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**The Slow-Witted Beast: Mass Media Sings the Devil's Tune
The Substance Of Truth
By Tolu Olorunda
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"Unenlightened mass media has served as a covert propaganda machine for white supremacist thought, skillfully manipulating representations to convey to black folks and everyone else the notion, however false, that black life is horrible, that black people are the enemy, dangerous to themselves and others."

-Acclaimed Scholar, bell hooks, in her highly enriching 2002 book, [Rock My Soul : Black People and Self-Esteem](#).

The "slow-witted beast" is a phrase borrowed from a [recent lecture](#) given by Comedy Central's Jon Stewart, in which he sat down a few corporate journalists and told the brutal and honest truth to their faces. Calling the mainstream press a "*brutish, slow-witted beast*," Stewart chastised them for the "*false sense of urgency they create, the sense that everything is breaking news*." The Comedy Central host also seemed to be displeased with the level of adulteration that has become normative within the cable news beltway. He said, "*The 24-hour networks are now driving the narratives and everyone else is playing catch-up*." No doubt this cry from the hyper-wealthy, White-Jewish comedian is but a mere reflection of the dissatisfaction and discontent most Black, Brown, Red and Yellow peoples around the world have expressed for decades. Peoples of culture/color around the globe have suffered the sting of unfiltered dishonesty, distortion and deformation by the affluent media empires. At the crossroad

of a black man rising to the highest pedestal in political platform, journalists of culture/color still remain underrepresented in Washington. It is as though the corporate press has neither the intellect, nor the moral fortitude, to see how grossly illogical it is to host panels of White men/women over the age of fifty, whose attempt – rather pathetic – to “understand” Barack Obama never exceeds the thinking capacity of a fifth grader.

The 2008 Presidential race, particularly with the emergence of Barack Obama, has exposed many, otherwise hidden, insightful details about the media’s laziness and self-obsession. NPR co-host, Brooke Gladstone, affirmed this notion in a [recent appearance](#) on PBS’ *Bill Moyers Journal*. “*This is about celebrity,*” she said. “*This is about putting your finger in the air and following the public mood. Is it news? No.*” A media which prides itself in being “dependable,” “trusted,” and “powerful,” sure has some explaining to do - if those slogans are to be taken seriously. It is of little doubt that the corporate news empires have always had *challenges* when it comes to race, and Barack Obama’s presence at the balcony of political stardom helped reinforce this reality. It was the white-controlled media stations who first asked the question – with such unbelievable gull and effrontery – “Is Barack Obama Black enough?” In an unsuccessful effort to look self-interrogatory, the corporate press would, from time to time, feature [all-white panels](#) to confront the issue of race in the campaign. As a noted scholar [once quipped](#), “*That’s like Hugh Hefner getting a stripper to come on the show and tell him that he’s not a sexist.*”

In 2005, when [Rev. Jesse Jackson challenged](#) the National Association of Black Journalist for failing in its responsibility to confront the corporate media structures, many thought such provoked outrage would yield substantive results, but three years later, just like the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, not much has changed. Rev. Jackson, noting that “Not one black (person) leads a show on CNN, or Fox News or MSNBC,” asked the NABJ-packed room a simple question. “Doesn't that offend you?” It is remarkable to acknowledge that a Black Man might attain the seat of the presidency, and the task of reporting, translating and transcribing the implication of the moment would float upon a sea of unenlightened white journalists. In 2008, three White females host highly-watched newscasts on the cable news networks, but not one individual of color has, at the very least, been subjected to consideration. With such a precedent, the “manipulating representations,” of which bell hooks spoke, can only yield more credence. In a race where a black man is faced with the daunting task of opposing a White man, without coming off as threatening, “[uppity](#),” or “[disrespectful](#),” the mainstream press has operated as the third leg of the McCain campaign.

The media has played “enabler,” as “Master John” and “Mistress Sarah” have lived out their fantasy of cracking the whips of invective-laden insults on the back of their disobedient slave (Obama), who, as [John McCain put it](#), should have done what he “asked Sen. Obama to do.” John McCain unabashedly proclaiming that he is punishing Sen. Obama for being defiant seems to have not made a difference in the mainstream media's malnourished coverage of this historic race. The 24-Hour News Networks have neither budged nor subsided in their hyper-vigilance on Obama. Barack Obama is not a unique case, as Black men throughout history have had to deal with the grim reality of being rendered “[invisible](#),” while simultaneously functioning under the scope of societies’ omnipresent judgmental lenses.

Perhaps Black Athletes in the media are the greatest example of the corporate media's hyper-vigilance on Black bodies. Philadelphia Eagles' quarterback, Donovan McNabb once, in an interview on HBO, infuriated the White-supremacist press for his [courageous admission](#) that Black Athletes are inordinately scrutinized, antagonized and microscopically examined by fans, coaches, owners, managers and teammates alike – especially in contrast to their White counterparts. *"There's not that many African-American quarterbacks, so we have to do a little bit extra,"* McNabb said. Using his Black-Quarterback status as a case-study, he declared, *"Because the percentage of us playing this position, which people didn't want us to play, is low, so we do a little extra."*

Powerhouse tennis players, Venus and Serena Williams, are also specimens in the laboratories of White public opinion. Award-Winning Sportswriter, Dave Zirin, [once remarked](#) that Serena Williams and Venus Williams still remain alien-like figures – in spite of their enormous gift and talent – in the world of professional Tennis, because the administrators, referees, fans and coaches "don't know what to do in Tennis with people like the William Sisters. The announcers don't know how to report on them, they don't know how to talk about them." In a recent episode of the popular NBC comedy talk-show, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, Zirin's theory and proposal was unambiguously confirmed. The host, an Irish Comedian, struggled to characterize the combativeness of *U.S. Open* champion, Serena Williams. Ending up with "Intimidating" and "fierce," O'Brien spent a substantial slice of the interview, examining the No. 1 seed's on-court outfits - which he called "sexy," drilling a hole into her personal life, and making random comments – probably meant as compliments – concerning her temperament. One can only envision the *Gloria Steinems* of the world, holding press conferences and rallies to deliberate what to do next, if Ms. Williams happened to be non-black. Serena Williams' dad, Richard Williams, is no doubt a believer of this gospel, as he [once observed](#), much to the shock and feigned ignorance of White Tennis players/fans/coaches/sportscasters, that his daughters are "never accepted" because "people are prejudiced in tennis."

The slow-witted Beast, which has abdicated its responsibility and duty should not be depended upon to make amends any time soon. As the old saying goes, *"A leopard cannot change its spots."*

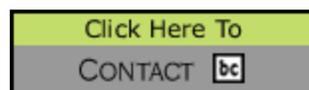
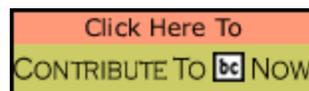
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