



# An Image Of Silence

BY KELLY HERTZ

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There's a face I've been seeing a lot lately. I see it while I work and then when I'm away from work. I saw it in the sky Tuesday night as a nearly full moon played hide-and-seek behind some broken clouds. I even see it when I close my eyes and don't want to see anything at all.

It's the face of a small, dark-haired girl who looks like she's sleeping. She seems like such a fragile thing, and in my imagination, her slumber suggests a sense of peace, as if she had fallen asleep after a hard day of play.

But then my view of the face pulls back to bring in the larger truth. She lies naked in some brush, her throat is slit and chunks of her are ripped away. She really is sleeping, in a fatal sense, but peace was far from the last thing she knew when her life stopped.

This is my memory of a photo of Rebecca O'Connell's corpse.

The image, blown up to poster size, was displayed in a Yankton courtroom back in 1992 during the sentencing hearing for Donald Moeller. He had just been convicted of raping and killing the 9-year-old O'Connell two years earlier near Sioux Falls. The trial was moved to Yankton, and after weeks of harrowing testimony, Moeller was found guilty and faced the death penalty. That poster, created by prosecutors, was meant to figuratively and literally drive the last nail into Moeller's coffin in the minds of the jury.

On Tuesday night — on Halloween eve with that moon lurking in the sad autumn heavens — Moeller finally paid the price for his long-ago crime. He died quietly as a lethal injection efficiently did its work. At the end, he seemed to embrace his fate, according to reports. One can only ponder the ghastly contrast between his death and O'Connell's.

I had nothing to do with this newspaper's coverage of the 1992 trial. However, I did sit in on part of the sentencing hearing because my uncle was the presiding judge and I wanted to see him in action.

While what I remember most was that face on the poster, I also recall my uncle instructing the jury that, in weighing the death penalty, they could only consider what was done to O'Connell up until the point of death. They could not consider anything that was done to her body afterwards, at which point the matter, to put it coldly, was



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moot. There was something unspoken in that directive, something left to the mercy of my imagination, that was genuinely sickening.

The face that I still see now, drawn from fragments of memories and feelings from two decades ago, is the face of that silent moot point — what was left behind. It utterly belies the terrifying last moments of that little girl's life, when she was violated, hacked up and done in.

As it happened, Moeller was executed on the anniversary of the infamous 1938 "War of the Worlds" radio broadcast by Orson Welles. That program remains a masterpiece in the craft of storytelling and manipulation. The most chilling moment occurs when the radio program says nothing. As an announcer "reports" on a strange cylinder that had crash-landed in New Jersey, he describes something slithering out of the object and a mysterious beam of light materializing. Then a jet of flame erupts from the Martian vessel and incinerates the crowd. You hear blood-curdling screams and frantic descriptions, but then it abruptly cuts off ...

There is nothing but an awkward silence. It's a vacuum in which your imagination fills in all the terrible blanks.

When I think of O'Connell's face on that poster, what I really see is the silence that followed the awful, sobbing wails of horror that rang out until they simply died away. It's a disconnection that connects all too perfectly. It leaves my imagination painting grotesque pictures that I cannot bear to see.

Moeller's execution may bring a sense of justice to O'Connell's family, but I suspect it's very little comfort: It changes nothing, it brings back no one and it doesn't begin to atone for all the empty, painful years that have followed. But sometimes, that's all justice can offer, meager though it is.

Still, I can see that little girl's face, which haunts my memories these days like a Halloween ghost. Her killer is dead now, but she is still timeless. She is always 9 years old. She is always wrapped in silence. She is always a story untold and unfinished. And that is how she will always remain, Tuesday's exercise notwithstanding.

You can follow Kelly Hertz on Twitter at [twitter.com/kelly\\_hertz](https://twitter.com/kelly_hertz)

# Sorry, We're Out Of Race Cards

BY KATHLEEN PARKER

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WASHINGTON — Predictable as rain, the race card has surfaced just in time to stir up electoral passions, justify outcomes and explain away inconvenient truths.

Just days from Election Day, the zeitgeist belched up one of its least attractive — and least defensible — memes. (Was it the weather?)

Pre-emptive theories, in no particular order, include: Colin Powell endorsed Barack Obama because they are both black (according to Romney surrogate John Sununu); if Obama loses Florida, North Carolina and Virginia, all of which voted for him in 2008, the old Confederacy will be restored (Daily Beast commentator Andrew Sullivan); Americans still harbor racial bias even if they don't know it (recent online poll, Associated Press).

Anyone reading headlines related to the poll might infer that white Americans are biased toward black Americans. Extrapolating, given the current election season, it follows that if some voters prefer Romney, it is because Obama is African-American.

But a review of the poll reveals something not quite so definitive or sinister. Overall, the findings suggest that most Americans are moderate, fair-minded and for the most part don't see things one way or the other based on race.

Some of the questions themselves, on the other hand, were unnecessarily provocative and biased. That is, their design was based on an assumption of racial bias. For example, participants in the AP online poll were asked whether they agree or disagree with the following statements: "Irish, Italians, Jewish, and other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors."

What kind of question is this? Who doesn't believe that everyone should work his or her way up? The underlying assumption is blatantly racist, implying as it does that blacks *don't* work and *do* expect special favors.

It is heartening that the majority, perhaps perceiving the trap, neither strongly agreed nor disagreed.

Another statement read: "It's really a matter of some people just not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder, they could just be as well off as whites."

Why not just ask people when they stopped beating their children?

The lengthy poll posed similar questions about other races and ethnicities. I selected these two because they

were among the most egregiously biased and were most pertinent to the current election. It should be noted that most of those polled expressed a preference for Obama to win on Nov. 6, even though the figures have dipped somewhat since 2010, when the AP polling began.

Oh, and most identified themselves as white Christians (though not necessarily born-again) and most were from the South. So much for the Confederacy, which never dies in the eyes of some political commentators. Sullivan found "fascinating" the reconstitution of the Confederate states should Romney win the three previously mentioned. But the obvious implication, Sullivan's protests notwithstanding, is that people who vote for Romney in those states are necessarily racist.

What else could he have meant by mentioning the Confederacy in the context of a black incumbent president being rejected by three Southern states that previously embraced him? Operative words: "previously embraced him."

What happened? Did all those people who voted for Obama in 2008 suddenly become racist? Or have they lost confidence in Obama four years later? Obama had a 70 percent approval rating early in his administration. Did all those people suddenly become racist?

We are not a nation naive enough to think race plays no part in our perceptions and responses. And where there are humans, there will be racists. But this nation also elected an African-American as its president. By an overwhelming majority, Americans like him and wanted him to succeed.

If Obama loses, it will be his own un-doing. Meanwhile, no one questions why 95 percent of blacks support the president. Is it racial? Or is it simply that most African-Americans happen to be Democrats?

Sununu implied the former, hinting that Powell chose Obama out of racial loyalty. I wish Sununu hadn't gone there. Had Powell endorsed Romney, he'd be a GOP hero, just as he now is to Democrats who have managed to overlook his convincing support for the weapons of mass destruction hypothesis in Iraq.

So it goes. But even the netherworld of politics should have standards. To pre-emptively label people racist for favoring a candidate who happens to be white, and otherwise advancing a narrative that will create only racial animus should Obama lose, is implicitly biased, intellectually dishonest and a breach of good faith. Stop it.

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# THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

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## OPINION | WE SAY

### Forum Season



**THUMBS UP** to the many candidate forums that were held in Yankton — as well as so many other communities and districts throughout the region — this election cycle. These events gave the public a chance to hear from the candidates about their priorities and what they would do if elected. In all likelihood, these things may have been redundant for some people, including the candidates — how many times did each candidate have to discuss his or her background in a two-minute block? — but that's what retail, grassroots politics is all about. Don't forget to do your part and vote on Tuesday.

### Still Rising



**THUMBS DOWN** to the news this week that South Dakota's child obesity rate crept up during the 2011-2012 school year, according to the state Department of Health. It was reported that 15.9 percent of children young than age 19 rated as obese in the state, which was up from 15.2 percent the previous year. The good news is that we are still well below the national child obesity rate of 19.6 percent. But that's only a small comfort. The increase shows that more work needs to be done in this area — despite the fact that nutrition has been a big focus of concern for the last few years. The effort cannot stop, since childhood habits can turn into costly adulthood maladies.

### Better Education



**THUMBS UP** to the opening of the new Nebraska Indian Community College (NICC) campus in Santee, Neb. The NICC has operated a college in the village since 1984, but the school has been housed in rooms at the Santee Sioux tribal hall. The new building gives the NICC its own home and control of its own destiny. NICC officials hope the current enrollment of about 45 students will double in the coming years, and they see potential for new programs. In turn, the school can offer educational opportunities for those who can't easily attend classes elsewhere. The better facilities also encourage more students to stay and apply their training to the reservation and surrounding area.

### New Hire



**THUMBS UP** to the City Commission's announcement Thursday that Amy Nelson will be the new city manager of Yankton. She has a record of economic development success as the city manager of Canton that we hope continues during her tenure here. We should also note that she is Yankton's first female city manager. It's about time, right? She will be working alongside Nancy Wenande, who is only the second female mayor for the community. We've said this before and we'll say it again, we're glad to see more women leading the community alongside their male counterparts. It's one sign of a healthy city that offers equal opportunities to all.

## ONLINE OPINION

The results of the most recent Internet poll on the *Press & Dakotan's* Web site are as follows:

### LATEST RESULTS:

<b>Who do you support in the District 18 Senate race?</b>	
David Allen	49%
Jean Hunhoff	38%
Neither/undecided	13%
<b>TOTAL VOTES CAST</b>	<b>510</b>
<i>The Press &amp; Dakotan Internet poll is not a scientific survey and reflects the opinions only of those who choose to participate. The results should not be construed as an accurate representation or scientific measurement of public opinion.</i>	

### CURRENT QUESTION:

**Who do you support in the Yankton County Commission race?**

To vote in the *Press & Dakotan's* Internet poll, log on to our website at [www.yankton.net](http://www.yankton.net).

## TODAY IN HISTORY

### By The Associated Press

Today is Friday, Nov. 2, the 307th day of 2012. There are 59 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On Nov. 2, 1962, President John F. Kennedy delivered a brief statement to the nation in which he said that aerial photographs had confirmed that Soviet missile bases in Cuba were being dismantled, and that "progress is now being made toward the restoration of peace in the Caribbean."

**On this date:** In 1783, Gen. George Washington issued his Farewell Orders to the Armies of the United States near Princeton, N.J.

In 1795, the 11th president of the United States, James Knox Polk, was born in Mecklenburg County, N.C.

In 1865, the 29th president of the United States, Warren Gamaliel Harding, was born near Marion, Ohio.

In 1889, North Dakota and South Dakota became the 39th and 40th states.

In 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour issued a declaration expressing support for a "national home" for the Jews in Palestine.

In 1936, the British Broadcasting Corp. inaugurated "high-definition" television service from Alexandra Palace in London.

In 1947, Howard Hughes piloted his huge wooden flying boat, the Hughes H-4 Hercules (derisively dubbed the "Spruce Goose" by detractors), on its only flight, which lasted about a minute over Long Beach Harbor in California.

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman surprised the experts by winning a narrow upset over Republican challenger Thomas E. Dewey.

In 1959, former game show contestant Charles Van Doren admitted to a House subcommittee that he'd been given questions and answers in advance when he appeared on NBC's "Twenty-One."

In 1963, South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem was assassinated in a military coup.

In 1979, black militant JoAnne Chesimard escaped from a New Jersey prison, where she'd been serving a life sentence for the 1973 slaying of New Jersey state trooper Werner Foerster. (Chesimard, who took the name Assata Shakur, is believed to be living in Cuba.)

In 1992, movie producer Hal Roach died in Los Angeles at age 100.

**Ten years ago:** President George W.

Bush called Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein a "dangerous man" with links to terrorist networks, and said that U.N. inspections for weapons of mass destruction were critical.

**Five years ago:** Speaking at a graduation ceremony at Fort Jackson, S.C., President George W. Bush said U.S. military deaths had fallen to their lowest levels in 19 months and the Iraqi people were slowly "taking back their country" in the wake of the American troop buildup there. Michael Mukasey drew closer to becoming attorney general after two key Senate Democrats, Charles Schumer and Dianne Feinstein, said they would vote for him despite his refusal to say whether waterboarding was torture. Choreographer Igor Moiseyev, who transformed folk dance into a legitimate art, died in Moscow at age 101.

**One year ago:** The Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to some 19,000 Japanese-Americans who'd served in the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 442nd Central Postal Directory and the Military Intelligence Service.

**Today's Birthdays:** Rhythm-and-blues singer Earl "Speedo" Carroll (The Cadillacs/The Coasters) is 75. Singer Jay Black (Jay and the Americans) is 74. Political commentator Patrick Buchanan is 74. Actress Stefanie Powers is 70. Author Shere Hite is 70. Rock musician Keith Emerson (Emerson, Lake and Palmer) is 68. Country-rock singer-songwriter J.D. Souther is 67. Actress Kate Linder is 65. Rock musician Carter Beauford (The Dave Matthews Band) is 55. Singer-songwriter k.d. lang is 51. Rock musician Bobby Dall (Poison) is 49. Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage is 48. Actress Lauren Vélez is 48. Actor David Schwimmer is 46. Christian/jazz singer Alvin Chea (Take 6) is 45. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker is 45. Rock musician Fieldy is 43. Rock singer-musician John Hampson (Nine Days) is 41. Rhythm-and-blues singer Timothy Christian Riley (Tony Toni Tone) is 38. Rapper Nelly is 38. Prodigy (Mobb Deep) is 38. Actor Danny Cooksey is 37. Rock musician Chris Walla (Death Cab for Cutie) is 37. Country singer Erika Jo ("Nashville Star") is 26. Actor-singer Kendall Schmidt is 22.

**Thought for Today:** "Drop the question what tomorrow may bring, and count as profit every day that Fate allows you." — Horace, Roman poet (65 B.C.-8 B.C.)

## FROM THE BIBLE

*But present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. Romans 6:13.* Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

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