The Effects of Change

By Nathaniel Tolbert

In the October/November Issue of Vibe magazine, multi platinum rapper Lil Wayne made some interesting remarks regarding the Tea Party Movement and the treatment of President Barack Obama. Regarding the Tea Party: “You learn from what the right-wing is doing and you take something from it...I feel like as (black) people the most that we can do is better ourselves and learn. Then look at yourself and ask ‘Am I the person they’re talking about or am I not?’ You have to make the most of who you are because the Republicans are never going to like us.” And regarding President Obama Wayne added: “…the right-wings’, at times, blatant disrespect of the oval office has more to do with Obama’s racial make-up than his policies.” Wayne concedes that while the criticism over the President’s handling of the economy might be understandable, “Some of the talk has gone beyond politics. “I don’t think I have to say that for everybody to know that,”

While this set of statements is not groundbreaking or revolutionary, the fact that they came from Lil Wayne really made me think about the current social/political climate in this country. The Obama Era was supposed to be the start of a new beginning. Not only ushering a new school of thought into the political arena, but signaling that Black People had finally “made it” in America. The glass ceiling was broken. However, from my perspective, and apparently the perspective of others, this has not been the case. Never before has a President of the United States of America been treated with such disrespect. The media often refers to him as “Obama”, dropping the honored title of “President” that traditionally goes in front of the name of the head of state. Additionally, President Obama has been cursed at in congress, has had his American citizenship challenged and has endured demands that his birth certificate be made public.

Lil Wayne, a multiplatinum music artist and crossover star, echo’s sentiments that are undoubtedly going through the minds of a sector of American citizenry; and his statements are rather shocking, not necessarily because they display an awareness that are out of line with his bizarre, drugged out image, but more so because as a multimillionaire public figure his comments make him vulnerable to black-listing and conservative backlash on the highest levels. His comments can easily be framed as polarizing and realistically he could disappear as quickly as the Dixie Chicks did after they criticized President George W. Bush. His statements re-affirm in my mind that we are reaching a boiling point in this country. Wayne’s comments, however, are just a lead-in to a bigger question, have we reached a point were race has once again become a push button issue in this country? I believe so.

Instead of becoming a country championing racial harmony post Obama it seems we have taken steps backwards, at least from my perspective as a black male. It seems that instead of propelling the country forward regarding racial dynamics, the presidency of Barack Obama has led to an increase in a new passive-aggressive brand of racism. The racism of innuendo, comments and actions that can easily be dismissed when somebody suggests they contain negative racial overtones. The Birther and Tea party movements are an example of the passive-aggressive bigotry movement. Their over the top conservatism itself is questionable yet defendable, however, the audacity of their movement is deeply rooted in racial bias. Questioning whether an elected American president is truly an American disrespects not only the office of the Presidency but the political process as well. The press’ initial handling of the Birther movement as more
than just a group of conspiracy theorist was even more offensive then the group’s message. The Tea Party’s insistence that the economy is stabilized while increasing tax cuts and blaming the poor and disadvantaged for sucking up governmental resources reeks of American majority entitlement at its worst.

These schools of thought have begun to permeate a sector of American consciousness as well. A recent editorial in the Boston College Observer entitled *Our Voluntary Segregation of Race and Culture* questioned the necessity of black specific organizations like Black Student Forum and the Black Student Law association, blaming their existence for the natural segregation of black and white students. The article also pointed the finger at the First Year Experience by pointing out racial discrimination and making white students feel bad and causing them to shy away from their black contemporaries. The author claims that since there are no fundamental differences between blacks and whites there is no reason for these groups to exist. Much of the language in the article was harsh and the racial dynamic was black/white specific, the author only mentioned Asian students as an afterthought. The patronizing tone of the article’s opening paragraph reminded me of white entitlement at its worst, “An instructive video was shown by the Office of First Year Experience to the freshmen during orientation, commanding the whites to be nice to the blacks; for the whites to resist their culture of racism and open themselves to a new world of growing minorities.”

To disregard the necessity for culturally specific clubs on a campus where white students are the overwhelming majority is something that is not worth rebuttal or discussion in my eyes. This kind of mindset brings me back to what Wayne said. “You learn from what the right-wing is doing and you take something from it,” What’s unfortunate however is that another part of his statement also holds true. “You have to make the most of who you are because the Republicans are never going to like us.” It has become prevalent that two opposite ideologies are forming and race relations have become an issue consistently lurking in the American consciousness. Even post-Obama the perversity of race in the United States lives on. One can only hope that we soon move past this re-emerging issue.