

Bush neglected civil rights

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George W. Bush's term as president ended nearly a year ago but America is still feeling the effects of his presidency: an economic recession, two wars that drain both human and financial resources and a less than stellar reputation in the international community. Thanks to a recently released report, we can now count neglecting civil rights among the many injustices former President Bush and his administration inflicted upon this country.

According a report from the Government Accountability Office, which reviewed activities of the federal Civil Rights Division from 2001 to 2007, lawyers within the division wanted to investigate several allegations of civil rights violations but were often not allowed to do so by their supervisors. Among the cases not investigated were allegations of voter intimidation and violations of employee rights.

The report also notes that, when compared to the tenure his predecessor, former President Clinton, Bush's oversight of the Civil Right Division signaled a drop in the enforcement of several major laws that promote equality and justice. The division filed about six lawsuits per year in an effort to enforce anti gender and race discrimination laws whereas, under Clinton, it filed about 11 such suits each year. There was also a decrease in actions taken to enforce the Voting Rights Act, a law that prohibits discriminatory electoral rules. Under Clinton, the division filed four suits per year; during Bush's time in office that number dropped to two cases a year.

To many, it may seem that we are living in a post-racial America. In reality, violent race-based crimes have increased over the last year. Subtle and not so subtle discrimination and bias is alive and well in the work place. And, if you believe that the voting booth is free from such bias, we have to only think back to the 2004 election, where blacks in Florida reported being turned away from the polls. If you recall, the controversial election went to President Bush.

Though Bush is gone from office, the effects of his actions remain. Just as Obama has to work tirelessly to clean up the economy, he will also have to work to boost the efforts of the Civil Rights Division. This particular area of government was allowed to falter under Bush and, as a result, many entities may have gotten away with serious civil rights infractions. The President will not only have to clean up the department, he'll also have to put the most serious offenders on notice, letting them know that their actions will no longer be tolerated.