

The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

www.BlackCommentator.com

March 5, 2009 - Issue 314

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The Return of the Mulatto The Green-Eyed Monster The Fifth Column

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"You can't write that about [the president of the NAACP](#)."

"Write what?" I said.

"*That*," Melissa told me, pointing at my notebook's screen. "You're calling him a 'mulatto'?"

"Well, that's the definition, right? [His father was white, his mother was black](#). I think." I scratched my head. "Maybe he's a [quadroon](#)." Melissa rolled her eyes.

"But he says he's black," she insisted.

"On the Stephen Colbert show, he was asked if he was black, and he waited before answering the question."

"Oh come on," Melissa said, shaking her head. "They edit those things, you know that."

"How could they edit a pause? In fact, he said it would be a '*great end*' for everyone to be white, and that the next best thing is for everyone to be treated as if they *were* white!" Melissa's bright green eyes stabbed me.

"Okay, okay," I said, hitting the backspace button repeatedly. Melissa's naturally long tresses brushed me as she leaned over my shoulder, the blue of Microsoft Word reflecting on her pretty, freckled face.

"And *that*," she commanded again, "that's just a puerile ad hominem." I reached for my thesaurus. She slapped the back of my ashen hand, defibrillating my heart with her touch. "A childish personal attack."

The text on the screen read: "Am I the only one who is spooked—pardon the expression—by [Ben Jealous's](#) resemblance to white supremacist [Steve Sailer](#)?"

I protested, "He said himself that lily white Stephen Colbert could easily pass for a relative, that he and Colbert could be cousins. Isn't he sending a not-so-coded message?"

"Message to who?" Melissa asked.

"To white America: 'I'm more like you. Don't lump me in with these black beasts.'"

"You'll never forgive Obama for his '[mutt like me](#)' comment, will you?" said Melissa, half-smiling.

"I don't know why other mulattoes didn't get up in arms—he was comparing them to dogs."

"The word 'mulatto' comes from the Spanish for—"

"It's like when Henry Louis Gates's children—in his own documentary—admitted they weren't interested in Africa, because it was only 'half them'."

"W. E. B. DuBois was part white, you know," Melissa observed, as if to say, "Checkmate."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, so was Jesus. I don't have anything against people who are half-white or even all-white: give me a [Tim Wise](#), a Joe Slovo, or Spock any day over a coal-black Uncle Thomas. Being triracial doesn't disqualify you from genuinely attempting to further the advancement of a particular race. But these guys, [Cory Booker](#), [Harold Ford](#), [Valerie Jarrett](#), they're not John Brown or even John Beige."

"No," she said emphatically, "you can keep your John Brown, or Fig P. Newton or whatever other terrorists you want to hold up as models. The people Obama has surrounding him, white, black, or" —she saw from the expression on my face that she had better not say, "green" or "purple"—"or, whatever, they're the best-qualified men and women for the job."

"I'm just saying: is one of the qualifications being mulatto?"

"You're a broken record," she answered, sounding tired.

"A what?"

"I think you're jealous of Jealous. It's as simple as that."

"Well, what about this Fraley or Fairly fellow."

"Who?"

"The guy who wrote an article about the new, taxpayer-funded Klan statue in Nashville, and got death threats and chased out of Tennessee."

"Oh—" Melissa's eyes rolled—"that egomaniac."

"Maybe he is an egomaniac," I conceded, "but whatever he is, he said on the radio somewhere that he was surprised to hear Ben Jealous was in the NAACP—not that he was president of the NAACP, but that he was even *in* the NAACP—because, in his view, Jealous was *not at all interested in black issues*."

"But he was publisher of—"

Fairly went to Ben Jealous and his wife for help. The man who would be president of the NAACP was completely unconcerned about helping a black man whose career and reputation were ruined by Klan supporters and the white media, all for suggesting that the founder of the Klan shouldn't get a statue. A phone call from Jealous, ordering the local NAACP to speak out, could have turned the tide. Would DuBois have acted like that?"

I continued. "Moreover, Jealous insulted Fairly, saying Fairly 'had it coming'."

"No, no, no," Melissa said, "don't lie: Fairly didn't say that. He said Jealous said *Julian Bond* probably thought Fairly 'had it coming'."

I was befuddled. Maybe I had my facts wrong. Melissa seized the time to press on.

"Look, Julian Bond said, 'It would be beneath us to consider' Ben Jealous's biracial background as something that might disqualify him from being NAACP president."

"The only thing whiter than Julian Bond," I muttered, "is a line of cocaine." She snorted a chuckle, then said:

"Look at [Walter White](#), the NAACP president in the 1930's. He could have passed for white."

"Have we returned to the blue-vein shadocracy of the 1930's?" I asked.

"In the colonial past," I added—"and America, remember, for black people was a semi-colony—the Europeans placed the mulattoes a rung above the blacks, the natives."

"I don't know about that...", she said slowly.

My eyes pleaded with Melissa's. Hers were green. Mine were brown. She won.

I sighed in resignation, erased the entire document, and then began typing again:

"Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants...."

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