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Cover Story Obama & Me: An African American Activist's Search for Clarity By Ajamu Baraka BC Guest Commentator

As an African American, I have been confused, frustrated, enraged and mystified by what is now referred to as the "Obama phenomenon" among African Americans. And while this phenomenon is complex, I am only going to comment on one aspect of the phenomenon - the almost irrational defense of President Obama by significant majorities in the African American community.

With the election of Barak Obama in 2008, African Americans and progressives in the U.S. and throughout the world celebrated what appeared to be the beginning of a new era in the U.S. and a possible change in how the U.S. relates to the world. So the pride felt by many African Americans with the election of the first "Black" President was understandable. And with the rise of the Tea Party and the clearly racist treatment he was receiving, it was also understandable that most African Americans would want to protect this president.

But what is not understandable, at least not in rational terms, is the complete lack of critical discussion and/or analysis in the African American community of the Obama administrations' policies. For example, as African Americans approach the next election and have an opportunity to reflect on the administration and the impact of its policies on the health and prospects for the development of African American communities, one would assume there would be serious discussions taking place in our communities where we would examine the administrations' past policies and formulate new demands that represent our community's concerns and positions in order for the

administration to receive our votes. But that is not happening. Even though our communities are facing an economic calamity unlike anything experienced since the depression era of the 1930s, not only are those discussions nowhere to be found, but to even suggest the need for a conversation like that is usually met with hostility.

This is the most disturbing aspect of the Obama phenomenon. This strange and dangerous disconnection between what is really happening in our communities - unemployment more than double the national average, capital disinvestment, record foreclosures, collapsing housing stock for the poor, dwindling government services, abusive police and a racist judicial system responsible for locking up more than a million African Americans - and our unwillingness to acknowledge the crisis that we face!

The only explanation is that, for many in our communities, to acknowledge the crisis would also require acknowledgement that we have not received much relief in the form of general or specifically tailored policies from the Obama administration. And many of our people are reluctant to do that because it might play into the hands of Obama's enemies, so it is claimed. Instead, convenient explanations are offered by African American politicians and opinion leaders regarding how hard it is for Obama to pass legislation with the opposition he receives from the Republicans, while we pretend not to notice the administration pushing through legislation that benefit the banks and corporations and signing executive orders to expand and protect the rights of almost every constituency group out there but us.

I know that the majority of African Americans are going to give the Obama administration and the Democrats their votes, partly in response to the very real threat of the radical right represented by the candidacy of Gov. Romney, partly because of the "lesser-of-two-evils" argument and partly out of habit. But at least before that great day in November when the vote is tabulated, I hope that across this country African Americans along with our allies and friends would sit down together and discuss in rational terms just what we are getting for our votes from the Obama administration.

But specifically for those of us in the African American community, I also hope that, when we finally get past the Obama phenomenon and come back to our senses, one of the lessons learned is that we cannot put our faith or future in the hands of any one person or party - that we finally understand that it is only through our own efforts that we

define and defend our rights, build our future and create a better world.

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