

The Right's Racism Is Showing

Exclusive: The House Republicans dumping the food stamp program, the continuing GOP assaults on voting rights and the celebrating among some right-wing commentators over the Trayvon Martin murder verdict are indications that white racism is alive and well in the United States, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If there remained any doubt about the connection between American racism and “small-government conservatism,” the Tea Party-dominated House Republican majority helped remove it last week in its handling of the farm bill. The Republicans larded on extra money for agricultural subsidies benefiting mostly white-owned agribusiness and then lopped off the food-stamp program entirely. It, after all, benefits a disproportionate share of blacks and other racial minorities.

In this exercise of government favoritism for wealthy whites and cruelty toward the poor (many blacks and other minorities), the pretense of free-market economics was even stripped away. If “libertarianism” were not just a polite cover for racism, the House Republicans would have killed agricultural subsidies, too.

But the Republicans didn't. They seemed fine with various forms of taxpayer giveaways to white-owned agribusinesses, but they were determined to inflict as much pain as possible on blacks and minorities who already have suffered the most from the Great Recession. There was even a cruel vindictiveness to the process.

In justifying the House action on food stamps, Rep. Stephen Fincher, R-Tennessee, referred to the New Testament but ignored the teachings of Jesus, who told his followers to feed the poor and care for the needy. Instead, Fincher extracted a line from Thessalonians, “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”

But it turned out that the starving mandate did not apply to Fincher, who has been a recipient of several million dollars in farm subsidies, including \$70,000 in direct payments in 2012 alone for doing nothing. As New York Times columnist Paul Krugman wrote on Monday, “I don't think the word ‘hypocrisy’ does it justice.”

Obviously, the Republican mean-spirited behavior is not entirely aimed at minorities. As Krugman noted, “almost half of food stamp recipients are non-

Hispanic whites” and the percentage is 63 percent in Fincher’s Tennessee district. But race remains a powerful driving force for the GOP’s behavior.

Indeed, whenever you run up against right-wing hypocrisy, it’s a safe bet that race is a factor. For instance, Tea Partiers love to go to Washington, dress up in Revolutionary War costumes and protest their taxation *with* representation. But they are remarkably silent about a continuation of “taxation *without* representation” for the residents of the District, many of whom are black.

Yes, it’s true that D.C. whites are also denied congressional representation but you can bet that if D.C. were overwhelmingly white (and right-wing) rather than substantially black (and liberal), the Tea Partiers would be screaming about the injustice of it all.

It’s also true that the Republican insistence on voter IDs (to eliminate the virtually non-existent problem of in-person voter fraud) will disenfranchise some poor and elderly whites who may not have drivers’ licenses. But the right-wing politicians who are pushing these laws know that on balance it will keep more black- and brown-skinned Americans from the polls.

That’s the numbers game they’re playing. But to rig the elections, they must frame their maneuvers in “race-neutral” ways, which means that, sadly, some whites must be disenfranchised along with blacks and other minorities. Those whites shut out from elections amount to collateral damage in the war to “take our country back.”

Pleasing Euphemisms

“Free market,” “libertarian,” “contract rights” and “small government” are the current in-vogue euphemisms for maintaining white supremacy. Though you still hear, “states’ rights” from some right-wing politicians, the phrase does have a stigma from the battles to protect segregation a half century ago.

But these various concepts all targeting the possibility that the federal government might reflect the democratic will of the American people and act against racial bigotry or other injustices can be traced back to the original political battles of the young Republic over slavery.

The Federalists, who were the prime movers behind the Constitution, were what you might call “pragmatic nationalists.” They understood that the point of the document crafted in Philadelphia in 1787 and ratified in 1788 was to centralize power in the federal government and enable it to take the actions necessary to build the country.

Their “originalist” view of the Constitution could be described as the federal

government doing whatever it must to protect the country and advance the nation's "general welfare." Many Framers were troubled by slavery but they were not purists. They even accepted repulsive compromises that counted black slaves as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of representation in Congress. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Right's Made-up Constitution.](#)"]

Nevertheless, Southern Anti-Federalists the likes of Virginia's George Mason and Patrick Henry argued that the Constitution, by centralizing power in the federal government, would inevitably lead the United States to outlaw slavery and cost wealthy plantation owners their massive capital investment in human chattel.

Though these Anti-Federalists narrowly lost the fight over ratification, they didn't fade away. They organized behind the charismatic Thomas Jefferson, who had been in France during the writing and ratifying of the Constitution. Jefferson served as Secretary of State under Federalist George Washington and as Vice President under Federalist John Adams, but he fought the ambitious nation-building plans of Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton and undermined Adams. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Rethinking Thomas Jefferson.](#)"]

Protecting Slavery

As the new constitutional Republic took shape, worried plantation owners, including many Anti-Federalists, organized themselves as the core of an agrarian-based political movement that is commonly referred to as Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party. The party presented itself as representing the interests of simple farmers, but in reality the base of Jefferson's movement was in the slaveholding aristocracy.

Jefferson himself was a deeply racist individual who made a mockery of the words he wrote in the Declaration of Independence, "all men are created equal." He engaged in the pseudo-science of skull measurements to argue in *Notes on the State of Virginia* that African-Americans were inferior to whites. He also insisted that it would be impossible for whites to live in the same country with freed blacks.

But Jefferson proved to be a skilled if unscrupulous political leader. His party's success, in first demonizing the Federalist Party and then dethroning its leaders, led to a 24-year run of Virginian presidents, starting with Jefferson in 1801 and followed by Jefferson's neighbors and protégés, James Madison (a former Federalist ally of Washington) in 1809 and James Monroe (who had been one of the early Anti-Federalists allied with Mason and Henry) in 1817.

All three were slaveholders who defended the institution of slavery and opposed the manumission (or freeing) of slaves in the United States. As Virginia's

governor in 1800, Monroe called out the state militia to brutally put down an incipient slave revolt known as Gabriel's Rebellion, with 26 alleged conspirators hanged. Jefferson and Madison pondered various schemes for deporting freed African-Americans.

Though slavery was always in the background, the chief political principle of Jefferson's party was to roll back the Constitution's empowerment of the federal government and to claim that the document's seemingly expansive powers were really quite narrow. The effect was to shield the interests of slaveholders who feared that their investments in bondage might otherwise be lost.

By the end of the Virginia Dynasty in 1825, the roots of slavery had dug down even deeper in America's soil with many Virginian plantation owners, who had exhausted their own land by overuse, starting a new industry: breeding slaves for sale to the new slave states to the west. The United States was on course for the Civil War. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Right's Dubious Claim to Madison](#)."]]

The Demise of Slavery

Ironically, just as the Anti-Federalists had feared, the growing industrial power of the North and its swelling immigrant population tilted national power away from the South. But slavery was still defended by Jefferson's Democratic Party, which competed against the Whigs and then the Republicans, based primarily in the North.

The election of anti-slavery Republican Abraham Lincoln was the final straw for hard-line slavers who then orchestrated the secession of 11 Southern states. With secession, the Democratic Party lost much of its representation in Congress.

Despite the centrality of slavery to the War Between the States, Southerners insisted then and some still do today that the conflict was not about slavery, but about "limited government," "constraints on federal power," "states' rights," and "contract rights." But the inconvenient truth was that the Confederacy quickly drafted a constitution perpetuating slavery and the South conditioned its later peace negotiations on slavery's continuation.

In the final days of the war in 1865, while the Southern states were still in rebellion, Lincoln engineered passage of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. After the South's surrender and Lincoln's assassination, the Radical Republicans pushed through the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteeing equal protection under the law and the Fifteenth Amendment assuring the right to vote regardless of one's color.

After the Southern states returned to the Union and especially after Reconstruction ended in 1877 the pro-slave Democratic Party became the party of Jim Crow and made possible the brutal oppression of freed blacks, who faced lynching and other acts of terror. The solid Democratic South only changed in the 1960s when the national Democratic Party took the lead in passing major civil rights laws.

The so-called Dixie-crats were then welcomed into the Republican Party by opportunistic politicians such as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Given the stigma of outright racism, Nixon, Reagan and other Republicans employed code words dog whistles that were heard by the white racists but could be explained away to more enlightened Americans.

Rebranding as Patriots

Thus, we were back to euphemisms about “limited government,” “constraints on federal power,” “states’ rights,” and “contract rights.” One other cosmetic change in the new millennium was for the Right to “rebrand” itself from its overt love of the Old Confederacy to a supposed harkening back to the Framers’ “originalist” view of the Constitution.

Except that instead of citing the pragmatic nationalism of Washington, Hamilton, Adams and the earlier incarnation of Madison who all favored a vibrant central government the Right promoted the revisionist version of a weak central government as devised by Jefferson and the Southern slaveholders.

With the election of the first African-American president in 2008, and with it the recognition of the demographic changes that Barack Obama represented, the lightly repressed racism of the American Right bubbled to the surface with conspiracy theories about Obama’s supposed Kenyan birth and posters showing him in African tribal dress with a bone through his nose.

Of course, Republican and Tea Party leaders still insisted that their political movement was not about racism, but about free markets and removing the heavy hand of government regulation. But their actions kept belying their words, both in the racially tinged legislation like discriminatory voter ID laws, resistance to immigration reform and elimination of food stamps and in the rulings of the right-wing Supreme Court, such as gutting the Voting Rights Act.

Then, there was the right-wing backlash on Fox News and talk radio against the public outrage over the murder of an unarmed 17-year-old African-American boy Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. Some right-wing commentators even celebrated the acquittal of his killer George Zimmerman on Saturday, much as an earlier generation of racists cheered “not guilty” verdicts for Klansmen accused of

lynching uppity Negroes.

When confronting the apparent glee that some right-wingers expressed over Zimmerman's acquittal and facing comparable sentiments when the Supreme Court's majority trashed the Voting Rights Act and House Republicans axed food stamps for the poor one has to wonder where these white racists hope to take the United States.

In their ugly words and deeds, there is an echo of Jefferson and an earlier generation of American racists who wistfully hoped that they could ship non-whites out of the United States and make the young nation white and homogenous.

We heard that wistful voice again last year in Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney wanting to make life so miserable for Hispanic immigrants that they would "self-deport" and complaining that Obama was giving "stuff" to the unworthy "47 percent" whose color in the mind's eyes of Romney's white listeners was surely of a darker hue.

The current dysfunction of the Congress is another distant echo of the pre-Civil War days when Southern whites obstructed any proposal for federal government action, even disaster relief, as a possible precedent for ending slavery. In the modern case, the fear may be that the federal government will help non-whites gain genuine political power.

So, what is becoming painfully apparent is that the pleasant thought that the United States was finally reaching a post-racial future isn't true. The only question is whether the reassertion of white supremacy now in the guise of "small-government conservatism" will succeed in creating a Second Jim Crow era.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Israel's War Talk on Iran

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is pounding the war drums on Iran again, drawing support from the usual suspects in Washington's think tank community and the media. The goal seems to be to derail prospects for negotiations with Iran

and on the Palestinian dispute, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Amid a prolonged campaign to keep us scared about what is depicted as an inexorable Iranian march toward acquiring nuclear weapons, it is easy to lose sight of the cyclical nature of discourse about Iran's nuclear program, which began in the days of the Shah and has been the subject of repeated unrealized predictions about how close the Iranians supposedly were to getting a bomb.

Rather than any one-way march, what we are seeing is a wheel of alarm that keeps turning around. Discourse on this subject is better understood not in terms of threats posed by Iran but instead in terms of the purposes, both long- and short-term, served by hyping of such a threat.

A couple of developments in particular have pushed the latest turn of the wheel. One is Hassan Rowhani's victory in the Iranian presidential election, which has made it harder for the alarmists to keep painting the face of Iran as a menacing one. The chief agitator on Iran, the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu, already sorely misses one of its most helpful props: outgoing Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, even though he does not leave office until next month.

Netanyahu's government also is discomfited by recent movement, or at least appeals for movement, in diplomacy aimed at settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Secretary of State John Kerry really does seem to be serious about getting something done on this problem.

There also have been pointed reminders lately from voices within Israel, including editorialists at major newspapers and experienced security officials such as former Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin, that continuing the government's current course means a bleak future for Israel of costly international isolation and even losing any identity as a Jewish and democratic state.

For Netanyahu's government, one of the purposes of ringing alarm bells about Iran as the "real problem" in the Middle East is to divert attention from these truths about the conflict with the Palestinians and to divert energy from any diplomacy aimed at ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. Any new attention to the Palestinian issue is a spur for that government to ring the bells yet again.

It thus was unsurprising that Netanyahu took to U.S. airwaves on Sunday to try to scare the pants off us again about the Iranian nuclear program. As usual, he conducted his fear-mongering while seemingly oblivious to major realities about this subject. He ignored the repeated and publicly expressed intelligence

judgments that Iran has not decided to build a nuclear weapon and may never decide to do so.

His demand that Iran end all enrichment of uranium is clearly a non-starter and only a prescription for making diplomacy fail. The amped-up saber-rattling he demands from the United States as well as Israel only heightens whatever interest the Iranians may have in a nuclear deterrent, further impairs diplomatic prospects by making the Iranians even more doubtful about U.S. intentions, and ignores how implementation of a military threat would probably be counterproductive by leading the Iranians to make the very bomb-building decision they have not to date made.

His description of the Iranian government as a “messianic, apocalyptic, extreme regime” is a crude stereotype that continues his practice of treating this entire issue in a cartoonish way, even when he is not using literal cartoons at a podium at the United Nations. He ignores that the only existential threat that a nuclear weapons state in the Middle East poses to another state in the region is the threat that Israel poses to Iran, and he ignores that the only threats of military attack in that duopoly are the threats that Israel is making against Iran rather than vice versa.

Besides not being led astray by this pied piper of alarm, there is work to be done on the issue of Iran, and all the more so in the wake of the Iranian presidential election. Some of the most important points to bear in mind are expressed in a just-released open letter to President Obama from 29 national security experts and former government officials (myself included).

The letter observes that Rowhani’s election presents “a major potential opportunity to reinvigorate diplomatic efforts to resolve the standoff over Iran’s nuclear program.” It calls on the administration to redouble efforts to engage Iran not only on the nuclear issue but also on other matters of concern to the United States.

On the nuclear issue, it states that a new proposal is needed that, while incorporating what the United States and its Western partners are seeking regarding limiting and verifying Iran’s nuclear activities, treats sanctions in terms of their stated purpose of leverage to obtain such an agreement, rather than just being unending punishment or a domestic political statement.

Sitting back and expecting Iran to make the next move would likely lead to just one more episode in the long history of missed opportunities in this relationship.

While doing these things, avoiding what is unhelpful is also important. As the

letter states, “no further sanctions should be imposed or considered at this time as they could empower hardliners opposed to nuclear concessions at the expense of those seeking to shift policy in a more moderate direction.” Also unhelpful would be more of the sorts of military threats that Benjamin Netanyahu likes to make.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a [blog post at The National Interest’s Web site](#). Reprinted with author’s permission.)

Truth Requires Truth-Tellers

President Obama says he welcomes a vibrant debate on government secrecy and surveillance, but he then punishes the people who provide information that could make such a debate meaningful. The mainstream U.S. news media also shows little regard for these brave truth-tellers, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

In a July 8 [editorial](#), the New York Times described the issue of National Security Agency (NSA) spying on Americans as one of “overwhelming importance” worthy of national debate. Noting that President Obama said he welcomed such a debate, the Times then pointed to a core problem: “This is a debate in which almost none of us know what we’re talking about.”

It turns out that everything about the NSA surveillance operation is “classified” and therefore done in secret. As a result there is no public access to the information needed for a debate. At least that was the case until “leaker” Edward Snowden risked all to tell the American public and indeed the whole world about it.

Thus, the public now knows that all the legal justifications for NSA operations are themselves secret. For instance, there is the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, originally created by Congress to judge the legitimacy of government requests for wiretaps but it also operates under extreme secrecy. According to the Times, this court “has for years been developing a secret and unchallenged body of laws” that now go far beyond its original mandate. Yet the process of the court’s runaway empowerment has been beyond contesting.

As the Times puts it, there is a “complete absence of any adversarial process”

which is, after all, "the heart of our legal system." To demonstrate this, the editorial tells us "the government in 2012 made 1,789 requests to conduct electronic surveillance; the court approved 1,788 (the government withdrew the other one).

Were they all legitimate requests? It is impossible to know because "no one was allowed to make a counterargument" and the details of each request are secret, too. In other words, the court is an ever more widely used rubber stamp for a part of the government which in its apparently addictive pursuit of information is now literally monitoring us all. And, it is doing so with no public transparency and no traditional checks and balances.

The Times concludes that this situation constitutes a "perversion of the American justice system" which Congress, playing (in my view) the role of Dr. Frankenstein, has not been able to bring under control (after authorizing the system as a post-Watergate reform in the 1970s and then expanding it in the post-9/11 climate of fear).

"The [surveillance] court has morphed into an odd hybrid that seems to exist outside the justice system, even as its power grows in ways that we can't see," the editorial said.

It is at this point that the Times editorial falls short. Since the U.S. government's surveillance court was operating in such secrecy, how is it the paper knows enough to denounce it?

Except for the annual release of the overall numbers of warrants issued or rejected (rarely), virtually all the information on the court's rulings that is, the substantive nature of its work comes from someone (in this case Mr. Snowden) who leaked the information on which the Times now relies. Indeed, in the case of such secret government operations, it is always a "leaker" who performs the public service of shedding light on dubious and often dangerous official behavior.

Yet the Times has not come to Snowden's defense. It has not noted his actions as praiseworthy or campaigned against the persecution he now suffers at the hands of the administration's Justice Department. By not doing so, the newspaper improperly separates this story from the storyteller, and while the Times informs us of the high importance of the story, it leaves the storyteller to his fate.

What does this tell us about the Times' editorial board? Perhaps that they lack the moral courage to defend the sources who make informed public debate possible. In this case, the Times won't defend a man who arguably has done more

to uphold American civil liberties than anyone since Martin Luther King Jr.

The Threat to Civil Liberties

The man who brought us the story of the NSA says he has had no second thoughts about telling the tale. On July 12, Snowden met with a number of human rights organizations at his temporary refuge in Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport. Here are a few of the points he made:

–Through his contract work for the NSA, Snowden found that he “had the capability without any warrant to search for, seize, and read your communications. Anyone’s communications at any time. That is the power to change people’s fates.”

–Snowden also concluded that the daily use of this capacity by the NSA was a “serious violation of the law. The Fourth and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution of my country, Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and numerous statutes and treaties forbid such systems of massive, pervasive surveillance.”

–“My government [U.S.] argues that secret court rulings, which the world is not permitted to see, somehow legitimize an illegal affair. . . . The immoral cannot be made moral through the use of secret law.”

–Appalled by this situation, Snowden took to heart the 1945 Nuremberg principle that says, “Individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience. Therefore individual citizens have the duty to violate domestic laws to prevent crimes against peace and humanity from occurring.”

–Having concluded that the NSA’s real and potential secret access to the communications of almost every American, and a growing number of non-citizens, was criminal in nature (perhaps totalitarianism in the making), he leaked the classified information that would bring the NSA’s activities into public view. “That moral decision to tell the public about spying that affects all of us has been costly, but it was the right thing to do and I have no regrets.”

Threat to Classified Information

The U.S. government, which has pursued Snowden as a traitor and criminal, did not take well to these public statements. The White House accused Russia of providing Snowden with a “propaganda platform,” and it is reported that President Obama got on the telephone with Russian President Vladimir Putin to express his displeasure.

No substantive attempt has been made by U.S. officials to publicly engage the

issues raised by Snowden's revelations. President Obama has followed his by now usual path of using positive words (I welcome a debate on secrecy) and then pursuing policies that blatantly contradict them (making Snowden's life miserable and threatening reprisals against any country that helps him).

It is the U.S. government that is telling other countries to "follow the rule of law" (that is, U.S. law) and help capture Snowden. He illegally divulged classified information and that is all there is to it. End of discussion.

The fact that the NSA and other U.S. "intelligence" agencies may be acting beyond the law, both domestic and international, is apparently not open for discussion. The fact that it was President Obama who refused to prosecute blatant criminal behavior that occurred during the George W. Bush administration seems all but forgotten. His decisions to go after Snowden and to show no mercy to Pvt. Bradley Manning say that this President is perfectly willing to use double standards. There will apparently be no serious debate on this fact either.

In the face of actions of men like Edward Snowden, the Obama administration has sought to crack down on other potential "leakers" throughout the government. As part of an effort titled the Insider Threat Program, the majority of federal agencies, not just ones dealing with classified material, have been instructed to watch out for potential "leakers."

Classes are being conducted to instruct many federal workers in the telltale signs allegedly given by people who might divulge information. This has the potential to set off a witch hunt, and so we can ask, how many careers will be ruined through the misuse of this program?

As Edward Snowden had hoped, his revelations have raised public awareness of the massive gathering of information by the government. However, it is unclear whether this heightened awareness translates into significant public disapproval of this surveillance activity. There have been various polls taken and they are not consistent.

For instance, a July 10 poll by Quinnipiac University reported that by a margin of 45 percent to 40 percent Americans believe "the government's antiterrorism efforts go too far, restricting civil liberties." It also reports that 55 percent characterize Snowden as a "whistleblower" and not as a "traitor."

On the other hand, a June Washington Post – Pew Research Center poll said 56 percent of Americans considered the NSA accessing of telephone records of millions of Americans through secret court orders "acceptable" while 41 percent called the practice "unacceptable."

Such divisions of opinion are unlikely to inspire Congress or the Obama administration to change the situation. The numbers suggest that Americans, including progressives and liberals, do not really feel threatened by the massive spying, even if some of them find it problematic. Many suppose it is only the “subversive types” who have something to fear. They do not understand how easy it is for the bureaucrats to expand categories of “suspect” behaviors.

It also should be noted that, as described by the New York Times, the prospective national debate is far too limited in scope. As it is evolving it concentrates solely on the intelligence-gathering activities of the government in its efforts to forestall terrorism. No one is discussing whether there are other strategies available in the “war on terror” that might make massive spying unnecessary. There are such alternatives.

As I have suggested in other recent analyses, terrorism is largely stimulated by U.S. foreign policies in regions such as the Middle East. Those policies, in turn, are largely the products of the inordinate influence of economic and ideological lobbies. Change foreign policy and you can substantially reduce the risk of terrorist attack.

In doing so, you eliminate the alleged need for massive government spying. So, are you concerned about the erosion of civil liberties by a government that feels compelled to spy on you so as to make you safe? If so, why not have a national debate about the nature of our foreign policies and the influences behind them?

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism.
