

The Racial Divide Makes Some Voters Go Against Barack Obama - MabuhayRadio

Written by Atty. Lope Lindio

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I received an e-mail on Sept. 20, 2008, an election poll that has been circulated within the Filipino-American community. Associated Press (AP) writers Ron Fournier and Trevor Tompson, reported in an article entitled, "*Poll: Racial views steer some white Dems away from Obama*" that: *Deep-seated racial misgivings could cost Barack Obama the White House if the election is close, according to an AP-Yahoo News poll that found one-third of white Democrats harbor negative views toward Blacks — many calling them "lazy," "violent" or "responsible for their own troubles* ."

The poll, conducted with Stanford University, suggests that the percentage of voters who may turn away from Mr. Obama because of his race could easily be larger than the final difference between the candidates in 2004 — about two and one-half percentage points."

The way I see it, the significance of this poll is most unfortunate to all Americans. It is not about the candidacy of Senator Obama, which in this context is irrelevant, but about the standing of minorities in this country. The AP finding is detrimental to democracy if it's true that America is divided by racial fissure. If elections are to be decided by the candidate's race, rather than by his prescriptions to what ails the country, it's bad for everyone, especially for those not belonging to the WASP establishment and mainstream society, like, for example, Filipino Americans.

Everyone says that the election this year is historic. The major parties are pitting Barack Obama, an Afro American, and John McCain, a certified white establishment candidate. Although Barack Obama can very well belong to either side of the racial divide, he has identified himself, and looks more, Afro than Anglo. In Filipino lingo, he's bangus, or milkfish, because, being half-bred - 1/2 white and 1/2 black, he can say he is from Kansas and from Kenya, too, or "puedeng lalangoy (o mamamangka ba?) sa dalawang ilog (he can in fact figuratively swim or paddle in two rivers)." In fact, he is a closer cousin of the Cheneys and a more distant relative of the Bushes. He is also related to a Kenyan leader, somewhat a man of dubious character, a certain Odinga. So his ethnic bloodlines have been over there, and right here, in this country since the coming of the Pilgrims. Yet, white Americans, and those thinking they're Whites, mostly Asians, very likely Filipinos, cannot help it but still look down on Mr. Obama as unfit to become President, solely because of the color of his skin and the characterizations of the black people who are stereotyped as "lazy", "violent", etc.

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The Associated Press poll finding should be a cause for concern to Filipino Americans. It's not a reason for celebration. But it's odd that some of them are kind of exulting at the prospect of beating Mr. Obama on the basis of bigotry. How important is John McCain's victory than the respect they should expect in a multicultural society? For if the Whites could treat the Blacks so poorly, when they're from here, whose attachment to this country goes back even before the Revolution, that would give us a clue of the Whites' equally poor or lower opinion of the new Americans, who, unlike Senator Obama, don't even have a droplet of white blood corpuscle. If you happen to have any, like, for example, when you got it through blood transfusion, you cannot even count yourself lucky. Look at Mr. Obama. He has 50%, yet the Whites don't give a hoot of their sanguinary relationship!

The significance of this poll is most unfortunate to all Americans. It is not about the candidacy of Senator Obama, which in this context is irrelevant, but about the standing of minorities in this country. The AP finding is detrimental to democracy if it's true that America is divided by racial fissure. If elections are to be decided by the candidate's race, rather than by his prescriptions to what ails the country, it's bad for everyone . . .

Let's face it. Compared to what generations of Blacks have done for their country of birth, like, for example, manual labor in plantations, honors in the Olympics, highlighting entertainment business, fighting wars in Vietnam and Iraq, etc., have the other nationalities, including Filipino Americans, given more to this country? And yet some Whites are uncomfortable putting Afro Americans in power because they don't trust them, perhaps, or probably, they resent the competition. Of course, these bigots would say, as the AP reported above, the reasons are there, coded or even obvious, they may be. The Blacks are free-loaders, lazy, violent, etc. I wonder if this description would also apply to Filipinos who were branded "indolent" by their Spanish oppressors that Dr. Jose Rizal found it necessary to defend them. After all, their next-door neighbors, the Mexicans, don't fare better, either. The Whites look down on them even worse than Blacks. They're portrayed mostly as sombrero-covered squatting figure sleeping in a shade next to a tree or against a church. Reminds you of (the Filipino character) Juan Tamad (Lazy John), right? Yet, amazingly, Filipinos do not take this AP finding offensive. They even circulate the news with gusto, as if they have found in this finding a saving grace that will help in the election of their champion, John McCain.

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If, indeed, there are such African Americans who are "lazy" and "violent" as described in the report, it's deplorable if the Whites take their poor opinion of the Blacks against Obama. He, of all people, who is half-bred, and who rose to the top of the world against all odds, like being born of a single mother, and being taken to unknown unlikely places, like Indonesia, etc. But to be generous about it, this might be understandable for the Whites to be so poorly mannered, in the context of American history. It's the age-old issue, once again, of race discrimination, however, much it is known and accepted that this country belongs to the Blacks as it is to the Whites, and every other American. But for Filipino-Americans to join this bandwagon mentality, it's ludicrous and incredulous. They are hurting themselves more than they're helping the candidacy of John McCain. They can vote for a candidate of their choice without undermining their short and long term interests by encouraging latent discriminatory attitudes to show up its ugly head again. They can do more good to this country if they are duly awakened in the struggle against racism in order to get America stronger and their self-interest protected.

For Filipino-Americans not to be worried, and even kind of looking exulted by this Associated Press article, is to be in self-denial and blind to the political, social, and economic realities facing the country today. This is regrettable. I hope that we cannot so soon forget what's really important for this country so that we can rise above petty-and-silly belief that we are what we are not. # # #

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