



Reimagining the Future With Obama:
Being Aware, Organized and Engaged
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It is not difficult to recognize or respect the remarkable moment in the history of this country that the election of Barack Obama represents, nor the profound and particular meaning it has for us as a people; or the significance it holds for all progressives who contributed to it; and the promise it can hold for the world, if we reimagine the future in life-affirming and life-enhancing ways and dare continue the struggle to bring it into being. It is our foremother Anna Julia Cooper who reminds us, however, to be careful about our tendency to assume a singular person's achievement represents advancement of our people instead of simply an opening that still must be widened so that all can enter. She says, "we too often mistake individuals' honor for race development". And likewise, "we often mistake foliage for fruit and overestimate or wrongly estimate brilliant results".

Certainly, the Obama victory is a brilliant result, but the fruit of full freedom, equal justice, real equality and shared power for us as a people is still to be cultivated, consummated and harvested. And thus the struggle must and does continue. But there is, still and rightfully so, a need to celebrate this moment in history which brings to mind and heart a wide range of thoughts and feelings: i.e., a shared happiness with and for our people; reverent remembrance and respect for our ancestors whose work and struggle before us brought us to this place; a sense of relief and redirection for the country; anticipation of new possibilities for us and the world; and a deepened appreciation for the need to continue the struggle to forge the good future we all hope for and deserve.

Indeed, Obama himself has said the campaign was a chance for change, not change itself. Likewise, the election is a change of the guardian of state interests, but not the change

the Obama campaign promised of a new way to relate to each other and the world. And if Obama is to be more than a new moral mask for the established order and a political muzzle for us to preempt and prevent needed social criticism, we must honor our social justice tradition, continue the unfinished struggle and challenge him to do likewise.

So yes, I share the happiness of our people in their sense of winning a long-coming and hard-fought victory and vindication, their celebration of making the long journey from enslavement to the highest office of leadership of the very society that enslaved us and of winning within a system that didn't favor us, and that, it was said, was not ready to receive us in such a position of prominence, prestige and power. And yet we did it.

I also remember with reverent respect the ancestors and elders, those who opened the way down which we still walk on this long and unfinished journey and taught us the way to walk with dignity, strength, and determination in the world: Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Martin Delaney, Marcus Garvey, Mary McLeod Bethune, Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin L. King, and others too numerous to name. And I pay homage also to those who ran the political race before Obama, especially those who ran the presidential race—Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Jackson, and Al Sharpton, all who taught possibility, widened the circle of inclusion and kept alive the hope and commitment to change eventually chanted by Obama advocates during the campaign and victory celebrations around the world.

And there is this palpable sense of relief and redirection for the country, a hopeful feeling that an Obama administration will rescue the country from the Bush night-and-day-mare of corporate corruption,

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violations of human and civil rights, economic collapse and the cheap peddling of vulgar flag pin-wearing patriotism framed and fermented in fear and hatred against peoples of the world.

In its place is the need to respect the right and insure the capacity of the people of New Orleans to return and rebuild their lives and future; and to address issues of adequate and affordable housing, universal health care, employment, education, rebuilding the economy, improving multicultural relations and the practice of peace as central to U.S. recovery, respect and positive reassertion in the world. But again, relief and redirection will come not from a single man surrounded by corporate colleagues, lobbyists of every kind and conservative congresspersons who will caution slowness, minimum motion forward and maintenance of a system of trade-offs and back-slapping set in place centuries ago. Only an aware, organized and engaged people can call for and compel the steps needed to turn hope into policy and promise into practice.

All over the world, there is this widespread anticipation of the proposal and pursuit of new possibilities, beyond the Bush years of imperial illusions and aggressiveness, unjust and unjustifiable wars, institutionalized torture and state terror against citizens and various peoples of the world, efforts to dominate and occupy rather than cooperate and the military-might-as-right claim to the resources of the world. And in place of this international banditry and bludgeoning are

perceived possibilities of non-interventionist aid for the people of Darfur, Haiti, Congo, Africa as a whole, and the rest of the world, the end of occupation and a just peace and repair for Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, and framing of a future of common interests and cooperation.

As a people who remain a key moral and social vanguard in this country, we must be in the front ranks of those who dare develop and put forth an agenda for ourselves and the country, to help frame the issues, to reimagine the future, and to inform and guide the work ahead to build a politics of social justice, just peace and a shared good in this country and the world. Dr. Ron Daniels, President, Institute of the Black World 21st Century, has called us to conference next week 2008 November 19-23 in New Orleans and we urge all to attend and participate in this historic dialog.

This State of the Black World Conference is the first national planning conference since Obama's election. It will engage African American leaders from around the country, representatives from African nations and other countries in the Diaspora in an intergenerational dialog to think thru issues in politics, culture, economics, community organizing and the academy, as we move beyond the election to turning ideas into action, hope into public policy, and the energy cultivated during the election to rebuilding and sustaining a movement for real, experienced and uplifting change. (To register visit: www.stateoftheblackworld.org)

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