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By Dana Milbank

Call out the National Guard! It's racial integration time in the Tea Party.

Tea Party leaders Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe, both of the national advocacy group FreedomWorks, were discussing the movement's success while having coffee with reporters this week, when one of the questioners asked about the Sept. 12 rally in Washington, yet another Tea Party event distinguished by a sea of white faces.

"I'm glad you brought that question up," replied Kibbe, "because we have a project that we're launching this week called DiverseTea." He said DiverseTea would highlight "African Americans, Jews, Hispanics, others that have come to this movement, because there is this nagging perception that we are not diverse."

DiverseTea? Sounds like a politically correct beverage along the lines of Tazo Tea and Honest Tea (which makes President Obama's favorite, Black Forest Berry). Will the Tea Party movement, through its DiverseTea subsidiary, start brewing Hispanic Hibiscus and Jewish Jasmine? Same-sex Tea Party couples could sip Earl Gay.

Alas, it was not Outreach Oolong that Kibbe had in mind (and, besides, there's already a drink called Diversitea, recommended for scuba divers who are "waiting to off-gas"). Rather, visitors to DiverseTea.com are asked a

puzzling question: "Are you a Diverse Tea Partier?" If you are "diverse" (presumably this means non-white), "you could be featured on DiverseTea!"

As of Tuesday afternoon, the list of "Diverse Tea Partiers" on the site had reached a grand total of five. And one of them was Tito Munoz, a ubiquitous figure at Republican events dubbed "Tito the Builder" by John McCain's presidential campaign.

DiverseTea, evidently, takes a long time to steep. Still, its launch is an acknowledgment that movement leaders are sensitive to the impression that the Tea Party is largely a coalition of angry, white, Protestant men. White tea may be loaded with antioxidants, but it's too weak a brew to sustain the movement.

In the short term, the Tea Party's composition

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doesn't much matter. Many Tea Party-backed candidates are bound to prevail -- not because of their ideology but because there's huge disenchantment, even among Democrats, with the economy and Obama's handling of it.

But longer-term demographics are ominous for the Tea Party (and its Republican host) without non-white support. And they're not going to get it with the antics of the last 18 months: a Tea Party leader satirically referring to African Americans as "coloreds," the taunting of black lawmakers with racial epithets, the racist depictions of Obama, Newt Gingrich's claim that Obama has a "Kenyan, anti-colonial" worldview.

When the diversity criticism came up Monday, Kibbe attempted to deflect the issue by telling the gathering, hosted by the Christian Science Monitor, that "this room doesn't look that diverse either."

Armev asserted that "intellectually, there's greater diversity" in the Tea Party than in the Democratic or Republican parties. That's probably true: Tea Party candidates this year have voiced opposition to masturbation, support for prohibition and a fear that bicycle-sharing would lead to world government.

Armev, the former Republican House majority leader, probably didn't sweeten the DiverseTea appeal on Tuesday when he accused African American and Latino

communities of taking "reprisals" against those of their race who join the Tea Party: "The difficulties, the harassment, the intolerance, the abuse that they suffer comes from . . . your own community, your own relatives, your own family."

Alternatively, the lack of love that minorities have shown for Tea Party activists might have to do with the fact that the "big government" the activists decry is what protects minority rights in places such as Arizona. There's also a fear that the Tea Party's limited government theme will spread into social issues. Armev, for example, promised "a fight" on abortion if Republicans gain a majority in Congress.

The DiverseTea questions followed Armev and Kibbe to a luncheon Tuesday at the libertarian Cato Institute. During the Q&A, a man of Pakistani background complained about Tea Partyers' "xenophobic" attitudes toward Muslims. "It's the most inclusive

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group of people I know," Armev countered.

A few minutes later, a woman asked about how the Tea Party could appeal to different ethnicities if its leaders do things such as accuse Obama of being a Muslim. After Kibbe did his plug for DiverseTea, Armev called the Tea Party "the largest liberating movement on behalf of conservatives of color I've ever seen." As a result, "I see black conservatives in America coming out of the closet," he said. "It's a wonderfully refreshing thing."

Wonderfully refreshing? Let's call that one Black Passionfruit.

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