

## OUR VOICE Out with Old

Back in 2005, when Barack Obama was just a senator — he'd announce his campaign for the presidency in 2007—there was a distinct paradigm shift in the Black power, political and otherwise. Obama wasn't yet the poster child for this type of Black political specimen; he was simply one among a growing number of them. People like Tenn. Rep. Harold Ford and Newark, N.J. Mayor Corey Booker; or, in the most recent years, Washington, D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty and Mass. Gov. Deval Patrick.

This new breed of Black politician came equipped with unassailable pedigrees, having done one, some, or all of these things: obtained top-notch educations; worked in corporate America; apprenticed under veteran lawmakers (African-American and otherwise); been schooled in the nuances of politics, networking and deal-making. They also brought with them a healthy reverence for the past, for the battles fought, tears cried, blood shed, rights violated and indignities endured by Blacks and Black politicians of the Civil Rights Era. They credit their rise to being able to stand on the shoulders of their ancestors.

This new breed of Black politician is able to appeal to not only Blacks, but a cross-section of voters of all races, ethnicities, backgrounds and income brackets. They're sensitive to the issues facing African-Americans, but not so Afrocentric in their focus that they discount broader social issues affecting all Americans.

A 2005 article on Salon.com notes the transition: "Black politics is maturing beyond the language of grievance and adopting an increasingly middle-class, entrepreneurial character. Between 1997 and 2002, the number of Black-owned businesses grew by a staggering 45 percent. More and more Black professionals are buying homes in outlying suburbs relatively free from gang violence and urban blight. As they build middle-class lives, African-Americans are adopting middle-class values: an intolerance of corruption and an expectation of accountability from their political leaders. Having outgrown identity politics, they are forcing Black leaders to run on their own merits in racially diverse districts."

"Throughout the country, they are demanding not just representative diversity, but better government. Nowhere is this more evident than in last month's re-election of New York's Republican mayor, Michael Bloomberg, who received half the Black vote and 30 percent of the Latino vote, despite challenger Fernando Ferrer's deliberate campaign as a Latino candidate. In the election's aftermath, reported *The New York Times*, national Democratic Party leaders said they 'needed to shun the racial and ethnic politicking of the past.'"

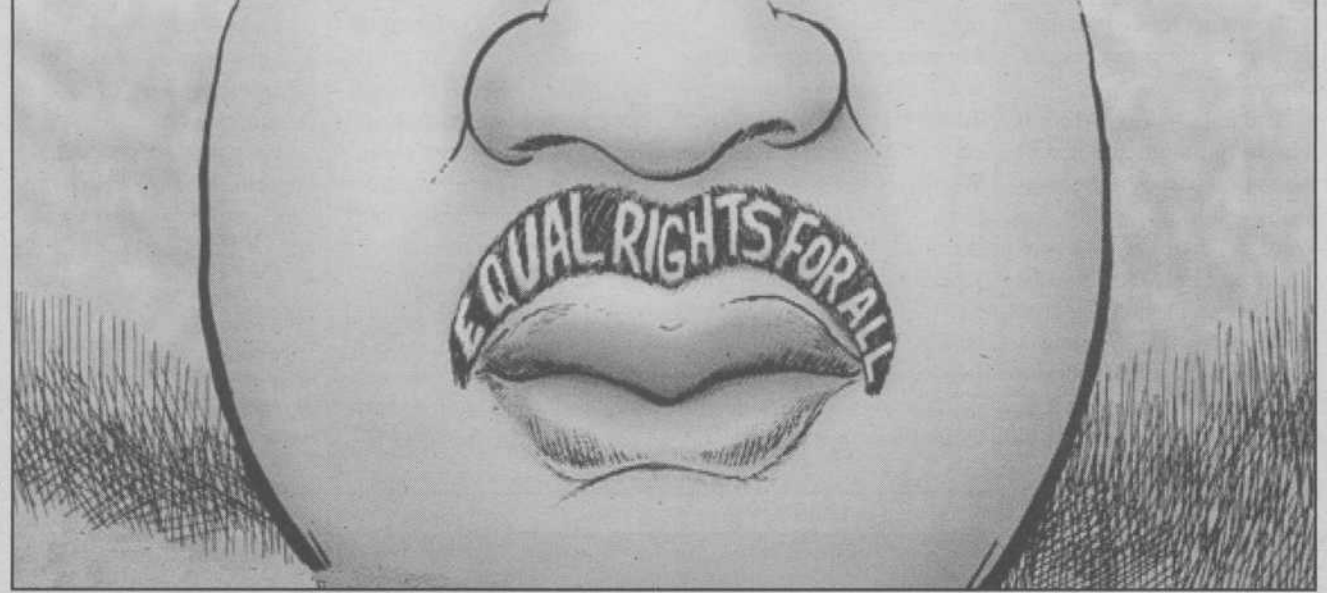
Nearly four years later, that column's salient point still resonates. The problem is that, as time has gone by, we haven't seen a corresponding number of this new breed of Black politician. Nor have we seen a large influx of new (read: young) folks thrust into the leadership positions of our most venerable organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or the National Urban League. Too often the voices of young, potential leaders are silenced or muffled by an old leadership guard eager to retain power and unconvinced that younger leaders are willing and able.

Perhaps it's time for a youth movement in all of the institutions so sacred to Black America. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from Obama's historic success, from Patrick's election in Massachusetts (no small feat), from Steven Horsford's ascension to Nevada's Senate Majority Leader (the first African-American to hold that title). Perhaps it's time for civil rights organizations and churches and nonprofits and businesses to take notes from these young politicians. Perhaps it's time to create a pipeline of potential leaders so that 25 years from now we're not lamenting Obama's presidency as a historical blip.

In many respects, creating this pipeline of talent would honor the memory of Dr. Martin Luther Jr., whose birthday we'll commemorate this month with a parade downtown. If we do what we're capable of doing, the next generation of Black leaders will bring us markedly closer towards King's dream of economic and social equality.

This Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Ask Yourself—

# GOT MLK?



## Obama days away from history

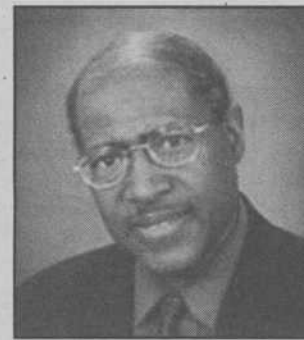
By Ron Walters  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Even after a long campaign in which we have analyzed every twist and turn of the road together, what I have just written as the title to this piece has the clear and unmitigated ring of unreality, if one has been Black in America as long as I have.

Writing some days before the Inauguration, I am sure that I am not alone in the feeling that, as Barack Obama places one hand on the Bible that once belonged to Abraham Lincoln and the other in the air, swearing fidelity to the Constitution of the United States of America, and is declared the 44th President of the United States, it will unleash an unimaginable sense of joy and pride whatever one thinks of our condition in America at that moment.

Yes, we will celebrate, some watching the parade, others attending various balls, and we will not "come down" until it begins to be tempered by the realization that he is indeed inside the White House, in fact, in the Oval Office, and that he is facing a set of crises unprecedented in American history.

That will elicit another feeling, a feeling of anxiety, because literally the weight of this country and much of the world will be upon his shoulders and he and his administration will be faced with the test of executing the kind of judicious solutions that have the capacity to re-



RON WALTERS

solve these problems.

A Black man has never faced such a test in the history of America and although we wish him well, we also know that despite the well wishers, these crises that he inherits will be treated as his shortly and he will be judged and second-guessed at every turn in the road with respect to every proposal.

Presidents normally receive a lot of criticism and advice, but looking at administrations for 40 years now, I have never seen the weight of the advice that is descending upon Obama even before his takes office. Much of this is because of anxiety about the depth and severity of the crises such as the economy, home foreclosure, and the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and etc.

But it seems everyone wants to give Barack Obama advice and while for many, it is their job, for others, their advice smacks of a lack of confidence in a relatively young, inexperienced Black man who has come to occupy the helm of society.

Trying to gauge the reaction of Blacks to Obama's

presidency on radio shows, private conversations and elsewhere, I have detected that some Blacks wince in anger when he is attacked because they identify him with the Black community. Thus, a monumental challenge for us will be to detect when criticisms of Obama are based on credible and legitimate questions of his public policies and those that are leveled against him for who he is. Because of our experience with racism, Blacks often are good at determining when indeed, a criticism has an underlying message that has little relevance to the issue at hand. But some are so good at covering up their criticism that assessing the degree of racism that he will attract as a Black president of the United States, regardless of his attempt to run a race-neutral administration, will be difficult.

So, being trigger happy will not help, but being vigilant is the right posture. I rec-

ommend an attitude of vigilance because of the fact that many of the problems Obama will face have no patent ideological guide and no surefire policy corrective and, thus, there are many times when he and his administration, especially in their attempt to change course, will face uncertain choices and failure is almost certain for some.

So, the success of his presidency will depend as much upon understanding of the difficulty of his challenges, placing expectations of his enormous gifts in some rational perspective, and sorting out racism from real substance.

Given the prospect that he will face a high bar of performance and success probably not expected of any other modern president, it will take all of the 95 percent of the Black community, the 43 percent of Whites and the 70 percent of others who

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NEVADA'S ONLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER  
**LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice**  
GRIOT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.  
THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.  
Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.  
900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104  
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