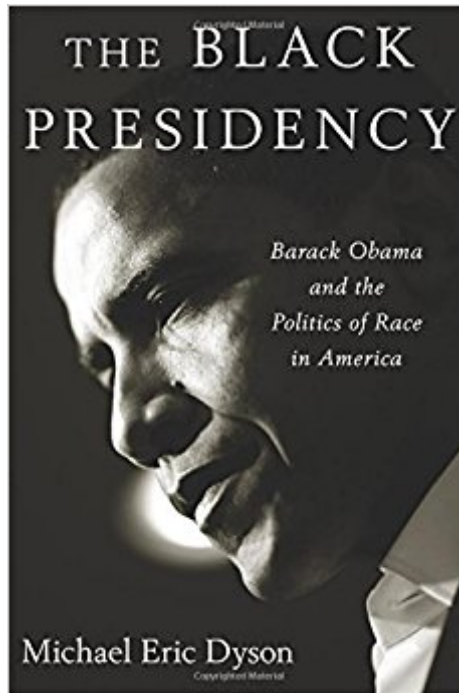




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# The Black Presidency: Barack Obama And The Politics Of Race In America



## Synopsis

A provocative and lively deep dive into the meaning of America's first black presidency, from *“one of the most graceful and lucid intellectuals writing on race and politics today”* (Vanity Fair). Michael Eric Dyson explores the powerful, surprising way the politics of race have shaped Barack Obama's identity and groundbreaking presidency. How has President Obama dealt publicly with race as the national traumas of Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, and Walter Scott have played out during his tenure? What can we learn from Obama's major race speeches about his approach to racial conflict and the black criticism it provokes? Dyson explores whether Obama's use of his own biracialism as a radiant symbol has been driven by the president's desire to avoid a painful moral reckoning on race. And he sheds light on identity issues within the black power structure, telling the fascinating story of how Obama has spurned traditional black power brokers, significantly reducing their leverage. President Obama's own voice from an Oval Office interview granted to Dyson for this book along with those of Eric Holder, Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young, and Maxine Waters, among others, add unique depth to this profound tour of the nation's first black presidency.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice *“It's a brilliant and complicated portrait of a brilliant and complicated president.”* —Salon

“Readers will recognize Dyson’s practiced flair for language and metaphor as he makes an important and layered argument about American political culture and the narrowness of presidential speech...[T]he book ably maintains a sharp critical edge...[The Black Presidency] might well be considered an interpretive miracle.” —New York Times Book Review

“An enlightening work...incisive criticisms....Dyson reinterprets some soaring moments in the Obama race canon...Dyson reconsiders [the post racial debate] in memorable terms and points to the pitfalls inherent in the concept. [Dyson offers] as sharp a distillation of white privilege as you’ll ever read.” —Washington Post

“For a fuller explanation of the relationship between Obama and black America, Michael Eric Dyson’s The Black Presidency is indispensable.” —The New Statesman

“Driven by the hopes Obama raised with his historical rise to power, Dyson delivers a provocative scrutiny of a presidency as complex as the ongoing issues of race, and he does so with grace and wary empathy.” —BookPage

“Michael Eric Dyson once again proves his intellectual heft, critical thinking depth and finesse with words and messages. . . . [T]his is a must-read.” —Essence

“Dyson offers harsh assessment of Obama presidency.” —The Boston Globe

“Dyson is one of black America’s most influential figures...Dyson’s criticisms are accurate...The Black Presidency is far from a gloomy read...[Dyson] is always insightful, and entertaining.” —Maclean’s Magazine

“The Black Presidency: Barack Obama and the Politics of Race in America” by Michael Eric Dyson is a thorough analysis of the historical significance and legacy of Obama’s presidency, as well as his often surprising approach to racial issues.” —Tampa Bay Times

“The Black Presidency is complicated. It’s not that it’s a dense read (quite the opposite, actually), but its thesis patently refuses to put forward a simplified narrative about Barack Obama’s presidency...Dyson is critical of Obama -- specifically, he is critical of Obama’s treatment of race -- but he simultaneously recognizes the ways in which the president has been successful.” —news magazine

Dyson offers high praise and admiration for Obama, but also a searing critique.” —Chicago Sun-Times

[The Black Presidency is a] fine, very well-written and thought-out [book that] dissects Obama from a decidedly black perspective, analyzing his complicated relationship to his identity as a black presiden...[Dyson is] sympathetic to Obama...although that doesn’t stop him...from juming on Obama with both intellectual boots...Dyson fights to redeem his subject at his book’s intellectually dramatic close.” —The Root

“Georgetown professor and New York Times op-ed contributor Dyson...turns his full critical (and often angry) attention to the president. It’s an early take, as

Obama has a little under a year left in office, but a smart one. — Brooklyn Magazine

— “Dyson succeeds admirably in creating a base line for future interpretations of this historic presidency. His well-written book thoroughly illuminates the challenges facing a black man elected to govern a society that is far from post-racial.” — Kirkus, Starred Review

— “Insightful...as America’s first black president, Obama faces unusually heightened expectations. He has been in a precarious position, one that Dyson examines diligently and passionately in this timely analysis.” — Publishers Weekly

— “A perceptive, carefully sourced, and thought-provoking inquiry.” — Booklist, Starred Review

— “Michael Eric Dyson combines cutting-edge theoretical acuity with the passionate, engaged, and accessible stance of a public intellectual.” — Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

— “Immensely engaging, unflinchingly honest, and appropriately provocative,” — Michael Eric Dyson proves, once again, that he is without peer when it comes to contextualizing race in 21st-century America. — The Black Presidency — is a must-read for anyone who wants to better understand America’s racial past, present, and future, as well as an urgent and vital contribution to any serious discussion of race in the waning moments and aftermath of Barack Obama’s time in office. — Gilbert — King, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning — Devil in the Grove — — “Michael Eric Dyson meticulously captures the tension between the immense burden of expectation and record of achievement of the Obama presidency. His portrait of a legacy still in utero captivates with an uncanny prescience and sometimes-critical eye. — The Black Presidency — is at once scholarly and emotional; historically important and packed with the irony of the moment; mindful of past and present injustices but, like its subject, striving toward hope. — Overall, — The Black Presidency — represents the great first step in contextualizing our most modern leader in the grand scheme of history.” — — — Jesse Eisenberg, Academy Award-nominated actor and author of — Bream Gives Me Hiccups — — — “Prophetic and scholarly, profound and colloquial, luscious and rigorous, empathic and critical, tough and fair, this is Dyson in tip-top form, on the essential and enduring dilemma of our republic — and its expression by and upon the first black president. This book is enormously clarifying.” — — Diane McWhorter, author of the Pulitzer-Prize winning — Carry Me Home — — “Michael Eric Dyson’s account of Barack Obama and the politics of race is riveting. There have been a plethora of books on Obama’s presidency, but none creates a greater awareness of the burdens, challenges and possibilities he confronts in addressing the changing dynamics of our nation’s race relations. This illuminating, balanced, and well-written book is essential

reading for citizens trying to understand the promises and pitfalls of America's racial maze.

•William Julius Wilson, Lewis P. and Linda L. Geyser University Professor, Harvard University

“Michael Eric Dyson's *The Black Presidency* is a brilliant and searing analysis of what it means to be African-American in the Age of Obama. Every page sizzles with owlsh erudition, fearless thinking, and barely contained fury. When it comes to frankly discussing race and American identity Dyson is in a league of his own. Highly recommended!

•Douglas Brinkley, Professor of History at Rice University and CNN Presidential Historian

“Michael Eric Dyson, as passionate and incisive as always, has written a provocative and important book on President Obama and his relationship with the black community. Whatever your views, it will help you understand the complex puzzle of race and how we can reach for a more just society.

•Walter Isaacson, CEO of the Aspen Institute, author of *Steve Jobs*

“In *The Black Presidency*, Michael Eric Dyson's surgical blade simultaneously lacerates Barack Obama's confounding clumsiness on race, and in the same razor-edged stroke, redeems the current president to a deserved place of permanent legend in American life. No one understands the American dilemma of race and Barack Obama's confounding and yet wondrous grappling with it better than Michael Eric Dyson.

•Douglas Blackmon, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Slavery By Another Name*

Michael Eric Dyson, one of our most graceful and lucid intellectuals writing on race and politics today (*Vanity Fair*), delivers a provocative exploration of the politics of race and the Obama presidency. Barack Obama's presidency unfolded against the national traumas of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, and Walter Scott. The nation's first African American president was careful to give few major race speeches, yet he faced criticism from all sides, including from African Americans. How has becoming the face of America affected Obama's presidency and the nation's identity? Dyson explores whether Obama's use of his own biracialism as a radiant symbol has been driven by the president's desire simply to avoid a painful moral reckoning on race. And he sheds light on identity issues within the black power structure, telling the fascinating story of how Obama has spurned traditional black power brokers, significantly reducing their leverage. Perhaps most movingly, Dyson illuminates the transformative moments, especially in his second term, when Obama has publicly embraced his blackness and used it as a powerful lens onto America, black and white. President Obama's own voice from an Oval Office interview granted to Dyson for the

book along with that of Eric Holder, Al Sharpton, and Andrew Young, among others, adds unique depth to this profound tour of the nation's first black presidency."

As a white American, undoubtedly under-appreciative of black American life and experience, I mostly enjoyed the perspective and insight of an African-American writer critiquing our first African-American president. At certain points in his book, I thought Mr. Dyson was too harsh in his assessments of President Obama's performance as a spokesperson and advocate for African-Americans; his outrage over the president's criticisms of black failures of responsibility within certain segments of their communities while failing to equally criticize continuing individual, systemic, institutional white bigotry and racism missed an important political point. Had President Obama taken white racists and racism to task, the backlash he would have suffered would probably have stopped his political agenda and policies in their tracks and mired his terms in office in an unending defense of any such comments and observations he might have made. I write this in no way as a denial of the continuing, pernicious racism that exists in this country. It is, instead, a recognition of the fact that President Obama is not a black leader in the same vein as Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson, or John Lewis. Those men, for the most part, were leaders of a movement of an oppressed people, operating outside, while engaging with, the country's political system. President Obama is the embodiment of our political system. As such, he is obliged to represent all the American people, not merely advocate for a particular segment of the population. The president might have called on white Americans to open their hearts and let go of their fear, prejudice, even hatred of black Americans. Those who would be open to such a calling, I suspect, have already largely let go of these toxic emotions. For the rest, an appeal of that sort, coming from a black president, would be met with only anger and resentment. Perhaps he should have tempered or resisted making his comments on African-American shortcomings, but I assume he thought it important enough that any reticence he felt was overcome by what he viewed as an important issue to address. I am not cynical enough to believe the president made such comments in the vain hope of scoring political points. Nor, I should point out, does the author make such a claim. Mr. Dyson also failed to take an accounting of the president's heritage. He was born in Hawaii, a state hardly caught up in the tensions and violence of the civil rights movement of the mid twentieth century. His mother was white. His father was Kenyan and absent from his life. He was raised by his mother and maternal grandparents. He grew up with few other African-Americans. I would think it would be difficult for a man from such a background to be fully empathetic to the experience of African-Americans who grew up with Jim Crow and the pernicious racism of an

America an ocean away. And the voluntary absence of his father might well have felt like abandonment to the young Barack Obama. It would not be beyond the realm of possibility that Obama's angry words regarding the issue of absent black fathers came from a place of personal pain. As I said in opening, I am white, and because of that fact, I cannot experience the presidency of Barack Obama as an African-American experiences it. That is what made this work important and well worth reading to me. I found Mr. Dyson's writing skills beyond reproach. His mastery of the English language makes the book engaging, thought provoking and challenging to one's passively held point of view. I definitely learned a bit about how our differences of experience, heritage, and history shape our differing perceptions of shared events. I highly recommend this book to anyone with interest in current events, recent history, and especially race relations, racism, and social-political perception and perspective.

OMG, nobody breaks it down like Michael D. (MD), king of metaphors. He tells the truth about our POTUS without disrespecting or demonizing him. He uses his words President Obama deserves to go down as one of the most important and consequential presidents in our history, and yet, when it came to race, he often stumbled. He may not be a strong enough word; he damn near fell off the precipice. I must admit when I first started reading this book I didn't think MD would forthrightly report on the president and his laissez-faire attitude when confronting or handling African American policies and issues; boy, was I wrong. What I especially appreciated (as I do with every book I've read by him) is his inductive reasoning where he brilliantly states and illuminates the many false equivalencies asserted by the POTUS such as between black and white experiences and how the president mistakes racial effects for their causes. Also, in his fear of alienating white people POTUS several times equates white and black anger (as if) while failing to mention white privilege. As MD reminds us: Not only did white privilege and government assistance enhance the standing of whites, but it also sharply contrasted to, and reinforced, black suffering (JIM CROW yesterday and today). MD expounds on how black anger for POTUS is counterproductive when it extends to the present; white anger, by comparison, is explained only in contemporary terms and thus severed from its racist roots. The disturbing result is that it is okay to be white and angry; it is not okay to be black and angry. And the biggest one, especially in today's climate with a Black person being killed every day it seems, the

president's assertion of a false equivalency between the thuggish police who are armed and how they kill African Americans at will. And let me just interject here for all those out there that like to say "most cops are good". Where are they? Why aren't they assisting in stamping out the bad ones. So much more revealed in this book. Two terms he used to describe black people's collective terror that I thought were so apropos and resonated with me and should become part of our lexicon: "slow terror" which seeps into every nook and cranny of black existence, "fast terror" denied opportunities for generations/forever in US you know: jobs, education, deplorable housing and being kept out by redlining, our kids being expelled and locked up at disgusting rates etc; and "Fast terror" is more dynamic, more explicitly lethal, more grossly evident. It is the spectacle of black death in public displays of vengeance and violence directed against defenseless black bodies. In some ways I feel pity (lack of a better word) for our brilliant POTUS. The man is brilliant and a prophet of sorts that chose to prophesize what was politically expedient for him and the Democratic/Republican (pretty much the same) Party. He drank the Kool-Aid that so many blacks do that believe that they "can get rid of the 'thug' label by denouncing rap music, sagging pants, and the boorish behavior of a few wayward youths. The way he pandered to the Republicans, even in his final quarters was disheartening and the final coup de grace was when he gave away the chance to put an African American on the SCOTUS bench, preferably a Black woman, his largest support group, he nominated another white man. Not to mention he had three chances and never did he nominate an African American though he did nominate Sonia Sotomayor a great choice. As Michael Dyson points out his presidency hardly put a dent in the forces that pulverize black life: high infant mortality rates, high unemployment, atrocious educational inequality, racial profiling, and deadly police brutality. And that's unfortunate, to say the least.

First I would like to mention that I rarely ever make reviews on (even though I shop here regularly!), so this was very significant for me to do so. I also am not a big reader, but I just finished this book 4/16/17 and received this book mid January after I ordered it. I have to say that I just love Michael Eric Dyson's mind. He makes me want to study the dictionary. A dictionary is what you will need in order to learn the words he uses! It's great though because it makes me learn new words I never



knew before and expand my vocabulary. Michael Eric Dyson's assessment of President Obama is a very honest and thorough one. It's not all complimentary, which is good. If it were all praise, then I believe it would make you question just how honest he was really being. It is definitely a great read and I plan to get MED's new book, *Tears We Cannot Stop*. Great book!

Dr. Dyson explains the best president's ever struggles with being The First Black President of the USA and the Black President of Black America....President Obama has had to deal with overt racism for 8 years yet still he rose despite Black America not rising much in that same time period! Dyson encourages Obama to own his Blackness and speak with specific policy proposals to uplift Black America too!

I loved this book and I take pride in the accomplishments of the 44th president of the U.S.A. as outlined in the scholarly work present here. Although I am not in agreement with all of the author's views or biases, I do feel that he has made every effort to present the pros and cons, strengths and liabilities of the Obama presidency in as fair a manner as possible.

Dyson is a great writer. A little too hard on Obama. Pretty good history. Some obvious biases

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