

RELEASE IN PART  
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**From:** Neera Tanden [redacted]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 15, 2009 12:21 AM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** couple of things  
**Attachments:** hrc memo 9 14.doc

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1. On health care: we're kind of optimistic that Baucus will actually deliver, but hopefully, we'll know in the next 48 hours (though I feel like I've written that several times before).
2. Memo: I've attached a memo with some thoughts for you. I hesitate a little in sending it because obviously my knowledge of the foreign policy world is quite limited. But on the off chance it's helpful, I'm sending it along. Let me know what you think; if it totally misses the mark or is utterly obvious, my apologies.
3. I've pasted a Glenn Greenwald post below, which captures exactly what I was trying to say last week:

SATURDAY SEPT. 12, 2009 09:13 EDT

## Is the Right's attack on Obama's legitimacy new or unprecedented?

(updated below - Update II - Update III)

Several people objected in comments, emails and other places to my argument yesterday that what Rep. Joe Wilson did -- though dumb and juvenile -- was hardly some grave threat to the Republic or even a substantial deviation from standard right-wing political behavior. Some argued that Obama's race has caused the Right's hostility towards him to be both unique and unprecedentedly intense. That some people react with particular animus towards the first black President is obvious. But there is nothing new about the character of the American Right or their concerted efforts to destroy the legitimacy of Obama's presidency.

To see that, just look at what that movement's leading figures said and did during the Clinton years. In 1994, Jesse Helms, then-Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, claimed that "just about every military man" believes Clinton is unqualified to be Commander-in-Chief and then warned/threatened him not to venture onto military bases in the South: **"Mr. Clinton better watch out if he comes down here. He better have a bodyguard."** *The Wall St. Journal* called for a Special Prosecutor to investigate the possible "murder" of Vince Foster. Clinton was relentlessly accused by leading right-wing voices of being a murderer, a serial rapist, and a drug trafficker. Tens of millions of dollars and barrels of media ink were expended investigating "Whitewater," a "scandal" which, to this day, virtually nobody can even define. When Clinton tried to kill Osama bin Laden, they accused him of "wagging the dog" -- trying to distract the country from the truly important matters at hand (his sex scandal). And, of course, the GOP ultimately **impeached** him over that sex scandal -- in the process issuing a lengthy legal brief with footnotes detailing his sex acts (cigars and sex talk), publicly speculating about (and demanding examinations of) the unique "distinguishing" spots on his penis, and using leading right-wing organs to disseminate innuendo that he had an abandoned, out-of-wedlock child. More intense and constant attacks on a President's "legitimacy" are difficult to imagine.

This is why I have very mixed feelings about the protests of conservatives such as David Frum or Andrew Sullivan that the conservative movement has been supposedly "hijacked" by extremists and crazies. On the one hand, this is true. But when was it different? Rush Limbaugh didn't just magically appear in the last twelve months. He -- along with people like James Dobson, Pat Robertson, Bill Kristol and Jesse Helms -- have been leaders of that party for decades. Republicans spent the 1990s wallowing in Ken Starr's sex report, "Angry White Male" militias, black U.N. helicopters, Vince Foster's murder, Clinton's Mena drug runway, Monica's semen-stained dress, Hillary's lesbianism, "wag the dog" theories, and all sorts of efforts to personally humiliate Clinton and destroy the legitimacy of his presidency using the most paranoid, reality-detached, and scurrilous attacks. And the crazed conspiracy-mongers in that movement became even more prominent during the Bush years. Frum himself -- now parading around as the Serious Adult conservative -- wrote, along with uber-extremist Richard Perle, one of the most deranged and reality-detached books of the last two decades, and before that, celebrated George W. Bush, his former boss, as "The Right Man."

It's also why I am extremely unpersuaded by the prevailing media narrative that the Right is suddenly enthralled to its rambunctious and extremist elements and is treating Obama in some sort of unique or unprecedented way. Other than

the fact that Obama's race intensifies the hatred in some precincts, nothing that the Right is doing now is new. This is who they are and what they do -- and that's been true for many years, for decades. Even the allegedly "unprecedented" behavior at Obama's speech isn't really unprecedented; although nobody yelled "you lie," Republicans routinely booed and heckled Clinton when he spoke to Congress because they didn't think he was legitimately the President (only for Ted Koppel to claim that it was something "no one at this table has ever heard before" when Democrats, in 2005, booed Bush's Social Security privatization proposal during a speech to Congress).

This is why so many people were so skeptical of the heartfelt belief among many Obama supporters that he was going to usher in some sort of new, harmonious "post-partisan" age. The long-standing and well-established nature of the American Right would never permit such a transformation. After 1990s House Majority Leader Dick "Barney Fag" Armev told Joan Walsh on *Hardball* earlier this year that "I am so damn glad that you could never be my wife," I wrote:

*These are the people who have largely been in power for the last two decades and the country is in the shape one would expect it to be in as a result. That's why all of this chatter about post-partisan transcendence and trans-partisan harmony and the like is so inane.*

*Why would anyone think that "common ground," on any consistent basis, can be found with people like this, or that it would be beneficial to eliminate real differences in order to accommodate their views?*

Nothing that the GOP is doing to Obama should be the slightest bit surprising because this is the true face of the American Right -- and that's been true for a very long time now. It didn't just become true in the last few months or in the last two years. Recent months is just the time period when the media began noticing and acknowledging what they are: a pack of crazed, primitive radicals who don't really believe in the country's core founding values and don't merely disagree with, but contest the legitimacy of, any elected political officials who aren't part of their movement. Before the last year or so, the media pretended that this was a serious, adult, substantive political movement, but it wasn't any truer than it is now. All one has to do is review their behavior during the Clinton presidency -- to say nothing of the Bush years -- to see that none of this is remotely new. Nothing they're doing to Obama is a break from their past behavior; it's just a natural and totally predictable continuation of it.

**UPDATE:** Bob Somerby today addresses much the same issue with the same conclusion, concluding: "Your discourse has been this way for decades." His argument as to why is well worth reading.

**UPDATE II:** In comments, CarolynC makes the most persuasive case possible for the opposite conclusion: that the level of rage is much worse now. I don't agree with her ultimate conclusion (for the reasons I stated), but some of her individual claims are undeniably true.

**UPDATE III:** Law Professor Darren Hutchinson places all of this in the context of the apparently genuine belief/hope of many Obama supporters -- alive as recently as a few months ago -- that, unlike Hillary Clinton, Obama would be a unifying figure who would cause the country to transcend its divisions and leave behind its bitter ideological disagreements (the Post-Partisan Age). I would hope that even the Truest Believer of that promise could now recognize that -- even if such an outcome were desirable -- no such thing was ever going to happen.