

Arrogant and Aggressive Black People:
Who are they?



An Essay by:
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Far too often, very capable and qualified individuals with sound and solid convictions, armed with self-pride, self-confidence, and self-respect, are negatively referred to and labeled as being *arrogant*. This has been a longtime observation of mine. This contrived process is nothing but negative branding. It is strategically used to plant seeds of disharmony and distrust. It breeds adverse reactions. It is deflecting. Issues at hand get muddled and buried in the process. It cripples valid and substantive conversations. This negative branding challenge one's integrity, inventing non-existent personality flaws, and can cause a great deal of distress and unrest. Upon observation, information, and belief, negative branding is most often applied to individuals of color whose goals and aspirations are above the 'norm'.

It is a longstanding, well established, and well known fact that in order to successfully follow career paths, achieve goals, and fulfill dreams, we must be prepared and equipped when opportunity knocks. We are urged, prompted, encouraged, and even challenged to attain the highest level of education possible. There are members of this diverse society who must seek and prepare to become qualified above and beyond the "average" in order to compete with even the "below average". Far more individuals succeed in that preparation process than are given credit. The successes are often achieved while pushing through and overcoming roadblocks, obstacles, and contrived barriers. They have the confidence that they can do and be anything they want and prepare to be. They appreciate and respect having had the rightful privilege of earning outstanding credentials. Indeed, they are proud to have had the fortitude to persevere and proud that they carefully positioned themselves to meet and greet opportunity. "The mind is a terrible thing to waste" has been a familiar and resounding mantra. Unfortunately and regretfully, these unique, well educated, and highly qualified individuals are sometimes scornfully branded as *arrogant*. That branding iron bears intense heat and leaves a permanent mark.

On another hand, the *lack* of self-respect, self-confidence, and pride is used to brand certain other members of this society - in another vein, to a different end, for a different gain. Again, the branding iron leaves its permanent and life scarring mark. I will not attempt to develop those undisputable statements at this particular time.

Quite often questions are begged by society at large as to: “*Who do they really think they are? How dare they think they’re better than me? How dare they set such haughty goals for themselves? Can they truly be that qualified? Do they have enough experience?*” Actually, the subliminal questions are: “*How dare they be better educated and more qualified? How did they come by such an opportunity? It must have been that discriminatory affirmative action program. And, holy cow, how could they have the audacity to even birth the determination to take advantage of so many open doors and wide avenues to meet opportunity head-on. After all, they have small and inferior brain power – they are born stupid!*” These questions are begged from more corners of a lot of communities than some might imagine or admit. After all, some Blacks are viewed as being inferior to even the least qualified of others. There are many narrow and malignant schools-of-thought that fire these mind sets.

I often ponder what is actually meant when the term *arrogant* is so freely tossed around and about. Do the users of that particular term really know what it implies or care whether or not it fits? I think not. Or, do they simply hear a term with a negative connotation and hold on to it as an excuse for not giving the situation at hand due consideration. After all, some people feast and live on that which is negative, never focusing on the positive. Of course, they would not dare admit and acknowledge that they have simply been brain-washed. After all, they are too smart for that!

The media focuses, highlights, and expounds the negative. Negativism is a best seller in this society! The term, *arrogant/arrogance*, has been and is frequently becoming a media *sound-bite*, a *catch word*, a *buzz word*, with the sole intent to divide and conquer. It’s a term that does not even provoke much thought and, ironically, doesn’t lend itself to discussion and perhaps education and clarification. The term serves as slamming, unwarranted, and unfair “strikes” against undeserving individuals. Once it is attached, it lingers and follows at high costs. A foul ball is rarely called. Once the brand is affixed, even if it has been appropriately dispelled and/or corrected, it is rarely openly revisited. If ever, the ‘correction’ certainly does not get the attention as did the initial unfair and negative brands. Moreover, in order to perpetuate that longstanding fallacy that certain individuals are undeserving of many considerations, terms such as *confident* and *assertive* are reserved for other segments of society, under like situations and circumstances.

Typically, if fruit-bearing ideas are birthed; if beliefs and convictions are honorably upheld, and if broad and sophisticated goals are set, branding again raises its negative head. That particular brand is that of being *too aggressive* – not *assertive*.

It often appears to be taboo, out of order, challenging, to suggest a change or substitution for longstanding and even archaic procedures, processes, customs, and/or positions. This is the case even if the change would be in step with evolving times, customs, and environments which would render value-add. Best practices dictate that periodic inventory-taking is always in order. Processes and procedures should, from time to time, be re-examined and re-evaluated. To coin a phrase, change represents growth and growth should always be the focus. Yet, we are more than likely confronted with the age-old adage: *it's working; if it's not broken don't fix it*. We become stuck – locked in 'the box'. Many voices with enlightening, sound, and concrete ideas/messages are not heard. Their input is not considered weighty enough to even listen to, let alone measure – it's *too aggressive*.

If excitement and enthusiasm is displayed regarding an endeavor, that's *too aggressive*. When a plan is outlined and a strategy is being carefully developed, again, that's *too aggressive*. At this juncture, it is perceived as being threatening. It is narrowly thought that only disruption and disaccord can now be brought to the table. Certainly, there will be no value-add! The term *assertive*, in a positive vein, is strategically omitted. This omission, for the most part, is merely based upon the narrow and flawed opinions of those who refuse to be broad and open-minded. The conclusions drawn are based upon catchy phrases, sound bites, and stereotypes. They are never based on the true analysis and measure of the proposition or the one proposing. The sole intent is to negatively brand.

Unfortunately, regretfully, and shamefully, this particular conversation, with a view towards educating, understanding, and perhaps reconciling cannot be embraced in diverse settings. Insensitivity to the experiences of others with different backgrounds is, in reality, an ill that has shut down many conversations, even when diversity is not necessarily the core subject. As a matter of fact, a serious, open, honest, and long overdue conversation cannot be had, even one-on-one, with members of the opposite race. This is the case even though meaningful friendships had been previously established. Actually, it is almost impossible to have this conversation.

Americans, on a whole, would like to think that, at this point in time, the 21st Century, we are sophisticated, smart, mature, versatile, and intelligent. Americans would certainly not want to be viewed as being a 'backwards' nation. It would like to proclaim to the world that there is no lack of respect for diversities; that there are just and equal opportunities for all. Further, it makes a futile attempt to portray that no one is judged by the color of their skin, the texture of their hair, or the sound of their native tongue – it attempts to portray that we all love and respect each other as individuals, without prejudices. Some even pretend, for whatever reason, that “we, collectively, have indeed overcome”. Be that as it may, prejudices and racism is just as rampant today as ever before. It is in fact institutionalized. This country was built with and on racism.

There are indeed some Individuals with convictions closely related to hate, bigotry, and racism. They, however, do not want to be publicly exposed as such. For the most part, these hateful and destructive convictions result from the lack of knowledge, the lack of sensitivity, lack of appreciation, and the refusal to be fair and open-minded. The 'in the box' mentality, both the willed and inherited pre-judgments (prejudices) are the crippling, dominating, and ruling factors. Many individuals do not want their own inadequacies focused upon. Please note that the closet doors are typically thinner than other doors; they are hardly ever fireproofed, and can be walk-ins. Actually, there are really no secret closets! That gigantic monster-of-mass-destruction, clothed in many disguises, white robes, black robes, no robes, has a distinct and foul aroma. It can be detected a mile away.

Could it be that Senator Barack Obama is one of those far too many individuals being negatively branded so as to cripple and hinder his plight during these great and historical times? Are his many and outstanding attributes overlooked and ignored due to negative brandings? Are individuals as well as groups fallen prey to the fangs of meticulously engineered brainwashing tactics?

At this juncture, let me state that I am truly baffled by the need, the attempt, to tip-toe/soft-shoe around the fact that Senator Obama is indeed a Black man. I am just as baffled by those who pretend that race does not come to play in this or any other arena. To

many, it is deemed “politically incorrect” and feels uncomfortable to discuss, to admit. Well, I guess that age-old adage that *the truth hurts* has not lost its validity.

The wide-spread premise is that reference to one’s race, one’s culture, one’s nationality, should not be made. It is considered divisive. Silence, however, does not camouflage the thoughts of a narrow mind and certainly not the evidence as manifested by actions/reactions, subtle or otherwise. Very often, and conveniently, reference to the *race card* being played is made – as a deflector. That is a joke. It is outrageous and it is ludicrous. It is just that: a deflector - a catch phrase, a sound bite, that sells media. It matters not who makes the reference – Black, White or Other.

What is that infamous *race card*? If in fact there really is such a deck of cards, who shuffled the deck and who really added the *jokers*? I propose that the ‘jokers’ in the deck are carefully planted and many times tucked up someone’s sleeve. They will certainly fall out, in clear view, to no one’s surprise. Let’s shuffle those *jokers* out into the open? Let’s hold an open conversation. Let’s dismiss and forever bury these ludicrous, childish play-toy terms. One ought to be free and feel comfortable to make references to one’s race, culture, and/or background for points well made and well taken. This should be the case without being ridiculously accused of playing some silly race card game that has never been adequately defined and the rules have never been outlined.

The time is upon us to dismiss all of the politically convenient game-playing. One’s race should not be toyed with and is not a card attached to some silly game. We are quite simply a nation of diverse races, cultures, religions, and beliefs, all with equal rights. That fact is not to be ignored or belittled. The phrase ‘melting pot’, I believe, was coined in this country to have been indicative of the *well blended mix* of many races/cultures, and nationalities, all very proud and acknowledging of their roots. As long as the intent is not to discriminate, victimize, or demean, there is absolutely nothing wrong in making reference to one’s race. There is nothing wrong in attempting to embrace and understand the cultures of one another. There is nothing wrong in respecting and even celebrating each other’s culture.¹

¹ “Against logic there is no armor like ignorance.” - Laurence J. Peter

“Ignorance breeds fear, fear breeds bigotry, bigotry breeds hate.” - Unknown

Will the fact that Senator Obama is a Black man enter into play during this Presidential race and will that fact affect the outcome? When the need arises and in the context of what is being discussed, why can't we indeed openly discuss those well known effects that his being a Black man will have on this presidential race – *he's black, he's not black enough, and he's too black*? Let's expound upon and expose that phrase “working class White.” Surely no one is oblivious to the fact that Senator Obama's race, skin color, and/or name, culture, and misperceived religious background will solely determine how many individuals and communities will cast their votes. Some will even consider which church he had attended; who the pastor was, and what information, from that pastor's point of view, was imparted. These factors will surely play out while many continue to play that imaginary card game during this presidential race.

Again, racism is institutionalized. It was carefully woven into the seams that bind/unbind this country. Let's just talk for a second. Yes, be assured that there are those who will not vote for Senator Obama simply and only because he is a Black man. There are those who will vote for him just because he is Black. On the other hand, there are many who will simply vote for him because he is a very intelligent and qualified man who happens to be Black. Be assured, no matter the case, his being Black will not be ignored or overlooked. Senator Obama possesses very strong, positive, and well-thought-through convictions. He can relate to and identify with all people. As a sensitive and astute individual, he attempts to gather a clear understanding as to what we the people, through all walks of life, would like to see addressed, reversed, and set straight. Senator Obama attempts to formulate and calculate remedies for the many failures to that end. Overall, Senator Obama represents a long overdue change in the mindset, demeanor, and direction of this society.

Senator Obama's presence on the national and international scenes has introduced to the nation and the world many fabulously qualified and brilliant news commentators, analysts, columnists, et al, of color, across all political parties. Though not having been highly visible on the world stage, major television networks, these individuals have obviously been working effectively behind the curtains for quite some time. This wonderful view, opened and widened by Senator Obama's audacity to hope, serves to instill great pride and, yes, hope into the hearts and minds of many, especially children and

young adults of color. The rainbow is becoming more colorful and the horizons have been delightfully broadened. Their individual and unique aspirations no longer seem unattainable for them; they no longer are deemed imaginary. This is something that has been quite remote and unimaginable far too long. They can identify and relate to a greater extent than ever before. They do not have to scrounge through secluded and deliberately misplaced history books, old articles, etc. to study someone with whom they can relate to and identify with.

Senator Obama has surrounded himself with well-meaning, confident, and assertive advisers and forerunners during this campaign. Together, going forward, they will carefully, with earnest forethought and collaboration, surround his plight for the presidency and his presidency with staff and confidantes whose credentials, ambitions, and resolves will be of high measure. Most assuredly, these individuals will be those who will complement the Senator, his unique qualifications, his initiatives/endeavors, and the democratic platform. There will be a concerted effort to reach across state boundaries, the hills, the vales, the waterways, and the aisles of the House to incorporate all views into unified positions. Senator Obama is a great candidate for the highest office of this country.

No, Senator Obama is not arrogant. Very simply, he is confident that he can be the President of these United States that will go down in history as the President who dared to hope for all the people of this land. He believes that he is and will be recognized as the President who brought about change we all can believe in. Having properly equipped himself and positioned himself to meet opportunity, Senator Obama has the confidence that he can, with due diligence, achieve his goals. He acquired a formal above-average education for himself and is most certainly highly qualified. He is a motivational and innovative orator, very well voiced and excellently versed. Not only does he have confidence in himself, but he thoroughly believes that there are many others, across all races and cultures, who truly feel that he can ably represent all and will in fact work for the good and betterment of all, regardless of race, religious belief, creed, or color. He makes a great appearance both as an individual and as a family man. He believes that many respect and acknowledge that he indeed recognizes and honors the individual. He further believes that many respect and honor him as an individual, even with his own unique DNA. That is

considered by many to not only be *arrogant and aggressive*, but *presumptive as well*. *Presumptive*? This is yet another attempt to negatively brand.

Senator Obama asserts and thoughtfully articulates, with pride, that which he holds to be truths. He openly challenges war-making decisions; embarks upon areas that many would rather close the door on and pretend that ills do not exist; pretend that change is not necessary; that it is not broken so why fix it. The uniquely intelligent, capable, and Honorable Senator Barack Obama did indeed set goals for himself, laid out a roadmap and persevered. He outlined a plan before embarking upon his endeavors, packaged his hand-crafted tools rolled up his sleeves, and went to work. Additionally, armed with compassion, peace, love, and respect for all people, he diligently and conscientiously went to work in areas of great need and appreciation. Given his qualifications and accompanying credentials, I am positive there were and are other career options available to him. More than likely he could have embarked upon a safer path, one that would have rendered less stress, less controversy, fewer personal attacks upon him and his family, and greater monetary gain. These outstanding attributes and endeavors do not deserve nor warrant the negative brand of aggressiveness. It is very simply assertiveness. Senator Obama is a confident, assertive, and an inspiring individual.

At the risk of sounding and even, admittedly, being redundant, Senator Barack Obama is a unique and highly intelligent gentleman. Just as loud and clear as the inadequacies and ills (negative stereotypes) of some are exclaimed, it is certainly appropriate, deserving, and in order to applaud, with pride, Senator Obama at this very special moment in time.

Under all of the given circumstances, Senator Barack Obama's audacity to hope to be elected to the highest office of this country is first-class self-confidence. He believes in this country and has confidence in the American people. He believes that we are a people evolving. He believes that we are living in evolving times. He is able to stand back from a previous position, from a different viewpoint, reexamine, reevaluate, and rightfully draw altogether different conclusions. He is willing to expand his views and his positions. He represents change we all can believe in and benefit from.

Senator Barack and Mrs. Michelle Obama, together with their two wonderful daughters, Malia and Sasha, complement each other. They are indeed a breath of fresh air. I concur with Mrs. Obama. I understand fully and appreciate her point of view: *for the first time in my life (72 years of it) I am proud to be an American*. No, I am not a communist/traitor! I never for a moment considered leaving this, my country – *ain't going nowhere* – don't bother inviting me to leave simply because I am aware of and recognize its sins. My ancestors built this land with their blood, sweat, and tears. Their lives shall not have been lost in vain. I too laid a brick or two in the building process. I very simply come from a different direction than some, with a different American experience. I, accordingly, have a different appreciation for this great moment in history than others. I only wish that my experience and that of others could be recognized, respected, and even appreciated rather than condemned and loathed. *"Walk a mile in my shoes and until you do don't criticize and accuse."*

I personally experience great pride and enthusiasm as I witness and wallow in the flavor of this great and historical moment in time. As I observe Senator Barack Obama and his family, it actually brings tears of pride to my eyes. I absolutely stop in my tracks. Very frankly, I did not think I would live long enough to experience this great moment – I truly didn't feel it would happen in my lifetime. My parents and grandparents did not live to witness this great moment in time. I have two deceased siblings, one who was a civil rights activist and historian, did not live to experience this historical moment. Incidentally, I have quite a few whiplash scars and some yet raw wounds on my back, received while growing up and even while rearing my children in New York. I observed plenty scars and open wounds on the backs of my parents and grandparents. They had hoped that my experiences would have been much different. I then hoped that my own children's experiences would have been different. I am still hoping that my grandchildren's experiences will be different. Many times, throughout any given day of the week, present day, someone or something pierces one or two of those nearly healed wounds. They then purge them with vinegar. *"Still I rise."*

Mere words cannot adequately express the joy of my heart as I witness my grandchildren experience these moments. There is now hope that the *whips and swords* of injustices, inequities, and disrespect for individuals of color will be burned at the stakes by

all stakeholders of this intended land of liberty and justice for all. As Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. dreamed 45 years ago, I now have the hope that they, my grandchildren, truly live in a country where they will no longer be judged by the color of their skin. Please note that my grandchildren, during this 21st Century, have personally met that wicked-monster-of-mass-destruction. They met it in a majority White junior and senior high school where they were/are very high and exceptional achievers. With their broad minds and innate sense of discernment, they individually observed and concluded that the system was indeed biased - inequitable. On many occasions, they concluded that, they were overlooked when their uniquely high and exceptional achievements/performances, curricula and extracurricular, were neither recognized, awarded, nor applauded. They observed what they considered to be undeserving recognition, from their point of reference, being bestowed upon others. This aided in firing their belief that the 'system' is indeed biased. The examples are many and are not limited to their secondary school experiences. Nevertheless, it is my fervent hope that there will not remain permanent scars.

My grandchildren are of age, mature, smart, intelligent, and sophisticated enough to appreciate their unique and unbelievable experience during this great moment in time. For their undivided attention, every opportunity is taken to point out and point to events surrounding the era. They are encouraged to be cognizant, discerning, and to form their own unique opinions. They are urged to be particularly aware of the issues and to make note of the several and different positions taken. They will remember just where they were and what they were doing when this particular moment in time occurred. It's a piece of history that they will share and pass on to others, with great pride.

You may certainly love, appreciate, and support Senator McCain whose credentials I will not question. He is certainly an outstanding American citizen who served this country during wartime, enduring pain and suffering as a prisoner of war for several years. He has also served as Senator for several more years. While those experiences are not to be dismissed or taken lightly, he, like Senator Obama, has not had the experience of being the President of the United States. So, forgive me if I don't get that '*Obama is not experienced enough*' argument. It is invalid. Obviously, Senator Obama is a much younger man than Senator McCain. However, that does not negate the fact that he, Senator

Obama, is a diplomat and possesses impeccable leadership qualities. He is more than qualified to be the President of these United States.

Regardless of one's choice of candidate, it is not necessary to negatively brand Senator Obama as *arrogant* and *aggressive*? Negative branding is cheap and beneath any level of intelligence. It has no place in this sophisticated society. Quite obviously, Senator Obama is neither arrogant nor aggressive. He is a very smart, proud and confident young man with an obvious level of self-respect, self-confidence, and self-determination.

Acknowledge and respect Senator Obama for his achievements, his brilliance, his prominence, and his perseverance. Give due consideration to the fact that, given the history of violence against political leaders and others in this country, he risks his life and places his family in harm's way, for a common cause.

In good conscience, without prejudgments (prejudices), prudently examine Senator Obama's position on the many issues and challenges that plague us as a nation whose plight is to become united, on all fronts. Cease with the negative branding, the ridiculous card games, and do not blindly buy into like tactics. Be honest with yourselves and admit that Senator Obama is indeed, by his own rights, a most viable candidate for the office of President of these United States. He can and he will, with a spirit of excellence, steer and ably represent this democracy of the people, by the people, and for the people, nationally and internationally.

With the assurance that change usually represents growth, I challenge each of us to be committed to carefully examine and evaluate our individual behaviors, attitudes, and belief systems. I would venture to speculate that the majority of all people are simply tired and weary of negativism; tired of *politics as usual!* We are tired of a stagnant '*in-the-box*' mentality! To expand our horizons; to look at things from a different point of view; to accept, respect, and appreciate the fact that we are a very diverse though whole society, all with a voice, all with rights, is simply that which is required to dignify and, yes, even justify, our being.

To recognize and accept the shifting of paradigms is indicative of a growing and sophisticated society. *The cheese has been moved!* A change in the mentality and in the hearts of so many key players, old and new, is on the horizon, a *change we all can believe in and embrace*. Can we pull this one off? *Yes we can!! This is our moment! This is our time! This is truly one special moment in time!*

My name is Ramona Bolice Smedley, Black Female, age 72. I was honorably reared by my mother who became a widow with 4 little children at age 32. I received my secondary and some undergraduate education in the coal fields of McDowell County, West Virginia. I began my adulthood in Westchester County, NY; continued my higher education and became business-school-certified in office systems and office practices; married, and raised 3 children as a divorcee. I am semi-retired and reside in Metro Atlanta, Georgia.

I am the very proud grandmother of five. I have one granddaughter entering her sophomore year at Howard University, Washington, DC, for the 2008/2009 school term. Her sister, as a high school senior, aspires to enter Spelman University or Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, in 2009.

Note: Initially, up to and including one week before Super Tuesday, though not quite decided, I strongly embraced Senator Hillary Clinton. I had a startling wake-up call; took another look, from a different vantage point and drew altogether different conclusions regarding certain positions and overall presentations in that camp. I then expanded my view in the direction of Senator Obama. I heard Michelle Obama speak in Los Angeles one Sunday afternoon and did the unthinkable. I "*flipped-flopped*." Is that yet another phrase used for negative branding? Oh well! Actually, I merely expanded my view, used my unique discerning skills, did some homework, and came to a different set of conclusions. I amended my position .

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and
live out the true meaning of its creed:
'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal'."
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Taken from the "I have a Dream" Speech
August 28, 1963

"Racism is not an excuse to not do the best you can."
Arthur Ashe
(1943-1993)
Quoted: Sports Illustrated, July 1991

"If we accept and acquiesce in the face of discrimination,
We accept the responsibility ourselves and allow those
Responsible to salve their conscience by
Believing that they have our acceptance and concurrence.
We should, therefore, protest openly
Everything that smacks of discrimination or slander."
Mary McLeod Bethune
(1875-1955)

"I am the author of the only dictionary that defines me."

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