When Wall Street’s casino hijinks went on tilt and markets plummeted worldwide, Alan Greenspan, American economist and darling of the corporate elite, blamed it on “a few bad apples.” Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006, chose to blame the systemic international nervous breakdown of the financial system on a few individual players rather than admit that not only were some apples rotten, but the barrel itself was as infected as a nuclear waste dump.

It occurs to me that the ignorant, racist, and seemingly irrational messaging of the Republican Tea Party movement can be blamed on a few bad apples. The Tea Party is depicted as a shrinking minority of American white people who are resistant to change. They see the shifting demographics of America (read the browning of America), perceive an African American president bent on giving their stuff to black people, and they head for their Bushmasters. As much as this sounds like hyperbole, it is a fact that when Barack Hussein Obama was elected president, firearms sales soared. Republican rhetoric takes us back to the civil war era with code words like “states rights” and the formation of secessionist movements. Not to mention that on any bright shiny American day, the president can be slurred with watermelons, or threatened with nooses, or subjected to the “n-word,” which was recently caught on film when a white person reporting the inauguration slipped and called it a “nigger inauguration.”
This is no news. It is also no news that much of America considers itself to be post-racial, despite these few bad apples. White media pundits, progressive intellectuals and certainly liberals, can often be heard clicking their tongues at the Tea Party and mounting attacks against this fringe group, defending democracy, civility, civil rights, and just plain common sense. As an African American, this certainly warms my heart and calms my fears as I hear about recent alleged lynchings in Dover, Delaware and Klan recruitment efforts. Well, it’s just a few bad apples, we all say. America is better than that.

But the burst of the housing bubble that brought the economy to its knees was not just a few bad apples, as Wall Street mavens claimed. How could they have known that the financial instruments that they fashioned would be corrupted by greed. Duh. It was a systemic failure that involved government deregulation, banking practices, insurance fraud, and predatory lending practices that caused the breakdown. I also submit that the disturbing American underbelly, the Tea Party Republicans, that are stinking up America, are the direct product of this bloated, engorged capitalistic experiment that has existed from its inception to demonize “the other” for exploitation by a dominant white male culture. Americans are all holding their noses from the Tea Party stench and dousing themselves with the perfume of liberalism and post-racial congratulations so that they can avoid the facts.

According to a recent study conducted by the Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP) at Brandeis University, “The wealth disparity between white and black households has more than quadrupled, regardless of income bracket.” It also states that the assets of white families topped black families by $95,000 between 1984 and 2007. Furthermore, middle income white family assets are superior to the assets of high-income black families.

The entrenched structural and institutional vestiges of slavery, Jim Crow, and its aftermath have not been dismantled, although the modern optics of racial inclusion obscure the facts. It is understandable that Americans, white people in particular, are breathing a sigh of relief that racism is on the run with the election of our black president. It is comforting to be able to point to the Tea Party as “the problem” and the few bad apples in whom reside the vestiges of our racially embarrassing history. Indeed, it is thrilling to see the LGBT agenda on the president’s desk and Hispanics courted at every turn. But just as Sonia Sotomayor did not single-handedly obliterate racial animosity toward Hispanics, Barack Obama cannot erase structural racism over which he does not preside.

The fact that we are indulging a post-racial narrative because of the president’s election is absurd on its face. For instance, Tim Wise, Caucasian anti-racist advocate, points out that when white women such as Margaret Thatcher or Golda Meir rose to positions of power, the world did not say to women, “Abandon your cause, the fight has been won. We are now post-women.” Obviously, economic and social justice for women still eludes us.

We need not dismiss the Tea Party Movement, funded by a corporate agenda with allies operating in the corridors of power, and we should not look down our noses at the rabble rank-and-file. These people are afraid for their futures and insecure that white privilege may no longer earn them a sumptuous piece of the American pie. They are the instinctual harbingers of America’s future who like the birds in a tsunami, sense impending doom before it hits.

The God-given rights to pursue happiness that Americans so love to parrot, were never originally intended for anyone but white male landowners. As we are busy weaving this amazing tapestry of
diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial threads, we must be careful not to throw a blanket over history and the facts. Before we start pointing fingers at each other, we need to come out of the stupor of the American dream into the reality that the annoying headache of the Tea Party is merely a symptom of a much more deadly disease.

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