

## Ketanji Brown Jackson hearing reveals Republicans' racist fears

*Republicans are becoming so hysterical because people like Judge Jackson pose a revolutionary threat to the status quo*



*Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson, during her Senate confirmation hearing on Capitol Hill on Wednesday.*

*Steve Phillips*  
Sat 26 Mar 2022

“Black Girl Magic” is on full display in the supreme court confirmation hearing for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, and Republicans are apoplectic. The juxtaposition of Jackson’s calm, confident, professionalism with the hostile, cynical and contemptuous questioning by senators such as Texas senator Ted Cruz is an object lesson for the entire world on the ongoing dynamics of systemic racism in the United States.

Rather than do their constitutional duty of engage with a prospective supreme court justice on the pressing legal issues of the day, the Republican committee members have opted to throw racist red meat to their rabid white supporters who are gripped by fear of people of color. Cruz led the charge with his attacks on critical race theory, asking Jackson whether she agrees “that babies are racist” and trying to paint the judge as a dangerous person who would force white children to learn about racism.

In so doing, Cruz was working from a tried and tired playbook that seeks to dramatize anti-racist demands in ways that fuel white fears about the consequences of Black people attaining positions of power. There is a long history in this country of the leaders of white people trying to force Black people to denounce anti-racist movements as a condition for entry into the highest precincts of power (Cruz is Latino, but his base is largely white). In 2008, the media tried to force Barack Obama to denounce his pastor Jeremiah Wright's statements forcefully condemning white supremacy. Two decades earlier, Jesse Jackson was dogged by demands that he distance himself from Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. The point of said attacks is to try to weaken support for the Black person one way or another. Either they distance themselves from Black leaders and movements, thereby diminishing Black enthusiasm, or they refuse to renounce anti-racist voices, and that refusal is then used to scare white people.

Cruz and his ilk gravitate to such tactics because white fears about Black people have defined politics in this country for centuries. One of the Republican questioners of Judge Jackson was South Carolina senator Lindsey Graham, representative of a state that has been in the forefront of efforts to whip white people into a frenzy about the prospects of Black equality.

In 1712, the South Carolina legislature passed the "Slave Laws" – legislation designed to control the behavior of "Negroes and other slaves [who] are of barbarous, wild, savage natures". South Carolina's leaders were so extreme in stoking white fears that the state was the first to secede from the Union and turn to violence after Abraham Lincoln's election on an anti-slavery platform in 1860. Graham's predecessor, Strom Thurmond, ran for president in 1948, defiantly declaring that, "there's not enough troops in the army to force the Southern people to break down segregation and admit the n---r race into our theaters, into our swimming pools, into our homes, and into our churches!"

Today's Republicans are becoming so hysterical because people like Judge Jackson pose a revolutionary threat to the status quo in that they reveal the ubiquity of Black brilliance. Cruz, Graham and their fellow modern-day Confederates know instinctively that as the public sees how many amazing Black women there are, it becomes much harder to explain why most of the powerful positions in this country are still held by white men. In 233 years, there hasn't been a single Black woman smart enough to sit on the supreme court? The notion is absurd. So, if it's not lack of talent, then it must be something else. Like racism and sexism. Exposing this reality is very dangerous to a political party whose power rests on exploiting that racism and sexism (all the while denying it exists).

The very fact that Jackson's nomination is historic and not routine is a profound indictment of the United States of America. Hour after hour, question after question, Judge Jackson – secure in the knowledge that she is simply the latest talented Black woman and not the first – is calmly, confidently and politely taking a wrecking ball to the myth that America is a meritocracy. And the implications of that scare the Republicans to death.

- *Steve Phillips is a Guardian US columnist*