

Enough, already

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

If ever there were a situation so vividly captured by Macbeth's "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (or very little), it is the exchange between Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Sen. Barack Obama in their campaign for the Democratic nomination for president. Suddenly, two wars, a weakening economy, health care and climate change are pushed off the presidential stage.

This started when former President Bill Clinton took a verbal jab at Obama's account of his early war opposition, branding it a "fairy tale." But what Hillary Clinton said in a televised interview has been getting most of the attention: "Dr. King's dream began to be realized when President Lyndon Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 It took a president to get it done."

While some took offense at the King remark as marginalizing the efforts of the great civil rights leader, Hillary Clinton actually did no such thing. King had been in a long struggle to gain equal treatment under the law for African-Americans, starting when he went to Montgomery, Ala., in 1955 as a young minister to take over a bus boycott.

Between the bus boycott and the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the nation went through many changes, both social - which King was greatly responsible for - and political, some of that started by John F. Kennedy but most done by Lyndon Johnson.

Even with the monumental efforts of King and many other civil rights leaders, the legislation likely would not have gotten past Southern conservatives in the Senate, where Johnson skillfully had served as majority leader. King made it clear during the 1964 presidential campaign that electing Johnson over Barry Goldwater was crucial to progress in civil rights.

In 2008, whether King or Johnson was more important to the civil rights movement is not an argument worth having, particularly if the goal is to inject race into the presidential campaign.

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