

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

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December 18 , 2008 - Issue 304

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Cover Story

The Time for a Revolution African American Leadership

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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BlackCommentator.com welcomes Professor Ron Walters as a columnist and a member of the Editorial Board. Dr. Walter's "African American Leadership" column will appear on a regular basis.

It struck me while analyzing the current victory of Barack Obama that the last time there had been such a formidable Democratic landslide was in 1964 and the election of Lyndon Johnson made possible the mandate he used to create the Great Society. At that time, the racial progress of blacks was at the center of the '64 election, but today the fears and anxiety of Americans for their own economic viability drove the 2008 election. Given the difference, the great question that blacks must face now is whether they yield their own needs for change entirely, in light of the fact that they have been the most damaged recipients of both the inhumane policies of the past 30 years of conservative government and have doubly suffered disproportionately in the current economic crisis.

The answer to that question may be that in binding up the wounds of the nation, the Obama administration should be demanded to consider the truth of the previous statement and find a way to attend to the black community simultaneously. Blacks may benefit from ratcheting down spending for the war in Iraq, or from universal health care, or creating jobs from the stimulus package. But while it may be obvious that they are conjoined, many analysts also feel that although occasionally strong patterns of general economic growth have lifted blacks too, they have not lifted them sufficiently to overcome the inequalities that persist without targeted policies.

In the last 30 years, legislators have pulled back from policies that favored disadvantaged adults, leaving them to the vagaries of the demand and supply of Capitalism. They have also eliminated policies that appeared to favor racial or ethnic groups of color, viewing that as "preferential treatment." Yet, there were few blacks who have profited from the from tax cuts or no-bid contracts; instead they fought the wars, filled the jails and survived on their "personal responsibility."

I believe that a revolutionary approach to the current crises is absolutely necessary, since what has happened to America is not just the fault of a few bad decisions, but a structural crisis, produced by a way of thinking about privilege and the use of power. Events rom Katrina to the present, have uncovered the inability of government institutions to address the needs of people because they were not fundamentally structured for that purpose, but to serve powerful interests.

Bayard Rustin, an associate of Dr. Martin Luther Kings, Jr., said in a 1965 *Commentary* article that the movement from protest to politics could affect American institutions. Rustin felt that the participation of Civil Rights leaders in the 1964 election proved their capacity to promote such a project to launch a new revolution that would transform American institutions that served human needs.

By 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was convinced that political and moral corruption had led to the Vietnam War and what was needed to restore American morality was "a true revolution of values." In his speech, "A Time To Break Silence," he said that this kind of revolution would "look uneasily" and say "this is not just," to the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth," to capitalists who invest but care little for the people whose profits they take out, to Western arrogance which has everything to teach people and nothing to learn, to people who believe that war is the only way settling human differences, to those who inject the poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of normally humane people.

With a strong election mandate, an equally strengthened political party in government, the wealth of the resources from his campaign, his positive personal appeal in the U. S. and around the world and the abilities of those around him, Obama is in an important posture for historically significant change. His approach has been not just been focused on immediate fixes, but to embed in them the seeds of long-term change as well. Furthermore, the depth, severity and comprehensive nature of these crises should lead any logical observer to conclude that they cannot be fixed by merely returning to business as usual, Obama must go beyond that, he must affect a "true revolution of values" that affects the structure and mission of American governmental institutions.

If this project is done right – and if it includes and is sensitive to -- the relevant leadership of those communities who have the most to gain from a new American revolution, then perhaps many of the problems that African American people face could be addressed.

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[Ethnicity](#)) (Rowman and Littlefield). Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Walters

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