

# INDYPENDENT READER

*toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old . . .*

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[Home](#) > [What Happens to a Dream Deferred?](#)

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## What Happens to a Dream Deferred?

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Monday, September 2, 2013 - 00:00



*This article originally appeared[2] on ZNet.*

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

As Americans commemorate the historic March on Washington by marching once again, we not only wax nostalgic on Dr. Martin Luther King's dream and congratulate ourselves on electing the first African American president, we also acknowledge what Langston Hughes called "a dream deferred" with economic justice stuck in '60s disparities and a Supreme Court and Republican party hostile to minorities' voting rights. As right wing political leaders take every opportunity to obstruct and delegitimize President Obama, they stir the bubbling pot of bigotry in a country still very racially divided.

The Trayvon Martin murder and George Zimmerman acquittal ripped America apart and put racial injustice on America's front page as people of all colors and from all walks of life mobilized to challenge "stand your ground" laws, NRA gun mania, and racial profiling overreach. While GOP regressive policies unite many offended women, gays, and minorities in "I have a dream" coalitions, there are too many people who see "their" America slipping away from them, spouting, "take back my country," secessionist/nullification rhetoric.

Congress has become the haven of "Republicans gone wild" and racism run amok. Some lawmakers are talking about impeaching the president for no particular "high crimes and misdemeanors" reason. Senator Ted Cruz and others are on a mission to defund ObamaCare, threatening to shut down the government by not approving a temporary spending bill if funds for the health insurance plan are included. Republican "debt ceiling" challenges keep the government teetering on a fiscal cliff. The Birther Movement that includes GOP politicians refuses to recognize this black man in the Oval Office and insists that he is not even born in America. Mainstream media is finally asking the question: Is it race?

Not only are Republicans determined to obstruct the president and his congress, they are also determined to disenfranchise the people who voted for him. At least 82 voter suppression bills were introduced [3] in 31 states this year alone to pry the ballot from the hands of African Americans who are having John Lewis '60s flashbacks. The disenfranchisement also disproportionately affects students, Hispanics, and the elderly.

Conservative columnist George Will dusted off the Daniel Patrick Moynihan report of the '60s to call the proliferation of black single mothers a greater threat to the black community than loss of voting rights. The Moynihan report [4] called 24% black unwed mothers a crisis in the black family and Will said, "Today, it's tripled, 72 percent, and that, not an absence of rights, is surely the biggest impediment."

The fact that a respected GOP apologist for the racist and un-American voting rights legislation sweeping the country would throw out a red herring that insults some of America's most vulnerable is unfortunate for political discourse and George Will. It puts him in the Limbaugh/impeachment/tin foil hat camp. But it is no surprise that racial venom should drip from his lips. He blamed the Detroit failed city on the "cultural collapse" of black people.

Right wing congressmen and political commentators are not the only ones leading the charge for unfairness. The Supreme Court encouraged unpopular racial attitudes to come out of the shadows when they excised Section 5 from the Voting Rights Act, which freed states of federal oversight put

in place because they had a history of disenfranchising and terrorizing blacks who would dare exercise their voting rights.

It was not a big surprise when Voter ID laws and restrictive legislation ballooned as soon as the Court took its eye off the ball. Hyped up on “voter fraud” blarney, Republican lawmakers from the South and some battleground states, immediately took advantage of the Court’s decision.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg commented [5], “The notion that because the Voting Rights Act had been so tremendously effective we had to stop it didn’t make any sense to me and one really could have predicted what was going to happen.”

Certainly, that was a no-brainer, but I did not see this next one coming. Unfairness in high places trickles down. In South Carolina, 24 African American friends of Michael Brown were asked to leave Wild Wings Restaurant because a white customer complained that they felt “threatened” by their presence. And they weren’t even armed with Trayvon Martin’s Skittles and a sidewalk. African Americans denied at the lunch counter makes me think of the Jewish refrain, “Never again.” Now an injustice that was in the “Never again” history of civil rights comes to haunt us again [6].

Hearing the story of Michael Brown, however, did not prepare me for the insanity of Neo-Nazi Craig Paul Cobb. Sixty-one-year-old Cobb is trying to carve out an all-white town in the mostly abandoned Grant County of North Dakota where white supremacists can practice their hatred undeterred. He was arrested in Canada for spreading his virulent brand of racism there. Last year on the Vanguard News Network, he posted that residents would be required to fly a “racialist banner,” at all times, which could include a Nazi flag. This Neo-Nazi has purchased 13 lots in the town of Leith, which has only 19 people. Residents fear that this is a land grab [7] to take over the local government.

If Republicans have gone wild, Cobb has gone off the reservation. In a country with a history of violence against black people, of a slave system that robbed a whole race of its humanity, legislative, Supreme Court, and individual actions that threaten not only African Americans but all “we the people,” cannot be taken lightly. What is so disturbing is that the inhumanity of a Craig Cobb is echoed in the corridors of power and legitimacy in Washington. When people say that they want to “take back America” what they imply is that they want to take America backward. When “states rights” politicians talk about seceding from the Union, they roll the clock back to the Civil War that decided the question of slavery.

Three and a half years after his famous speech, King told Sander Vanocur in a TV interview that the dream “had turned into a nightmare,” dampened by the war in Vietnam and dissension in the movement on the issue of nonviolence. But he also said “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” At the recent March on Washington, President Barack Obama reminded us that the arc does not bend on its own, but requires “constant vigilance.” A GOP that empowers intransigent right wing extremists, a Supreme Court turning back the clock on civil rights, blacks turned away from restaurants, and Neo-Nazis plotting to take over the reins of government is cause for America to not only be vigilant, but wake up, stop dreaming and act.

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- [2] <http://www.zcommunications.org/what-happens-to-a-dream-deferred-by-auset-marian-lewis.html>
- [3] <http://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/election-2013-voting-laws-roundup>
- [4] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Negro\\_Family:\\_The\\_Case\\_For\\_National\\_Action](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Negro_Family:_The_Case_For_National_Action)
- [5] <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/ginsburg-not-surprised-voter-id-laws-vra-gutted.php>
- [6] <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/26/south-carolina-charleston-wild-wing-cafe-black-americans/2704125/>
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