

## Welcome to Our World

Written by Stephanie Jones, NNPA Columnist  
Thursday, 04 October 2012 00:00

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*There are 47 percent who are with [President Obama], who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you name it. These are people who pay no income tax. My job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives.*

- Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney

When Mitt Romney was busted boasting to wealthy supporters that he has no use for the 47 percent of the American voters who don't pay federal income tax, the former Massachusetts governor further hobbled his already limping presidential campaign. But he may also have unwittingly broken the bond between the GOP and the White Republicans who make up a large part of that 47 percent, paving the way for an interesting potential political realignment.

After all, White Republicans who are retired, serving in the military, are disabled or work hard but don't make enough money to pay federal income tax must have been pretty surprised to hear just what their party's standard bearer thinks of them. After all, they pay plenty of regressive payroll, sales and other taxes.

For months, Romney's remarks were known only to the well-heeled few who had paid \$50,000 apiece to hear him make them. But now everyone knows that the Republican nominee has written off half of the nation's voters, including a substantial portion of the GOP base and, even worse, brags about it in his favored "quiet rooms" with disdain, condescension and a sneer.

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We also now know, thanks to his obtuse and incoherent triple conflation, that logic isn't Romney's strong suit. How does the fact that 47 percent of voters support the president and 47 percent of households don't pay federal income tax and some people who don't pay federal income tax are irresponsible, add up to nearly half of all American voters being lazy, government-dependent, non-taxpaying Obama-supporting victims?

Romney defended his comments by claiming they were "off-the-cuff," as if that means they shouldn't be taken seriously. But the fact that they were spontaneously and spoken when he didn't think he would be overheard by anyone outside of his narrow station makes Romney's comments all the more telling. After all, character is who you are when no one is looking. And when Romney thought we weren't looking, he showed us exactly who he is: a man who believes that people are expendable if they don't serve his purposes, even those people who believed he was on their side.

To those folks who have been so callously cast aside, I say: Welcome to *our* world. We know how you feel.

In our world, where we Black voters are dismissed and demeaned by the Republican Party as a matter of policy and practice, Romney's comments come as little surprise. While the Republican Party falls all over itself catering to and pandering to White voters, the party and its candidates have long shown very little interest in us. But at least, until recently, they made an effort to *pretend* to seek our support, even though they knew that we knew that they really didn't mean it.

But in this election cycle, the party has flung itself headlong into the gutter, fielding a stream of candidates who alternately ignored and insulted us, often in words and tones better suited to the Jim Crow era than the new millennium. The party's refusal to denounce – and its willingness often to participate in and even generate – racist dog whistle swipes at minorities, in general, and the president, in particular – denigrates a once-respectable and respected political organization.

And while they don't care whether we vote for *them*, Republican officials across the country are now using every lever of power at their disposal to try to keep us from voting at *all*.

No matter how much these modern-day poll taxers claim "voter fraud," and "ballot integrity," the record shows that the voter ID requirements, early voting restrictions, and other voter

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suppression measures they have forced into law are designed for one purpose and one purpose only: to keep minorities, women, the disabled, the elderly from voting because they think they'll vote for President Obama and other Democrats. Period.

It is no secret what the Republican Party thinks of Black voters – when it bothers to think of us at all; it is one of the reasons that support for Romney among African Americans is so infinitesimal that pollsters can't even measure it. But now, Romney has slipped up and showed us all of us that he thinks much the same thing about a whole lot of White Republican voters, too.

As a result, the White Republicans in the 47 percent are now getting a taste of what Black folk have been experiencing for much too long. But will they realize that they have much more in common with us than with the party that smiles in their faces and talks about them behind their backs? If they do, imagine how our shared experience of being treated as others/outside/less-than could empower us to recognize, build upon and leverage our shared political interests.

Welcome to *our* world, indeed.

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