

## **On Barack: An Open Letter**

by Spencer Overton

*Many of our folks are into forwarding email, and I just received the following from a couple of independent sources. I've posted the open letter in its entirety.*

**From: Bacardi L. Jackson**

**Sent: Wednesday, March 07, 2007 2:31 PM**

**Subject: On Barack: An Open Letter and Invitation to Thoughtful Brothers and Sisters In America**

As I and my husband sat watching The State of Black America 2007, presented by Tavis Smiley, we were awe struck, motivated, inspired, filled with pride and edified by the broad ranging views of the impressive collection of black intelligencia represented on the stage. Following each of the richly-crafted commentary from rapper Chuck D to astronaut and engineer Mae Jemison to Professor Cornel West to poet Sonya Sanchez to one of my innovative classmates Omar Wasow (just to name a few), I oohhed and ahhhed out loud as each broke it down, laid it out and spoke truth to power.

But then it happened . . . my enthusiasm came to a screeching halt! Here we go again . . . that same gratuitous question mainstream media outlets across America seem to be commissioning ambitious black folk to answer and justify: Is our brother, Barack Obama, down enough with the cause to deserve our support?

I just knew this panel of amazing minds and deep souls would once and for all stop the madness and give a resounding, "we're not falling for another Rove-ian mindtrick to sidetrack us from the substantive issues at hand to debate your historical lies and give credibility to your ignorance." I just knew this conscientious crew would cite to Obama's academic excellence and obvious intelligence, his outstanding achievements, his proven commitment to our community through his life's work, his impressive legislative record, his coalition-building skills and political experience. But instead, Malcolm's proverbial crabs started grabbing, pulling, pinching and reaching for dear brother Barack's neck. I was mortified.

Seeming to come to his aid, one of my longtime heroes, Professor Olgetree, pointed out that Barack, Michelle Obama and others of his students had not only been impressive students at Harvard, but had dedicated their lives and careers to public service. But, (damn it), he added, he can't take our vote for granted.

Then, Brother Cornel (whose audio version of Race Matters I listened to so many times I almost committed chapters to memory) chimed in, not to save Brother Barack, but to highlight his absence from the State of Black America panel to be (how dare he) at some other event to boost his Presidential candidacy when he knew about Tavis' event more than a year ago. While Professor West did mention that his questions about the depths of one's love for the people were relevant for

all candidates everywhere, they, unfortunately, were explicitly asked only of Obama.

Finally, our fearless leader and host, Tavis, who, by his own admission, knew Barack before he was "Barack Obama" sealed the tomb. He assured the audience that, the night before, he got a call from an apologetic Barack who was unable to attend, but "really wanted to be here." As if completely cued in by the tone in Brother Tavis' statement, the audience gave a loud and unambiguously sarcastic "Aaawwww." Adding salt to the wound, dear friend Tavis responded, "well, that's what he told me" in that familiar I-know-he-sounds-like -he's-full-of-it-but-I'm-going-to-pretend-to-be-his -brother-anyway delivery.

Now, I don't point out the dynamics of this dialogue to take away from the amazing legacies of Brothers Ogletree, West or Smiley. They've all made important and lasting contributions to our community and will likely continue to do so, but I do question why they, and we as a community, tend to be so uncharitable toward our own, but inexplicably benevolent to others.

For example, how does a white man who signed the deeply disparate crack-cocaine bill into law, introduced a devastating crime bill that further entrenched the prison industrial complex at the expense of black communities and black political power everywhere, oversaw the murder of more people on death row during his presidency than any president in the history of our country, completely dissed and dismissed our sister Lani Guinier, who would have been an amazing Attorney General for our country and for our community, purely for the sake of political expediency, get to be donned the "First Black President"?

Is our loyalty so easily spawned because one acts like a "pimp," plays the saxophone and visits a few pulpits? I am absolutely amazed at the absence of critical black analysis about Clinton's performance in office while Brother Barack has to be hyper-analyzed, criticized and have his thumbnails extricated for DNA samples before we'll believe he's one of "us." There is no other candidate in this or any other Presidential race (save Shirley Chisholm who, in her day, was hung out to dry by the Black Caucus) who has had to work so hard despite an extraordinary track record to show us that he or she is about the business of making the country better for black people and thereby making the country better for all people.

Al Sharpton, you are absolutely right that everyone who looks like "us" is not one of "us" - at least to the extent that you mean not all black people work for what's in the collective best interest of black people (that is, if such a collective interest still exists - which is another discussion altogether) - but when did you become the blackometer? And, why raise a question of loyalty when you have no substantive evidence of disloyalty? Just to hear yourself talk? Because he's getting more press than you? I'm not suggesting for a minute that Obama and every political candidate not be held accountable for their voting records, their political past, or even their personal judgment, but to question Obama's blackness simply because he is black is the ultimate irony and a dumb distraction, for which Republicans and racists everywhere are cheering us on. And, to question Obama's loyalty simply because he didn't make an appearance at this week's forum hosted by the black gatekeeper flavor of the month is sheer idiocy.

I think a more relevant question is what do the black commentators who make the television and

radio appearances to raise and answer the question of Barack's blackness have to gain? It certainly provides them with more face time before the American public and cushions their backsides with a blacker-than-thou throne (even if only in their own minds). I think a more relevant question to our so-called black leaders and academicians is what (other than a supersized ego or potential profits) gets in the way of their unequivocal support of the only person in the race who has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to implementing policies that best serve black people?

To be sure, there may be valid critiques of Obama, but his absence from a forum, his failure to be stereotypically "black" or the fact that he is black are not valid or even useful critiques. So, forgive me for being just a bit skeptical of those black politicians (who reside in key states - e.g., Brother Al and South Carolina State Senator Robert Ford) whose primary critiques are that Barack just may not be black enough or, even better, that America's just not ready for a black President, so they can gain the political spoils and spot light press of selling out a brother early and often.

If I had the technological savvy, I would jump off this page with all the passion, hope, rage and volume of Spike Lee's Dap and tell you, brothers and sisters everywhere, please please please WAKE UP!!!!!!!!!!

The best thing Barack can do for us is to win, not show up at yet another black forum simply to prove he's one of us by placating the egos who believe Barack should clear his calendar for their "ultimate black" event! There are plenty of other candidates (and so-called leaders) who warrant our scrutiny and skepticism - not to mention a host of misogynistic lyricists, child molesting musicians, and other unaccountable black-community-made millionaires. Barack, however, has proven with his excellence, his achievements, his commitments, and his life's work that he warrants our support.

Rather than using his credentials and connections to build his personal wealth, Obama chose to pursue careers like providing job training for residents of poor neighborhoods, directing voter registration drives and fighting for civil rights. Unlike other candidates in the race, Obama has been consistent in speaking against sending our black babies to murder, and to be murdered by, brown people in the Mesopotamia for the sake of multinational corporate interests. He has successfully forged coalitions with people across racial and political lines to introduce a host of legislation that would, among other things, get guns off our streets, reduce greenhouse emissions, and limit the influence of special interest lobbyist on Capital Hill.

As for whether Barack's black enough, let us not forget that race exists in America not in our biology, genetic code or even our phenotype, but rather by the institutionalization of the economic and social construct of chattel slavery and its vicious offshoots. Under that regime, "a dab'll do ya." Whiteness equates to economic and social privilege and that privilege fades as it traverses the racial spectrum.

Anyone who has any black ancestry living in this country, whether for a day or for generations, will experience the vestiges of slavery and the consequences of white privilege, making the question of

whether one is descended from enslaved Africans or colonized and oppressed Africans irrelevant. It is not simply the experience of that oppression, however, that demonstrates loyalty to our community and that deserves our community's loyalty, but rather recognition of the injustice of it and actions taken to dismantle it. Clearly, Obama has met this test!

Let the record of each candidate speak for itself. But, for the sake of our ancestors and, more importantly, our descendants, do not inadvertently become a pawn of white privilege by demanding that Obama's record be scrutinized more closely and meet a higher standard than his white counterparts simply because some narcissistic crab in a barrel didn't find himself at the top.

**Sincerely,**

**B.L. Jackson**

**A Sister Who Unequivocally And Without Apology to Hillary, Bill or Al Supports Barack Obama for President And Invites Other Thoughtful Brothers and Sisters To Do the Same**