

Wilmer J. Leon, III: The “Politics: Another Perspective” Interview

By Kam Williams
For The Skanner News

Wilmer J. Leon, III is a political scientist whose primary areas of expertise are Black Politics American Government, and Public Policy. Dr. Leon has a B.S. degree in Political Science from Hampton Institute, and a Masters in Public Administration and a Ph.D. in Political Science from Howard University.

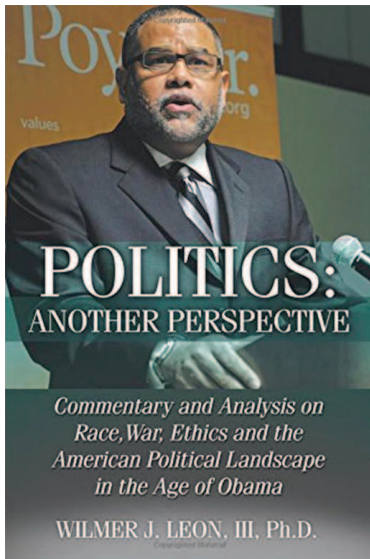
He is a nationally-syndicated columnist and the host of SiriusXM Satellite Radio’s “Inside the Issues with Wilmer Leon.” He is also a regular contributor to national and international television news programs, newspapers and websites.

Kam Williams: Hi, Dr. Leon, thanks for the interview.

Wilmer J. Leon: Kam, my pleasure. Thank you for your interest in my book “Politics Another Perspective.” The struggle continues and we can only move forward through fact based analysis and dialogue.

KW: What interested you in publishing a collection of your op-eds?

WJL: As a political scientist, I was looking for a way to



provide to the general public clear analysis of some of the issues impacting the country. I wanted it to be in a form that would be easy for readers to access and digest. I’ve always received great feedback on my op-eds. So, a collection of them seemed to be the natural answer or solution.

KW: Most of the pieces were written during Barack Obama’s tenure in the White House. How would grade him as a president?

WJL: Wow, that’s a difficult question to answer. Usually we take some time and allow the lens of history to provide some distance and space for the analysis to be done. Right

now, I would give President Obama a “C.”

KW: What would you say is his legacy?

WJL: Again, that’s a difficult question to answer. Symbolically, being the first African American president is invaluable and powerful. The fact that I can turn to my 15-year-old son and say, “You too can be POTUS,” is a very powerful reality. In terms of domestic policy, navigating the country through the economic crisis was an incredible accomplishment. Even though he bailed out the banks, he did nothing for the homeowner. If he had forced the banks to lend the bailout money back to the homeowner in the way of more favorable loans, property values would have remained stable. The ACA [Affordable Care Act] was a great accomplishment even though its rollout was an utter failure. How can one pay so much attention to the detail of the legislation and then ignore its implementation? This is mind-boggling. He should have used the Recess Appointment option with Merrick Garland. He should have nominated an African American woman to the Supreme Court instead of Kagan. In terms of education, he continued the Bush Era neo-lib-

eralization of education, No Child Left Behind, with Race to the Top. From a foreign policy perspective, he continued a lot of the Bush administration approaches, if not policies. The assassination of Gaddafi was an utter failure. As a Senator, he voted against the illegal invasion of Iraq and then does a similar thing in Libya making the problems in the Middle East worse. The use of drones

WJL: Not at all. Again, the symbolism is invaluable, but you can’t pay the mortgage with symbolism. In his defense, the African American community, for the most part, did not challenge him and force him to use his bully pulpit to address our issues. In that regard, we gave him a pass. So many of us were so happy to have him there that we focused on the politics of pigment and pheno-

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type and forgot the politics of policy. He rewarded other constituencies

was not as benign or sterile as he tried to make them out to be. To a great degree, he did not use his bully pulpit to rally his base against the obstructionist Congress. I don’t believe that the politics he ran on were really his politics. I think he’s a conservative corporatist who ran as a centrist. He tried to be reasonable with a House and Senate that swore to oppose him at every turn but thought that his intellect was more powerful than their racism. Those are a few examples.

such as the LGBTQ, Latino and women, but ran from us unless he was forced to speak to us.

KW: How do you explain the Trump victory? Do you think the Democratic Party made a mistake closing ranks behind Hillary, especially after it was obvious that Bernie was the candidate with all the enthusiastic popular support?

WJL: There are a lot of factors to the Trump victory. Dr. King called it “White backlash” and Dr. Ronald Walters called it the politics of resentment. A major part of this was the backlash to 8 years of an African American president.

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