

# National Black Church Initiative

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**PRESS RELEASE**

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## National Black Church Initiative Condemn Majority Leader Reid's Remarks on Race

**His remarks present the nation an opportunity for an honest dialogue on race**

**Washington DC-** The National Black Church Initiative, a coalition of 34,000 churches across America, condemn Majority Leader Reid's remarks concerning how he described, then senator, Obama's run for the presidency as "light skinned and without a negro dialect." These are insensitive remarks, and they should be rightly condemned. There should be no double standards, whether they are Republican or Democrat, especially when it comes down to racism. The National Black Church Initiative condemned then majority leader, Trent Lott's remarks, and we are not hesitating to condemn the insensitive and inflammatory remarks of Majority Leader Reid.

Shame on you Harry Reid!

How could it be that you hold one of the most important offices in the land and stoop to this level of ignorance? President Obama has been consistent in not engaging the nation into a race dialogue since his campaign and since his speech on race in Philadelphia. The president, like NBCI, feels that race is a divisive and nasty issue, and it can only lead to confusion if not properly handled. The National Black Church Initiative, three years ago, launched its Civil Society Initiative. The purpose of that initiative is to help strengthen trusted institutions like the church, the school, and the Congress, so that when they speak with some level of authority, they also possess moral integrity; thus having the conviction of the citizens in those who they have entrusted their belief in. We work to achieve this through dialogue, where we express our feelings and begin to correct them with scientific, philosophical, and biblical truths. Harry Reid's comment impede this Civil Society Initiative tremendously because it brings into question the sincerity of leaders of one of our most trusted institutions, namely, the Congress. At the same time, he brings forth an issue, presenting us with a wonderful opportunity to call for dialogue; a chance to initiate discussion in order to rightfully confront and surpass the issue at hand.

The Rev. Anthony Evans, president of NBCI says, “Yes, I am deeply ashamed of Harry Reid’s remarks. He should have known better, and I seriously doubt that this was a slip of the tongue. Those words in which he enunciated clearly spoke to his historic understanding of racial prejudice in America. Those words also underscore how whites have traditionally, since the middle passage and through slavery, sought to divide, humiliate, and conquer African Americans by noting their goodness according to how close their skin color is to white. Neither whites nor blacks have any lock on righteousness and goodness.

The recent Wall Street recession clearly illustrates how white males manipulate the entire American economy and nearly brought it to a disastrous end. Black and brown people were not adversely affected by the economic downturn. They were disastrously forced to alter every phase of their lives, from employment to housing, and not only did they suffer, but many people of good will, white, black and of all races, suffered because of the abhorrent greed of a handful of white, Wall Street business executives. Harry Reid’s comments spoke to the historic ugliness of racial hatred, and he should understand that. He also, with those words, continued to divide our nation between white and black even though he knows better. We do have the capacity and full will of forgiveness, and we forgive him, but we will not let him off the hook, for he has a moral responsibility for the position that he holds to atone for his sin.”

Here are the issues: We have an African American president for the first time in over 200 years of American history, but African Americans, as a group, are still being oppressed and discriminated against. The old stereotypes that have characterized American attitudes and dispositions seem to have left a residue remaining as strong as the actual practice. America must rid itself from every notion of prejudice and discrimination from its soul in order to be a whole nation. The Majority Leader cannot just mouth the principles of equality and practice the racial prejudice of deception. Harry Reid has rightfully apologized for his actions, but apology is insufficient in dealing with the hidden and deeply rooted emotional feelings of hatred towards African Americans. Even if Majority Leader Reid did not believe this, that he acquires no malice or hatred in his heart towards African Americans, it would be difficult and nearly impossible to persuade all African Americans that this is the case.

The Black Church is ashamed of the Congressional Black Caucus and other black leaders including the Rev. Al Sharpton, who issued statements pandering to the apology of Mr. Reid, because they sense that the Democrats will lose the political momentum in passing key legislation on health care, the environment, and jobs. Even though the Black Church recognizes these issues as serious and significant, we cannot continue to advocate our moral role nor make an excuse for Mr. Reid because of the position that he holds. We can in no way become apologists for Mr. Reid’s actions. He should be held to the same standard that, former Majority Leader, Trent Lott, was held. What they did not understand was that there is a greater principle at stake. A principle being America must, as W.E.B. Dubois said, “it must deal with its race problem.” It cannot continue to delay this any longer. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Any right delayed is a right denied.” The time to deal with it is now, despite the political loss that may occur. We will be a better and richer nation if we deal with the race issue head on.

Short term political gains will not get us to a civil society that is based upon equality, non discrimination, non-prejudice, fair play, and honesty. The caucus was willing to sweep this under the rug, as well as the president, in their quick acceptance of Mr. Reid's apology. To fulfill the initiative of the church, to forgive the sins of the sinner, on behalf of the NBCI, we accept the Majority Leader Reid's sincere apology that this was a mistake. The church must always be ready to forgive, but it must never forsake its duty to condemn evil and it must never, in condemning evil, ever harm the soul of the individual. We love Harry Reid, but his remarks were ugly and wrong.

However, this was not a poor choice of words. Here is a man who has control over his words. This was a matter of a man's heart not fully liberated from prejudice. What the church does best is to act in a transformative way of transforming a sinner into a prophet. Here we have an opportunity to have an honest discussion on race and to build a stronger civil society, but the Black Caucus, the president and others want to stifle this important teaching opportunity for our nation, and the church must stand up and say, "This is wrong."

Harry Reid must atone for his sins. The bible says that much is given, much is expected. Apology becomes insufficient for a man like Harry Reid in his position. He must morally use the power of the office in which God has given him to not only start an honest sincere discussion on race, but to commit his life in transforming the hidden psychological hatred that exists in most men's hearts. Atonement is that you must not only apologize, but you must do something noble. The National Black Church Initiative is calling upon Majority Leader Harry Reid and President Obama to join with us in taking a three step improvement approach on the issue of race in America.

1. We are asking the majority leader and the president, along with the National Black Church Initiative and other religious leaders around the country to call for a day of racial forgiveness on a personal and corporate level. Here, our nation will pause and atone for the racial history of America and commit ourselves to a path of redemption.
2. We will allow ourselves, and our children, to seek fellowship with another racial group that we have never met, nor are informed of, and spend a day listening and sharing with each other our common and divine humanity with a pledge to establish not only friendship, but community. We would allow Martin Luther King's book "Where Do We Go from Here, Chaos or Community?" to provide the philosophical underpinning for this initiative.
3. The leadership of the church will, on different Sabbaths, exchange pulpits as well as establish congregation fellowships multiple times throughout the year with different religious traditions to promote the issue of tolerance of religion among all people of faith.

These 3 initiatives, as outlined by NBCI's Civil Society project, will go far in establishing the good will that the Majority Leader Reid has sincerely apologized for. We must not allow this opportunity to evade us as so many in the past have due to the insatiable appetite of cable news and political pundits who desire blood as opposed to dialogue between people of good will.

We have an astounding opportunity at hand to address the hidden prejudice in modern society, and to neglect this opportunity would be to contradict the very principles upon which this country is

built; freedom and the responsibility to counteract the wrongdoings of an oppressive past. While Majority Leader Reid has spoken out at such an inconveniencing time, maybe this is what our nation needs. This is a chance to take a deep breath from present, trying issues, to address this deep-rooted problem, come together as a nation, rebuild ourselves from the inside, and continue with other issues now as a stronger and more cooperative community. If we can de-polarize our feelings towards one another, the National Black Church Initiative is certain that we will be far more effective in dealing with modern issues when we are respectful and collected as a nation.

### **About NBCI**

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), a coalition of 34,000 African American and Latino member churches works to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare. NBCI is a faith-based health organization dedicated to providing critical wellness information and preventive health screening to all of its members. The African American community ranks first in eleven different health risk categories. NBCI's purpose is to partner with national health officials to provide health education, reduce racial health disparities, and increase access to quality healthcare.