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**What Congressman John Lewis was Really Saying:  
White Folk Getting' Ready to Act Up, Y'all!  
Between The Lines**

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Much ado has been made over Georgia Congressman's John Lewis' statements about the nasty turn the Presidential campaign took at Republican rallies last week. From Palin saying Obama was "palling around with domestic terrorists, to Republican rally supporters calling the Democratic nominee "an Arab," "a terrorist," and calling for Obama's death, shouting out, "Kill him!", the rhetoric of the campaign finally crossed the "colorline" last week in a way that we always understood was just beneath the surface. At least, black people understood it was just beneath the surface. It was no longer just about politics and political choices anymore. It became about violating another black man in a way that black men, and African Americans, in previous generations were violated through extralegal and illegal means (usually mob violence) when they made serious challenges to gain civil, social and political equal rights.

McCain/Palin rallies didn't resemble political rallies last week. They resembled Klan rallies, only absent the sheets. The venom spewed deep and the television cameras caught it. So did John Lewis, who said the McCain/Palin campaign was sowing the seeds of hatred and division. Lewis, as one of the most racially assaulted of the living frontline activists remaining from the civil right era, called it as he saw it. If anybody would know when a change in racial tone has occurred, I would trust that it would be John Lewis. He's heard it before, and he's been in the midst of mob violence - even under the collar of authority - having been assaulted on the Edmond-Pettis bridge in March 1965. Code language is John Lewis' second language, and code language has become McCain/Palin's first language or native tongue. Lewis was simply warning McCain, Palin and the rest of the country that this was getting ready to get uglier than we could imagine. Lewis' code language for, "White folk getting ready to act up."

Now before y'all start tripping, I'm not talking about all white folk. There are good white folk, then there are "those" white folk that were active in upholding America's race caste system. They used the same coded language, and usually stayed in line until it appeared that Blacks were too close to being equal, then they voiced their biases or acted in unlawful ways. There's always been right minded, upright, straight ahead white folk that were fair-minded enough not to engage in the racial divide, and some of them even advocated in the various causes for equality throughout the nation's history. But most were complicit in supporting the race caste system. That's the only way slavery and later, legal segregation, could survive as a socially acceptable normative deeply engrained in America's cultural norms. However, there were many, in significant numbers, that tried to do the right thing - what our grandparents and great grandparents called, "Good white folk."

We see that in those who are really giving the Obama campaign a chance to be heard, and are finding out his candidacy may provide a viable solution to this country's problems. And Obama is only trying to exercise his constitutional right to run for President of the United States, and he's getting too close for some white folks' comfort. So now they want to put the terrorist mob on him like they used to put the lynch mob on generations before him. Different periods, same language.

McCain got upset when Lewis provided him the analogy of George Wallace, who Lewis said, "never threw a bomb, never shot a gun...he created the climate and conditions that encouraged vicious attacks against those Americans who were only trying to exercise their constitutional right." Remember, John Lewis was named as one of the three "wise persons" McCain said he'd seek advice from if he were to become President. Yet, when called to respond to the "call for violence" through hated-filled rhetoric by some of his supporters, McCain claimed he was insulted to be compared to Wallace and that he can't control the "fringe element" in his party and defends his supporters, 99% of whom are "good people." Sounded like more than one percent of the people in attendance at those rallies were booing to me, but John McCain totally missed the point from his anointed "wise man."

All Lewis was saying was that McCain and Palin, like Wallace, were being complicit in creating an environment for hostility and violence to be waged against Obama, by not checking their "fringe element" as McCain likes to call them. 99% of the people of Alabama and Mississippi were "good people" who were complicit in upholding segregation for 68 years. The fringe element, the Klan, enforced the social norms.

The intolerance of terrorism, like the intolerance of desegregation or integration, started with the conversation - the rhetoric - that went unchecked and spread, once people knew hate talk would be tolerated. That's the lesson John Lewis was trying to teach John McCain. McCain said he was stopped in his tracks. Yeah, but it was for the wrong reason. Not because John Lewis was right, but because the Republican spin machine used it as an opportunity to shut down any inference that this really might be about race with a "terrorist" subterfuge attached to it. John Lewis knew exactly what it was, and being the wise man that he is, and that McCain, himself, thought he was, let Johnny boy know what time it was; that white folk were getting ready to act up if he left the crack in the hate door open.

Truth be told, I think John Lewis was right, and I think *some* white people still getting ready to act up as it becomes more obvious that Barack Obama might win this election. Watch.

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