



WASHINGTON WATCH
WITH ROLAND MARTIN

TRANSCRIPT

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**(SEG-
MENT 1)**

MR. ROLAND MARTIN: From the nation's capital, I'm Roland Martin, and this is "Washington Watch."

Today, the Black agenda in the age of Barack Obama, with news maker guest Benjamin Jealous, president and CEO of the NAACP; and Dr. Ron Walters, the prize-winning historian-author, and one of the nation's top political science professors. Then our "Washington Watch" panel with April Ryan, Washington bureau chief and White House correspondent of American Urban Radio Networks; the "Black Eagle," Joe Madison, talk show host for Sirius XM Radio; Deborah Simmons, citizen journalism editor of *The Washington Times*; and journalist and commentator Stephen A. Smith. Plus, two of the most powerful members of Congress, Representatives John Lewis and Maxine Waters. And "Web Watch" with Smokey Fontaine from NewsOne.com, and "Obama Watch" with Nia-Malika Henderson of Politico.com.

But first, we welcome Dr. Ron Walters and Ben Jealous.

And, Ben, I want to start with you. You're the youngest CEO in the history of the NAACP, and it - it's interesting with the election of this president, people are saying, "Hey, there's no need for Black organizations. There's no need for a Black agenda."

What do you say when you hear that?

MR. BENJAMIN JEALOUS: What changed on January 20th? What really changed was that children's aspirations got higher - right? I mean he wasn't just the first Black president; he's the first president with a funny name. He's the first president with a dad who came in from a different country. So, there's a whole bunch of kids whose aspirations get higher, especially in our communities.

But because we're in the midst of a recession, the families' situations actually have tended to have gotten worse since. And when children's aspirations go up, and the family situation stays the same, the frustration rises. So, the need for us is actually greater at this moment than it was on January 19th, because we have millions of Black families across this country, and millions of families in general, who're saying, you know, "Why does Mom have to work so many jobs?" "Why are [sic] our kids' school an embarrassment to everything that this country claims to stand for, and how will they ever become President if we don't fix those two problems?"

MR. MARTIN: Dr. Walters, I['ve] got to ask you that question. Folks might be shocked to say here, "Whoa. There's a greater need for a Black agenda with a Black president than ever before."

DR. RONALD WALTERS: Well, that's certainly true. I mean the - the Black agenda really is a reflection of the historical subordination of the African-American community, which means that there are differences, pr- -- disproportional differences -

between the way Whites live, the way Blacks live, Native Americans, Asians, Hispanics; so that our agenda comes out of a need to correct those inequities. Those inequities, as Ben knows, are profound today. He talked about them.

Since this report just came out, for example, which said that with the way - the way we're going, by next year, the Black unemployment rate could be 20 percent. The relationship between employment and poverty means that the poverty rate could be pushed up to 31 percent, which means that a third of the African-American community could be in poverty.

Now, that's - that's an alarming thing, but the fact of the matter is - is that it's been happening *all along*, and America conceives of this difference as normal. We then have to say to them, through the carving of a Black agenda, that it is not normal, and our civil rights objective is to finally reach a level of equality in this country.

MR. MARTIN: Let's talk in terms of specifics on that, Ben. One of the issues that you have been focusing on with the NAACP is social justice - the Troy Davis case in terms of being on death row, the number of Black men involved in the criminal justice system. So, how are you reshaping the organization, or reshaping the nation's consciousness to deal with that issue with President Barack Obama in the White House?

MR. JEALOUS: You know, with the NAACP, our focus right now is to - is to ensure that our people are the best local-volunteer

community advocates and community organizers that they can be. So, there's a real focus on - on retraining, a real focus on technology, because we need them to - to be able to fight as aggressively and effectively as possible.

Now, on the issues, I was just over at the Department of Justice. You know, we've got some real basic issues that have to be taken care of very quickly. White people are 65 percent of the crack users in this country. Black people are 85 percent of the people who are busted for using crack. The penalties for crack cocaine are a hundred times stiffer than for powder cocaine. So, we have Black families being torn apart because our government has decided that poor people and then m- -- many Black people, rather than send them to rehab, where we would send a rich person, or a White person for crack cocaine, send him to prison.

MR. MARTIN: But - but we n- --

MR. JEALOUS: Mom goes. You tear up the family. The kids go into foster care. Those issues have to be out front. We can't just talk about -

MR. MARTIN: -- but we've known those - those figures for quite some time. You have folks like Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican from -

MR. JEALOUS: Yeah.

MR. MARTIN: -- South Carolina, who has said we must change this. And so if you have so many people saying we must change this, why

has it not been changed? And how do you then begin to move people, whether they're Black, White, Hispanic, to say, "Let's put the pressure on members of Congress to change this law"?

MR. JEALOUS: So, we've just had the opportunity to change it since Congress has changed. The bill's there. We've been pushing it. We brought in people from 20 key states last spring. We're getting ready to go much more aggressive this fall.

I agree with you. If - if it's not changed - you know, if the bill isn't passed by Thanksgiving, you'll see billboards go up from the NAACP with - [chuckles] - those facts in cities across this country, and we're planning that right now. The - you know, if it's still not passed, you know, we will make it even more visible. We'll get even more aggressive.

Our thing is, "Look. We have the opportunity right now - and it may expire come January of 2012 - right - or, 2011, rather - to make tremendous change, change that we've been waiting for for ten years.

DR. WALTER: Yes.

MR. JEALOUS: I mean you - you look at an issue like the End Racial Profiling Act.

MR. MARTIN: Um-hum?

MR. JEALOUS: You had candidate *Bush*, in '99, saying driving while Black has to - you know, has to end, is a problem in this country. But then September e- -- 11th happened, and President Bush went a hundred eighty degrees on us.

MR. MARTIN: Um-hum.

MR. JEALOUS: Now is the time. We've pushed it. We've let Congress know. The 1- -- 1- -- leadership knows. We have been very polite and patient to this point, but because we know that we're on a clock that expires, you know, at the end of 2010, we will push more and more aggressively, and we're poised to do just that.

MR. MARTIN: I want to come back on that "polite and patience" point, but, Dr. Walters, I want to touch on the issue of voting rights. The Supreme Court ruled this summer, had a narrow-definition ruling on the issue of the Voting Rights Act, Section 5 - 8 to 1 ruling. Clarence Thomas, the only African-American in the Court, frankly, dissented and then said, "We should do away with Section 5."

When people say, "Well, the election of President Barack Obama is clear evidence that there is no need for all of these voting rights laws," is that alarming to you? And are you also saying to African-Americans, "Hey, don't allow the election of a Black president to cause you to say that the Voting Rights or those other issues are not just as important in 2009"?

DR. WALTERS: We need the Voting - [clears throat] - pardon me - the Voting Rights Act. If you go back to the last two election cycles, there was something out there called the "Election Protection Program." The Election Protection Program grew up as a manifestation of the fact that people were being kept from the

polls all across this country - not just Florida and Ohio. And they were not just Black. They were Jewish, and they were Hispanic, and there were others.

There were *thousands* - thousands - of complaints registered in the database of the Election Protection Program, which tells us that there's still a need for the protection of people in this country to have the right to vote. This is not just - just a Black thing. We initiated this, most certainly, but it is something that has helped all Americans enjoy the fruits of democracy.

This Supreme Court decision is going to, if it's expanded by the Supreme Court, allow a lot of states - here they were dealing with a municipal district in Austin, Texas - but it could allow states to bail out from Section 5. And that's erroneous.

Last - well, not last summer, but right after Katrina, you know, you had a mayoral election in Louisiana, and some of the people down there were concerned, because the date for the election was summarily moved. The Justice Department let it be moved. So, some of us went up to the Justice Department to see why this was allowed. This was amazing, to sit across from the assistant attorney general for civil rights and him not say a word.

But after the meeting, there was a memo that came back to Cleo Fields, for example, who had led this delegation with Reverend Jackson.

MR. MARTIN: State official in Louisiana.

DR. WALTERS: That's right.

MR. MARTIN: Former member of Congress.

DR. WALTERS: Absolutely. And they said, "Well, we knew this all the time. We let these changes occur, and then we approved them *after* the fact."

Well, now, that's - that's -

MR. MARTIN: Red -

DR. WALTERS: -- enlightening.

MR. MARTIN: -- red flag also.

DR. WALTERS: Yeah, that's enlightening, because it means that that is the seed for some of these complaints that I was talking about.

MR. MARTIN: Right.

DR. WALTERS: So, we really do need this administration and others to bring in a very strong regime of the protection of our right to vote.

MR. MARTIN: One critical issue that people have talked about that's a part of this Black agenda - some say the top issue - that is education: the funding of public schools. With President Barack Obama, his secretary of education, Arne Duncan, we're seeing the expansion of charter schools; and we're also seeing Republicans who're saying, "Wait a minute. Why do you ignore the issue of school vouchers?"

NAACP, formally opposed to school vouchers. The President,

they removed the provision in the budget to - to provide funding for school vouchers in D.C. Is [sic] school vouchers a part of the education agenda - part of the Black agenda when it comes to the next three, four years for this president? And should that be on the table for discussion in the Black community?

MR. JEALOUS: No. You know, the - the reality is you've got to recall how - you know, what school vouchers are. They're a subsidy for private schools. Why were they started? They were started to make White flight easier, to basically subsidize White families getting away from the desegregation buses.

Charter schools - public charter schools - public, unionized charter schools are things that we *can* talk - that we *can* talk about, that we *should* talk about.

MR. MARTIN: But, Ben, if you[ve] got a parent, though, right now who is saying, "My child's in a failing school. You know what? All I care about is my child getting an education."

MR. JEALOUS: Sure, certainly. And that's - a- -- and there should be good options there, and we should be fighting for those options.

Vouchers are - are - you know, I've - I've often told people, "Look. If you're willing to make your voucher, say, the same as the" -

MR. MARTIN: Right.

MR. JEALOUS: -- "full tuition for Georgetown Day, if you're willing to make your voucher \$50,000 or \$30,000, let's have that

conversation." But you're talking about 6,000 bucks or 8,000, when the school costs 20,000 bucks? This isn't a real conversation.

MR. MARTIN: A - a lot more to talk about on this whole i- -- whole issue of the Black agenda, so sit tight.

Folks, when we come back, we'll hear a different take on the Black agenda in the age of Obama, this time with our panel of reporters and commentators: White House correspondent April Ryan, radio talk show host Joe Madison, Deborah Simmons of *The Washington Times*, and commentator Stephen A. Smith.

**(SEG-
MENT 2)**

MR. MARTIN: I'm pleased to be joined by our panel: April Ryan, the White House bureau chief and White House correspondent of American Urban Radio Networks; Deborah Simmons, citizen journalism editor of *The Washington Times*; journalist and commentator Stephen A. Smith; and the Black Eagle himself, Joe Madison, radio talk show host on Sirius XM Radio.

And, April, I want to go to you. Is there a disconnect between the - the agenda of Black leadership and this president, who is African-American?

MS. APRIL RYAN: The disconnect is the fact that this administration realizes that each community has an issue, a certain problem that they need to deal with. But the disconnect is the universality, and earlier this year, *The State of Black*

America came out - 2009.

MR. MARTIN: National Urban League report.

MS. RYAN: The National Urban League report. And within this report, Roland, Marc Morial said there's a state of *two Americas* - two Black Americas - one of pride for Barack Obama being the President, for the elevation of a Black man to be the first Black president; but at the same time, you have a situation where the economy for Blacks is a bad situation. We are two times - we have double the numbers of unemployment rate in the Black community. We have issues of education. Fewer than 50 percent of African-Americans graduate. We have healthcare issues. Disproportionate numbers of African-Americans getting diseases like diabetes, heart disease - things like that.

So, there is still an issue within this administration to tackle everything universal- -- with a universal approach versus dealing with specific remedies for each problem.

MR. MARTIN: Deborah, I want to - I want to deal with that, because, clearly, if you are Jewish in this country, if you're Hispanic, if you're a woman, all the different interest groups have their own agendas -

MS. DEBORAH SIMMONS: Absolutely.

MR. MARTIN: -- when they go to the White House, but it seems that when this president has to deal with a Black agenda, all of a sudden there's a dance that has to go on. Agree or disagree?

MS. SIMMONS: Agree. There's a dance, and there's a dance that's

going on. It's not clear who's leading, which is the thing - which is fortunate why the Black Leadership Forum stepped out recently and said, "We're united. We're together." One Hundred Black Men, National Urban League, NAACP, National Council of Negro Women - all these organizations have united now to determine where they want Black America to move, and President Obama [had] better be in sync. [Crosstalk]- --

MR. MARTIN: Because if it -

MS. SIMMONS: -- because they're going to lead the dance.

MR. MARTIN: It was weird, Stephen, because during the - you know, this whole year - the first presidency - it was interesting. It seems the Black leadership didn't know when to say something, what -

MR. STEPHEN SMITH: Whoa, whoa -

MR. MARTIN: -- to do -

MR. SMITH: -- whoa, whoa.

MR. MARTIN: It was all over the place --

MR. SMITH: Well, see -

MR. MARTIN: -- sometimes.

MR. SMITH: -- the interesting part about it is that they didn't want to say anything, because you've got some people within our Black - you know, within our community. They wanted to be the leaders. It's har- -- it's *hard* passing that baton. It's *hard* moving aside and making room for new blood to come into play: "This man is going to be President of the United States. Well,

where would that leave us?" These are the questions that people within the African-American community were asking themselves as - as it pertained to some of our Black leadership.

At the end of all of this, you have a Black unemployment rate of 15.1 percent. White fo- -- White folks, it was about 8.7 percent.

You know, what? When you take that into account and consider the fact that African-Americans only make up 12 ½ percent of the population, and 1 in every 6 is unemployed, these are extremely big-time problems. So, you're wondering, "Okay, what is our president going to do?"

And then so you have some people within the Black community that are looking at Jesse or at Al Sharpton and the leadership before, and they say, "Well, you know what? Maybe we should do things *that way*."

But the reality is this man didn't become President of the United States by doing things their way; he came about it a different - an entirely different way, and it worked effectively. MR. MARTIN: Joe, you used to sit on the board of the NAACP. Earlier, we talked to its new president, Ben Jealous, and he said, because of the things April cited earlier and - and Stephen, he says [that's] even *more* of a reason for a Black agenda - because of where - the condition of Black America today, even with a Black President.

And so how - how do we begin to advance that agenda, knowing

full well the dance that's going on, because folks are saying, "Well, give the brother a chance. He really can't do stuff for African-Americans." How is that actually happening?

MR. JOE MADISON: Well, uh - well, I think y- - you *said* it, earlier. Y- -- you don't wait for an invitation.

MR. MARTIN: Even from this president?

MR. MARTIN: Oh, *especially* from *any* president, whether it's this president - he's a politician. He has to do things to get reelected. People in the Civil Rights Movement and in the social movement, they don't *have* to wait to get reelected. They've got to have the kind of tenacity that a Frederick Douglass had. I don't look at politicians as *leaders*. Politicians tend to react. Then - so, number one, you don't wait for an invitation.

Number two, I think the - the - the - one of the - the big problems we also have is in *our* business. The media can s- -- tend to focus only on one Negro at a time.

MS. SIMMONS: Right. [Chuckles.]

[CHUCKLING.]

MR. MADISON: And that was Jesse Jackson, Sr., who told me that.

MR. MARTIN: Um-hum?

MR. MADISON: And you know what? He's *absolutely* right. It's - everything that Barack Obama says, as if he's speaking not just for the *government*, but he's speaking now for everyone. There's no reason - and - and everything that we've talked about - everything April talked about, everything that's in the Urban

League report - there are African-American leaders out here every day, hitting the stumps, talking about it; but they do not get the media attention that they used to get, because now you have an African-American who *leads* the news every, single -

MR. MARTIN: But -

MR. MADISON: -- night.

MR. MARTIN: -- but - but can we, in terms of Black journalists, in terms of Black media, specifically, begin to also confront the issues? And that is when you have a disagreement with this president on -

MS. RYAN: Oh!

[CROSSTALK.]

MR. MARTIN: -- policy -

MR. SMITH: [Crosstalk]- --

MR. MARTIN: -- you should be standing up for policy and not saying -

MR. SMITH: Whoa, whoa, whoa. First of all -

[CROSSTALK.]

MR. MARTIN: -- I don't - [crosstalk] -

MR. SMITH: -- fir- -- first of all, let me say this.

MR. MADISON: Absolutely!

MR. SMITH: -- let me say this.

MR. MADISON: Absolutely!

MR. SMITH: First of all, let me say *thank you* for asking that question -

[LAUGHTER.]

MR. SMITH: -- because I - I have to be honest with you. One of the things that is absolutely *disgusting* about the African-American community is that we tend to operate - so many of us tend to operate off of emotion, when the facts are there to be attacked. The reality is is [sic] that, if you sit there, you look at the facts, and you look at the unemployment rate, and you look at how it is affecting your bottom line.

Then guess what? Don't let somebody come with you - come at you with emotion and try to manipulate your opinions and your feelings -

MS. RYAN: Right. So, lemme -

MR. SMITH: -- based on -

MS. RYAN: -- say this.

[CROSSTALK.]

MR. SMITH: -- that. That's what -

MS. RYAN: So, lemme - [crosstalk] -

MS. SIMMONS: [Crosstalk] -

MALE VOICE: -- I'm saying.

[CROSSTALK.]

MS. SIMMONS: -- from the Bill Cosby moment, when he stood up between - in front of the NAACP -

MR. SMITH: Right.

MS. SIMMONS: -- community.

MS. RYAN: I'm *glad* you guys -

MS. SIMMONS: "We've overcome -

MS. RYAN: -- can say -

MS. SIMMONS: -- from that" -

FEMALE VOICE: -- all of this.

FEMALE VOICE: -- "and" - "and" - "and that's great."

MS. RYAN: I'm glad you -

MR. MARTIN: Now, I had no problem with what -

MS. SIMMONS: Yeah, right. Neither did I.

MALE VOICE: -- Bill Cosby had to say.

MS. SIMMONS: We were on the sa- --

MR. SMITH: Neither did I.

FEMALE VOICE: -- we were eye -

MR. SMITH: Neither did I.

MS. SIMMONS: -- to eye on that one. I remember.

MS. RYAN: See, I'm *glad* you-all can say all of this. I'm sitting there in the White House, in the briefing room daily, and you have a - a very strange situation. You're questioning a president. You are that first line between the President and the American public. And then when you have people call you - African-American people call you: "Why did you ask the President that?"

We have to forget the sensitivities of the fact that this is an African-American president and still deal with holding a president accountable, just like we did with Bill Clinton, just like we did with -

MR. MADISON: *Absolutely.*

MS. RYAN: -- George W. Bush. The issues are still the same. Yet, there's a Black man in the office who, indeed, sees the issue of race. And the White House has said - many White House officials have said they are fearful of dealing with the race issue, because they don't want to amplify it.

MR. MARTIN: Fearful of dealin' with the - that issue, holding a Black president accountable. Hold tight. I want to pick up that when we come back. [

Folks, we'll be back in a moment with more of our panel. And later, Nia-Malika Henderson of Politico.com on First Lady Michelle Obama's role in the Black agenda.

**(SEG-
MENT 3)**

MR. MARTIN: We're back with April Ryan of American Urban Radio Networks, Joe Madison of Sirius XM Radio, Deborah Simmons of *The Washington Times*, and journalist Stephen A. Smith.

And before we went to the break, April, we were talking about this whole issue of accountability.

MS. RYAN: Yes.

MR. MARTIN: And, Joe, tha- -- that's an amazing issue when you begin to talk about it, because African-Americans, frankly, are so protective of this president and fearful of criticizing him. And I remember riding Air Force One. I made it clear to the President, "On school vouchers, you and I disagree. We're going

to" -

MR. MADISON: We're going to disa- -- he and I are going to disagree on Afghanistan before this is -

MR. MARTIN: S- -- s- -- so -

MR. MADISON: -- will be o- -- over, too.

MR. MARTIN: -- so, if we're talking about advancing a Black agenda, what are the issues that jump out for you that, frankly, you may not see eye to eye with this president, that we should be pushing and talking about?

MR. MADISON: Well, I - I - I don't see eye to eye with this - this notion that - and remember - remember the Democratic convention in New York? "We're not a red state. We're not a blue state. We're a purple" -

MR. MARTIN: Speech in 2004 - [crosstalk] -

MR. MADISON: -- "country." Remember that?

MR. MARTIN: -- in Boston. Yes.

MR. MADISON: And folks just *loved* that. It - with the exception of one Al Sharpton, who said, "Well, whoa, whoa. *Wait a minute.*"

We've got unemployment twice that of - of the general population. You talk about a healthcare crisis, and -- if - if *anyone* needs healthcare reform, it's certainly us.

Excuse me. Is repar- -- are - are reparations off the table -

MS. RYAN: Uh-oh. Uh-oh.

MR. MADISON: -- now?

MS. RYAN: That was Bill Clinton. We started that -

MR. MADISON: Do - do we -

MS. RYAN: -- with Bill Clinton -

MR. MADISON: -- do we not --

MS. RYAN: -- and we have not -

MR. MADISON: -- talk about that now?

MS. RYAN: -- and we brought that issue up during the time before the President took his first trip to Ghana.

MR. MADISON: It was hot before 2008.

MS. RYAN: It sho' -

MR. MARTIN: And he also -

MS. RYAN: -- was.

MR. MARTIN: -- talked about in an interview with Suzanne Malveaux --

MS. RYAN: But he -

MR. MARTIN: -- and he made it -

MS. RYAN: -- he does not -

MR. MARTIN: -- perfectly clear -

MS. RYAN: -- believe -

MR. MARTIN: -- at the -Journalists of Color Convention, where he said, "Frankly, I look at reparations, I think, with a" - "from a perspective of education and other issues and not the traditional view of reparations -" --

MR. MADISON: So - so, there's -

MR. MADISON: -- so - so, where are the spokespeople who were so

adamant about it when there was Bush and Clinton? And, again, I will say to -

MS. SIMMONS: One of them -

MR. MADISON: -- I - I -

MS. SIMMONS: -- is head -

MR. MADISON: -- I - but -

MS. SIMMONS: -- of the Judiciary Committee.

MR. MADISON: -- would say to - yes. That's right.

MS. SIMMONS: [Laughs.]

MR. MADISON: But wha- -- I will say that, again, whether he's a Black president, a White president, or a Jewish president, he is a *politician* and must -

[CROSSTALK.]

MR. MADISON: -- be treated as a -

MR. SMITH: To answer -

MR. MADISON: -- politician.

MR. SMITH: -- your question directly, I got a *lotta* problems with our president. I got a problem with the amount of money that he's spending. I got a problem with him looking as if he's a bit soft. That's right. I said it. A big *soft!* He -

[CHUCKLING.]

MR. SMITH: -- needs to step up and remind people - you['ve] got a Democratic House. You['ve] got a Democratic Senate, and we're going, and we're doing - making such - extending ourselves so strenuously -

MR. MARTIN: So, you don't buy -

MR. SMITH: -- to be[?] - [crosstalk].

MR. MARTIN: -- bipartisanship.

MR. SMITH: Aw, stop it!

MR. MARTIN: [Laughs.]

MR. SMITH: Please? It's *bogus*!

MR. MARTIN: [Laughs.]

[CROSSTALK.]

MR. SMITH: I mean it's just *ridiculous*! All I'm s- -- all I'm trying to say is this. The man is spending - if you consider the 7- -- \$87 billion stimulus package, the 410 mil- -- billion-dollar omnibus package, a \$3.6 trillion budget. Then you come with universal healthcare. You *knew* you were coming with universal healthcare, but you threw in the cap and trade stuff. I mean you look at the money he's spending *combined* with what his agenda's supposed to be, and the unemployment rate continues to escalate.

MS. RYAN: And you've -

MR. SMITH: And then on top -

MS. RYAN: -- hit a nail.

MR. SMITH: -- of it all, you're looking at all of these other -

MS. RYAN: *You've hit the nail.*

MR. SMITH: -- politicians, and they're -

MS. RYAN: We have no money.

MR. SMITH: -- trying to tell *you* what to do?

MS. SIMMONS: Right. [Crosstalk] - problem -

MS. RYAN: We have no money!

MR. SMITH: Excuse me! It's a problem!

MS. SIMMONS: -- [crosstalk] -

MR. SMITH: It's a *problem*!

MS. RYAN: We have no money -

[CROSSTALK.]

MR. MARTIN: April, hold tight. One second.

MR. SMITH: It's a *problem*.

MS. SIMMONS: -- this discussion -

MR. MARTIN: One second. Deborah?

MS. SIMMONS: -- when George Bush was spending money quicker than
the way - than Barack -

MR. SMITH: [Crosstalk] -

MS. SIMMONS: -- Obama is right -

MR. SMITH: -- [crosstalk].

MS. SIMMONS: -- now, and the only people were conser- -- c-
criticizing were the fiscal conservative under the radar.

MR. SMITH: Well, Roland didn't have a -

MS. SIMMONS: -- The media -

MR. SMITH: -- show then. I done criticized -

MS. SIMMONS: -- the media -

MR. SMITH: -- Bush -

MS. SIMMONS: -- [laughs] -

[LAUGHTER.]

MR. SMITH: -- I criticized Bush, too!

MS. SIMMONS: Touché. [Chuckles.]

MS. RYAN: But, you know -

MR. MARTIN: April, go ahead - [crosstalk].

MS. RYAN: -- the issue is - the issue is - Joe brought up the issue of reparations. Even if he wanted to, this country has not one dime to spend on reparation[s] and - and repairing *anything* for African-Americans. And we're back - if we go back, looking back in history, we're almost back in the same scenario, 1963, when we had the March on Washington.

MR. MARTIN: Um-hum.

MS. RYAN: You know -

MR. MARTIN: First of all, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

MS. RYAN: -- that's *right!*

MR. MARTIN: That was the full name.

MS. RYAN: That's right.

MR. MARTIN: It wasn't just the March on Washington.

MS. RYAN: That's right. That's right.

MR. MARTIN: You can't leave that part out.

MR. SMITH: [Chuckles.]

MS. RYAN: And - and -the unemployment rate in the Black community was *three* times that of White America. Now we're two times that of White America.

Now, also you have to look at the fact that we, as African-

Americans, and - are looking at a president who is Black, but there's still a fight for first-class citizenship through the umbrella of -

MR. MARTIN: Yeah.

MS. RYAN: -- economy.

MR. MARTIN: And - and - and that's the point.

MR. MADISON: [Crosstalk] -

MS. RYAN: And we have not one dime -

MR. MARTIN: And that's -

MR. MADISON: -- real -

MR. MARTIN: -- and -

MS. RYAN: -- [crosstalk].

MR. MADISON: -- real fight and one of the reasons that - that - that people tend to be protective of him is that the - the paradigm has changed. White America now realizes that White males don't make the key decisions on this country anymore, and there're some people that will never be able to wrap their heads around that.

I disagree with you. We *do* have money to pay for many of the things that we're talking about. Remember, Bush wa- -

MS. RYAN: Iraq, Afghanistan.

MR. MADISON: -- remember Bush was spending \$550 million a *minute* in Iraq. *We've got the money*. It's just a question of priorities, of what we want to spend.

MR. MARTIN: And -

MR. MADISON: And - and people out there who are s- -- conservative, who say, "We don't have healthcare money," let me remind you there was a study done that said 70 percent of the young men and women who are enlistment age cannot enlist because: 1) education - they don't have it, 2) criminal records, and 3) health.

MR. MARTIN: I['ve] got a -

MR. MADISON: Health is a security issue.

MR. MARTIN: A- -- all of 15 seconds. Stephen, then Deborah.

MR. SMITH: All I'mma say is this. I'm a capitalist, and I'm not ashamed of it. I'm not ashamed of it at all. Make sure people are employed. Keep money in people's pockets, and I guarantee you we'll find a way. We are a resolved people. We'll find a way to work around whatever - whatever -

MR. MADISON: True - [crosstalk] -

MR. MARTIN: [Chuckles.]

[CROSSTALK.]

MR. MADISON: -- by someone that - [crosstalk].

[CHUCKLING.]

MS. SIMMONS: And - and we're joined -

MR. MADISON: Yeah. Deborah.

MS. SIMMONS: -- we're - we're joined at the hip -

MR. SMITH: Yeah, which I pay for.

MS. SIMMONS: -- on that one.

The key - the key things I think we need to do are - [deal

with ?] - this ill health, of obesity, chronic - multiple chronic illnesses that are plaguing not just Black America, but *middle* America, in general, which is the bread and butter of this country.

MR. MARTIN: And - and -

MR. MADISON: [Crosstalk] - wasn't brought to you by McDonald's.

MS. SIMMONS: Right.

[CHUCKLING.]

MR. MARTIN: -- here's the deal. But here's the deal, though. I mean the bottom line is - you - you know, obesity is certainly -

[CHUCKLING.]

MR. MARTIN: -- a significant issue, whether it's fast food or whatever, but I will say this. I think this is the moment, frankly, when Black leadership, they must remind themselves of what their mission is. And that is if you are here to fight for these specific issues, you fight for them regardless of who is sitting in the -

MR. MADISON: Absolutely.

MR. MARTIN: -- White House -

MR. MADISON: Absolutely.

MR. MARTIN: -- and what they look like.

MR. SMITH: I agree.

MR. MARTIN: Certainly appreciate it, folks. Thanks so very much.

Coming up next, we'll check out the impact of the First Lady

on the Black agenda in the age of President Obama, and later we'll hear how two of the most powerful members of Congress see that agenda, Representative John Lewis of Atlanta, and Maxine Waters of Los Angeles.

**(SEG-
MENT 4)**

MR. MARTIN: I'm pleased to be joined today by civil rights icon Congressman John Lewis from Atlanta and Representative Maxine Waters from Los Angeles. She is the most senior of the 12 African-American women currently serving in the United States Congress.

I certainly want to thank both of you for joining us here on "Washington Watch."

Congressman Lewis, 1963, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom - you ended the speech by saying, quote, "Wake up, America. Wake up, for we cannot stop, and we will not be patient."

Earlier, we talked to Ben Jealous. Heads the NAACP. He said in 2009, African-Americans cannot be patient. How do you craft a Black agenda in the age of a Black president?

REP. JOHN LEWIS: I think it's possible, and we just have a Black agenda during an age of a Black president. There're so many Black Americans that've been left out and left behind. They're still hurting, and we still must say, "You tell us to wait? You tell us to be patient? We cannot be patient. We cannot wait."

We want healthcare, and we want it now." And we must help this president, who happen[s] to be Black, who happen[s] to be a strong leader - help him get this piece of legislation through the Congress.

MR. MARTIN: Congresswoman Waters, is that the real issue, looking at him as simply - and [it] may be difficult - as another president, by saying, "Look, these are the issues that we've always stood for" - the Congressional Black Caucus, the "conscience of the Congress" - "and so, therefore, we will not waiver even with you sitting in the White House"?

REP. MAXINE WATERS: One thing we know for sure: we don't have to educate him about what our issues are. In the past, we have had to educate presidents about our agenda, who we are, our expectations, what history has taught us. We don't have to do that with him. He *knows* what the issues are.

All we expect for [sic] him is to act on them, and act on them in new and creative ways, help to get things done without making a big deal of it. Just *do* it!

MR. MARTIN: Wha- -- and w- -- and what are those issues? Congressman, you spoke of healthcare [as] one of those issues. Ben Jealous mentioned the whole issue of the disparity between crack cocaine and powder cocaine. Folks are talking about education. What is on the horizon that, frankly, African-Americans should be focusing on for the next year leading up to the 2010 elections, when it comes to the issues that are part of

the Black agenda?

REP. LEWIS: Well, we - we have many issues. There're many problems, many unmet needs, but we need to give the African-American community - we need to give this President a major victory, and healthcare is one of the victories that we can give to the Black American community and to the President of the United States. People need a victory, and then we can move on to deal with the lack of fair treatment when it come[s] to the criminal justice system.

MR. MARTIN: So, for you, after healthcare, criminal justice is the next major -

REP. LEWIS: It is -

MR. MARTIN: -- issue.

REP. LEWIS: -- so important. Too many young, Black men are locked in jail, in prison, and we need to find a way to keep [sic] this growth of our penal system.

MR. MARTIN: Congresswoman Waters, what's the issue for you that people should be rallying arou- -- rallying behind, saying - pushing Congress to "get this done," that specifically targets African-Americans?

REP. WATERS: Well, we are all working on the issues that we have been working on for many years. Many of us were in state legislatures, where we worked on the issues of redlining and predatory lending and financial services issues, worked on education - access to education. We've worked on healthcare

issues and, of course, this healthcare reform that is being debated now is important, still. Many of our people are getting their medical care in emergency rooms. That's very costly.

But I am focused on something a little bit different - in addition to all those things. I'm looking at e- -- some economic issues. We have the Treasury Department, FDIC and the feds. Basically, this is a White boys' place, and we don't have many African-Americans that are working in these parts of our government, and they're not getting the benefit of a - for example, the bailout. They're not getting an opportunity to manage failed assets that are not performing, that are on the bank books. That - we just don't have access to the *tremendous* resources and amounts of monies that flow through these agencies.

And what's interesting about this particular area is this. On Wall Street, we have some of the most educated, competent, young Black professionals who are doing everything from money management to real estate. You name it. And they're all participating. They are so happy about Barack Obama. They raised money. They really, really see this as an opportunity to have access where they haven't had it before, and I'm really pushing that and working very hard on it, to open up these opportunities.

MR. MARTIN: You spoke about many Black Caucus members serving as state legislators and also on the local level.

REP. WATERS: Yes.

MR. MARTIN: U.S. Census, 2010. The whole issue of - of counting - that also - do you believe for - that that should be a part of this Black agenda, because that sets up setting congressional districts, future federal funding? It - do people truly understand - do African-Americans truly understand how the Census affects so many aspects of their daily life?

REP. LEWIS: I think more and more, African-American[s] have a[n] understanding of the Census, and that's why we're saying to people, "Be counted." It is important that we all be counted. It control[s] everything that we do as citizens, as - as a people - not just the congressional district, a legislative district, as you stated, but city council[s], boards of education, but also resources.

MR. MARTIN: But how do you deal with the Republicans, who are saying when it comes to the undercount, how they want to count? How are you - how - how are you looking at - with Congress, challenging folks who want to throw roadblocks up, frankly, in that whole counting process?

REP. LEWIS: Well, we have to say we must have a - a - a fair count, and we must make the resources available; make the staff, the personnel available to see that *every person is counted*. Whether you're here legal or illegal, you must be counted, because you're here in America.

MR. MARTIN: Congresswoman Waters?

REP. WATERS: Well, as you know, we've done some things to make

some changes already. We used to have that long, complicated form.

MR. MARTIN: [Chuckles.]

REP. WATERS: That is no more. We have a shorter form. We have to continue to educate. We have to continue to talk about why it's important. We've got to make sure that we come up with creative ways of doing it. We've got to count the homeless. We have got to make sure that we do everything possible to get a count that's going to help us get the resources back to those communities based on the formulas that are developed *because* of the Census count.

MR. MARTIN: Well, one of the things that - tha- -- that is very clear from talking to both of you [is] that we might sit here and - and say that it's great having an African-American sitting in the White House, having a First Family, but the reality is the issues that we care about are still there - and, frankly, pushing him to action should be the same as whether it was President Bush, whether it was President Clinton, or the previous presidents.

REP. LEWIS: Well, simply because we have an African-American president, it - it doesn't mean that the issue of race is behind us. The scars and stains of racism are still deeply embedded in every corner of the American society. So, we must not give up pushing and pulling and putting on the agenda - the *American* agenda - the concerns and needs of African-Americans.

MR. MARTIN: And that's what we plan on doing every, single week on "Washington Watch."

Congressman Lewis, Congresswoman Waters, we certainly appreciate it. Thank you very much.

REP. LEWIS: Thank you.

REP. WATERS: You're certainly welcome.

**(SEG-
MENT 5)**

MR. MARTIN: We'll get to Michelle Obama in a moment, but first the man behind our online interaction with you, Smokey Fontaine, the chief content guru at NewsOne.com, and he's here for our weekly "Web Watch."

Now, Smokey, you've been asking folks online about the Black agenda and the President, and so I mean, look. Lots of conversation this whole year about the President's agenda. What are African-Americans saying?

MR. SMOKEY FONTAINE: Well, the beauty of the Web is that it's really the great equalizer for our people online. It gives us an opportunity to express ourselves in ways never before, and we have seen -

MR. MARTIN: Writing, video blogs -

MR. FONTAINE: Right.

MR. MARTIN: -- you name it.

MR. FONTAINE: Anything you want to do - sitting at home, putting up a website. And we've seen an historic rise in Black political

activity online.

MR. MARTIN: How -

MR. FONTAINE: Folks -

MR. MARTIN: -- so?

MR. FONTAINE: -- we've - they've been putting up blogs. They've been participating in the political process. We've seen sites like The Root launch with *The Washington Post*, Griot launch at NBC News. Of course, our sister site, NewsOne.com, has seen a historic rise in traffic. And we now, for the first time, have an ability to poll African-Americans at scale to really get the pulse.

MR. MARTIN: Now, what are African-Americans and Whites saying about this president online? Are we seeing significant differences?

MR. FONTAINE: Yes, we are, and that was the first thing that really surprised all of us - was how different those - those polls were. We did a poll asking how relevant race was in the o-- oppose- -- in the opposition to Obama. We saw African-Americans on Black Planet - 67 percent said race played a large role in the opposition to Obama. That exact same poll was on AOL News, predominantly for a general market. Forty-five percent of their -

MR. MARTIN: "General market" - "White." I mean that's just[?] -

MR. FONTAINE: "General market" - "White," yeah.

MR. MARTIN: Yeah.

MR. FONTAINE: Forty-five percent of those respondents said that race plays no factor in the opposition. So, we see a dramatic disparity, almost the opposite when we poll African-Americans versus White Americans.

MR. MARTIN: But also what's interesting [is] you are seeing African-Americans who are just simply not enamored with everything that he does. I mean you have sites, the BlackAgendaReport.com. You have Black commentators, you have a number of people who are also looking at this president critically and using the Web to be able to speak to those issues.

MR. FONTAINE: Yeah. Obama does not get a pass online. In fact, the same give-and-take that you see for larger issues are [sic] happening in our community, and that's really help- -- that's really, really healthy. Right? Obama should use the Web to find out how he's being liked and how he's being disliked.

When we asked the Black Planet membership, "What do you think the number one priority should be on Obama's Black agenda?" they said - 53 percent - the economy; not race. In fact, only 5 percent of folks who were asked what should be the number one Black priority said "racism."

MR. MARTIN: Now, when act- -- a- -- and a- -- actually - [unintelligible] - that speech to me. Our panel's been discussing that all - you know, this entire show, and that is the economy is what drives everybody. It's driving education. It's driving jobs. It's driving healthcare. I mean it is the

economy, the economy, the economy - what James Carville said when Clinton ran: "the economy, stupid."

MR. FONTAINE: It *is* "the economy, stupid." And whether you're Black or White, you're still stupid if you cannot get the economy right. So, Obama will be criticized if he doesn't get it right.

But what we've also seen is an emotion. We've seen a real passion from African-Americans online who are pleading for our president to take their issues seriously, and to do this, and to also not be swayed by what they see as the normal par for being a president: criticism that's attacking them. "Do not get off your agenda. Do what we elected you to do," and we feel that online.

MR. MARTIN: And, actually, I think what's [going to?] be interesting about that - I mean he used the Web effectively, running for President. At the end of the day, these are the same folks who could really go after him if he's not speaking to their issues. And we've been seeing some of that all year, so, yeah. He might want to pay attention to what's happening online.

MR. FONTAINE: He will pay attention, if he's smart. He used it better than any president before to get elected. Let's have him use the Black activity online now to do what he was elected to do.

MR. MARTIN: All right. Smokey, we certainly appreciate it.

Folks you can participate with us here on "Washington Watch" at TVOneOnline.com and NewsOne.com.

Smokey Fontaine, thanks a bunch.

MR. FONTAINE: Thank you so much.

MR. MARTIN: All right, folks. You know all this talk about the Black agenda has me looking back to how our past is playing a part in our future. W.E.B. Dubois was maybe the first man in the modern era to set a Black agenda. Over a century ago, Dubois, the sociologist and scholar, wrote in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."

He certainly was prophetic about the twentieth century and, sadly, so far in the twenty-first. Dubois' Black agenda focused on education and political activism as two, fundamental keys in erasing the social curtain that separates Black and White America. Perhaps, that iron veil has finally been lifted in that the most visible person in this country is a very well educated African-American man in the most powerful political position as President of the United States.

But as we've heard so far today, it is painfully clear that race will continue to be a critical issue in America. But Dubois was right. The education of Black people - and maybe more crucially, of White people - is what may move us to the "post-racial" world we say we desire.

Now is our time for our regular "Obama Watch," and because we've spent so much time on President Barack Obama, it's taking the opportunity to explore First Lady Michelle Obama's role in

all of this. With me is Nia-Malika Henderson, a White House reporter for Politico.com.

Nia, how's it going?

MS. NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON: Hey. Good to be here.

MR. MARTIN: Michelle Obama - a lot of folks are talking about her. You know, we hear all this stuff about her shorts and arms - all that kind of nonsense. Frankly, I don't really care about that, 'cause it's a - it's an accomplished woman.

But what's interesting is here's a woman who - lawyer, involved in healthcare, but the most critical issue this year really hasn't played a critical role. What - wha- -- what's up with that?

MS. HENDERSON: It's true. I mean she very much had kind of an under-the-radar summer, and this fall, starting in the next couple of weeks, as a matter of fact, she's going to get more involved. She'll do it not in the way that Hillary Clinton did. And, of course, Hillary Clinton was testifying on the Hill and very much the face of healthcare.

Michelle Obama will do it in kind of a soft-sell, soccer mom kind of way. She'll be talking about childhood obesity. She'll talk about the importance of preventive health. And they really think that her role is more in kind of having the personal and - and the political intersect. So, she'll tell, you know, kind of stories. She'll meet with groups of women and talk about the - the importance of healthcare reform in that way.

MR. MARTIN: L- -- let me sort of expand that. I mean here you have a first lady, attorney, who - very involved in community-based issues. She's been emphasizing, during the campaign and even in the first year of the presidency of - of being a mother, of being a wife. But what is the problem with this nation accepting a first lady who *has* worked, who *is* smart, who *is* talented and who can do more than simply drop by schools and cut ribbons?

MS. HENDERSON: Yeah.

MR. MARTIN: Why can't she play an active role in policy?

MS. HENDERSON: Well, I mean I think there is a general expectation that she do something, but if you look back at Hillary Clinton, I think people are kind of looking at that playbook, because they have similarities. They're both Democrats. And I think the problem with a first lady being really active is that a first lady isn't an elected official. And she - she's essentially not able to be fired. So, I think -

MR. MARTIN: But so - [crosstalk] -

MS. HENDERSON: -- that was the -

MR. MARTIN: -- staffers. I mean those folk aren't -

MS. HENDERSON: Well, that -

MR. MARTIN: -- elected; they're -

MS. HENDERSON: -- that - that's true.

MR. MARTIN: -- chosen.

MS. HENDERSON: That's definitely true, but I think they think

she has kind of a more unofficial role - first, as, you know, kind of a role model; but also in getting these - getting women kind of onboard with healthcare -

MR. MARTIN: Le- -- le- --

MS. HENDERSON: -- as well.

MR. MARTIN: -- let's speak to role models. She is certainly a role model for women, but especially Black women. And - and what's interesting is when I - I hear Black women talk, they talk about what it means to have someone who looks like her. They talk about her hair, talk about her body, talk about how she's shaped, by saying that she is now embodying the essence of beauty, and they say for the first time, an African-American woman is seen in that light.

MS. HENDERSON: Yes. I mean you remember in that campaign. I mean it was Michelle Obama who brought a lot of Black people along in supporting Barack Obama, 'cause they saw her as this, you know, normal -

MR. MARTIN: I think she -

MS. HENDERSON: -- you know, every- --

MR. MARTIN: -- gives a better stu- -- stump speech than he does.

MS. HENDERSON: -- yeah. Oh, she's -- --

MR. MARTIN: So -

MS. HENDERSON: -- she's fantastic! You're - you're right. No, she's - she's a fantastic speaker.

MR. MARTIN: He calls her "the closer," but -

MS. HENDERSON: [Chuckles.] Right, exactly. Exactly.

But you're right. I mean I - I - I remember sitting in - in the hair salon and - and talking with women there, and they - you know, they see her arms, and they want to work out and look as good as she does. But it *is* a dramatic shift from what we've seen in representations of Black women, who are normally, you know, kind of positioned as - as being overweight. I mean let's face it. The most famous Black woman on the screen right now is - is Madea. It's a - it's not even a Black woman; it's a -

MR. MARTIN: Yeah, for 20 years -

MS. HENDERSON: -- man who's -

MR. MARTIN: -- we had Oprah Winfrey.

MS. HENDERSON: -- yeah, it was Oprah Winfrey. Exactly.

So, yeah. I mean there's a tremendous amount of excitement.

And she's very aware of her position as a role model. She doesn't do it in a heavy-handed way. She feels like - you know, if she lives her life in a good way and - and talks about the importance of fitness and things like that -

MR. MARTIN: I want to -

MS. HENDERSON: -- she'll be a good -

MR. MARTIN: -- get to -

MS. HENDERSON: -- role model.

MR. MARTIN: -- the whole issue of family. A lot of folks have focused on - in terms of the children, the relationship between her and the President in terms of husband and wife, the date tr-

-- date they took to New York. But also, when we - when I interviewed her for TV One, she talked about what it meant for her children to see this strong couple being intimate. Here's what she had to say.

[VIDEO CLIP.]

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA: My - my oldest daughter, now that she's ten - and she's very precocious and now can really articulate how she feels about this stuff. And she says, "You know, it makes me good to" - "feel good to see you and Dad hold hands." You know? So, sometimes you lose sight of that when you think, "Well, as long as we're taking care of the kids, the kids are okay."

Well, the kids want you to have a life together. They want to know that "my mother and father love each other, and if they love each other that much, they're going to love me."

[END OF VIDEO CLIP.]

MR. MARTIN: So, it - what's interesting at that point [is] where - how she talks about her daughters seeing hu- -- Mom and Dad holding hands and being intimate and what it means.

And so how does - well, what does that mean for the rest of the country and for African-Americans? 'Cause we look at ou- -- look at our numbers - not really strong when it comes to marriages, especially children being born out of wedlock.

MS. HENDERSON: Right. Again, I think - you know, in the sense that it means for - it means for those girls, seeing a loving - you know, loving couple and - and lets them know that they're loved, I think in the same way, that's how it works with the Black community. I mean they're this kind of *über* role model for Black love and for the Black community, and they're certainly something to kind of aspire to. 'Cause they have a relationship, I think, people see that's *real*. I mean she talks about him and how they kind of, you know, tease each other. They're very affectionate in public, and so I think they have really become a role model for - for Black folks in terms -

MR. MARTIN: E- --

MS. HENDERSON: -- of marriage and -

MR. MARTIN: -- a- -- a- -- and -

MS. HENDERSON: -- partnership.

MR. MARTIN: -- I - and I think also that you had a couple, frankly, who did not have a lot when they first got together.

MS. HENDERSON: Yeah.

MR. MARTIN: Frankly, he was - I mean he was beneath her. She was older -

MS. HENDERSON: Yes, that's -

MR. MARTIN: -- already --

MS. HENDERSON: -- true.

MR. MARTIN: -- working -

MS. HENDERSON: Um-hum, um-hum.

MR. MARTIN: -- and so they grew together. So, maybe some folks could learn something about that -

MS. HENDERSON: [Chuckles.]

MR. MARTIN: -- as opposed to saying, "I want somebody who has everything" -

MS. HENDERSON: "I want a" -

MR. MARTIN: -- "right now."

MS. HENDERSON: -- "baler right away." Right?

MR. MARTIN: There ya go. Absolutely.

Well, I appreciate it, Nia. Thanks a lot.

MS. HENDERSON: Sure.

[END OF SEGMENT.]

**(SEG-
MENT 6)**

MR. MARTIN: That's it for this edition of TV One's "Washington Watch."

I'm Roland Martin. Until next time, goodbye, and have a blessed week.

[END.]