

Land says Obama used Martin case for politics

by [David Gibson](#) in the [May 2, 2012](#) issue

A top Southern Baptist official has accused President Obama and black civil rights activists of using the Trayvon Martin shooting to foment racial strife and boost the president's reelection chances.

"Rather than holding rallies on these issues, the civil rights leadership focuses on racially polarizing cases to generate media attention and to mobilize black voter turnout," Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and the denomination's top public policy official, said on his radio program March 31.

"This is being done to try to gin up the black vote for an African-American president who is in deep, deep, deep trouble for reelection and who knows that he cannot win reelection without getting the 95 percent of blacks who voted for him in 2008 to come back out and show they are going to vote for him again." Land's remarks were first reported April 2 by the Associated Baptist Press.

Martin is the 17-year-old African-American youth who was shot to death in February by a neighborhood watch captain in Sanford, Florida. Martin was unarmed and was walking back to his father's house with a bag of candy and an iced tea when he was confronted by George Zimmerman, who was patrolling the gated community where Martin was staying.

What transpired next is a matter of dispute, but Zimmerman shot Martin once in the chest and killed him. Zimmerman was not arrested or charged. Because Zimmerman's father is white and his mother Hispanic, the growing controversy over the case has become racially supercharged.

Obama himself weighed in on the case, saying that as a parent he was pained by the shooting and adding: "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon." "The president's aides claimed he was showing compassion for the victim's family," Land said. "In reality he poured gasoline on the racist fires."

Some activists and pundits have tried to broaden the focus in this case beyond race to include issues of gun control and Florida's "Stand Your Ground" self-defense law, which has been cited on Zimmerman's behalf.

But the racial aspect of the Trayvon Martin case remains the central flashpoint in the debates. On April 3, NBC apologized for a *Today Show* segment that broadcast an edited version of Zimmerman's conversation with a police dispatcher moments before the shooting that made it sound as though Zimmerman was prejudiced against Martin because the teen was black.

There have also been criticisms of predominantly white churches for not speaking out more quickly on behalf of Martin and his family, though some groups—including the National Council of Churches and the group Churches Uniting in Christ—have subsequently weighed in with expressions of concern.

Evangelist Franklin Graham also spoke out after a recent meeting with leaders of the NAACP. Writing in the *Huffington Post*, he said: "It will likely take more time and information to determine if there was a racial injustice that February 26 night, but it takes no time to conclude there was an injustice, one that snuffed out the earthly life of Trayvon after 17 short years." Land's remarks seemed to represent an escalation of the rhetoric by a religious leader.

In his radio show, Land described activists Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton as "racial ambulance chasers" who, along with fringe groups like the Black Panthers, are fomenting a "mob mentality" that is akin to what the Ku Klux Klan used to do to blacks in the South.

"This situation is getting out of hand," Land said. "There is going to be violence. When there is violence it's going to be Jesse Jackson's fault. It's going to be Al Sharpton's fault. It's going to be Louis Farrakhan's fault, and to a certain degree it's going to be President Obama's fault." —RNS