



Can Black Americans Afford Obama?

My March 2008 column “Is Obama Ready for America?” started out: “Some pundits ask whether America is ready for Obama. The much more important question is whether Obama is ready for America and even more important is whether black people can afford Obama.” Let’s look at this.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson, in signing a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers, broke the color bar in Major League Baseball. In 1950, three blacks broke the color bar in the National Basketball Association (NBA): Earl Lloyd (Washington Capitals), Chuck Cooper (Boston Celtics) and Nat “Sweetwater” Clifton (New York Knicks). Their highly successful performances opened the way for other blacks to follow — peaking at 27 percent in Major League Baseball and 80 percent in the NBA.

Without a question, the first blacks, relative to their white peers, in professional sports were exceptional. There’s no sense of justice that should require that these players be as good as they were in order to get a job. But the fact of business, in order to deal with racial hostility and stereotypes of incompetence, they had to be first rate and possess character beyond question. It was not only important for their careers, it was important for their fellow blacks. At the time the sports color bar was being broken, black people could ill afford stumblebums. Today, black people can afford stumblebums in several sports. In fact, black people can afford for the Philadelphia Sixers to put Williams in their starting lineup. Any person watching me mess up royally would have to be a lunatic to say, “Those blacks can’t play basketball.” The bottom line is that whether we like it or not, whether for good reason or bad reason, whether it’s fair or unfair, people make stereotypes, and stereotypes can have effects.

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In that March 2008 column, I said, “For the nation and for black people, the first black president should be the caliber of a Jackie Robinson and Barack Obama is not. Barack Obama has charisma and charm but in terms of character, values and understanding, he is no Jackie Robinson.” Obama’s electoral success was truly remarkable. It’s a testament to the essential goodness of the American people. A June 6-9, 2008 *NBC News/Wall Street Journal* poll reported “that 17 percent were enthusiastic about Obama being the first African American President, 70 percent were comfortable or indifferent, and 13 percent had reservations or were uncomfortable.”

President Obama, with the assistance of devious House and Senate leadership, has gotten a health care law enacted that the majority of American voters are against. According to a recent Rasmussen poll, 58 percent of voters support repeal of the health care law. Under the president’s leadership, the 2010 budget deficit will reach more than \$1.5 trillion, about 10 percent of gross domestic product, the largest deficit since the end of World War II. We’re not that far behind the troubled nation of Greece, which has a current budget deficit of nearly 13 percent of GDP. Our national debt at \$13 trillion is about 90 percent of GDP and budgeted to grow by \$9 trillion over the next decade. On the diplomatic front, the Obama team is not doing much better, showing every sign of permitting a terrorist nation like Iran to acquire nuclear weapons.

Early indications suggest that the Barack Obama presidency might turn out to be similar to the failed presidency of Jimmy Carter. That’s bad news for the nation but especially bad news for black Americans. No white presidential candidate had to live down the disgraced presidency of Carter but I’m all too fearful that a future black presidential candidate will find himself carrying the heavy baggage of a failed black president. That’s not a problem for white liberals who voted for Obama who received their one-time guilt-relieving dose from voting for a black man to be president, but it is a problem for future



Written by [Denise Behreandt](#) on June 10, 2010

generations of black Americans.

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