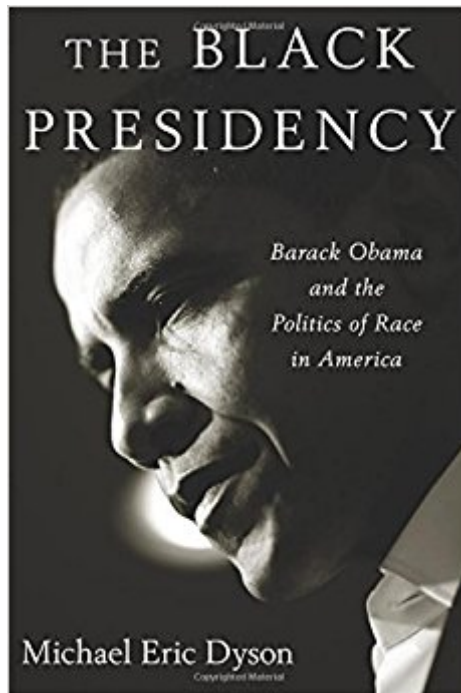


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The Black Presidency: Barack Obama And The Politics Of Race In America



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.

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Customer Reviews

One must admit that Dyson certainly has a way with words. This is one of the reasons I enjoy his writing and speaking. He is very clever when turning a phrase. And so it is with this latest effort from Dyson, the prose is smartly delivered in this book that examines Obama's presidency from the

perspective of his public speeches dealing with race. Some may see this as a limited undertaking, but the subtitle is; Barack Obama and the Politics of Race in America. The president comes under fire from Dyson, for being too passive when addressing issues of race. Dyson, so often hints, while not being fully throated in this criticism, that Obama is overly concerned with hurting white folks feelings or in drawing their rancor."Obama often has been loath to lift his voice on race lest he be relegated to a black box, although his reluctance has kept the nation from his wisdom and starved black folk of the most visible interpreter of their story and plight, an interpreter who also carries the greatest political clout in the nation's history."He seems to walk a fine line in this book, while saying obviously in response to critics, that I have criticized the president, but he also appears to be saying that he understands that being the first Black president and working with an obstructionist congress is a huge burden to bear and any criticism coming from Black America would do well to keep that in mind. Dyson does a great job of recounting the more memorable moments of Obama's presidency from the Philadelphia speech on race, the distancing from his pastor, the Trayvon Martin killing, Ferguson and right up to the vile murders in the South Carolina church. He discusses each of these events in the context of what Obama said or didn't say.

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.

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