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## EDITORIAL: Barack takes a bow

In a shocking display of fealty to a foreign potentate, President Obama bowed to Saudi King Abdullah at the Group of 20 summit in London last week.

Mr. Obama later said in Strasbourg, France, "We have to change our behavior in showing the Muslim world greater respect." Symbolism is important in world affairs. By bending over to show greater respect to Islam, the U.S. president belittled the power and independence of the United States.

The bow was an extraordinary protocol violation. Such an act is a traditional obeisance befitting a king's subjects, not his peer. There is no precedent for U.S. presidents bowing to Saudi or any other royals. Former President Franklin D. Roosevelt shook hands with Saudi King Abdulaziz in February 1945. Granted, Mr. Roosevelt was wheelchair-bound, but former President Dwight D. Eisenhower shook hands when he first met King Saud in January 1957. Mr. Obama's bow to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques does not help his image with those who believe he is secretly a Muslim, and why he chose to bow only to the Saudi King and not to any other royals remains unexplained.

No Americans of any station are required to bow to royalty. It is one of the pillars of American exceptionalism that our country rejected traditional caste divisions. Article I Section 9 of the Constitution forbids titles of nobility and stipulates that no officeholder or government employee may "accept of any present, emolument, office, or title, of any kind whatever, from any king, prince, or foreign state" without the consent of Congress. Judith Martin wrote in her Miss Manners column in 2001 that bowing "is not an ordinary bit of foreign etiquette one

might adopt out of courtesy when traveling. ... Americans do not properly bow to any royalty. We show respect for other countries' leaders the same way we do to our own."

Press outlets have been conspicuously silent on Mr. Obama's bow. Compare this to the New York Times' reaction when former President Bill Clinton inclined a bit too far when meeting Japanese Emperor Akihito in 1994. According to the Gray Lady, "The image on the South Lawn was indelible: an obsequent president, and the Emperor of Japan." Former President George W. Bush received thorough press attention after being photographed holding hands with then-Crown Prince Abdullah in 2005. "It clearly strikes a nerve," CBS News reported, while David Letterman satirized Mr. Bush as "officially the gayest president since Lincoln." These two cases were tame compared to Mr. Obama's full-out genuflection, which makes us wonder why it is not worthy of comment.

Mr. Obama is proving that one can be elected president without knowing how to behave presidentially. His servile gesture was fully fitting with the tone of his humility tour of Europe. In his eagerness to be loved personally, the president has lost sight of the fact that the leader of the free world also must be respected.