

RELEASE IN PART B6

**From:** Cheryl Mills <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Sunday, December 6, 2009 9:39 PM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** Fwd: Charles Blow in NYT today

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December 5, 2009  
Op-Ed Columnist

## Black in the Age of Obama

By CHARLES M. BLOW

A hundred and fifty years ago, Charles Dickens opened “A Tale of Two Cities” with the now-famous phrase: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. ...”

Those words resonated with me recently while contemplating the impact of the Obama presidency on blacks in America. So far, it’s been mixed. Blacks are living a tale of two Americas — one of the ascension of the first black president with the cultural capital that accrues; the other of a collapsing quality of life and amplified racial tensions, while supporting a president who is loath to even acknowledge their pain, let alone commiserate in it.

Last year, blacks dared to dream anew, envisioning a future in which Obama’s election would be the catalyst for an era of prosperity and more racial harmony. Now that the election’s afterglow has nearly faded, the hysteria of hope is being ground against the hard stone of reality. Things have not gotten better. In many ways, they’ve gotten worse.

The recession, for one, has dealt a particularly punishing and uneven hand to blacks.

A May report from the Pew Research Center found that blacks were the most likely to get higher-priced subprime loans, leading to higher foreclosure rates. In fact, blacks have displaced Hispanics as the group with the lowest homeownership rates.

According to the most recent jobs data, not only is the unemployment rate for blacks nearly twice that of whites, the gap in some important demographics has widened rapidly since Obama took office. The unemployment rate over that time for white college graduates under 24 years old grew by about 20 percent. For their black cohorts, the rate grew by about twice that much.

And a report published last month by the Department of Agriculture found that in 2008, “food insecurity” for American households had risen to record levels, with black children being the most likely to experience that food insecurity.

Things on the racial front are just as bad.

We are now inundated with examples of overt racism on a scale to which we are unaccustomed. Any protester with a racist poster can hijack a news cycle, while a racist image can live forever on the Internet. In fact, racially offensive images of the first couple are so prolific online that Google now runs an apologetic ad with the results of image searches of them.

And it's not all words and images; it's actions as well. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's 2008 hate crimes data released last week, anti-black hate crimes rose 4 percent from 2007, while the combined hate crimes against all other racial categories declined 11 percent. If you look at the two-year trend, which would include Obama's ascension as a candidate, anti-black hate crimes have risen 8 percent, while those against the other racial groups have fallen 19 percent.

This has had a sobering effect on blacks. According to a Nov. 9 report from Gallup, last summer 23 percent of blacks thought that race relations would get a lot better with the election of Obama. Now less than half that percentage says that things have actually gotten a lot better.

The racial animosity that Obama's election has stirred up may have contributed to a rallying effect among blacks. According to a Gallup report published on Nov. 24, Obama's approval rating among whites has dropped to 39 percent, but among blacks it remains above 90 percent.

Also, this hasn't exactly been a good year for black men in the news. Plaxico Burress was locked up for accidentally shooting off a gun in a club. Henry Louis Gates Jr. was locked up for intentionally shooting off his mouth at his own home. And Michael Jackson died after being shot full of propofol. Chris Brown brutally beat Rihanna. Former Representative William Jefferson was convicted. And most recently, the "personal failings" of Tiger Woods portray him as an alley cat. Meanwhile, the most critically acclaimed black movie of the year, "Precious," features a black man who rapes and twice impregnates his own daughter. Rooting for the president feels like a nice counterbalance.

However, the rallying creates a conundrum for blacks: how to air anxiety without further arming Obama's enemies. This dilemma has rendered blacks virtually voiceless on some pressing issues at a time when their voices would have presumably held greater sway.

This means that Obama can get away with doing almost nothing to specifically address issues important to African-Americans and instead focus on the white voters he's losing in droves. This has not gone unnoticed. In the Nov. 9 Gallup poll, the number of blacks who felt that Obama would not go far enough in promoting efforts to aid the black community jumped 60 percent from last summer to now.

The hard truth is that Obama needs white voters more than he needs black ones.

According to my analysis, even if every black person in America had stayed home on Election Day, Obama would still be president. To a large degree, Obama was elected by white people, some of whom were more able to accept him because he consciously portrayed himself as racially ambiguous.

In fact, commiserating with the blacks could prove politically problematic.

In a study to be published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences this month, researchers asked subjects to rate images of the president to determine which ones best represented his "true essence." In some of the photos, his skin had been lightened. In others, it had been darkened. The result? The more people identified him with the "whiter" images, the more likely they were to have voted for him, and vice versa.

The Age of Obama, so far at least, seems less about Obama as a black community game-changer than as a White House gamesman. It's unclear if there will be a positive Obama Effect, but an Obama Backlash is increasingly apparent. Meanwhile, black people are also living a tale of two actions: grin and bear it.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Minyon Moore** [redacted]

Date: Sat, Dec 5, 2009 at 8:42 PM

Subject: Charles Blow in NYT today

To: [redacted]

B6

Read his column today ... "Black in the Age of Obama" ... much to discuss

"This means that Obama can get away with doing almost nothing to specifically address issues important to African-Americans and instead focus on the white voters he's losing in droves."

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/05/opinion/05blow.html?\\_r=1&th&emc=th](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/05/opinion/05blow.html?_r=1&th&emc=th)