

Obama calls out two who stir up bad blood

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Body

Some of those who rail against illegal immigration can dish it **out** but they can't take it. Since most illegal immigrants come from Mexico or other parts of Latin America, critics sometimes say the sort of crude things that give the debate its anti-Latino flavor. But let someone **call** them on it and do they ever get defensive.

Speaking to supporters in Palm Beach last week, Barack **Obama** blasted a couple of media personalities by name.

"A certain segment has basically been feeding a kind of xenophobia. There's a reason why hate crimes against Hispanic people doubled last year," **Obama** said. "If you have people like Lou Dobbs and Rush Limbaugh ginning things **up**, it's not surprising that would happen."

It's about time. That some cable hosts and radio talkers grow their ratings by pandering to the anti-immigrant crowd is no big secret.

Statistics speak loudly

Not surprisingly, supporters of Dobbs and Limbaugh went on the attack. They insisted that **Obama** had overstated the statistics. In 2006, the FBI reported that hate crimes against Hispanics increased 10 percent from the previous year - 576 in 2006, 522 in 2005.

Nevertheless, Hispanics in 2006 were considered by the FBI as the No. 1 victim of hate crimes motivated by one's ethnicity or national origin, and by a margin that was the highest since records have been kept. Hispanics comprised 62.8 percent of victims of crimes motivated by a bias toward a victim's ethnicity or national origin.

So **Obama** was on the right track. In a world where the remnants of the Ku Klux Klan use immigration to recruit new members and where neo-Nazis have produced a repulsive computer game in which players shoot Mexicans crossing the border and watch them explode, it's obvious that these are hard times for Hispanics.

Limbaugh has made his share of sophomoric remarks about Hispanics and immigration. Not long ago, he aired a parody - a group **calling** itself Jose y los Ilegales singing "The Star-Spanglish Banner," complete with Speedy Gonzales accents and offensive lyrics. He also took a shot at Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa by saying that, when they were introduced - by former President Bill Clinton, no less - Limbaugh thought the first Latino to serve as mayor of America's second-largest city in more than a century was "maybe a shoeshine guy."

Still, there is a difference between sophomoric and sinister, and Dobbs is more accurately described as the latter. In fact, Fox News' Geraldo Rivera recently referred to Dobbs as a "hatemonger" for his treatment of the immigration issue.

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That also seems to be the view of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, which recently teamed up with a liberal group, Media Matters for America, to issue a report examining how the immigration debate is framed by cable news shows, including CNN's "Lou Dobbs Tonight." The report found that these kinds of shows overflow "not just with vitriol, but also with a series of myths that feed viewers' resentment and fears, seemingly geared toward creating anti-immigrant hysteria." Among the most common myths - that illegal immigrants commit more than their share of crime, drain social services, and conspire to retake the Southwest and return it to Mexico.

'Taco' crack draws ire

It also doesn't help Dobbs' reputation that, during an interview last year on CBS's "60 Minutes," he recalled a meeting with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus in which the CNN host claimed that the representatives, in trying to establish if he was pro-Latino, asked him if he "had ever eaten a taco . . . and an enchilada."

That crack inspired a letter of protest to CBS from Rep. Joe Baca, D-San Bernardino, insisting that Dobbs' comments did not "reflect the true nature of the discussion at our meeting." He called Dobbs' juvenile and stereotypical remarks about Mexican food "just one example of how he continues to belittle Hispanic members of Congress and the Hispanic community."

So did Barack Obama go too far in criticizing media talkers who are poisoning the public mood against Latinos? Are you kidding? He only scratched the surface.

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