

**The
BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

April 30, 2009 - Issue 322

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

Cover Story
Grading President Obama
African American Leadership
By Dr. Ron Walters, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

This is the season for giving President Barack Obama his 100 day grade and in my participation in a number of these events, I concluded that he has earned somewhere between an "A-" and a "B+", more the latter. My reasoning is two fold: while he has done a great deal for the nation, from which blacks also benefit, he has done little so far to directly target the persistent problems faced by the black community.

The comparison to the performance of President Obama is often made to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who also inherited an economic crisis and who sponsored 15 major pieces of legislation in an attempt to fix it. Barack Obama has to some extent matched that record by the gravity of his decisions. For example, Roosevelt had not inherited a war, but Obama made the decision as his first act of business, to inform the nation that he was changing course and establishing a timetable for American withdrawal from Iraq. In his era, Roosevelt had nothing like the financial behemoths that roam the landscape of American capitalism today and so, Obama's treatment of the banks, the financial institutions and the auto industry must be seen as comparable to Roosevelt's regulation of the banking industry.

Where there seems to be more comparability is in the social sector where both men created programs to get America working again. Obama crafted a \$787 billion Stimulus Package and a \$49 billion small business assistance package. Roosevelt did not have the equivalent of the home foreclosure crisis, but Obama enacted a \$79 billion home stabilization package. This performance was, therefore, not only breath-taking in its scope, but unprecedented in its historical importance in attempting to turn the country around.

On the other hand, I don't see the Obama administration giving much special attention to the Black community and even black leaders interviewed admit that his administration has been weak on grass roots economic measures. So, in order to give

Obama an "A" at this point, you would have to come to the conclusion that blacks not only benefit, but benefit as equally as others from the general policies that have been enacted on behalf of the nation. But how is that possible when blacks entered these crises suffering from double the rates of unemployment, triple the rate of incarceration, nearly double the lack of home ownership, and serious gaps with whites in almost every category of life? In this case, the rising tide will not lift all the boats equally.

In order not to grade him down, you would have to come to the conclusion that he could not possibly enact any targeted solutions to the problems faced by blacks and other such populations. Some accept that logic and give him a pass. I'm not ready to do that because I know that - without proposing legislation devoted specifically to blacks -- there are many non-racial ways of targeting public resources so that they effectively reach specific populations. The White House Office on Urban Policy could be such a vehicle, but he has not yet given it the profile or the mandate to do anything. No one has seen its Director, no speeches have been given about its agenda and so, one suspects that is in the offing for some time in the future.

If targeting public policy is not possible, then how do you account for the fact that one of the first acts of President Obama was to include a healthy percentage of women in his cabinet (some are still being confirmed). He then, signed the Lilly Ledbetter act promising equal pay for women, lifted the international gag rule for abortion counseling on American aid programs, followed that up with a White House Council of Women and Girls, and etc. In fact, this is an impressive list of actions devoted to women, who - not incidentally -- constitute 53% of the electorate.


This first 100 days would have been difficult for any President to mark important achievements, but especially when one has inherited the monumental problems faced by this Administration. Moreover, my colleagues believe that it is the second 100 days in which presidents have generally achieved much more. So, one should not despair that the black agenda has not been vigorously addressed as yet, but at the same time, one should not let the honeymoon that President Obama is enjoying among blacks and their leaders extend too far into the future.


[Click here to comment on any article
in this issue or see what others are saying in the](#)
The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member *Dr. Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Center and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park. His latest book is: [The Price of Racial Reconciliation \(The Politics of Race and Ethnicity\)](#) (Rowman and Littlefield). Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Walters.*

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)
Click Here

[Home](#)

Click Here To
CONTRIBUTE TO  NOW

Click Here To
CONTACT 

Your comments are always welcome.

e-Mail re-print notice

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002-2009
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved