

## Will President Barack Obama make a difference for Afro-Latinos?

Contributed by Christopher Rodriguez - Blacktino.net  
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I strongly believe most Afro-Latinos throughout the hemisphere would agree that the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama has already proven to be a symbolic victory for the people of African descent in the Americas.

Candidate Obama has already become an inspiration to a generation of new leadership, which is sprouting throughout the Americas. Obama's book "The Audacity of Hope," sums up the vision of a man who has the audacity to stand before the American people and claim his right to one of the most powerful and influential positions on earth.

His candidacy has implications for the millions of voiceless Afro-Latinos, who will be further emboldened to speak truth to power. Many Afro-Latino communities are at varying stages of development. Countries such as Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Panama, and Peru have relatively vocal grassroots organizations with strong leadership to articulate the concerns of their communities. Unfortunately, most grass roots organizations are either suppressed or lack the organizational infrastructure to mount any successful political campaigns on their own behalf. I believe that once these communities achieve full access to educational opportunities for their youth, they will develop a cadre of new leadership motivated by role models such as, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Barack Obama.

My main concern is that Mr. Obama will be confronted with the same concerns that faced African American Mayors in the 1980's and 1990's. Most big city mayors inherited cities which were nearly bankrupt and were sinking ships with little or no possibility of raising new revenue sources. Mr. Obama is facing a federal government treasury which has been raided by the multinational corporations, who made billions with no-bid contracts during the course of a seven year war in Iraq. Obama will inherit a huge deficit with foreign nations like China, who are buying our debt through government bonds to keep the U.S. economy afloat. The economic fallout of the mortgage crisis has placed the U.S. economy at the precipice of a complete collapse. Ultimately, this may hamper his ability to deliver government programs to address the health, education and employment needs of the American people.

Will the plight of Afro-Latinos reach Mr. Obama's attention while he tries to push his domestic and international agenda within the U.S. Congress? It will ultimately depend on the types of political coalitions Afro-Latinos form with other racial and ethnic groups. Unless Afro-Latinos organize a lobby along the U.S./Israeli Political Action Committees, we will remain in the shadows of the political process. The presence of Obama in the White House will have no meaning unless there are U.S. based organizations, dedicated to educating the power brokers about issues specific to Afro-Latinos in the Americas.

Major issues such as the dislocation of hundreds of thousands of Afro-Columbians, due to U.S. policy on

the War against drugs; denial of basic human rights to Haitians in the Dominican Republic; Mexican refusal to take population census of Afro-Latinos; Expropriation of Garifuna lands in Honduras by developers, have been overshadowed by the war and devastation in the Middle East. What type of Afro-Latino organization can manage the operations of political action committee that will sway the opinions of the White House, and members of Capitol Hill? How will Latin American republics be held accountable through the billions of dollars they receive in foreign aid, to allocate funds to develop projects beneficial to the Afro-Latino community? How can multilateral organizations such as the International Development Bank and the World Bank, increase efforts to direct developmental funds to underdeveloped Afro-Latino communities mired in poverty?

U.S. governmental agencies can develop regulations, which would require these foreign governments to submit plans to provide employment or set-aside programs for the marginalized communities. Strategic appointments of progressive Afro-Latinos to the Department of State and its component agencies, such as the Agency for International Development, are critical to addressing the poverty question of African descendants in the Americas. Afro-Latinos must convince both the Hispanic and Black Congressional Caucus to raise relevant issues relating to the Afro-Latino Diaspora, on the floor of Congress. Afro-Latinos desperately need a permanent presence in Washington DC, to pressure our elected officials and policy makers to create awareness of the fact that the human rights of Afro-Latinos are violated everyday.

An Obama administration can only make a difference if U.S. based Afro-Latino non-governmental organizations, and political action committees, can develop a strategic plan that will provide viable solutions to existing community challenges. Secondly, develop realistic proposals to public and private sources to build the capacity of U.S. based Afro-Latino organizations. Most importantly, provide technical assistance and support to Afro-Latino organizations throughout the Americas, in the areas of education, health, employment, and economic self-sufficiency. The strategic plan must focus on establishing coalitions with existing White, Hispanic and African American national organizations, to create Afro-Latino initiatives within their organizations and avoid program duplication. Funding sources tend to favor working with organizations with long established track records and established financial systems.

U.S. Afro-Latinos can be agents for change if watch dog organizations are developed to make governments, non-profits and private sector corporations accountable to communities, which have been rendered invisible. Afro-Latinos do not have to "re-invent the wheel," but approach national and international organizations to perform the jobs they have been funded to do. Obama cannot personally build the Afro-Latino organizations that need to be established. But if elected, Obama will be in the position to assist Afro-Latinos, bringing attention to a problem which has been long ignored.

Christopher Rodriguez is an activist, author and lecturer and has written a book entitled the Latino Manifesto: A Critique of the Race Debate in the U.S. Latino Community. For more information go to [www.Latinomanifesto.com](http://www.Latinomanifesto.com).

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