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## Waco and the Lexicon of Racism

**Q**uestion: When men (and a few women) belonging to gangs, known to law enforcement agencies for criminal behavior, explode in a rampage – using guns, knives, clubs, and chains in trying to kill each other, and police officers, too – that leaves nine dead, nearly 200 injured and hundreds arrested, is that a “riot?”

Answer: Apparently not – if the overwhelming majority of the gang members are white.

America’s present-day “racial divide” has never been more strikingly displayed than in the refusal of much of the mainstream and conservative media to describe the May 17 biker riot in Waco, Texas as a riot.

The riot, which occurred at a popular restaurant amid dozens of innocent bystanders and, according to police, involved members of five different gangs, was one of the most extraordinary outbursts of mass criminal violence in recent memory. Further, almost immediately after Waco police arrested the bikers, rumors swirled that other members of the gangs were heading toward the city to both continue the battle against their rivals and carry out death threats made against Waco police officials.

Yet, scanning the newspapers, the universe of online publications and the network and cable television news programs, you’d have scarcely come across any description of what occurred in Waco as a “riot.” Nor would you have likely found any reference to the bikers, clad in their distinctively grungy



**LAST CHANCE**

Lee A. Daniels

biker garb, as “thugs” – or, as one newspaper reader put it: “murdering tuggish rioters.”

MediaMatters, the watchdog group, pointed out the contrast in how Fox News, for example, covered Waco versus Baltimore and Ferguson.

It noted, “After African-Ameri-

Sally Kohn wrote, “In fact, in much of the coverage of the Waco shootings, the race of the gang members isn’t even mentioned. By comparison, the day after Freddie Gray died in the custody of police officers in Baltimore, not only did most coverage mention that Gray was black, but also included a quote from the deputy police commissioner noting Gray was arrested in ‘a high-crime area known to have high narcotic incidents,’ implicitly smearing Gray and the entire community.”

The disparity in coverage did not go unremarked upon on Black social media, in a host of progressive publications, and in numerous

In this instance, it’s that such words as “riot” and “thug” are part of the lexicon of America’s continuing racial divide that, among other things, individualizes white crime and white flaws, while it indicts all Black Americans for the flaws and crimes of individual Blacks. Some years ago a journalist friend of mine described this dynamic as “the chains of collective guilt.”

The phenomenon isn’t new, of course. Once, the lexicon of anti-Black collective guilt helped justify the actual chains of Negro slavery and the legalized racism that followed. Now, it’s usually employed in more subtle ways.

Except when it’s not: As in the revealing discoveries over the past two months of racist, sexist and homophobic tweets and e-mails by cops in the police departments of San Francisco, Miami Beach, and Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

In each case – all are still in early stages of investigation – police officers, some with long years on their force, were found to have exchanged from dozens to hundreds of social-media messages disparaging with vile slurs against Blacks, Hispanic-Americans, women, gays and lesbians, Muslim Americans – and, of course, President Obama.

Law enforcement co-workers and innocent civilians alike were denigrated along with Black criminal suspects. The bulk of the messages in all these instances focused on Black Americans.

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can communities in Baltimore and Ferguson, Mo. came together to demonstrate against the deadly and racially disparate policies of law enforcement, Fox News branded the protests a “war on cops.” But when the story became a mostly-white Texas biker gang plotting to kill police with grenades and car bombs, the network took a decidedly less sensationalist approach in its reporting.”

CNN Political Commentator

online reader-responses to mainstream-publication stories. (Many also noted the Waco police responded to the deadly shootout with none of the heavily-militarized equipment and body armor that immediately marked police responses to peaceful protests in Ferguson and Baltimore.)

Indeed, the differences in the language used underscore that the way words and phrases are used to talk about race and racial events has its own meaning.

Read the rest online at [www.theskanner.com](http://www.theskanner.com)



## Train Accidents and Infrastructure Neglect

**W**hen Amtrak Northeast Regional Train #188 derailed on May 12, federal budget observers wondered if the underfunding of our nation’s fraying infrastructure was at least partly responsible for the deaths of eight people and the injuries to more than 200. Despite these questions, House Republicans voted to reduce President Obama’s request for Amtrak funding from \$2.45 billion to \$1.14 billion. The Republican proposal not only reduces the current level of funding for Amtrak, which is \$1.4 billion, it also delays or eliminates needed capital for improvements.

Legislators who represent areas served by the Northeast corridor trains running from Washington D.C. to Boston), including New York’s Charles Schumer (D) and Philadelphia’s Chaka Fattah (D), have voiced objection to the parsimonious plan to underfund Amtrak. Still, House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), as characteristically myopic as the proverbial ostrich with its head in the sand, lost his cool when a reporter asked about funding for Amtrak.

When Ginger Gibson, a political reporter for the International Business Times, queried Boehner about Democratic criticisms of Amtrak funding, he called her question “stupid.” He then embarked on a partisan rant that ignored the fact that eight people



**BENNETT COLLEGE**

Julianne Malveaux

died because of the derailment. What does money have to do with it? Everything.

If budgets allowed for more than one engineer on a train, then Brandon Bostian, the engineer who claims not to remember why the train sped up, might have had

enough precautions to prevent this kind of accident? What will be done to prevent similar tragedies in the future?

Trains aren’t the only parts of our infrastructure that need attention. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) issues a report card on our nation’s infrastructure every four years. The most recent report, released in 2013, gives the U.S. a grade of D+ when 16 areas (including rail, bridges, aviation, roads and waste disposal) are considered. We get the highest grade, B-, in solid waste disposal because we are both producing less trash per capi-

lars are needed to bring our infrastructure up to the level of good, or B, level by 2020. They say the gap between what is funded and what is needed is about \$1.6 trillion, or \$201 billion a year. Our Congress is so focused on cutting spending that they refuse to invest in infrastructure.

Other parts of our infrastructure are even more substandard. One in eight of our nation’s bridges are structurally deficient, and more than 200 million trips are made across these deficient bridges in our 102 largest metropolitan areas each year. Many of these bridges have been poorly maintained and still handle heavy traffic. They are, on average, 42 years old. While repairs or new construction has begun on some, such as New York’s Tappan Zee Bridge, other neglected bridges are tragedies waiting to happen.

A strong infrastructure is an essential part of a sound economy. It makes it easier and more efficient to move both people and products. It provides jobs and other economic opportunities. On the other hand, allowing infrastructure to erode costs money. For example, ASCE reports that 42 percent of our nation’s highways are congested, costing \$101 billion in wasted time and fuel each year.

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some backup. Further, with more funding, would the positive train control safety system (which slows speeding trains) have been functioning properly?

Investigations have not yet revealed why Train #188 derailed. It was going 106 miles per hour when it should have been going 50, but how did it speed up so rapidly, and why? Why are there not

ta and recycling more of it. We earn D- grades for the status of our levees and waterways. We earn D grades for most other categories, so the C+ grade for rail, compared to D grades for aviation and roads, may not seem like such a bad thing. Still, while U.S. trains should be excellent they are just a tad better than mediocre.

ASCE says that \$3.6 trillion dol-

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