

# Leave the guns at home when protesting president



**E.J. DIONNE JR.** says threats of violence have been used in the past in the U.S. by those who wanted to bypass democracy and the rule of law.

**T**RY a thought experiment: What would conservatives have said if a group of loud, scruffy leftists had brought guns to the public events of Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush?

How would our friends on the right have reacted to someone at a Reagan or a Bush speech carrying a sign that read: "It's time to water the tree of liberty"? That would be a reference to Thomas Jefferson's declaration that the tree "must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

Pardon me, but I don't think conservatives would have spoken out in defense of the right of every American Marxist to bear arms or to shed the blood of tyrants.

In fact, the Bush folks didn't like any dissent at all. Recall the 2004 incident in which a distraught mother whose son was killed in Iraq was arrested for protesting at a rally in New Jersey for first lady Laura Bush. The detained woman wasn't even armed. Maybe if she had been carrying, the gun lobby would have defended her.

The Obama White House purports to be open to the idea of guns outside the president's appearances. "There are laws that govern firearms that are done state or locally," Robert Gibbs, the White House spokesman, said on Tuesday. "Those laws don't change when the president comes to your state or locality."

Gibbs made you think of the old line about the liberal who is so open-minded he can't even take his own side in an argument.

What needs to be addressed is not the legal question but the message that the gun-toters are sending.

This is not about the politics of populism. It's about the politics of the jackboot. It's not about an opposition that has every right to free expression. It's about an angry minority engaging in intimidation backed by the threat of violence.

There is a philosophical issue here that gets buried under the fear that so many politicians and media-types have of seeming to be out of touch with the so-called American heartland.

The simple fact is that an armed citizenry is not the basis for our freedoms. Our freedoms rest on a moral consensus, enshrined in law, that in a democratic republic we work out our

differences through reasoned, and sometimes raucous, argument. Free elections and open debate are not rooted in violence or the threat of violence. They are precisely the alternative to violence, and guns have no place in them.

On the contrary, violence and the threat of violence have always been used by those who wanted to bypass democratic procedures and the rule of law. Lynching was the act of those who refused to let the legal system do its work. Guns were used on election days in the Deep South during and after Reconstruction to intimidate black voters and take control of state governments.

Yes, I have raised the racial issue, and it is profoundly troubling that firearms should begin to appear with some frequency at a president's public events only now, when the president is black. Race is not the only thing at stake here, and I have no knowledge of the personal motivations of those carrying the weapons. But our country has a tortured history on these questions, and we need to be

honest about it. Those with the guns should know what memories they are stirring.

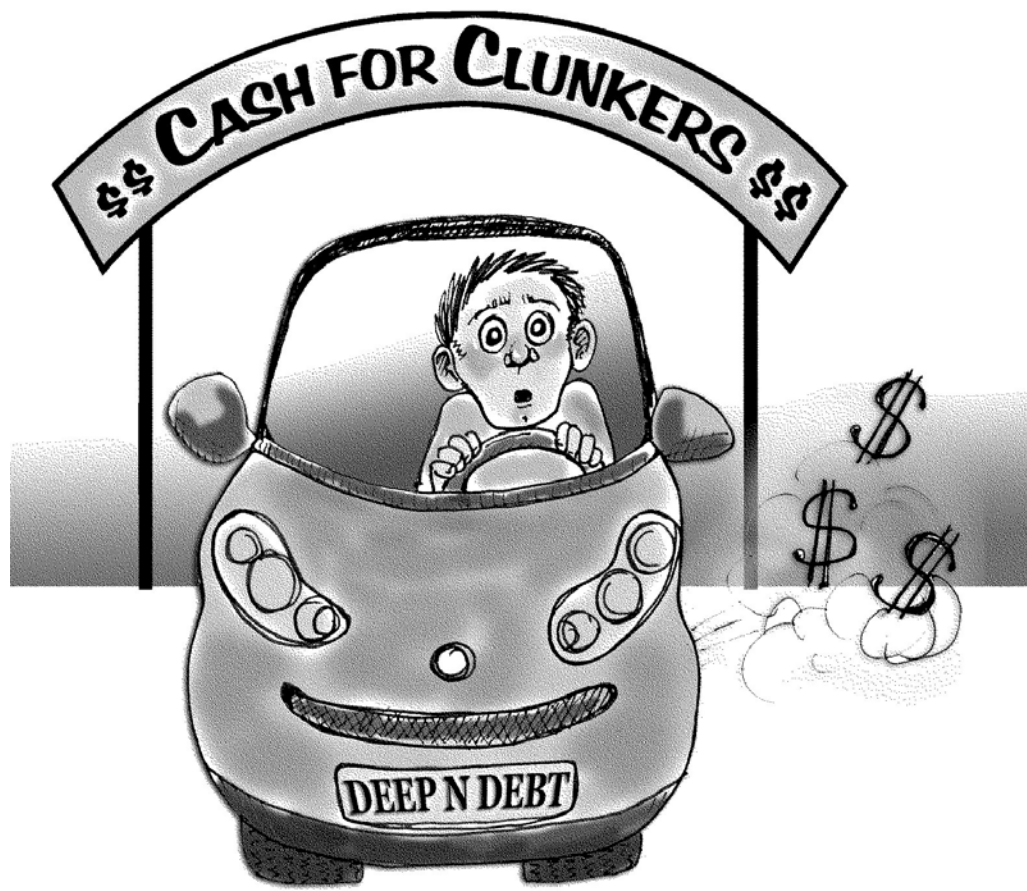
And will someone please tell the armed demonstrators how foolish and lawless

they make our country look in the eyes of so much of the world? Are we not the country that urges other nations to see the merits of the ballot over the bullet?

All this is taking place as the country debates the president's health care proposal. There is much that is disturbing in that discussion. Shouting down speakers is never a good thing, and many lies are being told about the contents of the health care bills. The lies should be confronted, but freedom involves a lot of commotion and an open contest of ideas, even when some of the parties say things that aren't true and act in less than civil ways.

Yet if we can't draw the line at the threat of violence, democracy begins to disintegrate. Power, not reason, becomes the stuff of political life. Will some group of responsible conservatives, preferably members of the NRA, have the decency to urge their followers to leave their guns at home when they protest the president? Is that too much to ask?

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## Clunkers program ignores basic economic principles

■ Backers tend to overlook program's negative effects

By JOHN W. DIAMOND

**P**OLITICIANS have been stumbling over one another to take credit for the popular Cash for Clunkers program, which provides up to \$4,500 to consumers who trade in gas-guzzling cars and trucks for more fuel-efficient vehicles. Earlier this month, President Barack Obama approved an additional \$2 billion for the program, which had nearly exhausted its initial \$1 billion funding in one week. Although it has been touted as a stimulus for the automobile industry and the entire U.S. economy, in reality the positive benefits of the program are often overstated and the negative effects are mostly ignored. The sooner the program ends the better, as the long-run costs are sure to outweigh any temporary benefits.

First, let's examine two groups of car buyers and the potential for economic benefit. One is composed of individuals who would have bought new cars eventually with or without cash-for-clunkers, and are taking advantage of the free lunch funded by taxpayers. While this provides an immediate economic stimulus to car dealers and manufacturers, it is also likely to result in a reduction of future automobile sales as has been the case with other incentive deals.

A second group of buyers would have continued to drive their clunkers or may have been in the market for a used car. Car sales to this group provide an economic stimulus to auto dealers and manufacturers. However, other industries are losers as these consumers will now purchase fewer goods because a larger portion of their budget is committed to a car payment. Note that an increase in car sales in July 2009 was also accompanied by a decline in the personal savings rate from 6.2 percent in June to 4.6 percent in July. Encouraging consumers to buy new cars leads them to increase household debt to finance the purchase, and thus save less. Given that Americans have been trying to save and pay off debt after a 10-year buying binge, it is not

sound policy to encourage hesitant consumers to take on more debt.

The less obvious effects of the program are sometimes lost in the crush to cash in on Uncle Sam's largess. For instance, increased car sales are bad for small garage mechanics who work on clunkers. Many of the cars purchased under the program are not made in America and thus the fiscal stimulus to manufacturers will not solely benefit the United States. What's more, the reduction in the supply of clunkers will lead to higher used car prices, and thus hurt lower income households that are unable to afford new cars.

The much hailed environmental impact of the clunkers program is a clunker itself. Just do the math: The Department of Transportation reported that the average fuel efficiency of initial trade-ins under the program was 15.8 miles per gallon (mpg) and that the average fuel efficiency of new purchases was 25.4 mpg (a net increase of 9.6 mpg). Given that the average person drives 12,000 miles per year, an annual savings of 287 gallons of gas per car is

possible. The first 250,000 clunker trade-ins will save 71 million gallons of gasoline per year.

But this savings is dwarfed by the 137 billion gallons of gasoline burned by the 250 million cars and light trucks registered in the

United States in 2008. The clunkers program will remove just 0.1 percent of the vehicle fleet from roadways and reduce gasoline consumption by less than 0.1 percent — at a \$1 billion cost to taxpayers.

A much cheaper and more effective idea is President Obama's campaign plan to make sure tires are properly inflated. This easy move could save 1.2 billion gallons of gasoline per year — 17 times more than the clunkers program.

Cash-for-clunkers serves as yet another reminder of the neglect of basic economic principles. At the rate the United States is issuing new debt, future generations will not be able to afford anything but clunkers.

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SIDDOWN YOU CONTEMPTIBLE BUM, AND LISTEN TO ME! I'M A DOG-LOVER...



...AND YOU WERE CONVICTED OF THE MOST HEINOUS CRIMES OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS IMAGINABLE!



NO SELF-RESPECTING ORGANIZATION SHOULD WANT TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH SUCH A DESPICABLE, POLLUTED LOWLIFE AS YOU!



LUCKILY FOR YOU, I BELIEVE IN REDEMPTION. HOW MANY MILLION DO YOU WANT TO QUARTERBACK FOR THE EAGLES?



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# Not everyone who disagrees with Obama is a racist



**JONAH GOLDBERG** says the president's supporters are using accusations of racism to bully the opposition into acquiescence.

**W**HAT if America transcended race, and Barack Obama wasn't invited?

The question comes to mind as cries of racism grow ever louder from Obama's supporters.

No one should be surprised. Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, liberal Democrats have to accuse their opponents of racism. Indeed, somewhat to their credit, fighting racism — alas, even where it doesn't exist — is one of the reasons they became liberal Democrats in the first place.

And that's the great irony of the Obama presidency. It was Obama's supporters who hinted, teased, promised or prophesied that Obama would help America transcend race. But now, it is they who shrink from their own promised land.

After all, it was not Obama's detractors

who immediately fell into the comfortable groove of racial grievance and familiar narratives when Henry Louis Gates insisted that a police instructor in racial sensitivity had to be a racist. That was Obama and his choir of heralds.

From day one, Obama's supporters have tirelessly cultivated the idea that anything inconvenient to the first black president just might be terribly, terribly racist.

This was always the nasty side of Obama's implied hope for unity. Obama gave oxygen to the idea that disagreement with him amounted to obstructing his mission to transcend race. During the campaign, that meant anyone who got in his way was wittingly or unwittingly abetting racism (just ask Bill Clinton). A writer for Slate magazine insisted journalists must not call attention to the fact that Obama is skinny. Such observations fuel racism by

highlighting his physical appearance, and that in turn might suddenly alert racist American voters to the fact that Obama is ... wait for it ... black.

Now that he's president, if you question his tax policies, energy plans or health-care ambitions, you are "hoping he will fail" — and that, with the help of roundabout reasoning, is tantamount to hoping we cannot transcend race. Loading the deck in such a way is a gift of Obama's. Time and again, he pre-emptively dissent by claiming he's open-minded, pragmatic and non-ideological, and therefore if you disagree with him, you must be some sort of zealot.

His shock troops make the same argument about race.

Princeton professor Melissa Harris-Lacewell finds racism in complaints that socialized medicine would result in fewer Americans taking responsibility for their own health care. "What we know over the past 25 years," she told NPR, "is that language of personal responsibility is often a code language used against poor and minority communities." In an ABC News story about how racist white militias are somehow connected to town hall protests, Mark Potok of the dismayingly left-wing Southern Poverty Law Center insists Obama has "triggered fears among fairly large

numbers of white people in this country that they are somehow losing their country."

Two weeks ago, town hallers were supposed to be members of the Brooks Brothers brigade, AstroTurf division. Now they're well-armed anti-government militias. At this rate, they'll soon be android ninjas with laser vision. Wait, strike that. They'll be really racist android ninjas with laser vision.

Suddenly, if conservatives want to transcend race, we have to agree to massive increases in the size of government and socialized medicine.

That's not transcending race, it's using Obama's race to bully the opposition into acquiescence. Actually transcending race would require treating Obama like any other president. Which is pretty much exactly what conservatives have been doing. Seriously, if Hillary Clinton were president, would conservatives really be rolling over for the same health-care plan because she's white?

Sure, racists don't like Obama (in less shocking news, bears continue to use our national forests as toilets). But that doesn't mean everyone who dislikes Obama is therefore a racist.

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