



“Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now”

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The Barack Obama I Voted For

For more than four years, I have said that I liked candi-
date Barack Obama better
than I like President Obama. Can-
didate Obama addressed the ques-
tion of race head-on when
pressured to distance himself from
Rev. Jeremiah Wright, the Chica-
go pastor who led him to Christi-
anity. But President Obama has
been a different story.

According to research conduct-
ed by Daniel Q. Gillion, an assis-
tant professor of political science
at the University of Pennsylvania,
in Obama’s first two years in
office, the nation’s first Black
president made fewer speeches
and offered fewer executive poli-
cies on race than any Democratic
president since 1961.

Frederick C. Harris, director of
the Institute for Research in
African-American Studies at
Columbia University, noted that
Obama’s 2011 State of the Union
address was the first by any presi-
dent since 1948 to not mention
poverty or the poor.

In the words of scholar Michael
Eric Dyson, “This president runs
from race like a Black man runs
from a cop.”

Obama’s first comment on
Trayvon Martin was that if he had
a son, he would look like Trayvon.
But he didn’t say what he would
do to make sure Black male
teenagers are not treated the way
Trayvon was treated by George
Zimmerman.

Obama’s first words in the after-
math of Zimmerman’s acquittal
were predictably insipid.

In his written statement, Obama
said: “The death of Trayvon Mar-
tin was a tragedy. Not just for his
family, or for any one community,
but for America. I know this case
has elicited strong passions. And
in the wake of the verdict, I know
those passions may be running
even higher. But we are a nation of

THE CURRY REPORT

George E.
Curry



laws, and a jury has spoken. I now
ask every American to respect the
call for calm reflection from two
parents who lost their young son.”

To quote another president, I
thought, “Well, there he goes
again.”

But last Friday, candidate
Barack Obama and President

That includes me,” he told
reporters in the White House brief-
ing room. “There are very few
African American men who
haven’t had the experience of
walking across the street and hear-
ing the locks click on the doors of
cars. That happens to me — at
least before I was a senator. There
are very few African Americans
who haven’t had the experience of
getting on an elevator and a
woman clutching her purse nerv-
ously and holding her breath until
she had a chance to get off. That
happens often.”

He explained, “And I don’t want
to exaggerate this, but those sets of
experiences inform how the
African American community

And that ends up having an impact
in terms of how people interpret
the case.”

While being candid about how
Whites generally treat Blacks,
President Obama was equally
frank when he said a Black person
faces a greater likelihood of being
killed by another African-American
than by a White person.

“I think the African American
community is also not naïve in
understanding that, statistically,
somebody like Trayvon Martin
was statistically more likely to be
shot by a peer than he was by
somebody else. So folks under-
stand the challenges that exist for
African American boys. But they
get frustrated, I think, if they feel
that there’s no context for it and
that context is being denied. And
that all contributes I think to a
sense that if a White male teen was
involved in the same kind of sce-
nario, that, from top to bottom,
both the outcome and the after-
math might have been different.”

The president demonstrated real
courage by addressing race in
America without being forced to
as was the case with Rev. Wright.
Moreover, he challenged us not to
let the last chapter of Trayvon’s life
be marked a misguided not guilty
verdict.

“And for us to be able to gather
together business leaders and local
elected officials and clergy and
celebrities and athletes, and figure
out how are we doing a better job
helping young African American
men feel that they’re a full part of
this society and that they’ve got
pathways and avenues to succeed
— I think that would be a pretty
good outcome from what was
obviously a tragic situation.”

*George E. Curry, former editor-
in-chief of Emerge magazine, is
editor-in-chief of the NNPA.*

But he didn’t say what he would do to
make sure Black male teenagers are
not treated the way Trayvon was
treated by George Zimmerman

Barack Obama finally became
one. He spoke with passion, with-
out the aid of a TelePrompTer or
notes, about what it’s really like to

interprets what happened one
night in Florida. And it’s
inescapable for people to bring
those experiences to bear. The

There are very few African American
men in this country who haven’t had
the experience of being followed
when they were shopping in a
department store. That includes me’
President Barack Obama

be a Black man in America.
“There are very few African
American men in this country who
haven’t had the experience of
being followed when they were
shopping in a department store.

African American community is
also knowledgeable that there is a
history of racial disparities in the
application of our criminal laws —
everything from the death penalty
to enforcement of our drug laws.

Blacks are the ‘Other’ Americans

I was told a story the other
night. Apparently on the evening
of the Zimmerman acquittal, in a
bar in South Carolina, a group of
White patrons were talking. Some
of them, upon hearing the news,
shouted “Free at Last!” in celebra-
tion of the decision. One person,
however, a White labor union
activist, decided that this was not
his gathering, and left in disgust.

The responses to the acquittal
have told us a great deal about the
USA. The bottom line is that
many people who knew or know
nothing about who Trayvon Mar-
tin was have concluded that he
was a demon and deserved death.
I realize that this is a very blunt
comment but I believe that it is
important to cut to the chase.
These individuals have decided
that aggression against a Black
youth who looks “suspicious”
(whatever that means) can be
raised to the level of death and
actually justified.

But here is the other
piece. There have been Whites
and some Blacks who have argued
that we should not be so upset
about the Zimmerman verdict
when there are so many examples
of Blacks killing Blacks that go



TRANS AFRICA

Bill
Fletcher Jr.

without comment. In other words,
we are hypocritical for protesting
the Zimmerman acquittal. This
notion actually misses a larger
point.

The acquittal of Zimmerman is
linked to a steady shift in the racial
relations that we have experienced

reflections of this change. The
Zimmerman acquittal is a
reminder that we have rights that
are not worthy of respect, even
though those same rights are on
the books.

None of this means that Black-
on-Black crime is of no or little
importance. Black-on-black
crime destabilizes our communi-
ties and is a reflection of the con-
tinued economic and social
ravaging we have experienced
over the years. The fact that this
crime is frequently ignored or
treated as inevitable leads to
despair. As a result our ability or
capacity to respond to larger
issues is undermined.

Thus, we should not be posing

The Zimmerman acquittal is a
reminder that we have rights that are
not worthy of respect, even though
those same rights are on the books

since the late 1970s. The erosion
of affirmative action, voting
rights, and unstoppable police
profiling and brutality, are all

the Trayvon Martin case against
Black-on-Black crime. They both
need to be addressed, but the Zim-
merman acquittal speaks to a very

dangerous trend in the larger U.S.
society that we can ignore only at
our peril. This trend suggests,
once again, that we have remained
the “other”, that is, a segment of
the population that is considered
by too many Whites to be
unknowable and dangerous; a seg-
ment whose lives and experiences
are not worthy of any particular
investigation and concern. A seg-
ment that must be marginalized or,
if we appear out of the dark, swat-
ted away, as one would do with an
annoying pest.

This is a time for reflection, as
President Obama suggested, but a
different sort of reflection. One
that really takes us into an in depth
understanding of the continued
operation of race in all features of
US society. Yes, that discussion
again...

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