

CHARGING TREASON WHILE COMMITTING TREASON

Patricia Roberts-Miller's Cunning Projection, Conspiracy Rhetoric, and the Identity Criticism of Barack Obama

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In her recent *Fanatical Schemes: Pro-Slavery Rhetoric and the Tragedy of Consensus*, Patricia Roberts-Miller proposes what she calls "cunning projection" as a theoretical framework for analyzing Southern, proslavery rhetoric during several decades prior to the Civil War.¹ Here I contend that Roberts-Miller's conception of cunning projection can profitably be used to explain other species of American rhetoric from different historical periods. I argue for this possibility by explicating her theory of cunning projection, briefly, in relation to Southern segregationist rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s and, at greater length, in relation to the identity criticism of Barack Obama. I proceed, first, by explaining her conception of cunning projection and her analysis of proslavery argumentation. Second, I explore segregationist rhetoric as a more recent manifestation of cunning projection. Third, I elucidate the two main elements of identity criticism of Obama—the claim that he was born outside the US and the claim that he is a Muslim—as another species of cunning projection.

In the appeals that slaveholding rhetors offered between roughly 1830 and 1861, they characteristically refused to consider alternatives to slavery. They did not simply maintain that the necessities of Southern agriculture (or what Kenneth Burke might call an economic "Neo-Malthusian bottleneck") drove them to practice slavery; nor did their defense of slavery simply reflect complacency (or what Kenneth Burke might call "bureaucratization of the imagination") (*Attitudes* 225-227, 298-306). Instead, they regularly and happily proclaimed that slavery provided unalloyed glories and benefits to all. These appeals feature what Roberts-Miller spotlights as stark, recurring contradictions that, she argues, qualify as typical features of proslavery argumentation and that, through an Alice-in-Wonderland version of logic, helped construct a formidable web of argumentation that enveloped the antebellum white South. As she documents, a single proslavery speech can easily include an obvious logical contradiction that can resurface in another proslavery

speech and again in a proslavery sermon and yet again in a proslavery editorial. One such often-repeated contradiction is the claim that slaves are happy and docile *combined* with the claim that slaves are war-like, antiwhite insurrectionists. Another frequently reiterated contradiction is the insistence that slavery is eternal *combined* with the assertion that slavery may eventually disappear. A third commonly recurring contradiction is the notion that slavery benefits everyone *combined* with the charge that the evil British wrongfully imposed slavery upon innocent, land-owning American colonists. A fourth recirculating contradiction is the harsh condemnation of sectionalism and factionalism *combined* with the ardent promotion of sectionalism and factionalism. Obviously, one task for critics of slavers' discourse is to account for such contradictions, which thrived for decades and became argumentative commonplaces in the white South.

Vigorously contesting historians' dominant view of the clash between abolitionist and proslavery rhetorics, Roberts-Miller challenges the assumption that, during this era, American political debate featured a balanced exchange of positions that competed for attention and consent in the public square. As she explains, prominent historians of this era, including Drew Gilpin Faust, presume that public discourse occurs in a "marketplace of ideas" in which people "are willing to examine, explain, modify, and even abandon any belief" after a careful process of public discussion and examination (19-20). According to Faust and numerous other historians, proslavery rhetors (many of whom hailed from South Carolina) produced discourse within a more-or-less routine process of reasonable public discussion until abolitionists issued feverish denunciations of slavery that, Faust and others conclude, spurred slavers to turn to increasingly alarmist, increasingly bellicose appeals. On the contrary, Roberts-Miller contends, slavers issued alarmist and bellicose appeals without regard to the tone of the national discussion of slavery and before polemical abolitionist voices gained prominence. Extending the scholarship of William Freehling, Roberts-Miller adds that, far from valuing open public discussion, slavers demanded that Northerners' critique of slavery, including polite and circumspect criticism, cease altogether. Despite the barbarity of slavery and despite their own self-contradictory arguments, proponents of bondage insisted that that institution stood above any possible criticism, insisting that, in her words, "free discussion of slavery in any public place was incompatible with slavery in slave states" (77). With the fervent, largely unqualified support of many Southern newspapers and pulpits, slavers fully expected to promote new policies—such as expanding slavery into the West—without national discussion. As she explains, slavers "wanted to change public policy regarding slavery without public debate. They wanted decision making without deliberation" (23). Freehling and Roberts-Miller add that, in addition to demanding Northern silence about slavery, slavers also disrespected the Bill of Rights—and its guarantee of freedom of speech and freedom of the press—when they prompted Southern state governments to pass laws to outlaw the criticism of slavery and, in contradiction to their insis-

tence on states' rights, sternly demanded that Northern state governments enact similar legislation.

In an effort to stop debate, proslavery mobs repeatedly attacked abolitionist speakers; one such mob murdered antislavery editor Elijah Lovejoy (Curtis, Richards). White Southerners cheered openly when Preston Brooks, a Congressman from South Carolina, used a cane to pummel Senator Charles Sumner, an outspoken abolitionist, on the floor of the US Senate, injuring Sumner so badly that he spent years recovering from his wounds (Donald). In addition, over a period of several years, Southern members of the House of Representatives installed the "gag rule" in an attempt to prevent former President John Quincy Adams and other Northern members of the House from introducing antislavery petitions in Congress (William Miller). Slavers also intercepted antislavery pamphlets at the post office in Charleston, South Carolina, thereby halting the distribution of US mail; they also passed laws to stop the dissemination of David Walker's abolitionist pamphlet and other antislavery tracts (Roberts-Miller 1-17, 159-86). Many slave states also outlawed literacy among slaves, partly as an effort to discourage them from reading abolitionist texts.

Roberts-Miller ties proslavery rhetoric to a white Southern honor code that fostered dueling.² When one aristocratic white Southerner male verbally offended another aristocratic white Southern male, the offended man would often challenge the offender to a duel with pistols. Dueling clearly did not refute the offending comment or criticism; but, by fatally wounding the critic, a duel erased the criticism (Roberts-Miller 77, 114, 116, 200). She explicates the Southern code that fostered dueling: "In an honor culture, one is dishonored, not by one's actions, but by people speaking of those actions. . . . If something does not exist unless and until it is mentioned in public discourse, one need not control one's own behavior, as much as control others' talk about that behavior" (116). Like dueling, the effort to kill an offending speaker, maim an outspoken Senator, mob a disagreeable orator, squash troublesome petitions, and eliminate distasteful pamphlets, while not rebutting any criticism proffered about slavery, might erase present (and possibly future) criticism while salvaging the honor of "insulted" slavers, at least in their own eyes.

White Southerners sometimes evoked another means of preserving the personal honor that they thought abolitionists were besmirching: they threatened to secede from the Union. Beginning in 1828, Southern legislators and other proslavery rhetors regularly engaged in brinkmanship with the North by warning of their own possible secession. Then, finally, despite Abraham Lincoln's promise not to interfere with slavery in the South, Southern states seceded in 1861. By contrast, Northern states never seceded from the Union, nor did Northern legislators ever threaten to do so. But, as Roberts-Miller explains, slavers regularly reproached the North by claiming that the simple criticism of slavery rendered abolitionists blameworthy for pushing white Southerners to secede and thereby to break or dissolve the United States.

According to slavers' argument, opponents of slavery thereby proved disloyal to the Union. In other words, slavers faulted Northerners for slavers' own treasonous gesture of threatening to secede and of actually seceding, followed by slavers' initiation of the extremely bloody Civil War. As Roberts-Miller explains, "Calling abolitionists traitorous may, to a modern reader, look patently insincere, if not actively silly. It was, after all, a smear made by nullifiers who had . . . advocated secession" (36). Analyzing slavers' petulant and irrational rhetoric, she observes, "nullifiers specifically and proslavery politicians generally took the strongest criticisms of them—that *they* were not particularly loyal to the Constitution—and projected the accusation onto their [abolitionist] outgroup" (36).

Roberts-Miller coins the phrase "cunning projection" to designate the rhetorical process of shoving one's own flaws onto someone else (37, 38, 103-26, 221-22). Through cunning projection, she explains, "One takes the major and most damning criticism of one's own position and simply asserts that it is true of the opposition" (221). Citing the work of social psychologists Derek Rucker and Anthony Pratkanis, she remarks that cunning projection "serves to persuade people that the name-calling group must be innocent of the charge, as they condemn it with such vehemence" (39, 222). In this case, slavers engaged in cunning projection when they projected their own traitorous desire to secede onto Northern abolitionists. She elucidates cunning projection, in part, by building on Burke's definition of scapegoating, which she quotes:

Projection device. The "curative" process that comes with the ability to hand over one's ills to a scapegoat, thereby getting purification by dissociation. This was especially medicinal, since the sense of frustration leads to a self-questioning. Hence if one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel, or "cause," outside the self, one can battle an external enemy instead of battling an enemy within. (Burke, *Philosophy* 173-74; qtd. in Roberts-Miller 38)

"Burke," she remarks, "emphasizes the psychologically soothing properties of scapegoating—that an individual feels strangely cleansed by projecting one's shames onto something ritually killed" (38). She adds that, when slavers engaged in cunning projection and scapegoated abolitionists, they discovered, "in Burke's terms, a perfect 'unification' device" that could foster solidarity among millions of white Southerners, including masses of poor whites who did not own slaves, while, in the minds of slavers, immunizing slavery from criticism (103).³

As Roberts-Miller maintains, advocates of slavery wallowed in insecurity while generating hugely overblown rhetoric alleging that white Southerners were innocent victims of the diabolical plans of crazed antislavery crusaders. By vastly inflating the numbers of abolitionists and grossly warping them into a monstrous threat, proslavery rhetors, Roberts-Miller argues, exemplified what Richard Hofstadter terms the "paranoid style" in American politics, a style that posits a huge, devilish conspiracy upon the innocent that requires a keen sense of emergency and deep solidarity among those who would resist it.⁴

Although Roberts-Miller provides only a few hints about other contexts for the curious antilogic of cunning projection, it unfortunately continued in American political life long after the conclusion of the Civil War. I contend that segregationists' responses to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s often exemplified cunning projection, scapegoating, and the paranoid style. Over many decades, throughout the South, white racists systematically violated African Americans' rights under the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees "equal protection under the law," including the rights to own property in good neighborhoods, to attend good public schools, to attend good public universities, to eat at lunch counters and restaurants, to rent rooms in hotels, and to read books in public libraries. When a crush of white segregationists killed two and injured more than four hundred others during a riot aimed at preventing James Meredith from integrating the University of Mississippi, the mob prevented Meredith from enjoying "equal protection under the law." When white police throughout the South routinely jailed activists for protesting segregation, they violated those activists' First Amendment right to freedom of speech. When segregationist mobs repeatedly and violently attacked reporters of major newspapers and camera crews of national television networks, they violated journalists' First Amendment right to freedom of the press (Roberts and Klibanoff). When lawless public officials (including Governor George Wallace of Alabama) and police countenanced the bombing of the homes and churches of those who objected to segregation, they promoted intimidation and murder.⁵

Further, segregationists throughout the South routinely and loudly defied the unanimous *Brown* decision of the Supreme Court that mandated the racial integration of all public schools in the US. One who flouted the *Brown* decision, Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas, commandeered the National Guard for the purpose of preventing black children from integrating Central High School of Little Rock, spurring President Dwight Eisenhower's decision to dispatch the 101st Airborne Division of the US army to escort the children past segregationist mobs on their way to school. With the apparent sanction of Governor John Patterson and the police, a segregationist mob in Alabama violated the *Morgan* decision of the Supreme Court by pummeling Freedom Riders who, in concert with the *Morgan* decision, were peacefully integrating interstate commerce.

Despite segregationists' unconstitutional practices and often violent behavior—which climaxed with the murders of Medgar Evers, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (none of whom was afforded adequate police protection)—Southern governors, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, and others frequently ignored the lawlessness of white racists while routinely and falsely claiming that James Meredith, Evers, King, and other integrationists were Communists. Hoover devoted enormous time to spying on King and attempting to destroy his reputation (Garrow, *FBI*). Given American participation in a nuclear arms race and Cold War against Russia, China, and Cuba—three Communist

nations—the charge of Communism amounted to an accusation of treason. That is, segregationists were asserting that advocates of racial equality were acting in concert with hostile foreign powers as part of a Communist conspiracy designed to overthrow the US. In doing so, segregationists exhibited a paranoid style while engaging in cunning projection and the scapegoating of African American avatars of Gandhian nonviolence. While blatantly disregarding the Constitution and the rule of law, white racist leaders and thugs projected their own treason onto exponents of civil rights, who, even when engaged in civil disobedience of local, racist ordinances, sought to implement American democracy for the first time in the South while acting in concert with the Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the dominant American religion of Judeo-Christianity (not the atheism of Karl Marx). Through cunning projection, segregationists succeeded, at least for awhile, in persuading some that, in Roberts-Miller's words, "the name-calling group must be innocent of the charge, as they condemn it with such vehemence" (222).

I maintain that Roberts-Miller's framework of cunning projection is also useful for explicating identity criticism of Barack Obama. By identity criticism, I do *not* mean criticism of the policies advocated by 2008 presidential candidate Obama or the policies espoused or enacted by President Obama since his inauguration in January 2009. (To anyone who will listen, I myself frequently rebuke Obama for many of his proposals and policies.) By identity criticism, I mean criticism of two of Obama's principal identity claims: his claim of birthplace and his claim of religious affiliation. I consider these below.

In 2008, a number of people criticized Obama's identity by declaring that he was not born in Honolulu, as he attested, but outside the US. Rebutting this claim, Senator Obama posted his Hawaiian birth certificate on his presidential campaign website of 2008.⁶ In the same year Factcheck.org, a nonpartisan project sponsored by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, refuted the birthplace criticism by printing the same Hawaiian birth certificate, which *Newsweek* and the *Los Angeles Times* reprinted as well (Henig; Malcolm). Factcheck.org further declared that, a few days after Obama's birth in 1961, a prominent newspaper, the *Honolulu Advertiser*, publicly announced his birth in Honolulu. After posting the newspaper announcement on its website, Factcheck.org dispatched experts to personally inspect Obama's Hawaiian birth certificate, which they found to be valid (Henig). As of the day I am writing these lines, no evidence has been produced that would challenge the validity of that birth certificate or the contemporaneous newspaper announcement of Obama's birth. Nor has evidence surfaced to support the claim that Obama was born in any specific place other than Hawaii. Yet, relying on unalloyed speculation, skeptics (sometimes called "birthers") have persisted in disputing Obama's Hawaiian birthplace. In 2009, World Net Daily and talk-show hosts Rush Limbaugh, G. Gordon Liddy, Sean Hannity, and Lou Dobbs all asserted that Obama either was or might have been born outside the US; they sometimes stated or implied that his mother gave birth in Kenya. Prominent politicians—including former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, Sena-

tor David Vitter, Senator Richard Shelby, and Representative Roy Blunt—have all reiterated a version of this claim. Several polls suggest that many Americans doubt that Obama was born in the US (“Barack Obama”). In April 2011, after major news outlets trumpeted Donald Trump’s revival of the birthplace criticism, President Obama held a press conference in which he distributed to reporters the “long form” of his Hawaiian birth certificate, which he then placed on the White House website, where it remains. The *Los Angeles Times* published this “long form” birth certificate (Memoli). Fact-check.org responded to Trump by noting that, in 1961, along with the *Honolulu Advertiser*, another newspaper, the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, also announced Obama’s birth in Hawaii (Jackson and Kiely). Still, the birthplace criticism persists. In October 2011, Governor Rick Perry of Texas, a Republican presidential candidate, recirculated the birthplace charge yet again (Geiger). In May 2012, the well-known and controversial Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Phoenix—sometimes deemed the “toughest sheriff in America”—held a press conference in which he charged that Obama was not born in the US (Forer).

The birthplace criticism matters because Article II, Section I of the US Constitution appears to many to stipulate that only a person born in the US qualifies to serve as President. For that reason Obama’s birthplace scoffers are either contending or strongly implying that he is constitutionally ineligible to serve in the White House.

World Net Daily and popular media figures Rush Limbaugh, G. Gordon Liddy, Michael Savage, Pam Geller, Jim Quinn, and Rose Tennent all provide the second identity criticism of Obama: the claim that he is a Muslim (“Barack Obama”). In 2008, Senator Obama’s campaign website also dismissed this charge, and Obama has repeatedly attested that he is a Christian. However, as Limbaugh admits, for roughly two decades, Obama and his wife and children regularly attended Trinity United Church of Christ, located in Southside Chicago. During the presidential campaign of 2008, a large controversy erupted when journalists aired statements by Rev. Jeremiah Wright, the pastor of Trinity Church, whose leftist Christian critique of the US resembled that of the radical Martin Luther King, Jr. of 1967 and 1968. Limbaugh and many others suggested that Obama shared Wright’s leftist Christian views and, therefore, did not deserve election to the White House.⁷

Note that World Net Daily, Limbaugh, Liddy, and others maintain *both* that Obama was born outside the US *and* that Obama is a Muslim. These identity critics do *not* simply claim or imply that Obama is a fascinating figure because he is the first Muslim president. Appealing to Americans frightened by the attacks of September 11, 2001, and fearful not only of al-Qaeda but also of Muslims in general, critics who make these two identity claims—when taken separately or, especially, when taken together—suggest, insinuate, hint, or imply that Obama is or might be a foreign plant who is not loyal to the US, its democratic principles or its dominant religion.

I maintain that, by suggesting, insinuating, implying or hinting that Obama is or might be an unconstitutional, foreign, anti-Christian, traitorous

presidential candidate, Obama's birthplace identity critics in 2008 sought to thwart national political debate and the national presidential election *not* by attempting to refute his ideas, but simply by disqualifying him from the campaign and removing him from the debate platform. By continuing to insinuate, hint, or imply that a foreign plant slipped into the Oval Office by means of a devious conspiracy, Obama's identity critics—especially those who continue to broadcast both identity criticisms after his election and inauguration—seek to undermine the democratic electoral process that allowed Obama to become president. They attempt to deny the validity of the 2008 primary election and general election, even though voters in November 2008 granted Obama a large popular majority plus a large electoral majority—a victory that included Obama's defeat of Senator John McCain in such normally Republican states as Indiana, Virginia, and North Carolina. These identity critics also insinuated, hinted, or implied that Obama's inauguration and subsequent occupancy of the White House were and are invalid. In other words, the identity critics insinuated or implied that Obama should be barred from running for the White House and now insinuate or imply that, as someone ineligible to serve as president, he should be banished from the White House. Instead of refuting his proposals and policies, they want to remove him initially from the political stage and now from the Oval Office.

By attempting to deny the legitimacy and success of Obama's candidacy—even after his triumphant campaign and inauguration—his identity critics consistently define themselves as patriots loyal to American ideals; like proslavery rhetors of the antebellum era, they object to factionalism while ardently promoting factionalism. Worse, Obama's identity critics, like the slavers, claim to support American democracy while actively rejecting it. Practicing cunning projection, they externalize their own rejection of democracy and their own treason, foisting that rejection and that treason onto their opponent, Obama. Roberts-Miller's analysis of proslavery rhetoric also fits the rhetoric of Obama's identity critics: "This cunning strategy of rhetorical projection rationalizes the bad behavior of the rhetor, in that it makes the aggressive behavior seem, at worst, defensive" (39). Through the cunning projection of slavers, Roberts-Miller explains, "those who support the Constitution are transmogrified into traitors, and those who wish to violate it are not" (125). This observation also describes Obama's identity critics. Like the cunning projection practiced by slavers, the cunning projection practiced by Obama's identity critics involves what Burke identifies as the unification strategy of scapegoating. Blue-collar, antiabortion Christian fundamentalists, Wall Street titans, and hunters in rural areas may have little in common; but Obama's identity critics attempt to unite all these people—and to distract them from policy debates—through a process of purification that they seek to achieve by scapegoating Obama.

Obama's identity critics also manifest what Hofstadter identifies as the paranoid style. Especially when combined, the two identity criticisms suggest, insinuate, or imply—or can be taken to suggest, insinuate, or imply—

that Obama was installed in the White House through an unconstitutional conspiracy for the purpose of aiding Muslim fanatics who wish to kill millions of Americans and to destroy the US. The implications of any such claim are huge. If Obama were a disloyal, foreign plant, then, anticipating that baby Obama would eventually run for the White House, Hawaiian officials and newspapers would, in 1961, be initiating the devilish plot when they conspired to attest falsely that Obama was born in Hawaii. Also wittingly or unwittingly furthering the conspiracy would be virtually the entire news media who, throughout 2007 and most of 2008, treated the alleged foreigner and/or alleged extremist Muslim as though he were a legitimate presidential aspirant whose prospects and ideas merited discussion. Also knowingly or unknowingly forwarding the conspiracy would be officials who prepared primary campaign ballots and general election ballots that included Obama's name alongside those of other contenders for the presidency.

Additional aware or unaware conspirators would be those other contenders—including Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator John McCain—who criticized Obama and who repeatedly debated him in formal, televised settings. The news media, ballot makers, Clinton, and McCain certainly treated Obama as someone qualified to pursue the highest office. Also fostering the conspiracy would be millions of seriously deceived Democrats who voted for Obama instead of Clinton or some other candidate in the Democratic primaries. Other witting or unwitting conspirators would be the millions of voters who picked Obama over McCain in the general election. Also intentionally or unintentionally facilitating the conspiracy would be everyone who participated in Obama's inaugural ceremony of January 2009, including John Roberts, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and a conservative Republican, who officially swore in Obama. The identity critics arguably imply that anyone who used or uses the phrase "President Obama" was or is knowingly or unknowingly promoting the same vast conspiracy.

In addition, many of these identity critics regularly contradict themselves. Limbaugh seems entirely unaware that he contradicts himself by charging *both* that Obama is a Muslim *and* that Obama is a leftist Christian. No one can be a bona fide Muslim and a bona fide Christian at the same time. Further, many of these identity critics, obviously including McCain's running mate Sarah Palin, strongly supported McCain's presidential bid. Palin and other birthplace critics of Obama failed to mention that McCain was incontrovertibly and by his own declaration born in Panama, where his father, a US military officer, was stationed. Simply stated, Palin and other right-wing birthplace critics cunningly projected any legitimate question about McCain's birthplace ineligibility onto Obama.⁸

Obama's identity critics also contradict themselves by refusing to notice that they themselves act in a way that furthers the alleged, anti-American foreign conspiracy. Whenever identity critics denounce Obama's proposals and policies—as they often do—they act under the assumption that Obama has the right to make proposals, sign legislation, and enact policies; that is, they

act as though he were a bona fide president. By affirming Obama's standing as president, they themselves further legitimize the Obama presidency that they simultaneously suggest, hint, or imply is the illegitimate result of a diabolical, foreign conspiracy. Among Obama's identity critics are several members of Congress who, by attending his State of the Union addresses given before a joint session of Congress, also confirm his position as president and thereby appear to foster the same fiendish conspiracy that they detect underneath Obama's candidacy and election.

Antebellum white rhetors used cunning projection in an effort to promote and protect white supremacy and slavery. During the 1950s and 1960s, white racists used cunning projection in an effort to protect white supremacy and segregation. Since 2008, a group of white rhetors use cunning projection in an effort to discredit Obama, an African American, and to remove him from the political scene. White racial anxieties may factor into all three of these cases. In each of them, a vocal group of whites sought to maintain a stranglehold on subordinated African Americans by resorting to the sad, tortured logic of cunning projection. In the first two cases, vocal whites also resorted to violence aimed at physically eliminating proponents of African Americans rights.

Writing prior to Roberts-Miller, Sharon Crowley examines the paranoid style of contemporary, fundamentalist, and apocalyptic Christian rhetoric. Crowley briefly links this discourse to proslavery rhetoric when she quotes and reflects on Abraham Lincoln's comment (in his Cooper Institute speech of 1860) about the extreme difficulty of changing the minds of those white Southerners who displayed swaggering, conspiratorial proslavery discourse that seriously misrepresented his intentions with regard to slavery (164). Exploring the possibility of a more civil rhetoric that could bridge the current, yawning liberal-conservative divide in the US, Crowley forwards several suggestions. First, she asks her readers to attempt "to demonstrate" to fundamentalist, conspiracy-minded Christians "the superiority of alternative values" (200). Second, she advocates efforts "to demonstrate the contingency of . . . [fundamentalist] values by locating them in space and time, thus destabilizing the system of belief in which these same values are taken to be non-contingent" (201). Third, instead of prodding devotees of this rhetoric to immediately jettison their entire worldview, she advocates a piecemeal approach of "disarticulating a particular belief from the others with which it is articulated" in order to hold that belief up to inspection (201). She candidly admits that anyone who adopts her first two suggestions might find success either "not easy" or "very difficult" (200, 201). Her third suggestion, she adds, requires "discernment and skill" combined with "time and patience" (201). She concludes with, in her words, "the hope that my readers will find, or open, many more paths of invention" to reach conspiracy-minded fundamentalists than she has "been able to name here" (201).

I endorse Crowley's notions for engaging not only with the rhetoric that she analyzes, but also with the identity criticism of Obama and with any

other new (yet, in some ways, distressingly old) manifestations of cunning projection that, unfortunately, may continue to surface in the public arena. But I also urge that, in addition to heeding her advice, we need to fathom cunning projection as an antidebate form of debate. We further need to understand its stubborn persistence and resurgence as a manifestation of long-standing white racial anxieties and to prevent those whom it targets from being removed from the national stage as the victims of false, self-contradictory charges and/or of physical violence.

NOTES

- ¹ Patricia Roberts-Miller is no relation to me.
- ² See Nisbett and Cohen.
- ³ See Roberts-Miller 103-26; see also Cooper.
- ⁴ See two books by Hofstadter. See also Davis.
- ⁵ For Wallace's knowledge about and tolerance of Ku Klux Klan bombings of African American homes and churches in Birmingham, see McWhorter.
- ⁶ Hawaii became a state in 1959, two years before Obama's birth in 1961.
- ⁷ For Limbaugh's linking of Obama to Wright, see rushlimbaugh.com/home/daily/site_031308/content/01125106.guest.html.
- ⁸ Unlike Obama's birthplace critics, none of Obama's prominent supporters generated a "birther" argument against McCain or made an effort to disqualify him from the presidential race of 2008.

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