



**OBAMA'S NOMINATION:
THE MEANING AND MEASURE OF THE HISTORICAL MOMENT**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 06-19-08, p. A-7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The difficulty of defining and understanding the meaning and measure of a given historical moment lies not only in the complexity and sheer number of factors which shape it, but also in the power and penchant of the established order for interpreting each meaningful historical moment in the most shamelessly self-referential and self-congratulatory way. The presumptive nomination of Barack Obama for president by the Democratic Party is clearly a historical moment of considerable meaning, but it is neither God-sent nor conclusive proof or automatic promise of significant social or systemic change. Even if Obama is also elected, it will not come without customary center-seeking and constituency-pleasing compromises which will tend to run counter to the original promise of real change as already witnessed. And perhaps, it will even carry with it results of greater benefit to the established order than to those who seek and struggle to change it.

Indeed, the established order has already begun to advertise Obama's nomination itself as iron-clad evidence of the end of racism and the beginning of a new era; compelling proof of the possibility of unlimited upward movement and an unimpeachable testimony and testament to the superior character of U.S. society. So before the media's customary mystification of the historical moment and allied "expert" analysts define the achievement and interpret its meaning in the image and interests of the established order, it is important to offer a more critical, correct and multidimensional understanding of its meaning and measure.

Indeed, this is truly a significant multi-faceted moment of history which like a newly cut gem offers numerous aspects and insights of possibilities and problems from various vantage points. It is clearly a shared

moment for all progressive people, especially people of color within this country and the world who see in this not only a symbol of success, but also, and with young people, a real reason to hope and cooperatively work on projects of common concern and common good in the world. The campaign and an allied movement offer an opportunity for us and peoples around the world to move beyond war and the worship of wealth, build peace, practice sharing resources instead of resource robbery, establish justice for all people, repair the planet and leave a life-enhancing legacy for future generations.

It is obviously a bittersweet moment for the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, former minister, father-mentor and advisor to Obama, and a man of heavy weight and worth in society and the world, and for his church, Trinity United Church of Christ, source of the Obama family's spiritual and moral grounding and social and political coming-into-being who now cannot welcome him in triumph. For the media miscast Rev. Wright as the man who would sink Obama's post-racial ship, wreck it on the rocks of the racial fears of Whites, and by not showing appropriate remorse for talking Old Testament talk of social justice and judgment in the midst of "New Times" talk of being blessed by seeking Caesar's riches and respect.

Moreover, it is an ambivalent moment for White power holders, those addicted to racial deference and privilege, and those who never had to really share wealth and power. They support Obama's providing a moral mask and message to involve youth, reinvolve the disaffected and present a new face to the world in the midst of the country's moral, financial and political decline in

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2

the world, but they are apprehensive about unintended consequences.

It is certainly a fear-and-loathing moment for racists and the rightwing, some of whom who not only cling in bitterness to racialized religion and guns as alternative gods, but also hold desperately to a "master" narrative which requires White supremacy as an article of faith, a fact of politics and a certainty of daily life. And finally, it is an unfinished moment for all of us who appreciate the moment, but know the difference between symbol and substance, between a man and a movement, and between change of administration and change of the way wealth, power and status are shared and distributed in this country and the world and thus the resultant need for the continuation and intensification of struggle.

It is clear that above all, this is a special moment for Africans, especially African Americans, bringing them a profound sense of victory and vindication. It represents victory first in their serving as the indispensable element and firmest foundation in the bringing of this moment into being. For if they had not turned away from the early advice of many Black leaders who urged allegiance to the Clintons and instead closed ranks (95%) around Obama he could not have and would not have won as was clear from South Carolina on.

It is victory also in that it represents a notable marker on the long road to freedom, justice, equality and shared power in spite of the ruts and road blocks in the way, not only to the White House, but also in the conduct

and shaping of our daily lives. Thus, praise is due here not to society for its claimed available opportunities, but to Black people who carved out of the hard rock of racial and social realities, space to build, grow and achieve in and who showed the will and did the work to overcome all kinds of obstacles and make varied and unbelievable gains in spite of the lack and limitations of claimed opportunities by others.

Finally, there is a sense of victory in seeing this nomination and anticipated election as a person and people's move thru history from the lowest position in society to holding its highest office. And in this they find a sense of vindication, a justification by history and heaven; a clearing away of racist claims of defect and deficiency and the reaffirmation of our dignity and identity as African people.

But it is also a moment of great meaning for Black people because they see it as one of their own who has chosen and been chosen to bring a new politics to the country and hopefully the world. And in the spirit and historical tradition of our ancestors like King, Bethune and Malcolm, we thus must not accept an assignment as socially unacceptable relatives, relegated to silent support and subject to sermons and lectures on right living by candidates to make Whites feel comfortable and correct in their stereotypical assumptions. On the contrary, we must act as we are, central not only to the campaign, but also to any serious reconception and reconstruction of this country in the interest of human good.

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