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**Harry Reid 'Negro' Comment: Reid Apologizes For 'No Negro Dialect' Comment**

[**PHILIP ELLIOTT**](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/01/09/harry-reid-negro-comment-_n_417406.html?view=print&comm_ref=false)   01/ 9/10 09:39 PM ET   **P**

WASHINGTON — Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid apologized on Saturday for saying the race of Barack Obama – whom he described as a "light skinned" African-American "with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one" – would help rather than hurt his eventual presidential bid.

Obama quickly accepted, saying "As far as I am concerned, the book is closed." Reid, facing a tough re-election bid this year, spent the day telephoning civil rights leaders and fellow Democrats in hopes of mitigating the political damage.

The revelations about Reid's 2008 comments were included in the book "Game Change" by Time Magazine's Mark Halperin and New York magazine's John Heilemann. The behind-the-scenes look at the 2008 campaign that elevated Obama to the White House is based on the writers' interviews with more than 200 sources, most of whom were granted anonymity and thus much of the material could not be immediately corroborated.

Among the details in the book:

\_ Presidential rival Hillary Rodham Clinton said she believed Obama's team had used out-of-state supporters to win the Iowa caucuses and had intentionally exploited Obama's race. She said the country faced a "a terrible choice" between Obama and Republican nominee John McCain.

\_ Obama and running mate Joe Biden barely spoke, kept separate schedules and seldom campaigned together. The campaign kept Biden off the nightly calls that included Obama, instead having the campaign manager and senior strategist brief Biden separately.

\_ Aides to McCain described the difficulties they faced with their vice presidential pick, then-Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin. Steve Schmidt, a senior adviser to McCain, is quoted telling Palin's foreign policy tutors: "You guys have a lot of work to do. She doesn't know anything."

\_ Former President Bill Clinton's efforts to persuade Sen. Edward M. Kennedy to endorse his wife's presidential bid fell flat when Clinton told the Democratic lawmaker that just a few years ago, Obama would have been serving the pair coffee.

But what caused the biggest stir Saturday was the Reid statement.

"He (Reid) was wowed by Obama's oratorical gifts and believed that the country was ready to embrace a black presidential candidate, especially one such as Obama – a 'light-skinned' African American 'with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one,' as he later put it privately," according to the book.

After new excerpts from the book appeared on the Web site of The Atlantic, Reid released a statement expressing regret for "using such a poor choice of words. I sincerely apologize for offending any and all Americans, especially African-Americans for my improper comments."

Obama issued a statement saying he had spoken with Reid, who faces a difficult re-election amid frustration from both liberals and conservatives with his leadership in the Senate and his agenda. For Reid, not faring well in polls, the comments can't help, even as Obama relies heavily on him to try to pass a health care overhaul.

Reid's office said he had also phoned to apologize to civil rights leaders, including the Rev. Al Sharpton; NAACP Chairman Julian Bond and Leadership Conference on Civil Rights president and chief executive officer Wade Henderson, as well as veteran political operative Donna Brazile. Reid also spoke with Reps. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., and Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C., both African-Americans.

The leaders quickly fell in line supporting Reid.

"While there is no question that Senator Reid did not select the best word choice in this instance, these comments should not distract America from its continued focus on securing healthcare or creating jobs for its people," Sharpton said.

Clyburn, part of the House's Democratic leadership, also supported Reid despite the comments.

"Sen. Reid's apology for his private assessment of President Obama's candidacy should be accepted and our time and energy should be devoted to helping him overcome current obstacles to job creation, health care reform and energy independence," Clyburn said.

Aides to Obama, the Clintons and Biden declined to discuss details of the book.

Palin's spokeswoman, Meg Stapleton, disputed the version presented in the reporters' book.

"The governor's descriptions of these events are found in her book, 'Going Rogue.' Her descriptions are accurate," Stapleton said in a statement to "60 Minutes," which is featuring the book in a Sunday broadcast.

"She was there. These reporters were not."

In 2002, Republican Majority Leader Sen. Trent Lott lost his leadership position for racially charged language; the Mississippi lawmaker said that if then-Sen. Strom Thurmond's 1948 pro-segregation presidential bid had been successful, the country would have been better off.

Obama has accepted apologies about past comments in the past that might be considered racially insensitive.

In 2007, Biden called Obama "the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy."

And Biden was later invited to be Obama's running mate.