

Our Post Racial President Claims to Be Black

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Last Friday, President Obama made his first attempt to claim his position as the first black president. In fact, for the first time in my recollection, the president referred to himself as an African American in one of his speeches - a dramatic turnaround from his "post racial" stance and his advocacy of other special interest groups.



On May 21, 2012 Newsweek proclaimed Barack Obama as America's first gay president. They could have also dubbed him America's first green president. Some entrepreneurs would name him America's first socialist president. Nonetheless, when blacks voted last year, their faithfulness to their candidate arguably won the election for him. Black voter loyalty had not been strongly acknowledged or rewarded publically. Therefore last week's address on Trayvon Martin's death was a milestone for black democratic activists. The speech was designed to explain to the rest of the nation what being a black man in our culture is all about. Further, the president wanted to explain why many blacks are so disturbed with George Zimmerman's acquittal.

As the president took up the role of teacher, explainer, and advocate for black America; he fell into the trap of appearing to play the politics of grievance. Yes, it was less incendiary than the tired rhetoric of Al Sharpton, Rev. Jessie Jackson and others. He did not speak to the outrage of some whites who perennially feel accused of "keeping the black man down." The president's address also failed to offer substantive policies, approaches or solutions. This type of speech would not have satisfied gay or green advocates, but blacks were excited that the president had spoken up for them.

What happened to Trayvon is every black mother's nightmare. All mothers worry, but black mothers particularly worry that their sons will become mixed up with the wrong crowd or will struggle to find an identity in a culture that loves to portray them as dangerous aggressors. But there were non-black tragedies in this case as well. The famed Allan Dershowitz impudently declared that Zimmerman should sue Angela Corry (from the Jacksonville, Florida district attorney's office). He felt that the hubris of her overreach with the second degree murder charge was only exceeded by her desire to charge Zimmerman with child abuse and

felony murder. "...That was such a stretch that it goes beyond anything professionally responsible," Dershowitz reported to Mike Huckabee.

The most egregious travesty of justice was NBC's admitted editing of Zimmerman's 911 call to make it sound far more incriminating than it was. This type of "reporting" led to a complete loss of perspective, where some have actually compared Martin's death to the slaying of Emmett Till. "Trayvon Martin certainly is the Emmett Till of the hoodie generation," says Michael Skolnik, president of GlobalGrind.

No matter how deeply moved you are by the Trayvon Martin tragedy, it is not in the same category as Emmett Till's murder. Till was just 14 years old in 1955 when he travelled from his native Chicago-where he attended an integrated school-to visit his extended family in Mississippi. He was apparently dared by some friends to speak to (or possibly flirt with) a young white woman who ran a local grocery store.

The young woman's husband and brother kidnapped Till, beat and tortured him, gouged out one eye, shot him through the head, tied a weight around his neck with barbed wire and threw his body into a river. Till's murderers were acquitted of any wrongdoing, and later-when it was clear they could not be prosecuted-sold their story to a magazine in 1956. They admitted brutalizing and murdering Till, but maintained they had done nothing wrong.

We are certainly not living in Emmett Till's Mississippi anymore. However, most blacks believe that Zimmerman pursued and gunned down Martin without any provocation, because they want to give Martin the benefit of the doubt that they feel is too often unfairly withheld from black men. Those who are naturally more sympathetic to Zimmerman should extend understanding to those who are experiencing this case personally. It is that kind of understanding that can help bring the healing the entire nation needs.

Where do we go from here? I believe that it's time for the Church to lead a moral and ethical revolution to fulfill Dr. Martin Luther King's dream. This is not the exclusive work of the black community or the white community. Whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians must labor together. Our unifying belief in Jesus Christ, the Bible and the same worldview will help us turn this corner. This is not the domain of government; it's the business of the Church. In recent days Bill O'Reilly has listed a series of challenges to the black community to take responsibility to turn its fortunes around. His analysis is right, but if this transformation is going to be accomplished in the next 40 years, it will take the multi-ethnic, unified Church to make it happen.

I am committed to making this change happen. I know I also speak for thousands of church leaders. We simply need a plan. In my next column, I will explore more about how this can happen.

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