Those darned whippersnappers and their new-fangled music!" type of rant.

I'm not complaining about trends in music, television, or fashion. I'm not even bitching about the evolution of the English language.

I'm talking about the frayed, thread-bare fabric of American society today.

*What the hell is happening to us?*

It seems the very foundation of society is not only cracking but crumbling. At record speed. In front of our very eyes.

The rule of law has lost its teeth. Republicans ignore Congressional subpoenas and are almost never punished. A deranged throng invades the Capitol, foolishly believing they will somehow thwart democracy. Then the idiots express shock – *shock!* – when their criminal behavior results in criminal penalties.

A boy grabs his semi-automatic rifle and travels across state lines to go people hunting, murders two innocents, then not only walks away scot-free, but becomes a poster boy to racists and needle-dicks everywhere.

Science is ignored. Higher education is ridiculed.

Social media is turning us against each other, but most folks can't bear the thought of logging off.

Automobile fatalities are off the charts as drivers become increasingly reckless, causing more frequent and deadlier accidents than ever before.

Hell, even simple self-preservation, once the most basic fundamental of life, seems beyond some of us. Our lakes and rivers are drying up, our oceans are rising, our forests are in flames, and the ice caps are melting. Global warming and climate

change are now simply undeniable as photos of dried lakebeds and exposed sunken boats have become commonplace. Yet so many (citizens *and* corporations) ignore the blatant evidence and continue to lie and deny.

*What the hell is happening to us?*

Why have so many Americans become hateful, vengeful, and so God-damned stupid?

I have a theory. And it may shock you.

I blame Barack Obama.

It's not *directly* his fault. Rather, it's the result of his presidency. Or rather, the *reaction* to his presidency.

I grew up in 1960s/1970s Indiana. So I know all about the "closet racist." Hell, I was surrounded by them. Chances are, so were you! You know the type...

He said things like, "She's pretty for a Black girl." Or, "He's Black, but he's just like us." Or, "After five minutes, you'll forget he's Black." And he actually thinks he's giving a compliment!

She's never joined the Klan. She's never used the "n-word," at least not outside her home. She knew to keep her prejudices to herself, especially as the new century began.

In my hometown of Kokomo, they jokingly referred to Apperson Way, the main street through the town's "Black neighborhood," as "African Way." All in good, clean fun.

Except to me. That's when I first started speaking out. Back then, the conversation usually went something like this:

"That's racist!" said I.

"Lighten up!" say they.

"It's not funny!"

"You have no sense of humor!"

"Calling it 'African Way' is offensive!"

“Well, they *came* from Africa, didn’t they?”

“We *brought them here against their will!*”

At which point, having lost patience with precocious little Leon, the closet racist would chuckle, tousle my hair, and turn their attention back to the other grown-ups.

But would they ever consider themselves actual racists? *Never!*

If a Black man were promoted over him to become his boss, he would be angry. *But he’s not racist!*

Or if a Black family moved in next door, she’d consider moving her family to another part of the suburbs. *But she’s not racist!*

They were 100% okay with Black people – so long as they knew “their place.”

So imagine their pain, their shock, their confusion and angst, when a Black man won the highest office of the land and became the “boss” of us all. It angered them. It made them just a little bit nuts.

Now multiply that man and woman by, say, 10 or 12 million or more.

*That’s* what the hell has happened to us.

The idea that a Black man could become the leader of the free world was incomprehensible to these closet cases. Obama’s victory pushed many of these folks out of their racist closets. They had to do *something!*

After all, the non-closeted racists had wasted no time. Vile posts and graphics online were instant and inescapable. We had to endure the ridiculous, reactionary “Tea Party.” We had to listen while they blamed Obama for every upset and disappointment in their lives.

But even to the still-timid closet racists, *everything* was the Black guy’s fault – even though they still knew, in their dark little hearts, that saying *why* they truly felt way this was still completely unacceptable.

They made shit up. Crazy shit, like “He’s a Muslim!” and “He’s coming for your guns!” and “He’s a foreigner!” and “He’s about to impose martial law!” and “Obamacare means death panels will decide who lives or dies!”<sup>1</sup>

They railed against his tan suit. They railed against his wife’s bare arms. All while ignoring his many real accomplishments.

But they still would *never* call themselves racists! Even though they knew they were.

That cognitive dissonance began to drive them bonkers.

Speaking of bonkers, tangerine-colored Donald Trump, a known racist since the 1980s, took up the anti-birther campaign, demanding to see Obama’s birth certificate.

And when that 300-pound malignant fistula glided down his gilded escalator in 2015, spewing bigoted bullshit as he announced his candidacy for President, the once-closeted racists found their poster boy. Trump wasn’t afraid to spout racist bile. He was speaking their language. He was voicing their rage.

And boy, were they enraged! After eight years of that Black bastard, they were pissed. They were exhausted. And now, they had a guy who wouldn’t judge them for being racist. Because he was a big one, too.

Once elected (and not by winning the popular vote), Trump emboldened these burgeoning bigots further.

Hearing a President of the United States of America respond to the blatant 2017 hate crime in Charlottesville with the words “there are good people on both sides” gave them full permission to finally act out on their worst instincts. Listening to the asshole refer to African and Latin nations as “shithole countries” empowered them. Emboldened them.

“How can it be *wrong* if the *President* says it?”

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that insurance companies basically already perform this service was lost on them.

“If *he* can spew racist bullshit, then *we* can, too!”

And that permission for crass behavior has since spilled over into the rest of American life. If the man holding the most respected office in the land demonstrates nothing but disrespect for all things good and decent, well, then you’re a fool if *you* follow the rules now.

It’s why highway fatalities have skyrocketed. Why crime is exploding. It’s why too many people basically volunteered to die of COVID, all in the name of “owning those libs!” It’s why common sense and common courtesy are both thin on the ground.

It’s why people (who should have better things to do) are up in arms over a Black Little Mermaid.

That’s how we ended up with a nation full of “Karens” (of *all* genders), ready to act out at a moment’s notice should reality present obstacles to their perceived (white) privilege.

Will pointing fingers and laying blame change anything or make matters worse? I don’t have an answer to that question. But I *do* know, if we hope to ever bring civility back into our national discourse, we *must* shine a spotlight on these assholes each and every time they act out.

That’s why, just like when I was younger, I try to call out bigotry whenever I see or hear it, be it on social media, or in “real life.” We must *never* tolerate it, nor accept it as “normal.” Because it is *not* normal. It should not be tolerated, no matter how accustomed and immune to it we become.

We will never abolish racism. But we *must* make racists ashamed of themselves again. We must constantly and consistently remind them that their behavior is absolutely, positively, *unacceptable* by *any* standard. We must shut down any hint of prejudicial language or behavior with zero tolerance.

When it’s safe to do so, risk making a scene when you witness racism.

Cut no slack. Show no quarter.

We need to shame these hateful racists.

We must shoo them back into their closets where they belong.

It's a start...

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