

Already Missing the First Black President

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Though the Presidential election is still several months away, many people have already stated that they miss President Obama. Include me among that group. I had always believed that it was pretty much impossible for a Black president to be elected in the U.S. Even many Blacks that thought it could happen one day believed that White supremacy was so widespread throughout the country, that it would just be a matter of time before a Black president would be assassinated.

After Obama was elected the first time, many cynics thought it was just a fluke. However, he was elected a second time and that was certainly no fluke. In the first election, most Black voters were supporting Hilary Clinton and professing to know nothing about Obama. However, White voters assumed the lead and Black voters followed. The election of a Black president was one of the most remarkable feats in the history of U.S. politics, and should make all but the most racist Americans extremely proud.

Obama is the Jackie Robinson of the Presidency. He and his family have had to endure racist abuse from White politicians and ordinary White citizens alike. Many bigots challenged his U.S. citizenship and embraced Islamophobia by trying to claim that he is a Muslim, and therefore un-American. Imagine what it must be like to have your every move scrutinized by those that want you to fail because of your race.

It will no doubt drive bigots crazy to learn that Obama often sounds like Malcolm X in his speeches. Malcolm had a profound impact upon Obama's thinking. Obama said in his autobiography that Malcolm's "repeated acts of self-creation spoke to me." That Malcolm X speaking style obviously helped propel Obama to the Presidency. How deliciously ironic!

Obama has been great for the U.S. and a great role model for the world. Since 1910, U.S. politicians had been talking about reforming the U.S. health care system. But only under Obama was action taken. Despite its shortcomings, Obamacare has provided health care for millions that did not have it.

The first Black President has been especially impressive in the areas of LGBT rights. He was the first president to refer to LGBT people in his speeches. Though he first claimed that he had mixed feelings about same-sex marriage, when the political waters were safe, he made the dive. Today same-sex marriage is legal in the U.S. Moreover, taking the baton from President Bill Clinton's Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy, Obama welcomed LGBT people into the military.

Obama has also been good for religious tolerance. He has consistently spoken out against Islamophobia and recognized Muslims as fellow US citizens. (However, in all due respect and proper recognition, President George W. Bush, despite his mistakes, was also very good in this regard.)

Obama has gone farther than any other president by commemorating Vesak, a Buddhist holiday, on May 20, 2016. He issued a proclamation on behalf of his wife Michelle and himself in "recognition of common humanity – shared values that also bind us all as Americans."

On the flip side, President Obama brought down one of the most notorious religious extremists of the 21st Century, Osama bin Laden. Before bin Laden was killed, Bush said that the greatest failure of his Presidency was that he was not able to get to bin Laden. Yet under Obama's administration, the seemingly impossible task of bringing down bin Laden was accomplished. Most conservatives wrote it off as a minor undertaking, or claimed that Bush's policies made it all possible. However, make no mistake. Had bin Laden been captured under Bush's administration, conservatives would have recognized the event as one of the greatest military excursions in U.S. history. The fact of the matter is that, for someone that Republicans claimed could not keep America safe, Obama has been pretty good at that job.

Obama was also the first president to recognize nonbelievers as fellow citizens. Compare this to George Herbert Bush, who reportedly said that he did not know that atheists could be U.S. citizens, and that the U.S. is supposed to be one nation under God.

The President has been great for good science. At his wonderful commencement address at Rutgers University on May 15, 2016 he said:

Facts, evidence, reason, logic and understanding of science: These are good things. These qualities you want in people making policy....When our leaders express a disdain for facts, when they're not held accountable for repeating falsehoods and just making stuff up, when actual experts are dismissed as elitists, then we've got a problem....In politics and in life, ignorance is not a virtue. It's not cool to not know what you're talking about. That's not keeping it real or telling it like it is....The rejection of facts, the rejection of reason and science – that is the path to decline.

None of this is to say that Obama has been perfect. Many progressives tend to expect a president to do far more than he or she is able to do in a capitalist society. However, as U.S. presidents go, Obama has been one of the greatest in many ways.

I would never be so ignorant, unconscious or historically illiterate as to refer to the President as “my nigga,” as one Black comedian has done. However, I do have to say, my brother, you have done extremely well and made many of us extremely proud.