



**POST-BLACK AND CONTINUOUS WHITE:
MISREADING THE MEANING OF OBAMA**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Wishing away Blackness while perpetuating the privileging of Whiteness is not the most effective or ensuring way to begin putting in place a new politics, nor is offering ongoing arguments, articles and assumptions on post-Black everything and no similar suggestions of post-White practice or prospects on anything. But the flood of post-Black fantasies and assumptions set out in writing and on TV “picture shows” for some time now have intensified and expanded as a parallel and part of discussion about the meaning of Obama’s historic campaign for the U.S. presidency. The recent article in the *New York Times Magazine* titled “Is Obama the End of Black Politics?” and subtitled “Post-Black” is only the latest in a spate of articles which preceded Obama’s rise to importance and will no doubt increase if he wins.

But in spite of the catchy title and the lineup of rising Black political stars, the end point is always the same—definition of a deficient, divided and self-destructive community. It is an old racist ploy of singling out and praising the few in order to better condemn the many. And the praise is never for self-determination, but rather for self-denial and self-concealment of one’s Blackness.

The author begins with an indictment that “old activists stood in the path of an African American’s advancement” for at first supporting Hillary Clinton. And he praises the new young Black politicians who supported Obama. But then he also argues that one of them by “not supporting Obama’s candidacy marked a kind of progress too.” For “the movement was, after all, about freedom to choose your own candidate”. However, the Movement was not about *who* to choose, but the *right to choose* itself, to

vote, and about *freedom, justice, equality and power* over our destiny and daily lives.

Moreover, the author goes on to claim in shameless contradiction that “you could argue that it was (the Clinton supporter)—and not those Black politicians who embraced Obama, because they closely identified with his racial experience—who represented the truest embodiment of Obamaism” and “was a genuine postracial politician”. Note that the old politicians who chose Clinton out of a sense of political reciprocity and concern that the resiliency of racism would limit Obama’s chances are not postracial. Regardless, the key purpose is to criticize Black. First, criticize “the old activists” who did not support their own at first and praise the young politicians who did. Then, turn around and criticize the same young politicians for supporting Obama for reasons of shared experience and identity and praise the one who did not but voted for a White woman as an expression of post-Black politics.

This racialized and irrational “reasoning” is directed towards several ends. First, it is to indict and dismiss the older generation of leaders and at the same time the legitimacy and relevance of their social justice claims, their rootedness in community, and their recognition of the centrality of multi-form struggle around issues of wealth, power and status. In this regard, they are criticized both for their being *too race conscious for their people* and *not race conscious enough for a selected person*. Needless to say, no such discussion is carried on about being post-White, post-Jewish, post-Gentile or even about other ethnics of color.

Secondly, the article seeks to redefine normal generational differences into divisive ones, to provide a language of antagonism and rupture instead of one of necessary con-

tinuity and regular generational change as in every group. Again, there is no deep discussion of generational rupture, antagonism, disregard for history or quips and quotes about retirement and replacement of the Gentile and Jewish old men. On the contrary, they praise and parade them on stage and have us give tearful testimony of what they did for us, the country and the world.

Thirdly, the article reflects a persistent practice of the dominant society of attempting to define reality and make us accept it even when it's to our disadvantage. Thus, the author repeats the platitudes that serve as praise *and prescription* for the new politicians. He says "comfortable inside the establishment, bred at universities, they are just as likely to see themselves as ambassadors to the Black community . . . as spokesmen for it, which often means extolling middle class values in urban neighborhoods as Obama did on Father's Day. Their ambitions range well beyond safely Black seats."

Actually, there's nothing new here—neither comfortableness dealing with Whites nor university education, nor aspirations for larger local, state and national representation including presidential aspirations; Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton "been there and gone". Even the ambassadorship, i.e., White appointments of "native spokesmen" to speak *to* their people rather than *for* their people is as old as imperialism, the Holocaust of enslavement and reports of Tom genuflecting and jitterbugging on the front or back porch. What would be new, if the author and similar-minded Whites have their way in redefining our shared communal self-conception and col-

lective vocation, is the radical increase of the number of people who embrace this view and practice.

Finally, the article reveals there is no discussion of the place of Black people in this new Black politics, only selected Black persons posing as post-Blacks. And if we take this irrationality to its ultimate conclusion, there are no Black politicians since there's no Black politics and only post-Black persons of dubious post-racial identity, serving as ambassadors from the White center to those on the margins, and as supporters of others' foreign and domestic interests, since they have none of their own.

But regardless of the aspirations and future of the "appointed" few, neither they nor Obama are the end of Black politics or Black people. They, as others before them, will come and go, but the people will endure forever. We, the people of pyramids and kente cloth, builders, book writers and readers of sacred signs from the beginning, earliest teachers of the oneness of being, the sacredness of life, the dignity and divinity of the human person and the ethical obligation to constantly repair, renew and transform the world, will not be defeated, deterred or dissolved. Indeed, we who endured and developed in the hell and horror of the Holocaust of enslavement and emerged to define ourselves in sustained sacrifice and struggle as a moral and social vanguard in this country and the world, will not be redefined out of existence by any election, regardless of how important it seems, or by any people, regardless of how powerful and pathetically prone to misread the meaning of their history and also ours.