

## Leftwing Speech Control Infects GOP

by Paul Gottfried

GOP operatives again fell on their noses trying to be more PC than the Democrats.

Their war on Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid for saying in private that President Obama was well positioned in 2008 because he is “a light-skinned African American with no Negro dialect unless he wanted to have one” turned into something truly tasteless. Although Reid apologized to the President for his “poor choice of words,” there was nothing outrageous in what he said, particularly in a private conversation. I heard quite a few observations similar to Reid’s from my impeccably leftist academic associates during the presidential campaign. Despite his left-leaning position as a senator, lots of Americans, I was told, would vote for candidate Obama because he seemed like a non-threatening black. White voters would feel good about themselves if they had the chance to vote for such a pleasant-sounding minority candidate.

I have no idea why anyone but a PC exhibitionist who is straining hard to win minority votes could take offense at Reid’s remarks. Black spokesmen such as Al Sharpton and Congressman Charles Rangel, who are known to scream racism at the drop of a pin, seemed unfazed by his comments. Both urged Americans to forget about this alleged insult and to pass the health care plan. Admittedly, such figures are highly partisan Democrats, but I have to agree with them about the silliness of the GOP’s reaction to Reid’s comment to personal friends.

Now we have Republican Senators John Cornyn of Texas and Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele demanding that Reid step down as Senate majority leader because, in Cornyn’s words, he had made remarks that were “embarrassing and racially insensitive.” Liz Cheney, daughter of the former vice-president, has been on television deploring Reid’s reference to “skin color.”

Meanwhile, Steele, who has been popping up on Fox News since the story surfaced, cannot contain his rage that “Democrats feel they can say these things and they can apologize when it comes from mouths of their own.” Steele’s apparent indignation may explain his verbal ineptitude as a critic of Reid. Unfortunately for this black Republican chairman, most other blacks do not seem to care about the senator’s remarks. It is the GOP, which is fuming over Democratic insensitivity to American blacks, that the overwhelming majority of black voters reject.

We are reminded that in 2002 Republican leaders pressured then-Senate majority leader Trent Lott of Mississippi to step down, after Lott had praised the presidential campaign of longtime South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond at Thurmond’s 100th birthday party. When Thurmond had run for the presidency back in 1948, he had been a Dixiecrat opposed to racial integration. Although there was nothing in Lott’s remarks to suggest that he approved of segregation, and although there was nothing in Thurmond’s career for decades to suggest that he was still a segregationist (many of his voters from the 1970s on were black), Lott was seen to have crossed the line by flattering the centenarian Thurmond. He therefore had to go as Senate majority leader. This decision was reached after neoconservative columnists had gone after Lott for ignoring “the most important event,” at least in Charles Krauthammer’s life, “the civil rights revolution” (Washington Post syndicated column, December 2, 2002).

The GOP was acting on its own when it humiliated Lott. It could have well abstained from playing the PC card and left the Mississippi senator in his place. That it chose to act differently was its own decision; certainly it was not a decision that it increased its share of the black vote since 2002. Thurmond, the man whom Lott was humoring, won a far higher percentage of the black vote in South Carolina than the supersensitive GOP has managed to pick up just about anywhere for the last decade. But then Thurmond traded in favors, not in raising the PC ante.