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**Senator Obama and the Constituencies
The African World**

By Bill Fletcher, Jr.

BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor

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It is said that one cannot argue with success, but in this commentary I will challenge that proposition. Despite being the presumptive Democratic Party nominee, there is something about the Obama candidacy that has been nagging at me. A lunch meeting with a woman friend of mine, followed by listening to a commentary by journalist Juan Gonzalez on "Democracy Now!", pointed to the same problem: the Obama campaign is not paying significant attention to certain key constituencies.

Whether it is in respect to women or Latinos, the Obama campaign seems to have conceded the ground, sometimes without a fight. It is not clear whether the campaign strategists believe that Senator Obama should be positioned as the candidate ABOVE all constituencies. Following from this, does the leadership of the campaign believe that special attention to key constituencies is somehow divisive? What ever the source of this approach, it could end up being self-destructive.

While it is true that Senator Obama has constituency 'desks' in his campaign, he seems to have an anemic women's outreach program. His campaign, while certainly trying to reach women, conceded the issues facing women to the Clinton campaign. This was a serious mistake. The fact that Senator Clinton is a woman should not have meant that a woman's voice was absent from the leadership and message of the Obama campaign.

Much the same could be said about Latino constituencies. Chicanos and new Latino citizens seemed to have been conceded to New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson prior to his withdrawal from the race. Later, in the June Puerto Rican primary, the Obama campaign did not attempt to match the Clinton outreach despite the concerns repeatedly raised about Latino voters (generally) not knowing Senator Obama or necessarily feeling comfortable with him.

While Senator Obama came out on top of the primary races, there is a long distance and a relatively short time-period until we reach the goal-post on November. Nothing and no constituency can be taken for granted. Among other things, this should mean:

- The Obama campaign should contain the voices of the diverse constituencies in the USA.
- These constituencies should be able to see and hear themselves in the Obama campaign (and its leadership).
- The campaign must make better use of 'surrogates', or representatives from various constituencies to help with outreach and bridge-building.

Any notion that Senator Obama can be all things to all people should be abandoned. This should especially mean that the campaign jettisons any idea that by not speaking to or acknowledging the issues of specific constituencies that it is somehow being a unifying force. Nothing could be further from the truth.

One thing the Obama campaign must keep in mind is actually quite simple: there are a lot of people in the USA who want a reason to NOT vote for a Black candidate. By ignoring the issues of various constituencies, he may provide the reason. By the same token, there are also millions of voters who wish to vote for Senator Obama because they want dramatic change. Ignoring constituencies is a time-honored method of saying, "...you don't count..."


Senator Obama and his campaign have an important set of decisions to make. They can believe that there will be something approaching a spontaneous unification of the Democratic Party electorate because of the threat posed by the candidacy of John McCain. Such a belief would be naïve. In the alternative they can ensure that the campaign strengthens its bases in the diverse constituencies that are needed to win in November and guarantee genuine inclusiveness rather than feel-good-ness. The choice ultimately rests with Senator Obama, but in either case, that choice must be made quickly. Time is no ally in this race.


BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of the **just released** book, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized](#)

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