

Short Communication

Obama and Woods: “Master Tacticians”¹ in a supposed post-racial world

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This essay examines and critiques Obama’s racial and political identity, comparing and contrasting it to another matchless man of color, Tiger Woods in a supposed post-racial world. This short essay is a critique: it interrogates Obama and Woods’ motivations in regard to how they both (dis)similarly frame their racial identities. Specifically, this essay will charge both Obama and Woods as being “master tacticians.”

Key words: Race, racial politics, racialization, discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Whites and the majority mainstream have never had to acknowledge something the nonWhite and nonmainstream worlds have—that Whites are not the problems, but everyone else is. There has been the “Negro Problem,” the “Jew Problem,” the “Irish Problem,” (the list goes on...) but interestingly there has never been a “White problem.”

Barack Hussein Obama II, the 44th President has been matchless throughout his political and professional career. He was the first Black editor of the Harvard Law Review, the first Black elected US President, the first US President to be born in Hawaii, the first “Democrat to receive more than 50% of the popular vote since Jimmy Carter in 1976” (Le, 2010, para 1), and in 2009 was the fourth US President to be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize (US Presidents Theodore Roosevelt (1906), Woodrow Wilson (1919), and Jimmy Carter (2002) were also Nobel Laureates) but was the first US President to receive this distinction during his first year of office.

Obama’s political, educational, and social matchlessness stems from his ability to “move people” through “hope” and “change” (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Notwithstanding all of this, Obama is not a post-racial president (Limbaugh, 2010).

CRITIQUE

Discourse: Multiraciality

This essay examines and critiques Obama’s racial and political identity, comparing and contrasting it to another

matchless man of color, Tiger Woods. This short essay interrogates Obama and Woods’ motivations in regard to how they both (dis)similarly frame their racial identities. Specifically, this essay will charge both Obama and Woods as being “master tacticians.” More than ever before in our nation’s history is multiraciality not only a possibility, but a fast-approaching reality. The number of multiracial Americans is up 33% since the year 2000, and by the year 2050 it is forecasted that Whites will be a racial minority (Multiracial, 2010). Although historically interracial marriage was banned under anti-miscegenation laws, now, interracial marriages are increasing steadily (Dale, 2010; Yen, 2010). According to Yen (2010), “The number of interracial marriages in the U.S. has risen 20% since 2000 to about 4.5 million” (para 1).

Barack Obama and Tiger Woods

If Obama considers himself Black, why is it that Tiger Woods does not wish to be perceived as a Black man? Both Obama and Woods come from interracial families: Obama’s father was Kenyan and his mother was White, while Woods’ father was Black and mother was Asian (Thai). Woods openly considers himself Canabilasian.

This essay argues that Tiger has more cachet being

¹The term “master tactician” is introduced in this essay. The idea of “Master tactician” came from watching Le Tour De France: the commentators referenced how cyclists were tacticians—employed and deployed tactics to fool fellow competitors during the sprint to the finish. This essay labels Obama and Woods “master tacticians” who present their racial identities in a self-maximizing way.

Canabilasian than simply being a Black man. If this is true, does Obama have more cachet being Black man than multiracial man? Yes, most certainly it does. Being the first African American elected US President launched Obama into uncharted territory and made him a racial leader, or does it? It is here that this essay begins the argument that both Obama and Woods have a self-investment in their racial identities. This is because departures from the racial status quo are viewed unfavorably and are highly questioned.

Readers of this essay will benefit from a conceptualization of what a “master tactician” is. After defining and articulating “master tactician,” this essay will explore why Obama and Woods so masterfully engage in this self-serving sort of behavior.

What is a master tactician?

A “master tactician” is a very astute person. A “master tactician” is also an individual who is confident, charismatic, charming, and cheerful. Obama and Woods are all of these and more. How else could Woods cheat on his wife with so many women for so long and not endure criticism? Further, master tacticians are very zealous and dedicated; they know what needs to be done when, and how to do it. They see long-term as well as short-term. They also know how to elevate themselves when the need arises. Master tacticians know how the “establishment” operates and employ methods that allow for their maximum gain. I am Korean; however, as a teacher who taught in an urban elementary school—and incidentally a highly Black populated school district—I found that several of the Black male teachers and staff with whom I worked and talked had negative things to say about then-presidential-candidate Obama.

Several of my Black colleagues would say things such as, “that man is not Black” and “he is not from the ‘hood.’” Essentially, these gentlemen were indicating their mistrust with Obama; a man who was Harvard educated, and seemingly did not have similar life narratives and histories. Truth have you, Obama was privileged and economically able to matriculate both his daughters in a school in Chicago with tuition fees in excess of \$35,000. In fact, according to Lucas (2008): “Tuition for the Chicago Lab School where Obama’s daughters attend is \$18,492 a year for grades 1 to 4, the grades Obama’s daughters attend. The tuition climbs to \$20,286 a year for grades 5 to 8, and \$21,480 a year for grades 9 to 12” (para 7). Perhaps my colleagues’ animus was class-based and not race-based. Nevertheless, other Black associates of mine discounted Obama’s racial blackness and his overall racial persona. I bring this up because although some of my school colleagues who were Black distrusted Obama, they inevitably voted for him in the election. In fact, polls indicate that Obama’s campaign was highly effective in garnering interracial voter support (Le, 2010). Le (2010) states that according to polls

conducted by CNN, “95% of African Americans, 66% of Latinos, and 61% of Asian Americans voted for Obama”

This essay will now argue that, like Obama, this essay will now argue that Tiger Woods is a master tactician.

Woods’ history and Obama’s share similar veins. Woods was an Ivy Leaguer (Stanford educated) like Obama, and was—and arguably still is, in face of his extramarital infidelity—highly “likeable” as a golfer and as a person. Popularity and educational level are not the most salient factors at play here. The key issue is that some Asians are Whitened, while Blacks are not. Obama is not Whitened, but Woods is Whitened. However, why has President Obama been labeled Black, and not multiracial, especially since his mother is White and father African (Kenyan)? I am arguing that Obama brands himself as a Black man. Further, he is married to a Black woman and his children appear to be “Black,” while Woods categorizes himself Canabilasian. Despite the election of a Black, or multiracial US President, I have yet to hear or discuss the election prospects for an Asian American becoming President of the United States. Woods really isn’t Black, nor is he Canabilasian. Truth be told, he is in-between (a mix) or hapa. Hapa refers to mixed racial heritage with partial roots in Asian and/or Pacific Islander ancestry. It means “half” in Hawaiian and has been embraced by multiracial individuals of part-Asian or Pacific Islander descent (www.hapavoices.com). According to the 2000 Census, there are 1.6 million Hapas in the US (this includes Tiger Woods who is part Thai).

As a master tactician, Obama sells himself as a plateau-arriver—someone who has broken the color line. Obama is like Jackie Robinson, the first Black to play in the major leagues. Woods could not be the “first” Black to play in the Professional Golfers Association (PGA). That distinction is already given to John Shippen, the first Black golfer to play in the US Open (Anderson, 2009). Woods knows this and thus distances himself from being Black. How else can Woods bolster his image if he cannot be the “first” at PGA? Woods decidedly considers himself Canabilasian and to dominate the field of golf. Tiger Woods is then, simply a “hero” and an “icon” to many, even though he has not thrown down a color gauntlet per se. Federer (2009) wrote the following about Tiger: “There’s no silly talk in public from Tiger. When he speaks, people listen. That is an important part of why he’s an idol for so many young athletes and why adults get giddy when they see him. They’re not just awed by his great wins; they admire him as a person” (para 1).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Racialization: Tiger Woods and his canabilasian identity

Admiration is something that is very difficult to come by, especially for people of color. Identifying himself as

Canabilasian may appear to be neutral to the unsuspecting onlooker, but what it really means is distancing himself from his Blackness and drawing nearer to his Asian and possibly Whiteness. However, minority followers of Woods have been deeply affected by his collusion. Why does Tiger Woods consider himself Canabilasian? Simply put: Tiger has more cachet being Canabilasian than just being a Black man; he knows this. Nevertheless, Tiger is a master tactician and thus is inspired to be very charming to his fan base. Walker's (2010) comments are illustrative of how Woods uses his charisma on the golf links: "Khammanivong [a fan of Woods] is Thai and knows that Woods' mother, Kultida, is too" (para 1). Tiger's personal and racial charisma can be found in how he responds to his fan Khammanivong: "I told him in Thai, 'Good Luck, Tiger.' Tiger said back to me in Thai, 'Thank you very much.'" (Walker, 2010, para 1).

DISCUSSION

Both Obama and Woods are master tacticians: their racial and public identities are purposeful and intentional. By all accounts, they will continue to employ the tactics that have gotten them where they are. They will continue their masterful behaviors—folks of color, like me, will simply have to live with the fact that in a supposed post-racial society, racism still exists; however, multiraciality is the path that the US is traveling. How one identifies him/herself (for example Canabilasian, Black, Hapa, etc.) is simply racial identification politics.

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