

# The Press & Dakotan

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Yankton Media, Inc., 319 Walnut St., Yankton, SD 57078

**CONTACT US**  
PHONE:  
(605) 665-7811  
(800) 743-2968  
NEWS FAX:  
(605) 665-1721  
ADVERTISING FAX:  
(605) 665-0288  
WEBSITE:  
www.yankton.net

**SUBSCRIPTIONS/  
CIRCULATION**  
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mike.hrycko@yankton.net

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**COMPOSING DEPT.**  
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**OPINION**

## Loving America, Hating Obama

The controversy over an inflammatory remark (or two or three) by former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani regarding President Barack Obama's love of country is actually a beast that touches on much more than a reckless assessment of how much the president of the United States allegedly doesn't love this nation.

Last week at a Republican fundraiser for Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, a potential 2016 presidential candidate, Giuliani declared: "... I do not believe that the president loves America." In an assessment that he prefaced by admitting "this is a horrible thing to say" — that is what's called a red flag — Giuliani explained, "(President Obama) doesn't love you. And he doesn't love me. He wasn't brought up the way you were brought up and I was brought up through love of this country." Giuliani later claimed he said this because "I do hear (Obama) criticize America much more often than other American presidents."

This set off a volcano of backlash, although it also saw some politicians, such as Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindahl (R), refuse to take issue with the remarks. Other GOP notables, like Walker, have gingerly sidestepped the matter. Giuliani himself tried to backtrack a bit in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece, but he still maintained the validity of his basic statement, and he didn't apologize.

This is the kind of nasty, alienating rhetoric that has disgusted so many people about our modern political discourse. And up to a point, such ugly rhetoric has certainly not been limited to one party or one end of the ideological spectrum. There's no doubting that.

But Giuliani apparently saw no reason to curb his venom, mostly because it was part of an ongoing conservative chorus. He was speaking to a very partisan crowd, as most political fundraisers are, and he felt free to engage in dispensing such judgments. He's since doubled down on his remarks even while trying to walk them back. He told the *New York Daily News* that Obama has been influenced by communism and socialism. The ex-mayor also explained that his statement about the president could not possibly be viewed as racist because Obama has a "white mother." The hole he digs gets deeper with every awkward explanation.

Unfortunately, we've heard this kind of thing frequently in recent years. Granted, all presidents have been fair game for rhetorical abuse, but in the current case, there no longer seems to be any boundaries of discretion for such broadsides, particularly among some — but not all — conservative elements who rabidly assail Obama and his policies. It's apparently fair game to openly question the president's nationality and his religious beliefs; to imply that he is somehow foreign, different and un-American; that he doesn't love the country that clearly has done a lot for him. There appears to be no utterance too outrageous, no statement too far out of bounds or too disrespectful.

Is this truly a sign of barely disguised racism, as some have charged? Is it easier to portray Obama as dangerously different because his skin color is different? We'd prefer to think not, but of course, we'd also prefer our politicians work together constructively toward goals, not maliciously against one another.

While such character attacks reside at the lowest rungs of our politics, the fact is they also speak to a certain segment of the electorate for whom it's all red meat, oozing with blood, that will be eagerly swallowed whole. And increasingly, that's the only political calculus that seems to matter.

(This has become practically a syndrome among some conservative politicians, who — apparently weaned on the belief that talk-radio entertainment rhetoric is also a good way to debate policy — periodically unleash wildly caustic remarks on a host of topics with seemingly little fear of political consequence. Last week, for instance, South Dakota State Rep. Isaac Latterell, a Republican from Tea, declared that Planned Parenthood is "worse than ISIS and lying about it." That ludicrous statement won him national headlines and social media ridicule, but don't be surprised if it also brings him some political donations.)

As we said, both sides generally play this bellicose political game — but one side has unquestionably ratcheted up the vitriol.

Which brings us back to Giuliani and his summary character judgments, based both on his own self-serving definition of loving America and on his desperate need to become a relevant political player again. Frankly, Giuliani's judgmental brand of American love may be something that not too many other Americans would find particularly appealing — because our country really *should* be better than that.

kmh

**IN HISTORY**

**By The Associated Press**  
Today is Wednesday, Feb. 25, the 56th day of 2015. There are 309 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On Feb. 25, 1940, a National Hockey League game was televised for the first time by New York City station W2XBS as the New York Rangers defeated the Montreal Canadiens, 6-2, at Madison Square Garden.

**On this date:** In 1836, inventor Samuel Colt patented his revolver.

In 1901, United States Steel Corp. was incorporated by J.P. Morgan.

In 1905, the Upton Sinclair novel "The Jungle" was first published in serial form by the Appeal to Reason newspaper.

In 1913, the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving Congress the power to levy and collect income taxes, was declared in effect by Secretary of State Philander Chase Knox.

In 1922, French serial killer Henri Landru, convicted of murdering 10 women and the son of one of them, was executed in Versailles.

In 1943, Allied troops reoccupied the Kasserine Pass after clashing with German troops during World War II.

In 1950, "Your Show of Shows," starring Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, Carl Reiner and Howard Morris, debuted on NBC-TV.

In 1964, Eastern Airlines Flight 304, a DC-8, crashed shortly after taking off from New Orleans International Airport, killing all 58 on board. Muhammad Ali (then known as Cassius Clay) became world heavyweight boxing champion as he defeated Sonny Liston in Miami Beach.

In 1973, the Stephen Sondheim musical "A Little Night Music" opened at Broadway's Shubert Theater.

In 1986, President Ferdinand Marcos fled the Philippines after 20 years of rule in the wake of a tainted election; Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency.

In 1991, during the Persian Gulf War, 28 Americans were killed when an Iraqi Scud missile hit a U.S. barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

In 1994, American-born Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein opened fire with an automatic rifle inside the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank, killing 29 Muslims before he was beaten to death by worshippers.

**Ten years ago:** Municipal employee and church leader Dennis Rader was arrested for the BTK ("bind, torture, kill") serial slayings that had terrorized Wichita, Kansas. (Rader later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 10 life prison terms.) A suicide bombing killed four Israelis

outside a Tel Aviv nightclub, shattering an informal truce. Amnesty International founder Peter Benenson died in Oxford, England, at age 83. Hall of Fame basketball coach John Chaney was suspended for the rest of the regular season by Temple for ordering rough play by one of his players during a game against Saint Joseph's. The Walt Disney Co. agreed to sell the Anaheim Mighty Ducks to billionaire Henry Samueli and his wife, Susan, for \$75 million.

**Five years ago:** President Barack Obama convened a health care summit with Democrats and Republicans; after a day of debate and disagreement, the president concluded the talkfest with a bleak assessment that an accord might not be possible. In Vancouver, the Canadian women beat the United States 2-0 for their third straight Olympic hockey title. Americans Billy Demong and Johnny Spillane finished 1-2 in a Nordic combined race. Yuna Kim of South Korea won ladies' figure skating.

**One year ago:** In a blunt warning to Afghan President Hamid Karzai, President Barack Obama threatened to withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 if a crucial security pact wasn't signed. (U.S. and Afghan officials signed the pact in Sept. 2014.) Jim Lange, the first host of the popular game show "The Dating Game," died in Mill Valley, California, at age 81.

**Today's Birthdays:** Country singer Ralph Stanley is 88. Actor Tom Courtenay is 78. CBS newsman Bob Schieffer is 78. Actress Diane Baker is 77. Actress Karen Grassie is 73. Humorist Jack Handey is 66. Movie director Neil Jordan is 65. Rock musician Dennis Diken (The Smithereens) is 58. Rock singer-musician Mike Peters (The Alarm; Big Country) is 56. Actress Veronica Webb is 50. Actor Alexis Denisof is 49. Actress Tea Leoni is 49. Comedian Carrot Top is 48. Actress Lesley Boone is 47. Actor Sean Astin is 44. Singer Daniel Powter is 44. Latin singer Julio Iglesias Jr. is 42. Rhythm-and-blues singer Justin Jeffre is 42. Rock musician Richard Liles is 42. Actor Anson Mount is 42. Comedian-actress Chelsea Handler is 40. Actress Rashida Jones is 39. Country singer Shawna Thompson (Thompson Square) is 37. Actor Justin Berfield is 29. Actors James and Oliver Phelps ("Harry Potter" movies) are 29. Rock musician Erik Hauger (Carolina Liar) is 28.

**Thought for Today:** "He who never leaves his country is full of prejudices." — Carlo Goldoni, Italian playwright (born this date in 1707, died 1793).



## The GOP And The Love Litmus Test

BY KATHLEEN PARKER  
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Republicans seem ceaselessly enamored of litmus tests, but the newest one — *Do you believe President Obama loves America?* — makes birthers seem witty.

The question arose after former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani told a private audience that he doesn't think Obama loves America. He further noted that Obama wasn't raised like him or members of the audience (conservative business people and assorted media), which, though probably true (Obama grew up in Hawaii and for a time in Indonesia), wasn't really the point.

Translated, Giuliani's observation was to question whether Obama is really on the home team, specifically when it comes to defeating the Islamic State. Whether Giuliani intended to dredge up the "otherness" of Obama, a remnant of the 2008 presidential election, isn't clear (or likely), the effect was to stoke long-simmering doubts about Obama's legitimacy.

To certain people, he is still an alien who doesn't think the way "we" do and is the son of a Kenyan anti-colonialist. (Aren't we all anti-colonialists these days?) The fact that he also happens to be African-American has many viewing Giuliani's comment as dog whistling to racists, which probably is not true.

Still, what he said had a certain familiar ring to it. And racists will embrace Giuliani's comments as speaking to them regardless of what was intended. As a result, Giuliani not only has tarnished his own legacy as America's mayor but has created problems for the Republican Party, which needed no new reasons for black voters to see them as unwelcoming.

Now, in the litmus test du jour, Republican presidential candidates are being forced to indicate whether they agree with Giuliani and also whether they believe President Obama is a Christian who loves his country. Good grief.

To be fair, these questions are coming from the media, not from the RNC, but litmus-voters are paying attention — and so are Democrats. It is hard to fathom what exactly certain Republicans want from Obama. Tears? A public declaration of love?

Several years back, some insisted that Obama wasn't a patriot because he didn't want to wear a flag lapel pin. This was absurd on its face. Wear a little flag pin and we're all good? Refuse to wear one and you might be a Muslim operative?

Giuliani's comments followed closely on the heels of Obama's much-criticized speech at the National Prayer Breakfast, which did fall short of inspiring, one has to admit. In his attempt to appear humble, the president tried to give equal time to our nation's flaws as he commended its accomplishments, saying:

"Lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that

during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ."

Well now, there's a comparison unlikely to curry favor among the brethren. This weird teaching moment might work in an op-ed piece or in academia, but when the enemy invokes these very events, we might want to avoid lending legitimacy to their justifications for savagery and genocide.

Uniqueness, meanwhile, is irrelevant. Using history as a guide lest we repeat it is one thing; it is quite another to essentially minimize present horrors because, hey, we've all been bad. Christians aren't currently burning people alive or beheading them in an attempt to convert the world to Christianity.

Obama's failed attempt to show the world how even-handed he is revealed a surprising lack of logic. But this hardly means that he doesn't "love" America, whatever *that* means.

It isn't really so shocking that Obama's too-careful wording might cause someone like Giuliani to react strongly in the moment. The fact that Republicans aren't eager to distance themselves from the comments suggests that there are enough on the right who agree with him that a denunciation might be risky.

The first summoned to the interrogatory was Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, for whom the dinner was intended when Giuliani stole the show. Walker has been asked repeatedly whether he thinks Obama loves America, an idiotic question that only a fool would answer except to say, "Absolutely!"

Instead, Walker grabbed a shovel and starting digging a hole right next to Giuliani's. Though he first replied that he didn't feel he needed to comment on Giuliani's comments, he later said he doesn't know if Obama is a Christian.

Well, of course he doesn't "know," but everyone knows what Obama has said. He's a Christian. I'm no less inclined to believe the president when he says he's a Christian than I am to believe Walker when he says he's one. If either man is a fake Christian, he has plenty of company, the fact of which makes very little difference to most Americans.

This is all politics, in other words, and Republican candidates need to get smarter. Litmus tests will keep coming their way, and anyone seriously considering running for president needs to know what he thinks before he's asked. When the camera is running is no time to share one's deliberations.

It seems that Walker could use better advisers and advance people — and the president might want to shake up his speech-writing department. In the meantime, only Giuliani owns his opinions.

Too bad they're so repugnant.

Kathleen Parker's email address is [kathleen-parker@washpost.com](mailto:kathleen-parker@washpost.com).

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**Future Leaders**

**Christopher Svarstad, Yankton**  
In response to Dr. Wayne Kindle's column (*Press & Dakotan*, Feb. 19) regarding the National Honor Society, I want to applaud the growth of that program.

As a high school graduate nearly a decade ago now and as a member of the National Honor Society, and as privileged as I was to give the commencement address at my graduation, the students inducted are worth noting. The NHS upholds the value of all those who have exemplified leadership. To all the students statewide inducted into the NHS, I say, "Well done."

There's a great deal I learned in my days as a member of the NHS and a great deal I learned from those people who inspired me to do what I did. None of it was easy.

Even though there are those out there who were not able to shatter that highest and hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to the determination of those who worked hard, there's millions of cracks in it. Always aim high, work hard and care deeply about what you believe in. When you stumble or get knocked down, get up and ignore those who say you can't or shouldn't go on.

There is one inductee worth noting in particular, a junior at Yankton High School, Skylar Elle — a person of integrity and leadership, surpassed by very few, someone from whom

**P&D Letter Policy**

The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** invites its readers to write letters to the editor. We ask that a few simple guidelines be followed:

- Please limit letters to 300 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.
- In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the **PRESS & DAKOTAN** will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.
- Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.
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a lot can be learned. Skylar has the intelligent, leadership and wits to do great, and be a future leader in our nation.

President Reagan said: "A leader, once convinced a particular course of action is the right one, must have the determination to stick with it and be undaunted when the going gets rough."

DESTINY: "Our republic and its press will rise or fall together."

— Joseph Pulitzer

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