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Trump's Weapon of Mass Distraction



Marc Morial
 Guest Columnist

"You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time."

— Abraham Lincoln

A recent CBS/New York Times poll found that 25 percent of Americans and 45 percent of registered Republican voters believe that President Obama was not born in the United States. Another 22 percent of Republican voters say they don't know. For the record, President Obama was born on August 4, 1961 at Kapi'olani Maternity and Gynecological Hospital in Honolulu, Hawaii. His birth certificate documents it. Hawaii officials confirm it. And, no one seriously doubts it except for a vocal minority of "birthers" who will do or say anything to get America's first Black President out of the White House.

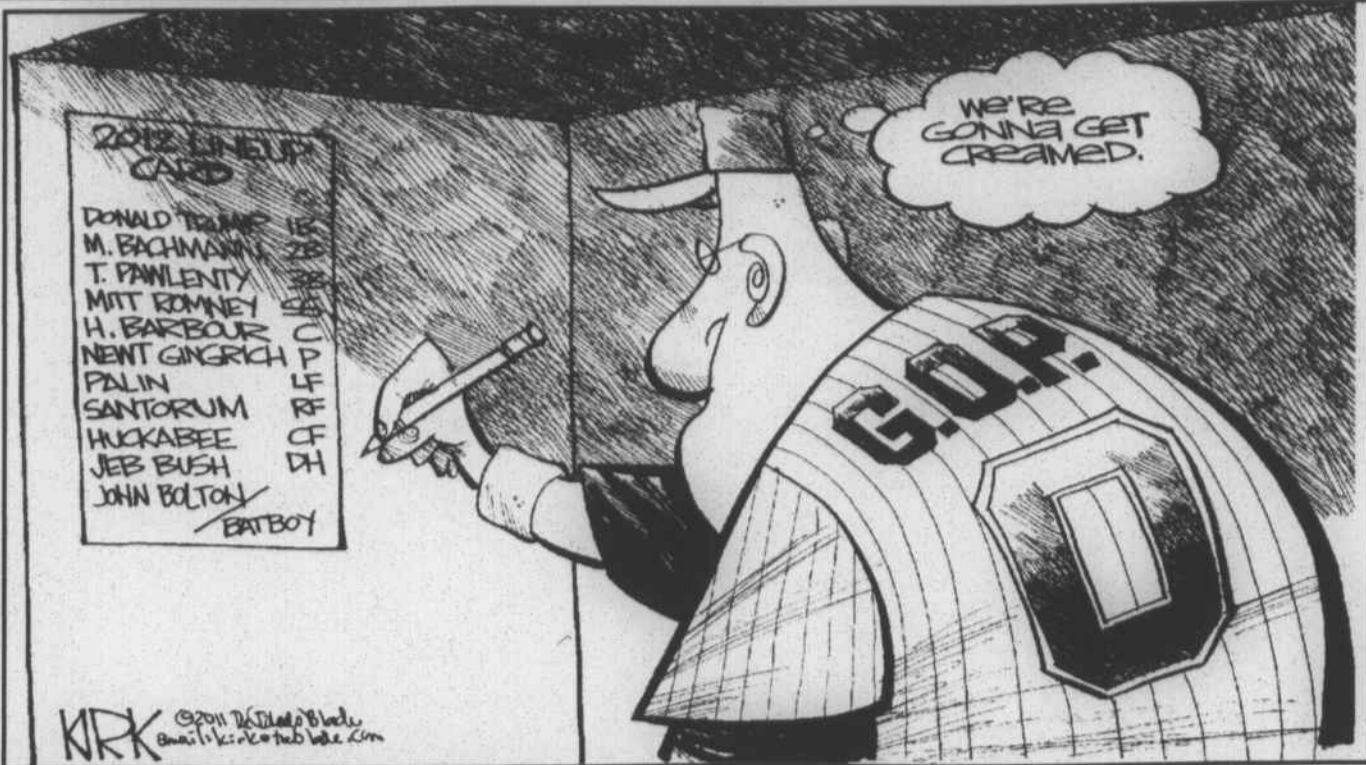
Recently, the birthers have turned up the volume with the addition of the bombastic rantings of -- Donald Trump, the New York business magnate, reality TV star, and potential Republican candidate for president. In recent appearances on "The View," "Good Morning America," "NBC Today," and other shows, Trump, who is playing the media like a fiddle, has repeatedly made false and incendiary insinuations that Barack Obama may not be a U.S. citizen and therefore not qualified to be President of the United States. Anyone with a modicum of intelligence can see that Trump's birther claims as well as his flirtation as a presidential candidate is nothing more than an insincere sideshow, intended to promote his personal brand and raise his TV ratings. But, as the new polling shows, in the looney tunes world of modern American politics, a sizeable number of the electorate is responding. That is unfortunate. It is one thing for Trump to "fire" contestants weekly on his "Apprentice" TV show, it is quite another to cynically fire up the right wing base with lies that feed their already biased assertion that President Obama is somehow "not one of us."

We urge the mainstream media to pull the plug on this hoax. Trump's birther-based candidacy is nothing more than a weapon of mass distraction that disqualifies him as a serious presidential contender. He is taking valuable air time from others who have important things to say about the most important issues of the 2012 presidential campaign, most notably the unemployment crisis in America.

Even pundits like Karl Rove, Bill O'Reilly, and Ann Coulter have discredited Trump's birther claims. Rove recently called Trump a "joke candidate" who is pandering to the "nutty right." And last week, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer, who last year signed a law requiring police to check the citizenship status of anyone suspected of being in the country illegally, actually vetoed a bill which would have required presidential candidates to show proof of citizenship before being admitted to the state ballot.

Another flamboyant American showman, P.T. Barnum is credited with saying, "There's a sucker born every minute." We trust that citizens of all political persuasions and the mainstream media will not fall for Donald Trump's weapon of mass distraction. With sky high unemployment, an epidemic of housing foreclosures, crumbling schools, struggling urban centers, a worsening debt crisis, and seemingly never-ending wars, there are serious issues that need our attention. President Obama's citizenship is not one of them.

Marc H. Morial is the President and CEO of the National Urban League.



What Bothered Me About the Barry Bonds Case?



Bill Fletcher
 Guest Columnist

I don't particularly like the attitude of former San Francisco Giants player Barry Bonds. I don't care for the way that he treated his fans and supporters. I don't appreciate his smugness.

Yet, at the end of the day, that is not what was at stake in the Barry Bonds court case.

Barry Bonds faces up to 10 years based on his conviction for obstruction of justice. This is not what prosecutors were looking for and it remains unclear how much jail time he will actually serve, if any. Nevertheless, when I think about the amount of money and attention that has been focused on this case, I cringe. And I ask myself, toward what end?

Don't get me wrong, I am against performance-enhancing drugs. That said, it is clear today that such drugs were accepted as standard operating procedure in Major League Baseball for years.

That does not make it right. It means that when a



Former Big Leaguer Barry Bonds.

line is actually being drawn it cannot be drawn backwards.

If owners, players, and the media were all involved in this culture of steroid use, then the bottom line is that there needed and needs to be total enforcement, which includes changing the culture of baseball so that it is understood that such drugs are unacceptable. Saying today that what was done in the past was unacceptable when, in fact, the industry accepted it rings of hypocrisy.

Yet what really bugged me about the Bonds trial is what sportswriter Dave Zirin discussed recently in a column. No one has yet been prosecuted for the circum-

stances surrounding the financial collapse of 2008.

No one has gone to jail, and yet millions of people, yes, quite literally millions of people were affected by the double-dealing and shenanigans of Wall Street, thereby losing their homes, pensions, and jobs. A crime the scale of the 2008 financial collapse should have been the subject of thorough investigations followed by a wave of indictments. Such actions certainly would have changed the culture of Wall Street.

The failure to take prompt and stern legal measures is the equivalent of Major League baseball having taken a pass on performance-

enhancing drugs for so many years. When no steps are taken, then the behavior is understood to be acceptable, if not permitted outright.

Instead of such actions, we are treated to the Barry Bonds show-trial, and the resources that were put into it.

So, I don't know whether Bonds or anyone else will go to jail. His career has been wrecked, in part due to his own arrogance, but certainly due to the steroids scandal itself. Other players are ducking for cover. More than likely this will all fade like an early morning fog. It seems, however, that it is far easier for the powers that be to focus their attention on one baseball player possibly involved in questionable activities rather than on an industry--big Finance--which crushed the lives and futures of so many people who were simply trying to live an honest life.

Go figure?

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Refighting America's Civil War



George Curry
 Guest Columnist

A recent cover of Time magazine featured an illustration of a crying Abraham Lincoln with the inscription, "Why We're Still Fighting the Civil War: The endless battle over the war's true cause would make Lincoln weep."

While I question whether today's effort to recast the Civil War would make avowed White supremacist Abraham Lincoln cry, there is no denial that much of America continues to shy away from acknowledging that slavery was the primary cause of what revisionists prefer to call the War Between the States or the War of Northern Aggression.

A Harris poll conducted in January showed that while 69 percent of respondents concluded that the North was fighting to preserve the Union, more than half -- 54 percent -- believed the South was fighting for states' rights; 46 percent thought the South was fighting to preserve slavery. In the 11 states that formed the Old Confederacy, two-thirds of Whites claimed states' rights was the real issue.

In his 1861 Inaugural Address, Lincoln was clear: "One section of our country believes slavery is right and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is wrong and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute."

That was quite a statement from a man who believed Blacks were inferior to Whites.

In the Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858, Lincoln stated: "I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people ... I am as much in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race."

Lincoln's goal was to preserve the union, not eliminate slavery.

"If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that," Lincoln said in an Aug. 22, 1862 letter to the New York Tribune. "What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help save the Union."

For the most part, Americans are not as clear as Lincoln was about the Civil War.

Time observed, "Americans have lost that clarity about the cause of the Civil War, the most traumatic and transformational event in U.S. history, which left more than 625,000 dead -- more Americans killed than in both world wars combined."

Yale University historian David Blight told the magazine, "No matter what we do or the overwhelming consensus among historians, out in the public mind, there is still this need to deny that slavery was the cause of the war."

As part of the denial, myths were created to obscure the facts.

The Washington Post, in a Feb. 26 article headlined, "Five myths about why the South seceded," pointed out that Confederate states opposed states' rights.

Written by James W. Loewen, author of "The Confederate Reader," the story observes: "On Dec. 24, 1860, delegates at South Carolina's secession convention adopted a 'Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union.' It noted 'an increasing hostility on the part of non-slaveholding States to the institution of slavery' and protested that Northern states had failed to

'fulfill their constitutional obligations' by interfering with the return of fugitive slaves to bondage. Slavery, not states' rights, birthed the Civil War."

The article debunked the myth that most White Southerners didn't own slaves and therefore did not support slavery.

"Indeed, most white Southern families had no slaves," Loewen wrote. "However, two ideological factors caused most Southern whites, including those who were not slave-owners to defend slavery. First, Americans are wondrous optimists, looking to the upper class and expecting to join it someday. In 1860, many subsistence farmers aspired to become large slave-owners. So poor white Southerners supported slavery then, just as many low-income people support the extension of George W. Bush's tax cuts for the wealthy now."

While many Americans remain in denial about the cause of the Civil War, there is no denying that more than 180,000 African-Americans -- both free and runaway slaves -- served in the Union Army during the Civil War. Even a handful, enticed by the promise of freedom, fought on the Confederate side. Even Blacks in the Union Army were paid less than White soldiers. Some refused any pay, realizing that no price could be placed on their freedom.

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