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National News

What will second Obama term mean for Blacks?

By [Starla Muhammad](#)

(FinalCall.com) - Now what? That is the question Black folks, the majority of whom have shown unwavering support for President Barack Obama are asking, now that he has been re-elected to serve another four years in the Oval Office.

It is the same community that was hesitant to publicly criticize the country's first Black president. The fear was in part, due to the blatant disrespect and racially tinged rhetoric hurled relentlessly at President Obama by those seething with utter contempt at seeing a Black face as Commander-in-Chief. The sentiment was that he did not need his own people also criticizing him, whether it was justified or not.

In 2008 as over 95 percent of Blacks voted for Mr. Obama, the almost immediate refrain became, "just wait until he wins a second term, then he will be in a better position to address Black issues."

This year's election also saw overwhelming support from Blacks, who were a key voting bloc in helping the president win battleground states like Ohio.

For a community that continues to suffer a double digit unemployment rate of 14.3 percent according to the Bureau of Labor statistics, a seemingly insurmountable wealth gap and disproportionate incarceration and poverty rates, supporters and critics want to know, will President Obama address the Black community's concerns? And perhaps more importantly, what should Black leadership and organizations demand in his second term?

"Well whatever you ask him, he's not going to give unless he wants to give it. There's no

recourse on him now,” Harry C. Alford, president and CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce told *The Final Call*.

A lot is going to have to do with the House of Representatives, the Senate and the White House and whether they can “get along” said Mr. Alford who did not sound optimistic.

“I don’t see any proof of that happening. It will be great if they do, we could get a lot done,” he added. But, if legislation does not get funded, “it doesn’t go anywhere,” said the longtime businessman.

“We are going in circles right now. So I think it’s going to be status quo, a lot of arguing a lot of finger pointing and what African-Americans should do is think about doing things for self as Elijah Muhammad taught us years ago and chalk our progress to what we do in terms of doing business with each other, communicating and strategizing with each other,” said Mr. Alford, referring to the Economic Program of the Nation of Islam patriarch.

“I don’t think there’s going to be many positive answers coming out of Washington, D.C.,” he added.

Founded in 1993 by Mr. Alford and his wife Kay DeBow-Alford, who serves as executive vice president, the National Black Chamber of Commerce has nearly 200 chapters in the U.S. and abroad.

When asked what President Obama could do to specifically help Black-owned businesses which grew to 1.9 million, a nearly 61 percent increase in 2007 but still lag behind in gross receipts and percentage of contracts Mr. Alford was very blunt.

“All he has to do is tell the department of HUD (Housing and Urban Development), the Department of Defense, his Cabinet people, ‘Make things better and it better start getting better now!’ ”

Under the direction of a prior presidential administration, the HUD secretary had success part of which was an increase in contract procurements from six to 20 percent for Black businesses, according to Mr. Alford.

Dr. Julianne Malveaux, noted economist and president emeritus of Bennett College for Women, a few days prior to the Nov. 6 election commented via Twitter that although the 171,000 new jobs created in October were encouraging, Black unemployment must be dealt with after the election.

“Black male unemployment down slightly, from 14.2 to 14.1 percent; black female employment up from 10.9 to 12.4 percent. Work to do!” commented Dr. Malveaux.

She added, “5 million people have been unemployed for half a year or more. A memo to the US Congress. Pass the American Jobs Act!!!”

With a Republican-controlled House and Democratic-controlled Senate, moving forward on legislation will be a challenge. It was also a problem in the second half of President Obama’s first term, according to Hilary O. Shelton, senior vice president for advocacy for the NAACP.

Mr. Shelton told *The Final Call* during the president’s first two years in office, issues important to the Black community were addressed via key policy decisions including the expansion of hate crimes legislation and the signing of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) bill that added four million children to the health care roll. Thirty percent of the children added were Black, said Mr. Shelton. President Obama signed the bill in February 2009.

“Passing a major revision in our healthcare system that added 32 million Americans to the healthcare roll, almost 17 million of those are African-American. Indeed it’s going in the right direction. The challenges, concerns, the agenda of the African-American community are front and center in the policy initiatives we’ve seen move forward,” said Mr. Shelton.

However there is much more that has to be done in the second term, he added, citing job creation, economic development, education and support for small businesses.

The day after the Nov. 6 election, it was reported that leaders of several Latino and immigrants' rights organizations on a conference call with reporters said President Obama owes his second term to Latinos.

Over 70 percent of Latinos voted for President Obama and they made it clear they would be pressing him even harder on immigration reform. While there are still those in the Black community debating whether or not President Obama "owes" anything to the millions of Blacks that voted for him, there is no such debate among Latinos.

"Black people have always wanted justice. We work on our own dignity. We want fairness. We want focus on poverty, we want focus on the new Jim Crow, the prison industrial complex and we want high quality jobs across the board," said Dr. Cornel West who along with Tavis Smiley was lambasted by many in the Black community when they challenged what they saw as the president's lack of speaking out and addressing these issues.

"If we vote 95 percent for our dear brother Barack Obama and our Brown brothers and sisters vote 71 percent then it ought to say something," added Dr. West.

Both men were recently in Chicago along with Amy Goodman of Democracy Now! for a post-election analysis event, "Poverty, Power, & The Public Airwaves," at Northwestern University Law School and answered questions posed to them by *The Final Call*.

"Latinos get on the phone the day after telling the president what they expect of him. Black folks four years later still haven't gotten around to making demands of the president and that's the difference between us and them," said Mr. Smiley.

When asked if Black people are happy with the symbolism rather than the substance of Mr. Obama's presidency, Mr. Smiley said yes.

"I think Dr. West and I both believe that symbolism matters but you've got to get around

eventually to the substance and too many Black leaders were silenced and sidelined in this first term and so I'm hoping that Black leaders and Black people find some freedom, find some liberation, find some courage to understand that if you give, you have a right to ask to receive;" said Mr. Smiley whose radio program with Dr. West entitled "Smiley & West" was recently picked up by two Chicago affiliates WCPT Chicago's Progressive Talk and Black-owned 1690 WVON.

Minister Louis Farrakhan often points out politics without economics is symbol without substance. The Minister has said elected officials should be held accountable by the people they serve and both have a role; Black people should not depend on politicians and the government to solve the myriad of challenges facing the community. The Muslim leader has often challenged Mr. Obama to use his "bully pulpit" in a way to help those that are less fortunate.

The man he represents, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, said in his nearly 50-year-old groundbreaking book, "Message to the Black Man in America" that for a people who have given all they had to help establish the independence for Whites in the U.S. whoever serves as America's president "should do something" to aid and protect the "so-called Negro."

This can be done by making Black people independent and not dependent and by putting an end to abuses like police brutality, Mr. Muhammad explained.

"The government can help the so-called Negro in many ways. I do not say the government should take us and set us down and make us lazy so we will not want to work for ourselves. I do not condone that sort of thing. No, help us to get a chance of doing something for ourselves. We are no more a people who can be classified as a necessary people for use only as servants. We are too many. We are 22 million people; no nation needs that many just for servants," wrote Mr. Muhammad.

Today, Blacks number 42 million in the U.S., 13.6 percent of the total population but the practical solutions laid out by Mr. Muhammad; remain applicable now as much as they did then.

The question remains, will Black people work together collectively to push President Obama, Congress and others in leadership to pass and enact policies that address the critical needs of

a suffering community, or will disappointment still reign supreme four years from now and beyond?

Mr. Shelton noted the struggle getting bills passed after the 2010 mid-term elections which saw the Republicans win the majority in the House of Representatives which they still control.

“Some things are within the purview of the executive power of the president. Most of the big issues that we are concerned about are not. They require major resource infusion and only the Congress can authorize and then appropriate those monies to pay for those kinds of things,” he said.

It will take work of the NAACP, National Urban League and other organizations and individuals working together within the political system, to move issues forward to be voted on and signed into law Mr. Shelton added.

“My fear is that this president will have served for eight years and that the numbers may, underline the word may, the numbers may indicate that in every category of importance, economic category, Black people lost ground,” said Mr. Smiley.

“If we look up four years from now after eight years of the Obama presidency and the numbers indicate Black people lost ground in the Obama era because we didn’t have what it took to demand something, that’s going to be a rough conversation four years from now, so I’m hoping that’s not the case,” he added.