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**Shame on John Lewis... for Backing down:  
Black Leadership in Peril  
The Substance of Truth  
By Tolu Olorunda  
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Why would a seasoned boxer back down from a fight he's most familiar with? And why would a Civil Rights Icon apologize for condemning unarmed bigotry:  
**INTIMIDATION!** Late last week, Georgia Congressman, Rep. John Lewis, attacked the McCain camp for its unabashed authorization of the pejorative rants at McCain/Palin rallies against Democratic rival, Sen. Obama. Rep. Lewis was unfettered in characterizing the McCain campaign's response to its supporters' rants as, "shocking and beyond the pale." Brief reminder: The McCain/Palin rallies had contained crowd-screams of "treason," "terrorist," "off with his head," "bomb Obama," "kill him," "traitor," etc. In reaction to the toxic level of racial hostility being stoked, Rep. Lewis [spoke out candidly](#) about the eerie similarity between McCain/Palin rallies and the racial atmosphere of the Jim-Crow Sixties:

*"George Wallace never threw a bomb. He never fired a gun, but he created the climate and the conditions that encouraged vicious attacks against innocent Americans who were simply trying to exercise their constitutional rights." Because of this atmosphere of hate, four little girls were killed on Sunday morning when a church was bombed in Birmingham, Alabama."*

This sobering caution by the Civil Rights Icon was meant to temper the rising heights of vitriol being spewed at Sen. McCain's Klan rallies. Unfortunately, Rep. Lewis would, soon after, demonstrate why most self-appointed Black leaders have a deficit of – what The Hon. Min. Louis Farrakhan once called – "testicular fortitude."

John McCain's camp was swift to feign shock at the words of a man Sen. McCain [once praised](#) as a "wise man." Calling Lewis's remarks "outrageous" and "divisive," McCain [expressed regret](#) that Rep. Lewis had launched a

*"character attack against Governor Sarah Palin and me that is shocking and beyond the pale. The notion that legitimate criticism of Senator Obama's*

*record and positions could be compared to Governor George Wallace, his segregationist policies and the violence he provoked is unacceptable and has no place in this campaign. I am saddened that John Lewis, a man I've always admired, would make such a brazen and baseless attack on my character and the character of the thousands of hardworking Americans who come to our events to cheer for the kind of reform that will put America on the right track."*

Before long, Rep. John Lewis would [renege](#) on his initial statements and suggest that,

*"A careful review of my earlier statement would reveal that I did not compare Sen. John McCain or Gov. Sarah Palin to George Wallace. It was not my intention or desire to do so."*

While Rep. Lewis was in the process of making amends to his ole' buddy, a McCain rally speaker was [invoking Prophet Elijah](#), warning that God's

*"reputation is involved in all that happens between now and November, because there are millions of people around this world praying to their god - whether it's Hindu, Buddha, Allah - that his opponent wins, for a variety of reasons. And Lord, I pray that you will guard your own reputation, because they're going to think that their god is bigger than you, if that happens. So I pray that you will step forward and honor your own name with all that happens between now and [E]lection [D]ay."*

At the final Presidential political farce – otherwise known as a “debate” – John McCain, a former naval officer, [defended](#) his [Klan rallies](#) at all costs:

*"Let me just say categorically I'm proud of the people that come to our rallies. Whenever you get a large rally of 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 people, you're going to have some fringe peoples. You know that. And I've - and we've always said that that's not appropriate.*

But to somehow say that group of young women who said “Military wives for McCain” are somehow saying anything derogatory about you, but anything - and those veterans that wear those hats that say “World War II, Vietnam, Korea, Iraq,” I'm not going to stand for people saying that the people that come to my rallies are anything but the most dedicated, patriotic men and women that are in this nation and they're great citizens.

And I'm not going to stand for somebody saying that because someone yelled something at a rally."

The “dedicated,” “patriotic” men and women Sen. McCain spoke of, are those who unashamedly claim to be scared “of an Obama presidency,” because they refuse to “bring a child up in a country where... someone that cohorts with domestic terrorists such as Ayers,” would be the Commander In Chief. McCain who “[rose](#)” to Obama's defense, calling him “decent,” was booed immediately by his mob-like audience, who would not tolerate any apologies for the [Communist](#) – otherwise known as Sen. Obama. Coming on the heels of Gov. Palin's comments that Sen. Obama would diminish “*the Prestige of the United States Presidency*,” one can certainly see how enabled McCain/Palin supporters are in [claiming](#) that Sen. Obama is an “Arab” – with the backdrop that Arabs (not just Muslims) are the spawn of the Devil. Rep. Lewis's lack of candor is a slap in the face to those who died so that a Black Man/Woman can run for the presidency without having his/her reputation dying the death of a thousand

qualifications.

What Rep. John Lewis did, of course, is not an isolated item in the boutique of Civil Right heroes who have timidly abdicated their responsibility and cracked under political pressure. Earlier this year, Rev. Jesse Jackson castigated Barack Obama for *"talking down to Black people."* For a man who has [vilified](#) poor Black single mothers for feeding their kids a *"bag of potato chips for lunch, or Popeyes for breakfast,"* and [censured Black men](#) for sitting *"in the house"* and watching *"SportsCenter' all weekend long"* – while [admitting](#) to watching *"a lot of SportsCenter"* – "talking down" appears a tad bit mild and contained. **Hypocritically condescending** seems more apt. Following outrage from within the Obama camp and the Black Community, Rev. Jackson backed away from his comments, and [promptly apologized](#) to Sen. Obama. Rev. Jackson noted that his last desire was for no *"harm or hurt to come to this [Obama's] campaign,"* and that his caught-on-mic comments in no way reflect *"any disparagement on my part for the historic event in which we are involved or my pride in Senator Barack Obama."* In an unmistakable tone, Sen. Obama would [subsequently deny](#) Rev. Jackson the prestigious record of speaking at every DNC since 1984. Jesse Jackson Jr., whose willingness to throw his father under the bus defies the very nature of *Solidarity*, was skillfully placed as a substitution.

The actions of Reverend Jackson and Rep. Lewis remind us of the urgent need for unfiltered Black leadership. The Black Community is rapidly deteriorating into a dying breed, and the gift of courage is the only remedy for our perilous state. Barack Obama has often explained himself to be neither a [leader](#), nor a [statesman](#) – especially in matters concerning Black folks and people of culture/color worldwide. Who will step up to the plate and turn this sh-- around????!!!!

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**BlackCommentator.com** Columnist, Tolu Olorunda, is an 18-year-old local activist/writer and a Nigerian immigrant. [Click here](#) to reach Mr. Olorunda.

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