

“What Will an Obama Presidency Mean for Black Americans?”

Like most Black Americans, I am pleased that Barack Obama is our new president. He has the acumen to make the most of his tenure. However, I must question whether Americans—especially Black Americans—who made tremendous efforts to ensure his election will receive a commensurate return.

I have inquired about the meaning of an Obama presidency for some time. In the past, the question was hypothetical because Obama had not been elected. Now that he is president-elect, it makes sense to rethink the question and sharpen it.

Given all of the issues that President Obama will face, and being an economist, it is reasonable to focus on economic issues. Given that there are so many economic issues for him to tackle, it is reasonable to focus on two questions.

We should assess President Obama’s success based on two narrowly focused statistics: Unemployment and relative household income. In September of 2008, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the Black Unemployment rate was more than twice that of Whites (11.4% versus 5.4%). Similarly, for 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that average (mean) income for Black households constituted 66.3% of White household income (\$46,631 versus \$70,331).

Set this commentary aside and then retrieved in early November 2012. Will Black unemployment be less than twice that of Whites at that time? Over the next four years, will the Black-White income gap close?

These are two basic statistics. If they don’t improve significantly over the next four years, then I think that an Obama presidency should be declared a failure from a Black American perspective.

You might argue that it is enough for a Black man to be elected president, and that his presidency is neither Black nor White. I respond that the American political system is designed to place persons in positions of “power” who can improve one’s well-being. Your vote is valuable, and you should expect benefits as a *quid pro quo*. Whether candidates are Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, etc., they must perform or they risk not being re-elected.

You may also argue that an Obama presidency is a “flood-gate opener” and that we will see the benefits of his presidency in the years ahead. I disagree. Black American obtained immediate positive, although partial, benefits when the Civil Rights and Fair Housing Laws were first passed during the 1960s. Moreover, rest assured that the rest of the country and the world are short-sighted about reaping the benefits of an Obama presidency. Either he gets it right and creates positive change or he will be looking for a new job come January 2012.

I fully agree that we must all do our part to help make an Obama presidency successful. However, we know all too well that a great opportunity often only presents itself once. One either makes the best of the opportunity or spends the rest of history talking shoulda, woulda, coulda.

The Obama presidency is a great opportunity for Black Americans. Let us hope that President Obama helps Black Americans make the best of it.

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