

Obama Wouldn't Be the First Black President, Diversity Inc, 2007

Obama Wouldn't Be First Black President

By Aysha Hussain

February 16, 2007

You've seen the headlines: "Are Americans Ready for a Black President?" "Is Obama Black Enough?" "Obama: America's First Black President?"

Ever since the nation first met Illinois Sen. Barack Obama in 2004, his race has been called into question more times than Michael Jackson's. Obama is clearly a black man, but is this really a breakthrough? Some blacks say Obama isn't "black enough," which seems ironic because for many blacks, former President Bill Clinton was "black enough." In 2001, Clinton was honored as the nation's "first black president" at the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Annual Awards Dinner in Washington, D.C.

Were there other "black" presidents? Some historians have reason to believe people don't really understand the genealogy of past U.S. Presidents. Research shows at least five U.S. presidents had black ancestors and Thomas Jefferson, the nation's third president, was considered the first black president, according to historian Leroy Vaughn, author of *Black People and Their Place in World History*.

Vaughn's research shows Jefferson was not the only former black U.S. president. Who were the others? Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge. But why was this unknown? How were they elected president? All five of these presidents never acknowledged their black ancestry.

Jefferson, who served two terms between 1801 and 1809, was described as the "son of a half-breed Indian squaw and a Virginia mulatto father," as stated in Vaughn's findings. Jefferson also was said to have destroyed all documentation attached to his mother, even going to extremes to seize letters written by his mother to other people.

President Andrew Jackson, the nation's seventh president, was in office between 1829 and 1837. Vaughn cites an article written in *The Virginia Magazine of History* that Jackson was the son of an Irish woman who married a black man. The magazine also stated that Jackson's oldest brother had been sold as a slave.

Lincoln, the nation's 16th president, served between 1861 and 1865. Lincoln was said to have been the illegitimate son of an African man, according to Leroy's findings. Lincoln had very dark skin and coarse hair and his mother allegedly came from an Ethiopian tribe. His heritage fueled so much controversy that Lincoln was nicknamed "Abraham Africanus the First" by his opponents.

President Warren Harding, the 29th president, in office between 1921 and 1923, apparently never denied his ancestry. According to Vaughn, William Chancellor, a professor of economics and politics at Wooster College in Ohio, wrote a book on the Harding family genealogy. Evidently, Harding had black ancestors between both sets of parents. Chancellor also said that Harding attended Iberia College, a school founded to educate fugitive slaves.

Coolidge, the nation's 30th president, served between 1923 and 1929 and supposedly was proud of his heritage. He claimed his mother was dark because of mixed Indian ancestry. Coolidge's mother's maiden name was "Moor" and in Europe the name "Moor" was given to all blacks just as "Negro" was used in America. It later was concluded that Coolidge was part black.

The only difference between Obama and these former presidents is that none of their family histories were fully acknowledged by others. Even though Obama is half-white, he strongly resembles his Kenyan father. And not only is Obama open about his ancestry, most people acknowledge him as a black man, which is why people will identify Obama, if elected, as the first black president of the United States.

Were there other "black" presidents? Some historians have reason to believe people don't really understand the genealogy of past U.S. Presidents. Research shows at least five U.S. presidents had black ancestors and Thomas Jefferson, the nation's third president, was considered the first black president, according to historian Leroy Vaughn, author of *Black People and Their Place in World History*.

[Link to Article and Comments](#)