



NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**ROBERT L. JOHNSON RELEASES A NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN
OPINION POLL ON THE OBAMA PRESIDENCY, UNEMPLOYMENT,
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND SOCIAL ISSUES**

Black Opinions in the Age of Obama: Results of a National Zogby Poll

BETHESDA, MD// MARCH 26, 2013 – Robert L. Johnson, founder and chairman of The RLJ Companies and founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET), today announced the results of a national poll commissioned by Zogby Analytics that reveals current African American sentiment on a range of issues that include the state of national affairs, race relations, employment, and a variety of current political and social issues. Johnson announced the results of the Zogby poll during his remarks today at a National Press Club Luncheon.

“I commissioned this poll for a number of reasons,” said Johnson. “First, for African Americans, this country has experienced the most historic political event and that is the election and re-election of the first African American president, Barack Obama. Because of this, I wanted to find out how African Americans today feel about Obama’s presidency and equally important, if they feel that their lives are better off having lived under the first four years of Obama and the prospect of an Obama Administration for the next four years,” he continued.

“Second, the country has experienced the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression and African Americans have been the hardest hit. Today, African Americans continue to have double the rate of unemployment and less access to capital, and whereas, African Americans were once the largest ethnic minority group and the dominant minority political voice, they are now confronted with the growing political influence of the Hispanic population, which may directly impact competition for jobs and minority business opportunities,” he continued.

“Further, I wanted to create a discussion within the Black community and the broader community to bring to the forefront of public debate key issues of primary concern to African Americans. I am pleased to say that I am intrigued by the results of the poll and I believe better informed,” he noted.

The poll reveals that African Americans have an immense sense of pride in Barack Obama as President of the United States and he is unequivocally liked. He receives a 91% favorable rating. Seventy-two percent believe that President Obama’s election has helped them while only 4% believe his election has hurt them.

(more)

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African Americans believe that President Obama's election has helped them. A majority of those polled – 62 percent – are optimistic about employment in the next four years.

On the issue of employment, the poll reveals that thirty percent of respondents believe they are doing better off financially than compared to four years ago; however, the most recent jobs report shows an ongoing high rate of unemployment within the African American community. When polled on why African Americans believe Black unemployment is consistently double that of whites, responses include: failure of the education system for minorities, lack of corporate commitment to hiring minorities, and a failure of government policies for hiring practices.

The poll was conducted by John Zogby and Zogby Analytics. One thousand and two randomly selected African American adults were polled by telephone and online survey. The complete survey results and remarks from today's National Press Club Luncheon can be found online at www.rljcompanies.com/news.

About The RLJ Companies: *The RLJ Companies, founded by Robert L. Johnson, is an innovative business network that provides strategic investments in a diverse portfolio of companies. Within The RLJ Companies portfolio, Johnson owns or holds interests in businesses operating in a publicly traded hotel real estate investment trust; private equity; financial services; asset management; insurance services; automobile dealerships; sports and entertainment; and video lottery terminal (VLT) gaming. The RLJ Companies is headquartered in Bethesda, MD, with affiliate operations in Charlotte, NC; Little Rock, AR; Los Angeles, CA; San Juan, PR; and Monrovia, Liberia. Prior to founding The RLJ Companies, Johnson was founder and chairman of Black Entertainment Television (BET). For more information visit: www.rljcompanies.com.*

About Zogby Analytics: *For three decades, the Zogby companies have produced polls with an unparalleled record of accuracy and reliability. Zogby telephone and interactive surveys have generally been the most accurate in U.S. Presidential elections since 1996. Zogby Analytics is composed entirely of senior level executives from Zogby International. Zogby Analytics, along with renowned pollster John Zogby, have continued in the tradition of conducting telephone and interactive surveys, while keeping an eye on the future by incorporating social media tracking and analysis into our work. Zogby Analytics conducts a wide variety of surveys internationally and nationally in industries, including banking, IT, medical devices, government agencies, colleges and universities, non-profits, automotive, insurance and NGOs.*

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***BLACK OPINIONS IN THE AGE OF OBAMA: RESULTS OF A NATIONAL ZOGBY
POLL***

Robert L. Johnson
Remarks – National Press Club Luncheon
Tuesday, March 26, 2013
MARCH 26, 2013 * 12:30 P.M. – 2:00 P.M. (EDT)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Angela Greiling (GRY-LING) Keane (KEEN), President, National Press Club
- Alison Fitzgerald, Chairwoman of the NPC Speakers Committee
- Nyree Wright, NPC Speakers Committee Member

INTRODUCTION

Thank you Angela for that kind introduction and thank you members of the Press Club and invited guests for being here this afternoon to hear the results of a national poll that I commissioned last month. The poll was conducted by Zogby Analytics. As many of you know, John Zogby has conducted and produced polls for over 30 years and is well-respected for his record of accuracy, credibility, and reliability. The poll was conducted by a telephone and online survey with a random sample of 1002 African American adults across the country to gauge their opinions on current social, economic, and political issues directly affecting the African American community.

RLJ VIEWPOINT

I have always been vocal about economic opportunity for African-Americans. As the founder of Black Entertainment Television and now The RLJ Companies, The RLJ Companies holds investments in RLJ Lodging Trust, a publicly traded \$2.5 billion hotel REIT, where I serve as Executive Chairman; RLJ McLarty, the largest minority automobile dealership group with over a billion in sales; and RLJ Equity Partners, a private equity firm in partnership with the Carlyle Group; and RLJ Entertainment, the largest independent distributor of entertainment content and traded on the NASDAQ.

I am what you might call a serial entrepreneur. I get a vision about something that should be done, usually in an area where African Americans are economically underrepresented, and I try my best to create business solutions to help address these social and economic problems.

For example, a year ago, The RLJ Companies launched OppsPlace, an online jobs and business site specifically designed to introduce minority individuals and minority owned businesses to large U.S. companies to encourage employment and business opportunities.

The businesses I have started, in addition to creating value for my investors and shareholders, have the important goal of empowering African-Americans who have the ability to create value and wealth for themselves and ultimately this Nation. Make no mistake there are millions of African American men and women who have the talent, the ingenuity and the work ethic to fulfill these goals.

I think you would also agree with me that this Nation has created the greatest society for individual economic opportunity and achievement that mankind has ever seen. But despite that fact, there is the troubling question that has to be asked, and that is – to what extent do African Americans fully participate in this equation?

My primary concern is why, after enacting and enforcing needed civil and equal rights laws, spending more money on education for African American students at all levels than at any other time in the history of this Nation, and having twice elected an African-American President, black American families are still experiencing a growing disparity in employment, access to capital, wealth accumulation, and as a direct consequence, stagnation in economic opportunity and quality of life?

In an attempt to answer this question, I commissioned the poll with the following political and economic developments in mind:

WHY RLJ COMMISSIONED THE POLL?

1. For Black Americans, this country has experienced the most historic political event since the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation. That event is of course, the election and re-election of the first African American president, Barack Obama. Because of this, this monumental occurrence for all Americans, but particularly African Americans, I wanted to find out how African Americans today feel about Obama's presidency and equally important, if they feel that their lives are better off having lived under the first four years of Obama and the prospect of an Obama Administration for the next four years.
2. This Nation is engaged in a major debate about the role of government in providing for the economic well-being of working-class and middle-class Americans. Without question, most African American families fall within that category. The debate raises the question of how much entitlement security the government should make available to these citizens and who should bear the cost of such transfer payments. The issue being raised is whether this country's economic future is at risk because of the rising costs of entitlements and the debt and deficit that follow. This dispute, no matter how it is resolved, will directly impact African American families more so than any other population.

This country has recently experienced the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. We have seen a decline in economic growth and opportunity for all Americans but African Americans have been the hardest hit. This has been true in the past and it is true today as the most recent economic data clearly drives home that fact.

Here are the facts:

- a. African Americans have double the rate of unemployment as white Americans (The National average is 7.7% and African American unemployment is 13.8% [Source: February 2013 Jobs Report US DOL] to be honest, it's probably greater than that when you count the number of African Americans who have simply given up on finding employment. Sadly, this is not a new fact, and according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, African American unemployment has been double that of Whites for over 50 years;
 - b. The income gap of white Americans is 10 times that of Black Americans – the net worth of the median white household is \$118,000, and the net worth of the median Black household is \$11,800;
 - c. The wealth gap between black Americans and white Americans over the last 20 years has increased from \$20,000 to \$90,000 according to the Pew Research Center; and
 - d. Nearly half of African Americans born to middle class families in the 60s will not attain the wealth of their parents (Source: Pew Research Center)
3. African Americans were once the largest ethnic minority group and the dominant minority political voice dating back to the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans are now confronted with the growing influence of the Hispanic population, which is today the largest minority population group.

I wanted to gauge African American sentiment about the political and economic changes that could result from Hispanic Americans being the largest minority. This demographic fact could lead to Hispanics potentially exercising greater political influence within the country on key issues of importance to African Americans, namely, competition for jobs and minority business opportunities and perhaps Hispanics becoming the dominant ethnic voice on cultural and social issues;

4. I also wanted to find out how African Americans feel about their political leaders and organizations that represent their interests, as well as assess their attitudes about key social and cultural “issues of the moment” *e.g.* immigration reform; marriage equality; the gun and assault weapons ban; and the 2016 presidential election; and finally,
5. I didn’t know of any other organization that has recently conducted a poll targeted to African Americans with this combination of social, economic, and political questions, so I decided to do it. I wanted to create a discussion within the Black community and the broader community to bring to the forefront of public debate key issues of primary concern to African Americans. I am pleased to say that I am intrigued by the results of the poll and I believe better informed. I hope you will be also.

Now, despite all of these political and economic realities confronting Black America, what truly intrigues me is that the poll results point to a Black America firmly believing that their lives are a “glass half-filled” rather than “glass half empty”.

RESULTS OF THE POLL: *Black Opinions in the Age of Obama: Results of a National Zogby Poll*

So, what did the poll, which I have chosen to entitle *Black Opinions in the Age of Obama* reveal? African Americans have an immense sense of pride in Barack Obama as President of the United States and he is unequivocally liked. He receives a 91% favorable rating. Seventy-two percent believe that President Obama’s election has helped them while only 4% believe his election has hurt them.

Consistent with the data that shows that African Americans believe that President Obama’s election has helped them, a majority of those polled – 62 percent – are optimistic about employment in the next four years.

Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents say they are doing better off financially than they were four years ago, about half say they are at least doing the same, and twenty-five percent (25%) say that “African Americans in general” are doing better while forty-four percent (44%) say they are doing about the same and twenty-one percent (21%) say they are worse off.

On race relations, tied to this feeling that the Obama presidency has been positive for African Americans fifty-three percent (53%) say that white-African American relations will improve, while only twenty-three (23%) are pessimistic.

When asked why they believed the Black unemployment rate was double that of whites. Responses include:

- Failure of the education system for minorities/African Americans (50%)
- Lack of corporate commitment to hiring minorities/African Americans (48%)
- Lack of good government policies (25%)

As to whether respondents felt they were overlooked or discounted as a serious candidate for employment because of their race, forty-seven (47%) percent said yes and thirty-nine percent (39%) said no.

When asked why the wealth gap has increased by \$70,000 over the last 20 years, nearly half (47%) of respondents say that both the lack of jobs and a lack of access to capital are to blame for the wealth gap between whites and African Americans.

Since I agree that unemployment and access to capital are the most pressing issues for African Americans, I also asked in the poll about something I have been promoting for the last few years – what I have called **The RLJ Rule**.

Two years ago at this Press Club, I spoke about *The RLJ Rule* which is adapted from the National Football League's (NFL) *Rooney Rule*. In 2003, the NFL established the Rooney Rule, which mandated subject to a fine, that the 32 teams give fair interviews to qualified minority candidates whenever a head coaching or general manager position becomes available before making a new hire.

The RLJ Rule, unlike the Rooney Rule, is voluntary and designed to encourage companies to establish best practice policies to identify and interview at least two African Americans at the managerial level before filling a position and to interview qualified Black businesses prior to awarding a procurement contract.

We included a description of *The RLJ Rule* in the poll and found that 75 percent polled were either “very” or “somewhat” supportive. Forty-seven percent of respondents said it would help African Americans' chances to be hired or to become a minority supplier and 53 percent said they would like to see The RLJ Rule enacted into law.

With these critical economic issues facing the African American community, the poll asked who was the person or organization that would be the voice for African Americans to ensure their voice was heard at the national level. The leading civil rights/economic empowerment organizations scored very well.

The **NAACP** received an 83% favorable rating, the **National Urban League** received a 69% favorable rating, and the **Congressional Black Caucus** received a 68% favorable rating. When respondents were asked for the name of individuals who best represents their interests, an overwhelming 40% said no one speaks for them.

A segment of the poll focused on issues related to the emergence of the Hispanic population, race relations, guns, gay rights, and the 2016 presidential election:

Hispanics – Sixty-three percent favor a path to full citizenship within 10 years for Hispanics who are here illegally, while only 16% say they should “never” achieve full citizenship. Interestingly enough, 51% of African Americans believe that Hispanics “will achieve greater economic growth than African Americans over the next five years”. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of 18-29 year olds shared this feeling and sixty-percent (60%) of those over 50 years old.

Some of the reasons include:

- Hispanics face less racism than African Americans
- Hispanic lifestyle/work ethics
- Hispanics given more opportunity/education is better

Guns – Sixty-seven percent (two out of three polled) favor a ban on assault weapons, while 20% oppose such a ban. This includes a majority of all age groups.

Expressing a deep concern about reaction to crime in the Black community, seventy-five percent (three out of four) believe that the Nation pays less attention to Black on Black crimes than on gun crimes against whites.

Gay Rights – African Americans are evenly split on the issue of same sex marriage. Forty-two percent feel that marriage is exclusively defined as between a man and a woman; while 40% would support gay marriages having the same rights as heterosexual couples. We also asked a question about ministers who oppose homosexuality and gay marriage.

The results were evenly split:

- One in three (34%) support the ministers;
- One in three (31%) say the ministers are wrong; and
- One in three (35%) have no opinion

2016 Presidential Race – We asked this question, if the Democratic primary for President were held today, for whom would you vote and who should President Obama endorse to succeed him as the next President of the United States?

- Out of six potential Democratic candidates, nearly half of the respondents (46%) say they would support Hillary Clinton for President if the Democratic primary was held today and about one in five would support Vice President Biden.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Zogby poll clearly demonstrates, for African Americans, having an African American President elected to two terms has created a tremendous feeling of unparalleled political pride.

Because of this feeling, and despite all of the economic challenges before us, I believe that African Americans are uniquely hopeful about their future. Interestingly enough, this emotion and belief was expressed by President Obama during his recent speech to the people of Israel. Speaking about the African American experience, the President said, *“To African Americans, the story of the Exodus told a powerful tale about emerging from the grip of bondage to reach for liberty and human dignity – a tale that was carried from slavery through the civil rights movement. For generations this promise helped people weather poverty and persecution while holding on to the hope that a better day was on the horizon.”*

I completely agree with the President. However, my concern and maybe even fear is that if this faith-like hope, or “promise of a better day on the horizon” is not rewarded with real and measureable economic change during and after the Obama presidency, the failure to do so could, and that would be regrettable, result in a major shift from hope to despair for millions of African Americans who today look at this Nation in the age of Obama and say “our glass is half-filled and we are still hopeful”.

Thank you for your time this afternoon and I’ll be glad to take any questions.

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