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on issues affecting African Americans  
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**Meeting A Critical Need  
Women of Color  
By Suzanne Brooks  
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*BC welcomes Suzanne Brooks as a columnist. "Women of Color" will appear on a regular basis.*

The responsiveness of The Black Commentator in establishing this column is to be praised. Women of color need all the avenues available to make it possible for us to rise from the marginalization and social invisibility in which we have been trapped for all the years of this country's existence. We have allies among men and white women who, along with us, work for freedom for all which includes us. However, there are many others who oppose our inclusion and there are some in our own groups who have made some individual personal gains which they use as an excuse to join those who oppress as long as they can be the "flies in the buttermilk" as we used to say. This is unacceptable.

For those who don't have a handle on the status and conditions of women of color today, I recommend that you read my [October 16, 2008](#) article in **BC**, "The Status of Women of Color in the American Political System" and Alice Walker's moving "[Lest We Forget: An Open Letter to My Sisters](#)" and Michele Wallace's classic "[Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman \(Verso Classics\) \(Verso Classics, 26\)](#) ." There is information in each of these which are relevant for African American, Asian American, Latino American, Native American, and Pacific Island Americans women and men. We cannot overcome the dire circumstances facing us without research and study of the situation each of our groups has. We must identify and read the work of those women of color and our supporters among men of color and radical white feminists who are also writing important books which help us to understand the past and to know what we must do in the future--beginning today.

In this column, I wish to express my happiness at the election of Barack Obama. As one of his early supporters, I worked as much as 40 hours a week or more on his behalf during the past 20 months or so, writing essays to counter smears, sending

information from the community to him and his staff, encouraging voters to vote for him, phone banks, fundraising, organizing meetings and more. Throughout my supportive work, I also worked steadily to communicate the interests and concerns of oppressed members of our country, especially women of color who are at the bottom in every measurable way. For this, I have received thanks from the communities and flack from those who would keep us excluded. But, I am still here.

From October 16 until today, I have been organizing a number of activities in preparation for the coming Obama administration. That work to come will include promoting compliance reviews of educational institutions across the country, beginning with California, to reverse the trend of circumstances resulting in the dramatic failure of schools to educate and graduate Black, Latino and other youth of color, which leaves them unemployable, headed for crime and ultimately incarcerated, thus moving US society back to segregation and thereafter to re-enslavement. Many of us will be working on stopping this trend. This column will keep its readers informed on our progress.

Other concerns to be addressed in coming issues will include race, sex and other discrimination (including the intersection of both to which women of color are subjected) in government and religious affiliated institutions. I am currently gathering information. Anyone who has had such experiences is welcome to let me know about it.

In today's discussion, I am responding to increasing concerns being expressed that people of color--those who are progressive, grassroots, working class, victims of discrimination, and advocates/activists for equity and justice--are not being included in Obama's Cabinet nor White House appointments, nor to major Federal agency posts. If true, this would be a gross insult to the millions of us who have worked so long and hard for Obama's election. Without our efforts and votes, Obama had no chance of winning the presidency. Thus, we not only have the right to be included, we have the responsibility to work from the inside to bring about the changes he has talked about and we have supported. We have no reason to wait to be included. We earned our place in his administration. He must make good on his promises to us now, just as he is doing for others. So far, it does not look promising. I hope that we will have some other, more positive indicators within the next few days. We will see.

I am aware that the Obama Transition Team of 7 men and 6 women are at work identifying/vetting individuals for appointment considerations. I do not yet know the associations/affiliations and backgrounds of all of the Transition Team members, though my research has indicated that there are some Ivy League University law school graduates including a couple of Obama's friends and at least 2 relatives of high powered politicians. With these considerations and emails now coming in from other people of color who are questioning whether we will be represented among presidential appointments commensurate with the level of support people of color--especially at the leadership of grassroots/working class levels. To many, this is the first and most important test of the Obama administration. I recall years ago, when Jimmy Carter was elected with much African American support and promises to include us substantively in his administration, but which did not occur. As a result, many who had supported him in his first bid for the presidency, did not support his re-election. I hope that Obama understands that any perception that he betrays people of color, after the massive outpouring of support in record numbers of African Americans but also of Latinos, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans would result in voter disapproval at the next presidential election. Together we made up over a third of those who voted for him. Obama cannot win re-election without us, nor can he govern meaningfully without us.

People of color, including African Americans, did not vote for Obama because he has African/African American heritage. Other African Americans have run for president before Obama and did not get the same level of support. So clearly, people of color vote thoughtfully for the candidate we feel is best for us. Politicians should pay attention this time to more than the details of the election. The mood of the people has changed. We will not accept being excluded from meaningful appointments. We will not nor will we accept token or symbolic appointments of white women who have no record of concern for and support of people of color including women of color. We will not accept men or women of color who have no record of concern for and support of people of color including women of color. We will not accept the appointments of white men who have no record of concern for and support of people of color including women of color. Those appointed should have some record of advocacy and activism for our communities. I have repeated this to make it as clear as possible. We have found our voice and we will be heard.

There are thousands, if not millions, of men and women of color who have as much education and experience--perhaps more with respect to the things affecting us--than the members of the Transition Team and many of those being considered for appointment. We do not deserve to be ignored, overlooked, shut out, or excluded because we are vocal in opposition to racism, sexism, the intersection of racism and sexism which impacts women of color, and all the other issues which keep the power elite in control at the cost of the lives of the rest of us. If there is to be real change, our leaders--those we trust based on their years of effort and sacrifice and because they live and work among us--must be appointed in substantial numbers and to positions of real power or there can be no real change. We will not accept cosmetic changes.

Any politician who does not recognize that the grassroots/working class did not come out in record numbers to vote for Obama because we see him as a celebrity or because we are enthralled by his oratory, is mistaken. We came out because our own leadership determined that this is the time for our action in our own behalf. The flow of power released in this way cannot be turned off at the top. We mean to share in the wealth and power of this country. The best and smoothest transition to such sharing is to have our people among those governing the nation.

Generally, if women are not equitably participating in the coming administration, we can all be sure that women of color will continue to be even more marginalized with only an occasional, symbolic appointment of a woman of color who is unconnected to the grassroots, working class, poor, and disenfranchised. We are paying attention to this.

It is now time to mobilize by learning to quickly research those being considered for appointments and to share that information immediately. Those receiving information have the responsibility to share it quickly and widely and to provide feedback to each other and comments to President Elect Obama and his Transition Team. And we need to express our opinions in massive numbers so that we are heard. Politicians, including Obama, respond to the will of the people when it is strongly expressed in large numbers. This is our job from now on--to speak out, to refuse to be silenced, to say what is true, to communicate what we want and need and to do it immediately.

More than a year ago, I asked Candidate Obama to organize community circles which could discuss issues and communicate their thoughts to him. He did eventually use this method to gather ideas for his platform. Now, we must organize our own community circles and find ways to communicate with other such circles. We cannot wait for someone to organize us and to tell us what to do. We are the leaders of our


communities. We are not only the ones we have been waiting for, we are also those who have suffered and survived and met challenges and overcome horrific experiences which have drained our resources and our lives. If we wish to be rescued from this, we must organize our own rescue efforts. We elected Obama. We have power and can do more. As we do more, he will do more too. As he has commented many times, the power to govern comes from the bottom up.


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**The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog**

**BlackCommentator.com** Guest Commentator Suzanne Brooks is the founder and CEO of International Association for [Women of Color Day](#) and CEO of Justice 4 All Includes Women of Color. Click [here](#) to contact Ms. Brooks.

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