

Was the Obama Election Good for Black People

Written by Davey D ID4577

Wednesday, 17 December 2008 05:42 -

This past Sunday over 1200 people showed up at Salem Methodist church in Harlem to listen and weigh in on a discussion that has been raging on in our communities but oftentimes swept under the rug. The historic election of Barack Obama has been a source of pride for many. Record numbers of Black people came out and voted for him. His largest percentage, a whooping 94% of Black folks punched his name in the ballot booth. However, many did so wondering if an Obama election will lead to pressing issues within the African American community would be addressed, or if his election would symbolize to those outside the community that racism was a thing of the past?

One of the nagging concerns that surfaced during Obama's historic run was him distancing himself from anything Black. He stayed away from key events ranging from Tavis Smiley's annual State of the Union where rival Hillary Clinton showed up to the 40th commemoration ceremonies in Memphis, Tn for the death of Dr Martin Luther King. His republican rival John McCain showed up for that event.

There were always grumbings that Obama was distancing himself from the Black community to appease skittish white voters who lived in the middle of the country who oftentimes made no bones about their reluctance to vote for a Black man. many of us held our tongues and rationalized that Obama "had to play the game" and "do what was needed to get elected.

Rap star David Banner explained it best when he suggested that we give Obama a chance and stop asking all these brilliant questions that we never asked white candidates who we often seem to give unconditional support. Let Obama get in the white house first and then push for him to address our issues.

Banner's remarks were supported by scholars like Dr Michael Eric Dyson who often talked about Obama giving Black folks a proverbial wink as he campaigned. Dyson told us that Obama understood our concerns but had to roll a certain way to get elected. He was catching unprecedented hell including several thwarted assassination attempts by racist whites. With all that pressure the least we as Black folks could do was keep our mouths shut and help clear the way for an Obama victory which at the end of the day would be ours.

Lastly the argument was put forth by many that we better go for Obama if for any reason to avoid a 3rd Bush-like term in the form of a reactionary figure like John McCain who at one point

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staunchly refused to vote for a Dr Martin Luther King Holiday. After a disastrous 8 years of Bush that harshly impacted the Black community to not vote for Obama was seen as treasonous.

While a substantial amount of Black folks heeded the suggestions of Banner, Dyson and other supporters there were others like Glen Ford of the Black Agenda Report who boldly made the case that Obama should not get a pass and his actions and words whether he was running for office or in office should be called into question if they weren't in alignment with issues that the community was talking about. The Black Agenda Report spent much of the campaign season questioning Obama's affiliations and key players who worked for him behind the scenes. They questioned his policy decisions and expressed concern early on that Obama was running too far to the right. Ford and his partner Bruce Dixon often noted that if we don't hold Obama or anyone's feet to the fire they will take us for granted and never come to our arena because we put no demands on him. In recent weeks Ford and Dixon have raised concerns about Obama's cabinet appointments, noting that many of them have had shady and antagonistic records when it comes to dealing with Black issues.

So with all this in mind, the stage was set for the Great Harlem Debate. Some thought that such a discussion was premature because Obama hasn't been sworn in yet, while others felt it was reactionary not realizing that many of the participants have debated each other throughout the campaign. Now was just as good as anytime to have this discussion. Obama is the President of the United States and not the President of Black America. Hence it would be up to the community to define and articulate their concerns just as they would to any other person sitting in the Oval Office. To not do so would be fool hardy.

This past Sunday attendees heard compelling remarks from great scholars and community leaders. Each speaker was given 8 minutes to make their case. Here's some highlights on how it unfolded.

Dr Leonard Jeffries kicked things off by talking about what an Obama victory symbolized. He said that he did not expect Obama to fundamentally change things or to take up causes like Reparations. He noted that it was up to him and our community to raise those issues. He said it was up to the community to put forth a Pan African Agenda not Obama. He said we can't be blinded by our ideologies so much so that we refuse to accept and be apart of the change that is occurring. He talked about how having a Black family in the White House spoke volumes to many who felt left out as well as people all over the world. He said Obama's image gets to replace the image of 50 Cent. Jeffries talked about the excitement that people in other countries like Germany had with Obama being in the White House. He also raised eyebrows when he said that Obama is the start of capitalism collapsing. He said Wall Street could be replaced

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with Afrika Street.

Cultural Scientist and author Dr Marimba Ani followed Jeffries and reminded folks the reason why so many had gathered that Sunday afternoon. It wasn't just to talk about Obama but also to bring attention and raise money about political prisoners. The Great Harlem debate in particular was to raise money for Mutulu Shakur-many of you know him as Tupac's stepfather. She wanted to make sure we did not lose sight of that because the plight of PP was not one that Obama has raised or was likely to unless pressured.

Dr Ani said that Obama has ignored Black people and that the power elite along with its media has sold Obama to the masses. She said he was controlled behind the scenes and basically chosen to represent interests that are outside the community. She also noted that many of us were not on the same page in terms of what their expectations and goals were. She said that as Pan Africanist and Nationalist those goals had not been clearly laid out and until they were it would be difficult to determine whether or not an Obama election was good for Black people.

She spoke at length about a racial identity and how Obama's victory has brought about a post racial climate. She talked in detail about the type of negative impact that is and will have on Black people who are increasingly being told that racism no longer exists. She also talked about how there are now all these articles and pundits who have been speaking out in recent weeks insisting that Obama is not Black as if to take away from the significance of his victory and also to further keep him disconnected from us.

She concluded her remarks to by reading an excerpt from a letter that Obama had penned in response to Kenyan officials who reached out asking for help. The letter talked about that help would be forthcoming if Kenya's foreign policy was in line with that of the US. The letter noted that the US would need to set up a base in that country to set up their Africom headquarters. You could tell by the crowds reaction that people were shocked to hear that.

Malik Zulu Shabazz who heads up the New Black panther Party spoke about the type of uplifting impact Obama rise to the presidency has had with the gang members he has been working with. he talked about the Crips in LA and the Bloods in Brooklyn expressing pride in seeing Obama run and win. He talked about how many felt inspired to do better for themselves. He also questioned why we would want to rain on the parade of those elders and other community members who saw this as a great accomplishment. He asked those opposed to Obama if we had rather had John McCain in the white house?

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New York City Councilman Charles Barron followed Shabazz and talked about the type of momentum an Obama win had given to those determined to make a difference on a local level. He said he and others in his East New York neighborhood took advantage of the excitement Obama brought to electoral politics and got key people into office including his wife who is now in the state assembly. He talked about the importance of us having community control from top to bottom and that Obama's run set the tone for us to make this happen all over.

Glen Ford followed Barron. The pair have debated Obama on a couple of occasions in the past. He wasted no time in laying out a compelling case against the President elect by talking about how our blind support of Obama has allowed him to run to the right and stay there. Ford underscored his remarks by talking in detail the concerns raised behind Obama's cabinet picks.

He talked about Robert Gates who he described as a war monger and a war criminal who was linked to Iran Contra scandal and the mining of harbors in Nicaragua.

Ford laid out arguments against cabinet pick Susan Rice who he said was aligned with George Bush in her support of the war we have with Somalia. He talked about Obama's chief of staff Ram Emmanuel and how his staunch zionist connections should be cause for concern. Ford also talked about Obama's economic team and how many of were on board the ship that has gotten us in the economic mess we are in now.

Ford concluded by reminding us that Obama's victory means he has power. He is in a position to set the agenda and make sound decisions that will keep the interests of those who are often taken for granted and adversely affected by policy decisions.

Those are just a few of the many highlights. We broke this Breakdown FM into two parts. In part two we hear engaging remarks from people like Viola Plummer of the December 12th Movement, Dr James Turner, Dr Don Smith, Pam Afrika and Afrika Bambaataa.

On this Breakdown FM show you will hear incredible music talking about the presidential election from artists like Brother Ali, Rebel Diaz, Dead Prez, Common, Zion I, Kev Choice and Afrika Bambaataa.

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Big shout out to my radio colleagues, former Green Party presidential candidate Jared Ball of Freemix Radio <http://www.voxunion.com/?p=542> and Andreas Jackson of Media Electic <http://www.andreasjackson.com> for being at the event and documenting the proceedings. Both these gentlemen have the entire 3 hour proceedings unedited on their respective sites. Their recordings and interviews which you are hearing on Breakdown FM are invaluable.

The Great Harlem Debate: Was the Obama Election Good for Black People? by Davey D

Listen to this Debate on Breakdown FM by clicking the link below

<http://odeo.com/episodes/23767113-The-Great-Harlem-Debate-pt1>

<http://odeo.com/episodes/23767115-The-Great-Harlem-Debate-pt2>

featuring remarks from; Dr Leonard Jeffries, Dr Marimba Ani, Malik Zulu Shabazz, Charles Barron, Glen Ford, Dr Don Smith, Viola Plummer, Dr James Turner, Pam Afrika & Afrika Bambaataa, with music from; Brother Ali, Rebel Diaz, Zion I, dead prez, Common, Kev Choice & Afrika Bambaataa.