



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on May 7, 2010

Clubbed With a Cliché: Tea Party Racists?

Tea Party groups around the country are facing an all too familiar attack: racism. The evidence presented is highly circumstantial. A disproportionately large percentage of Tea Party members appear to be older white Americans. Tea Party spokesmen have opposed granting the District of Columbia voting representation in Congress.

Some Tea Party concerns about the constitutional eligibility of Barack Obama to president appear on signs reading “Impeach the Kenyan,” a reference to his alleged African birth. Tea Party members are very unhappy with the direction our nation has taken under President Obama, suggesting to its critics that their concern is racial. It is hard to see much sense in any of these allegations.



Older, white Americans have historically been the most politically engaged of our citizens. This group is much more likely to vote than younger citizens or other racial groups. Black Americans have also been prominent in Tea Party events, including one black Tea Party member who was physically attacked by Obama supporters. Everyone is invited and welcome at these voluntary gatherings and the message of limited government and lower taxes have universal benefit.

Objections to granting an unconstitutional voting member in the House of Representatives to the District of Columbia are rooted in Article I of the Constitution, which defines representation in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. Americans who resided in Dakota Territory or Utah Territory prior to statehood were more likely to be white than the average American living in a state, yet these Americans in territories were “disenfranchised” in Congress — exactly like citizens of the District of Columbia. Moreover, because Americans residing in territories were thousands of miles from the capital, they have much less influence over the federal government than Americans living in the District of Columbia.

All Americans ought to be concerned about the qualifications for office in Article II being seriously enforced. Pointing out Obama’s presumed nation of national origin is simply a way of focusing attention on that issue. The president could end this question very simply, by providing a birth certificate.

Unhappiness with the general direction of America for many years is an underlying theme of the Tea Party, a movement that pointedly blames both political parties for lacking the courage to be honest with Americans or the ethics to pursue government constitutionally. The enormous flood of “printed paper” money, as Obama’s solution to economic problems, and his more or less open endorsement of socialism certainly concern Tea Party members more than in the past, but it is his policies, not his race, that cause concern.



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“Racism!” has been — and will continue to be — one of those meaningless clichés (like “Fascism!”) which are dredged up whenever there are no serious intellectual arguments. While racism, black and white, sadly still exists in pockets of America, the only consequence of constantly using the same name-calling campaign is that no one really takes it seriously any more.

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