

## COMMENTARY / CULTURE

*Alas, Poor Mitch*

“Hold up! Did Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell say what I thought he said?”

rhetorically asked columnist Jonathan Capehart.

Well, yes, Jonathan, your ears didn't lie. You heard what you heard. And if you are any person of color, neither did it come as a surprise.

Now as much as I'd like to cut McConnell some slack because of his “caught with his pants down” moment, I couldn't resist the opportunity. In case you missed it, here is what he said when asked about concerns about voter participation by African Americans:

“Well the concern is misplaced, because if you look at the statistics, African American voters are voting in just as high a percentage as Americans.”

Yep, he actually said that. You can't make this stuff up folks.

Some called his statement a Freudian slip, but activist and radio show host Egberto Willes said, “sometimes a slip of the tongue actually tells you where you really are, and that's what we have here.”

Okay Mitch, allow me to help you understand something important. Despite what's on either side of my hyphen – African/Black on one side, American on the other – like you I'm a red blooded American, was born one and will die one. I'm not some “other.” Those in my community will tell you the same thing. You may want to jot that down to avoid embar-

rassing yourself in the future.

And Mitch, you tried but failed miserably to remove your foot from your mouth. You told reporters at a news conference that you “omitted the word ‘all.’ Well, possibly, I'll give you that.

In another clumsy attempt to clean up your mess, you said that you “inadvertently omitted the word ‘almost.’ But then after that news conference ended, you returned to the microphones to correct yourself one more time. “The omitted word is ‘all,’ not ‘almost.’”

My, my, my!

Now Mitch, was it a courageous American or an African American policeman on those balcony steps who saved your hide while you ducked and hid from insurrectionists who breached the Capitol last January?

And rather than leave well enough alone sir, in a classic “I'm down with the soul brothers, some of my best friends are Black” attempts at clarification, you said this to cover your tracks:

“I was there for Martin Luther King's ‘I Have a Dream’ speech in the audience,” and was also present when President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act in the Capitol in 1965.” Okay nice, but it seems that key messages from those events failed to sink in with you Mitch.

And here's the kicker, more “some are my best friends are” words that flowed from your mouth: “I have had African American speech writers, schedulers, office managers over the years.”

Really Mitch, really?

Maybe you missed the memo, but that “best friends are Black” excuse played out many

years ago. Sounds to me like your Black “best friends” failed to pull your coattail on this fact.

Said Charles Booker, a Kentucky Democrat running for the U.S. Senate, “Mitch McConnell wants you to know it's fine for him to block Voting Rights because he has Black friends.”

Oh, but wait. Was it not you among those who recently voted against the passage of the Voter Protection Act? On the other hand, wasn't it you who voted in 2006 for the Voter Protection Act?

Specious is the first word that comes to mind when I think about your recent crocodile tears Mitch. Hypocritical is the other.

Wrote Jonathan Capehart, “When you're Black in the United States, you grudgingly grow accustomed to having people deny that your existence is integral to everything that makes this country what it is. Usually I roll my eyes and keep going in response to such nonsense. But the more I thought about them, the angrier the offense made me.”

Now there are silver linings to all this. First, one of the nice things about being a writer is that you don't have to sit around long waiting for story ideas. All one has to do is relax, watch the news, sip on a latte and, voila, wait for the next bungling Mitch McConnell to come along.

And here's the second, a quote from an AMERICAN, Mitch: “I want to personally thank Mitch McConnell. He just mobilized the biggest African American voter turnout for Midterms.”

And here's one more Mitch, again from an AMERICAN by the name of Maya Angelou: “When someone shows you



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who they are the first time, believe them!”

© Terry Howard is an award-winning writer and storyteller, a contributing writer with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, The Douglas County Sentinel, The BlackMarket.com, The American Diversity Report, co-founder of the “26 Tiny Paint Brushes” writers' guild, recipient of the 2018 Dr. Martin Luther King Leadership Award and 2021 nominee for the Georgia Media Association Serious Columns Award.

*don't wait for opportunity  
create it*

THIS WEEK IN  
AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY**ROBERT  
ROBINSON  
TAYLOR  
(1868-1942)**

Robert R. (Robinson) Taylor (June 8, 1868-December 20, 1942), a native of Wilmington, N. C., was a pioneering black architect of national renown, regarded as the first academically trained black architect in the United States and the first black student to graduate from MIT. He was the principal architect at the Tuskegee Institute. His known work in North Carolina is the Carnegie Library at Livingstone College in Salisbury.

Robert R. Taylor was the youngest of four children of Henry and Emily Still Taylor. Though enslaved until Emancipation, Henry Taylor, son of a white slaveholder and an enslaved woman, was a house carpenter who lived and worked in Wilmington essentially as a free man, and he prospered as a builder after the war. Henry and Emily Taylor worked to assure their children's education. Robert attended Wilmington's Gregory Normal Institute, an American Missionary Association school with teachers from New England. He also worked for his father and developed construction skills, and in 1888, with his father's encouragement he entered MIT. Taylor became MIT's first black graduate in any field and he was, it is believed, the nation's first academically educated black architect.

After graduating from MIT in 1892, Taylor went to work for Booker T. Washington as architect at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, where he planned and oversaw construction of 45 campus buildings and drew plans for others. He also founded a pre-architecture preparatory program for students and, most importantly, established technical drafting courses for all the young men enrolled in the Boy's Industries Department. Eventually he would head this largest component of Tuskegee's entire endeavor and was thus an administrator as well as designer and builder. Especially well known was his Tuskegee campus chapel, completed in 1898 but no longer standing. This was, he said at the end of his life, his masterpiece.

Taylor was also involved in projects beyond Tuskegee, including large and small schools, houses, a lodge, an office building, and libraries. Booker T. Washington encouraged Andrew Carnegie to support construction of Carnegie libraries for several black schools, which included three designed by Robert R. Taylor. Among these is the imposing, neoclassical Carnegie Library (1905) he designed for Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina. Whether he designed any other buildings in North Carolina is not known.

Taylor retired from Tuskegee in 1932 and returned to Wilmington where he was active in civic affairs and served as a trustee for Fayetteville State Teachers College. He died on December 20, 1942, while visiting Tuskegee—stricken while in his chapel—and was buried at Pine Forest Cemetery in Wilmington. At his death, Wilmington newspapers lauded his character and accomplishments. Shortly afterwards, a new housing development for low-income



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black families was named in his honor. Many of Taylor's descendants had distinguished careers, including his great-granddaughter, Valerie Jarrett, political adviser to President Barack Obama. In 2015 the United States Postal Service issued a first-class stamp honoring Robert Robinson Taylor.

