

Obama's Legacy: Compromise Doesn't Work with Our Political Opponents. When Will We Learn?

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In Chelsea Manning's first column since her commutation, she writes that Barack Obama's legacy is a warning against not being bold enough

[Barack Obama](#) left behind hints of a progressive legacy. Unfortunately, despite his faith in our system and his positive track record on many issues over the last eight years, there have been very few permanent accomplishments.

This vulnerable legacy should remind us that what we really need is a strong and unapologetic progressive to lead us. What we need as well is a relentless grassroots movement to hold that leadership accountable.

On the night of 4 November 2008, Barack Obama was elected on a platform of "hope" and "change". He was hailed as a "uniter" in an age of "dividers". I experienced a political awakening that night. I watched as the hope that President Obama represented was tempered by the shocking passage of Proposition 8 by a majority of voters in California. This reversed a major marriage equality court victory from earlier that year.

Throughout his two terms in office, these types of contradictions would persist. Optimism and hope would be met with backlash and hate. He faced unparalleled resistance from his opponents, many of whom wanted him to fail.

I remember during his first inauguration, on an icy January morning in 2009. I sat on the floor of a military headquarters office in Fort Drum, New York. With a dusty overhead television showing the ceremony, I sat, working in support of a half dozen military officers. We had our weapons ready, and our rucksacks heavily packed. Selected as the active duty army unit to deploy to Washington DC in case of an emergency, we were prepared for rapid deployment.

Ironically, many of the officers and enlisted personnel that were selected for this security detail openly despised President Obama. The seething vitriol and hatred simmered quietly in that room. In retrospect, it was an ominous foreshadowing of things to come.

On domestic issues, his instinct, as former First Lady Michelle Obama explained at the Democratic national convention this past summer, was to "go high" when his opponents would "go low". Unfortunately, no matter how "high" the former president aimed to be, his opponents aimed to undermine him anyway. There was absolutely no "low" that was too low

to go.

Even when they agreed with him on policy, they resisted. For example, when it came to healthcare reform, Obama opened the debate starting with a compromise. His opponents balked. They refused to move an inch. When he would push for the concessions they asked for, they only dug in deeper in opposition. Even when he tried proposing a bill that had been proposed by opponents years earlier.

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