



## **A Missed Opportunity in Obama's Speech on Race**

By Rev. Wayne Perryman

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I was asked to review and analyze Obama's inspirational and fascinating speech on Race. Many believe it is one of the best speeches we have heard on the subject since the I have A Dream speech. I agree. But I have one problem - he missed the opportunity to set the record straight on two issues that he brought up.

1. His first missed opportunity came one minute and thirty-four seconds into his speech, when he refers to the Declaration of Independence and how it was "stained by "this nation's original sin of slavery..."

Although he follows up and talks about how slavery "divided the Colonies and brought the convention to a stalemate," he failed to point out that as a nation we were always divided over the issue of slavery from the time the first slave ship arrived in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, to the end of the Civil War 246 years later.

He should have told the audience, that there has never been a universal endorsement of slavery by the white citizens of this country and that white America has always been split over the issue of slavery. He could have mentioned that 175 years before the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, the Mennonite Quakers (white folks) of Germantown, Pennsylvania passed an anti-slavery resolution in 1688. It was the first formal protest against slavery in the Western Hemisphere. Under this resolution, Quakers who participated in the slave trade were threatened with expulsion.

He should have mentioned that in 1711, 65 years before the Declaration of Independence was signed, that our white founding fathers passed colonial legislation to outlaw slavery, but their law was overturned by the British Crown.

He should have said the issue of slavery was so divisive that white churches split, white families splits (some fighting for the Union and other for the Confederacy) and eventually our nation split, which resulted in the Civil War.

He should have told his audience that the greatest obstacle in finalizing our Constitution was the issue of slavery. Pro-slavery members (who eventually became the Democratic Party) wanted to

count slaves as full citizens (of their state) for the sole purpose of gaining more seats in the House, but they had no interest in giving their slaves the same rights afforded their white citizens of their (southern) states. The anti-slavery members (who eventually became the Republican Party) strongly opposed this racist proposal. To finalize the Constitution and not give in totally to the pro-slavery members, they reached a compromise with the three-fifths clause. Stating that since the pro-slavery members did not offer their slaves citizenship (under “State’s Rights”) they could only count the slaves as 3/5 of a person when determining how many seats they could have in Congress.

In proving that our “nation” (meaning all of white America) never really endorsed slavery, he should have told his listening audience that in 1835 the anti-slavery movement had over 435,000 members and these white abolitionists fought and gave their lives to express their opposition to slavery and the mistreatment of African Americans.

He should have said that Harriet Beecher Stowe and John Brown weren't the only whites that opposed slavery, there were countless of other individuals such as Republican Senator, Charles Sumner, who was nearly beaten to death on the Senate floor by Democrats for his speech opposing slavery. There was Levi Coffin, the originator or the conductor of the Underground Railroad and several thousand other whites who eventually left the Democratic Party and formed the Republican Party to put an end to slavery.

By failing to point out the massive number of whites who not only opposed slavery but literally gave their lives to end it and racism, he merely perpetuated the myth and lie that our nation (implying that every white in America) endorsed or approved of slavery and Jim Crow. He should have made it clear, that it wasn't every white - it was primarily the white members of the Democratic Party - the party that became known as the Party of White Supremacy.

2. His second missed opportunity came 21 minutes and 14 seconds into his speech when he made the following reference to slavery, Jim Crow and the anger of his pastor:

- ‘We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist in the African-American community today can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow....’
- ‘...The anger is real; it is powerful; and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exist between the races....’

In order to foster a better understanding of the roots of racism Obama should have told his audience that the roots of racism rested in the soil of the Democratic Party, not in our nation as a whole. As a Harvard law scholar, Obama should have cited Case No. 06-1107, a case that was before the United States Supreme Court in 2007 where the Plaintiffs argued that:

“It was the Supreme Court’s decisions in key Civil Rights Cases that gave the Democratic Party the legal authority to inflict the alleged injuries on those whom the Federal District Court referred to as “the entire African American community. Those cases include, but are not limited to: The Dred Scott Decision, the Slaughterhouse Cases, Plessy v. Ferguson and the Civil Rights Cases of 1881, which convinced the Court that the 1875 Civil Rights Act was unconstitutional (Civil Rights Cases 109 U.S. 3 (1881)....’

[All of the landmark Civil Rights cases cited above were designed to deny blacks their rights as citizens and all were the legal actions of Democrats]

[The Plaintiff went on to argue] ‘In the Slaughterhouse cases and other subsequent cases including Plessy v. Ferguson, it was the court’s narrow interpretation of the 14th Amendment that allowed many racist practices to go unchallenged and unpunished under what the Democrats claimed as “States Rights,” including their right to own slaves and treat them as property and not as people....”

[The Plaintiffs cited Professor Bernard Schwartz of New York University School of Law who said] “Upon Plessy was built the whole structure of segregation that has been at the heart of the Democrat’s southern system of racial discrimination...”

[In their final arguments the Plaintiffs said]

“The court must understand that racism in America was politically driven. Without the political backing of those who made up and formed the powerful Democratic Party, a Party that gave their lives and spent billions to preserve the institution of slavery and the system of Jim Crow, slavery would have ended 100 years earlier, and Jim Crow would have died in the womb of those who conceived it. Contrary to public opinion, racism was not something that the entire white race engaged in. Racism was the political agenda of a powerful political party – made up of individuals who chose to use the deadly disease of racism to cover their own insecurities, in their relentless quest for wealth and power.’ [The entire brief of this case can be found in Rev. Perryman’s latest book entitled: Unveiling the Whole Truth]

Had Obama seized the opportunity to emphasize that our nation as a whole never endorsed slavery and that the roots of racism rested in the soil of his party, he would have narrowed what he called: the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races.

It is most unfortunate that Obama took the time to publicly denounce Rev. Jeremiah Wright’s “wrong” statements, but he has never taken the time to publicly denounce his party’s racist past which was far more devastating and divisive than his pastor’s sermons or his grandmother’s fears.

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