

# MEDIA FAILURE: GATES AND CROWLEY NEED TO PERSONALLY LEAD



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Yesterday morning I posted (Henry Louis Gates' Contempt Of Cop) on the legal implications of the Henry Louis Gates arrest thrust into the national consciousness by President Obama with his response to a question at Wednesday night's prime time healthcare press conference. The discussion here was outstanding, however in the major media forums of print, and especially television news and talk programming, the situation has devolved and cleaved into the all too predictable he said/she said pitting of one side versus the other. Left versus right. White versus black. Conservative versus liberal. Law and order versus criminal. Yadda, yadda yadda.

In short, what passes for media and journalism in this country today has failed the public audience it is supposed to serve. Again. A disappointing, but certainly not shocking result.

None of us, and none of the chattering media, were there at the Crowley-Gates scene, but we never really are for these moments in life and history; we still learn and live vicariously through them. By no means was Gates' conduct exemplary in the encounter, it simply was not. As far as the encounter itself, he was every bit as responsible for the escalation, and quite arguably more so, as the officer, James Crowley. By the same token, Crowley is the trained professional, who teaches other officers how to handle and diffuse situations exactly like this one, and he did not acquit himself well at all either. But that is as to the facts and interpersonal dynamics; from a legal standpoint, Gates' conduct was clearly and unquestionably completely legal. Irrespective of his conduct,

Gates' arrest was patently false and illegal; you would think some of the media's vaunted "experts" might could point that out.

The Crowley-Gates incident, however, provides a great teaching moment from both points of view, because each side made their point with classically poor conduct; we can all learn much from both. It is a perfect, and for once not tragic, vignette from which to discuss lingering and important issues of race in America. We owe both sides of the incident, Mr. Gates and Mr. Crowley, as well as the President and ourselves, the duty to take advantage of the moment and raise the discourse.

The media, and the citizens it serves, need to stop debating the legality of the arrest, because there really is no valid legal dispute there. The arrest itself was illegal. The national conversation should accept that, leave it behind, and move to the ground of what happened in the interpersonal dynamics of the two protagonists, what it meant to each other and what it means to our national collective. The dynamic occurring between Crowley and Gates takes place every second of every day between whites and blacks as well as police and citizens of all colors. Let the focus be on defusing the tension in every one of those encounters in the future through the lessons learned here.

It is time for Henry Louis Gates and Sergeant James Crowley, and the media that will cover them and feed their causes, to quit the personal posturing, step into each other's shoes and lead us to a better place. Their respective backgrounds should make them two of the most perfectly suited individuals possible for the task. If Henry Louis Gates and James Crowley are each the men they claim to be, they will start the process together and force the recalcitrant media and public to follow. Are they such men, or just the petty posturers they have each been to date?