

Racially-charged term is a political tar baby itself

Say goodbye to the term "tar baby."

It is one of the richest, most vivid terms in our language, so useful to describe a "sticky situation" in which someone is trapped and finds that every effort to get out compounds the trouble.

The term was popularized by Joel Chandler Harris's retelling of African American folk tales. His fictional Uncle Remus, an old black man, speaking in heavy dialect, shared his wisdom with a young white boy, telling the story of how a crafty fox captured his rival, a precocious rabbit.



D.G. MARTIN

Maybe you remember how the story began. "Brer Fox went ter wuk en got 'im some tar, en mix it wid some turkentime, en fix up a contraphum w'at he call a Tar-Baby."

Brer Fox put the tar baby in road and waited for Brer Rabbit to come by. He didn't wait long. The story continues, "Mawmin! sez Brer Rabbit, sezee - 'nice wedder dis mawmin,' sezee. 'Tar-Baby ain't sayin' nuthin', en Brer Fox he lay low.'"

When the tar baby fails to respond to Brer Rabbit's pleasuries, the rabbit angrily punches him in the face and is stuck. When the tar baby ignores Brer Rabbit's demands that he be let loose, the rabbit hits and kicks and butts his head until he is thoroughly trapped in the tar. At this point, according to Chandler's Uncle Remus, the fox comes out of hiding, "Howdy, Brer Rabbit," sez Brer Fox, sezee. "You look sorter stuck up dis mawmin," sezee, en den he rolled on de groun', en laft en laft twel he couldn't laff no mo."

Soon after becoming White House press secretary earlier this year, Tony Snow used the imagery of this folk tale to explain why he was not going to try to discuss in detail and try to justify the NSA's secret telephone monitoring program. "I don't want to hug the tar baby of trying to comment on the program - the alleged program - the existence of which I can neither confirm nor deny."

A few weeks ago, Massachusetts Governor and president prospect Mitt Romney explained the dilemma caused by the continuing problems of the "Big Dig" tunnel construction project in his state. Speaking to a crowd of supporters in Iowa, Romney said, "The best thing politically would be to stay as far away from that tar baby as I can."

Both Snow and Romney quickly found that the vivid "tar baby" metaphor was not appreciated by everybody.

Critics accused Snow and Romney of racism for using a term that is offensive to many African Americans because "tar baby" has also been used derisively to refer to blacks.

The complaints themselves brought forth a number of angry responses that pointed out that neither Snow nor Romney had used the term in a racial context. It is the critics, these respondents asserted, who are the "racists."

Whenever the scabs of our history of racial antagonism are ripped off, we see the deep estrangement that remains from our long history of racial injustice.

I am reluctant to give up the wonderful story, the wisdom of this African American tale, and the powerful image of a "too smart" rabbit stuck in a mess of tar.

Wouldn't we miss the chance to celebrate African American culture and its powerful teaching if we threw Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit into the trash bin of racial misunderstanding?

In response to a similar point raised by Tony Snow in his own defense, one African American commentator, Margaret Kimberly, says that we miss an important point. She writes, "The words tar baby are a slur, period. They are used to hurt, to anger, and to offend. The fact that they first appeared in the Uncle Remus stories doesn't let Snow off the hook. The Uncle Remus stories were part of a carefully orchestrated effort to make plantation life appear benevolent instead of horrific."

She may be wrong about the intent of those of us who use "tar baby" only to describe a "sticky situation." But unless and until we can put the term and the story on common grounds, we had better be prepared to take the consequences when we say "tar baby" in any context.

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Time for Africa to get its share of U.S. trade dollars

By Harry C. Alford

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

With the collapse of the recent trade round in Doha, the United States must examine what its economic priorities are around the globe. As the world's foremost military and economic power, we have the ability to encourage economic development, trade, and stability in countries whose people live in conditions unimaginable in the U.S. Specifically, the citizens of many nations around the world suffer from abject poverty, HIV/AIDS, and have almost no opportunities to lift themselves out of their dire condition.

To help correct this, the United States has developed a subsidy system over the past several decades in which more than 130 nations are exempted from duties on a number of imports to the United States. This program, known as the Generalized System of Preferences, aims to stimulate developing economies with unique incentives for production and exportation. It is capitalism at its best, and promotes friendship and stability through trade. We, the Black Diaspora, now want in.

In recent years, however, a number of countries that were once deemed "developing" have remained in the GSP program, despite marked progress. They are not only reaping the lion's share of its benefits, but brazenly abusing international trade agreements. For instance, the top 10 beneficiaries of GSP benefits account for more than two-thirds of the rewards.

Although they may not have economies on the scale of the U.S., Japan or Germany, countries like Brazil, India and Argentina are no longer the "developing" nations they once were. Indeed, their economies often export more than \$100 million each to the U.S., a level that far surpasses any reasonable definition of the term. Imagine if Liberia, Ghana or Kenya could participate in this. It would go a very long way toward economic development, jobs, and quality of life.

Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of the poorer countries on the GSP, whose exports are but small fractions of any of the top 10, receive negligent support. In our own welfare system, strict guidelines are set to ensure those who truly need help are given it, while those who have adequate incomes are no longer eligible. This same standard should apply to nations as well.

International trade abuse is another rising concern with current beneficiaries. U.S. patents and other forms of intellectual property rights are simply being ignored without consequence. Not only are U.S. farmers being affected by the importation of produce at duty-free prices, these goods are often made through patented biological farming techniques developed in the United States.

In the pharmaceutical sector, Brazil has recently announced that it will begin production of three U.S. drugs, without regard for any existing patent restrictions. Further, the software industry recently reported that in 2003, more than \$80 billion of the global market consisted of counterfeits.

Ultimately, countries that willfully violate basic intellectual property rights should not continue to receive subsidies, especially at the cost of American businesses and countries that desperately need more opportunities.

American political interests must also be considered, given the tumultuous political climate abroad. Aside from infringing on international trade agreements, countries such as Brazil and Argentina have befriended dictatorial leftist governments and have become an obstacle to the advancement of human rights and democracy. Governments that have the infrastructure to prevent such abuses must not allow them. The unfortunate reality is that political freedom in South America is severely limited at best.

To be sure, while many countries in Asia and South America take the GSP program for granted, scores of African nations lack even the most basic public infrastructure to provide for their citizens. The most effective way we can assist these countries is by helping them build resources through production and trade.

We want better utilization of this program in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique, Cote D'Ivoire, Senegal, Liberia, Camerons and states throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Why can't we go to Kroger and Safeway and buy produce and goods from Africa and not just South America. It is time for African-Americans to stand up and demand economic equity for the entire Diaspora.

Reform is at hand, and countries that abuse American generosity should be held accountable. Those that need investment, trade incentives, and economic development simply to feed their people should be given every opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty. Removing the top 10 beneficiaries of the current GSP will accomplish this, while holding egregious abusers of trade and human rights responsible for their actions and ensuring that those countries that are truly in need of our aid receive the help that they deserve.

Let's help the needy and not the greedy.
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Connection between crime and poverty

By Brian Peay
SPECIAL TO THE POST

You can't watch the news without hearing breaking news about a bank getting robbed, a report of an individual or place of business getting robbed. Why is this so?

People need money. Common knowledge teaches us that the suspects committing these offenses are most likely not individuals that come from families that are better than well off. It's likely they attended private school, were members of the country club, took private golf lessons or the product of a two parent household.

Then who are these individuals that commit these offenses? In April 2006 Charlotte-Mecklenburg police statistics stated robberies decreased by 13.9 percent. Their Street Crimes Task Force and the patrol divisions continue to target robbery suspects and hot spots.

The majority of these individuals live well below the national poverty level and many, however not all are minorities. Many of them are not from two parent households where a mother and father are present. Most suspects struggled in school and are all too often high school dropouts. What prompts someone to commit robbery?

It could be a combination of things. Generally an individual would commit an offense such as this due to lack of money or education about money. Maybe they are unemployed or even underemployed where they feel the need to break the law. A suspect could as well not be as financially literate as others where he/she is simply not educated enough to manage their finances whether they earn minimum wage or not. How can one be educated about money and its many uses? Simple.

The solution

Teach our kids about money as early as they can count it. Pass on the wisdom of wealth. Effective money management is a vital part of our everyday lives whether young or old. Finances must be taught in the home first. There are many negative influences on the radio and television today that are idolized by the youth. They actually believe that it's ok to die trying to get rich and don't realize the negative impact it imposes on the youth.

Kids need to be taught at an early age that money is not the goal. It's a tool to reach the goal. The goal should not be to get rich. The goal we should teach ourselves and our offspring is to live comfortably and decent. We all need U.S. currency, or dead presidents, every day to live decently. However, it's never a good idea to love money.

When a person loves money they'll do whatever whenever and however to achieve their goal of gaining it whether legal or not. If we're financially educated about money, its uses and dangers at an early age it will carry over into our early adult lives and most will utilize the knowledge daily.

There may always be crime and poverty. However, they both can be decreased significantly if proper education is incorporated at an early age. Another great way to start with our youth is to implement money management and financial literacy into the public school curriculum as an elective. In doing so it'll accommodate the knowledge that's already taught in the home. What is there to lose? My point? Incorporate financial education into the public school system. Knowledge is power!

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THE BOONDOCKS
by Aaron McGruder

I DON'T CARE WHAT ANYONE SAYS... IT AIN'T FAIR!!

WHY DO I GOTTA SUFFER AND PAY DOES?! I GOT NO TIME FOR LIVING 'AVERAGE'... I AIN'T GOT NO CAR, NO JEWELRY, NO YACHT -- NOTHING!! I WANT MINE'S NOW!!

YOU KNOW, A POET NAMED KAY RYAN ONCE SAID, "WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED IT POSSIBLE THAT WAITING IS SUSTAINABLE. A PLACE WITH ITS OWN HARVESTS..."

"OR THAT IN TIME'S FULLNESS THE DIAMONDS OF PATIENCE COULDN'T BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THE GENUINE IN BRILLIANCE OR HARDNESS."

IT MEANS YOU'RE A NERD AND POETRY IS STUPID. MEANWHILE, I NEED A SCENE TO GOP SOME REAL DIAMONDS AND A CONVERTIBLE JAG BY THE FOURTH GRADE.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT MEANS?

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