

What Does It Mean to Be a Mediocre Negro?

What do NFL stars Jim Brown and Ray Lewis, *Family Feud* host Steve Harvey, rapper Kanye West, megachurch pastor Darrell Scott, Dr. Ben Carson and Martin Luther King III have in common? They are all black. They have all met with (or worked with) President-elect Trump and spoken of their interaction positively. And they are apparently guilty of being “mediocre negroes” in the eyes of CNN-contributor and Morehouse College professor Marc Lamont Hill.

Speaking about Trump’s new “diversity coalition,” Hill described them as “a bunch of mediocre negroes being dragged in front of TV as a photo-op for Donald Trump’s exploitative campaign against black people.”

And speaking of Steve Harvey, who recently met with Trump and said he would be working with Dr. Carson to help HUD, Hill opined, “My disagreement is the way in which [Steve Harvey is] being used by folk like Donald Trump. Again, his intention is just to have a seat at the table. But when you’re at the table, you should have experts at the table. You should have people who can challenge the president at the table.”

When Hill was castigated for this comment, he quickly claimed he wasn’t talking about Jim Brown, the NFL legend who stood side by side with Muhammad Ali for years, or of Steve Harvey, or even of Ben Caron, whom he described as a “mediocre choice for HUD” but an “extraordinary human.” Instead, he stated that he “referred to the Trump Diversity Council,” of which neither Brown nor Harvey were a part.

I will take Hill at his word, but it’s quite odd, to say the least, to mention Harvey in the very same interview in which he speaks of these “mediocre negroes,” also stating, “Because

they keep bringing up comedians and actors and athletes to represent black interests, [it's] demeaning, it's disrespectful, and it's condescending. Bring some people up there with some expertise, Donald Trump, don't just bring up people to entertain."

So these "comedians and actors and athletes"—which would certainly include Brown, Lewis, Harvey and probably West—are not "mediocre negroes," simply because they didn't appear in the photo-op for the president's diversity council? Really? And he can use the same word, "mediocre," when speaking of Carson as the presumptive head of HUD but he didn't mean to say that Carson was a "mediocre negro." Seriously?

Either way, whomever he was speaking about, how is it not ugly and racist to call a fellow black a negro, let alone a mediocre negro?

Can you imagine if a conservative white broadcaster like Sean Hannity—or even a conservative black commentator like Larry Elder—said something like that on Fox News? The moral indignation and the calls for that person's head would be both nonstop and over the top. (Just think of what happened to sports commentator and baseball great Curt Schilling, himself a conservative, fired from ESPN after what was deemed an offensive Facebook meme about bathroom access for transgenders.)

But a black commentator on liberal CNN can use the derogatory term "negro," surely pointing back to an earlier period in our history when blacks quietly suffered indignation and segregation, and to date, to my knowledge the network has neither rebuked him nor distanced itself from his comment.

More insultingly, some of those who have been part of Trump's National Diversity Council include Bruce Levell, a prominent Georgia Republican; Alveda King, Dr. King's niece; Lynne Patton, vice president of the Eric Trump Foundation; Brunell

Donald-Kyei, an attorney and former Democratic Lt. Gov. candidate for the state of Illinois; and Dr. N. Denise Mitchem, vice president of corporate relations and government affairs pf UST Global—all of them black. Are they part of Hill's group of "mediocre negroes"?

As for Hill's accusation that all these people are being used as tools "for Donald Trump's exploitative campaign against black people," does that "exploitative campaign" include things like improving the quality of life in the inner-cities, providing more job opportunities for black Americans, undoing the destructive policies of the left, and appointing people like Carson to head up HUD?

What I find most galling, though, is that, for quite a few years now, "blackness" is measured by one's ideology rather than by the color of one's skin (or even by the person's life experience). Consequently, black friends of mine who are conservative are commonly told by their fellow blacks that they are "not black enough" or "not black anymore," as if they have not had the same life experiences or are not subject to the same racial profiling.

Black is now an ideology more than a skin color. (Similarly, "gay" not only describes a sexual orientation but an ideology, and conservative gays are seen as betraying their real identity.)

Not surprisingly, on his Prager U video "The Top 5 Issues Facing Black Americans," Taleeb Starkes, himself black, listed as problem No. 4 "Lack of Diversity," decrying the virtual absence of "honest dialogue between blacks and blacks."

Dare to differ with the party line, and you're a traitor to the cause and a traitor to your people. You're hardly even black anymore. You're just a "mediocre negro."

In my book, it's not much better for a black man to refer to a fellow black as a "mediocre negro" because of a difference in

ideology than for a white man to use a racial expletive to refer to a black person because he hates the color of his skin.

Are they not both blatant examples of racism? And are not Hill's comments the latest example of divisive and destructive identity politics?

If you read this, Mr. Hill, surely you can do better. Surely you can step higher, unless your agenda is to divide and destroy.

Is it?