

## **President Obama Should Advocate for Civil Rights**

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President Barack Obama's election was above all things a signal of progress for racial relations in America. Despite this, one year into his term the civil rights agenda seems to be placed on hold as the president and others focus on more "pressing" matters such as healthcare reform and the economy. The question of the hour is when will be the appropriate time for the president to address the civil rights concerns of African Americans and other minorities in this country? The president recently said that he cannot pass laws stating that he's "just helping black folks" as he is president of the entire country. Although these statements may seem logical, one must ask what if former Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Lyndon B. Johnson had these thoughts as they were passing the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil Rights Act.

Since his inauguration, Pres. Obama has encountered many recent civil rights incidents with a strategy of denying the racism rather than confronting its very existence in America. The arrest of Henry Louis Gates for breaking into his own home was a civil rights violation that sparked major debate about racial profiling that the president "solved" by having the two parties meet for a beer on the White House lawn. While this seemed to be a harmless antidote, it neutralized a discussion that could have led to a genuine resolution for millions of African American and Latino men who suffer from racial profiling in this country.

Another major racial injustice that has occurred during Pres. Obama's tenure has been the substantial, organized white Conservative opposition towards him. The opposition has characterized Obama as Socialist, a liar, a Kenyan citizen who is not qualified to be president, and have often depicted him as the Joker, a Batman character who wears "white face" costume makeup. The symbolism of the Joker harkens back to minstrel shows of yesteryear when prejudiced whites wore "black face" to showcase blacks as unintelligent buffoons. In fact the president's opposition became so intense that former President Jimmy Carter said that it was racially motivated. To this, the White House denied that the president's ill-treatment was based on the color of his skin. Recently, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid comments that the president was a "light-skinned black" who speaks "with no Negro dialect – unless he wants to have one" were met with the Pres. Obama's immediate acceptance of his apology.

The election of an African American president has caused our country's collective conscious to focus on the progress of the civil right's movement. Despite this, President Obama's decision to govern from the middle-ground has diminished the importance of seeking civil rights solutions for minorities. Eventually, the president's lack of acknowledgement of our country's discrimination problem will cause the issue to become more prevalent in our society. By neutralizing the problem, the civil rights agenda is placed on hold.