

**The
BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

October 30, 2008 - Issue 297

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

Special Edition
Ten Reasons We Should Turn Out the Vote for Barack Obama
By Eric Mann
BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

For those of us who are in the Civil Rights, Immigrant Rights, Women's Liberation, Environmental Justice, and Anti-War Movements, for those of us on the Left, the election of Barack Obama is of the utmost urgency. Voting for Barack Obama is not enough. Through November 4, 2008 we need to put all our energy into getting out the vote to elect Obama and defeat McCain.

Because of his brilliant organizing, the possibility of an Obama victory is palpable. Because of the racism of this country and the strong reactionary elements of the general population, the threat of a McCain victory is only too real.

The stakes leave no room for passive support. The Republicans coalescing against Obama are carrying out a calculated strategy to preserve and extend the victories of Reagan and Bush. If it can be imagined, they intend to take the country even further to the right. They want to destroy what is left of democratic liberalism, destroy the Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements, destroy the Immigrant Rights, Women's Liberation, LGBT, Anti-War movements, to destroy the Left.

To his credit, unlike Al Gore and John Kerry, Barack Obama is fighting back against the Right. Whether or not he cedes too much to them, which I believe he does, his election is a direct challenge to the neo-cons, the racists, and bellicose fascists who have controlled the White House, the media, and the political discourse in this country for decades. For all of us who consider ourselves "on the Left" and "organizers," for those of us who have a base, for those of us who are working in low-income Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander communities and doing anti-racist work in white working-class communities—this is a turning point in history. We understand the stakes of a racist McCain victory only too well, and we are the ones who can be pivotal in turning the tide for Obama. It is time for the antiracist Left to show the muscle of our community organizing and put that energy into the Obama campaign through November 4, 2008.

For some of us, we are already there. For others, you are needed. Obama needs and deserves our full support. As a strategist and tactician, you weigh all the arguments, all the options, but when the time comes, you must go into battle with great energy and enthusiasm. You must fight to win. Now is such a time.

We have to work for Obama's election and fight to win. Right now the Obama campaign is calling for the most intense involvement by those of us who support his candidacy. Our job is very straightforward. The Obama campaign urgently needs us to contribute money, to phone bank, to protect the vote at ballot boxes where the Republicans will try to steal the election (that is, every ballot box), and to hit the ground in aggressive door-to-door organizing in swing states. For those of us who do not live in a swing state that means traveling to Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Nevada, New Mexico, Virginia, North Carolina, Missouri, Indiana, West Virginia, Colorado and other states where the margins are still too close to call.

I am an organizer, that is what I do. In this election, reflecting my own views on the subject, I am committed to working on two major campaigns.

The Strategy Center's No on the Six Campaign.

This is a state-wide campaign in California that opposes six reactionary ballot initiatives. We are doing citywide lawn signs, on-the-bus organizing, phone banking, and precinct walking to defeat *The Six*. Two initiatives, Propositions 6 and 9, would further criminalize Black and Latino youth. Two bond and sales tax proposals, Proposition 1A and Measure R in Los Angeles County, would pass regressive taxes and bonds for pork-barrel, environmentally dangerous rail and highway projects that would further attack the funding for a clean fuel bus system, the centerpiece of our environmental plan. Two propositions attack LGBT people and women. Prop 8 tries to overturn gay marriage, and Prop 4 threatens women's reproductive rights through the onerous requirement of parental notification for minors. I work for this campaign through the Strategy Center in a broad coalition with many other progressive, grassroots groups. See www.noonthesix.org

The Obama Campaign

I am working to elect Barack Obama president of the United States. I have attended a two-day training at Camp Obama along with 350 people in Long Beach, along with thousands throughout the state and tens of thousands throughout the country at similar trainings. Many people are going from California to Nevada, a neighboring swing state with five electoral votes, to turn out the vote for Obama. I am working with the phone bank team to make phone calls to Nevada to elect Obama. I will be spending the last long weekend of this month through Tuesday, November 4 splitting my time between the *No on the Six* and the Obama phone bank teams.

Here Are Ten Reasons to Turn Out the Vote for Barack Obama

1) Because Barack Obama is Black and qualified, Black and liberal, Black and can be elected the first Black president in the United States.

Obama is a Black man running for president in a white settler state. Regardless of how much or little he chooses to campaign on race or against racism—and in my view it is far more than some of his critics think—Obama is Black. Everyone knows he is Black and the Republicans are making it a referendum against Blacks and for white supremacy.

The election of a Black president in a country built on conquest and slavery is almost unimaginable. And it cannot be imagined without the foundational work of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois, Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King, Jr. Huey P. Newton, and Malcolm X. Obama is running as a Black man at a time when one million Black people are in prison. He is Black at a time when the Black community is on the defensive and under siege, Black when many of its most gifted and dedicated organizers are tired, not discouraged, but exhausted from the assaults of the reactionary decades from Reagan to Clinton to Bush. Obama is Black as opposed to white, as in white supremacy, white racism, white chauvinism, white xenophobia, white fascism, white racist mobs, white McCain and white Palin.

Barack Obama is a Black Harvard graduate, a president of the Harvard Law Review, married to Michelle Obama, a Princeton graduate. They gave up jobs in corporate America to do work among the urban poor and working class. He is charismatic, a great debater, and a man of intellect. He is so much better qualified than John McCain that it is a testament to the racism of the U.S. that McCain is still in a close race. This is a white man who is clearly unhinged even in a prepared debate and has nothing to run on but the "Abuse of the Day" against Obama and his family.

Barack Obama is a gifted organizer who deserves the support of every dedicated organizer in the country. As a Black man in a white country, he out organized Hillary and Bill Clinton and their ostensibly unbeatable machine, a blow from which they may never recover. He is out organizing the Democratic Leadership Council, the anti-liberal caucus of Bill Clinton and Joe Lieberman that has dominated the Democratic Party since the defeat of Mondale and Dukakis. Obama has a very good chance of out organizing the entire white, Christian, conservative, aka fascist clique that has run this country since Reagan rose, Gingrich organized, Clinton capitulated, and Bush/Cheney took the dictatorship to its highest levels.

Electing a highly qualified, brilliant Black man against a Neanderthal white man is a major step forward in history and a high stakes fight that we need to be part of. It will be a major setback to the forces of white racism in the country and a real encouragement of the broad anti-racist coalition that is at the core of the Obama campaign. Let's turn out the vote for Obama. Now.

2) Because a Black man is being attacked by a white lynch mob and we have to throw our bodies in front of them and beat them back.

The McCain/Palin campaign rallies are becoming Klan rallies. Shouts of "traitor," "terrorist," "treason," "liar," "Hussein" "kill him" and "off with his head" have rung from the rabid racists at McCain and Palin rallies. Palin whips them up and McCain sometimes doesn't challenge them and sometimes goes through the motions, all the while praising them to the sky as "loyal Americans." These are the very kind of people who have populated lynch mobs in the past. They are capable of carrying out their threats. What part of "off with his head" do we not understand?

If many in the Democratic Party in fact conciliate with this racism by refusing to call it by name, preferring to use the vague term "extremism," Obama does not. At the last national debate he told McCain that some of his supporters have crossed a line by calling him a terrorist and proposing to kill him. McCain responded by saying how great and patriotic his supporters are. Do we really have to invoke King and Malcolm, Medgar Evers and Emmett Till, the Birmingham children and Bobby Hutton to understand that the assassination and lynching of Black people is deep in the DNA of white and U.S. culture and is a clear and present danger today?

John Lewis, the civil rights veteran from SNCC and now a U.S. congressperson from Atlanta saw it clearly,

What I am seeing reminds me too much of another destructive period in American history. Senator McCain and Governor Palin are sowing the seeds of hatred and division, and there is no need for this hostility in our political discourse. George Wallace [the racist governor of Alabama] never threw a bomb. He never fired a gun, but he created the climate and the conditions that encouraged vicious attacks against innocent Americans who were simply trying to exercise their constitutional rights. Because of this atmosphere of hate, four little girls were killed on Sunday morning when a church was bombed in Birmingham, Alabama."

We cannot stand by while a rabid white mob attacks a Black man screaming "Hussein, Hussein," "the one over there," "the F-ing Harvard Graduate," "the uppity one," "terrorist" and—we must take this very seriously—"kill him" and "off with his head." The McCain forces are the forces of evil and must be defeated.

McCain and Palin should be under arrest for encouraging, inciting, aiding, and abetting, racist hate crimes. Let's turn out the Vote for Barack Obama, Now.

3) Because there are differences of life and death significance to our communities between Barack Obama and John McCain.

Obama is advocating many positions that are conservative, and some, like his proposals to expand the war in Afghanistan and violate the sovereignty of Pakistan, that are reactionary. But there is still a profound Left/Right battle going, albeit within the confines of U.S. electoral politics and the two-party system in 2008. While he does not have a comprehensive progressive program, there are some key issues on which the difference between Obama and McCain are Black and white.

Let's look at some of the real choices Obama is making.

- *Economic Crisis, Housing Crisis.* Obama has supported the \$750 billion bail out for U.S. financial markets. This is a major setback for working people. He is now arguing, however, that now it is time to bail out not "Wall Street" but "Main Street." He is calling for a 90-day moratorium on foreclosures by any bank or company that receives any U.S. government aid. Is that enough? Of course not, but he is the only candidate even talking about helping people losing their homes in the foreclosure tsunami. If such a moratorium is imposed, it can lead to far more stringent demands to extend and expand that moratorium. By contrast, McCain is talking about letting the free market run its course.
- *Woman's Right to Choose.* Obama vigorously defends a woman's right to choose. When asked in the last debate if they would make *Roe v. Wade* a "litmus test" in the selection of Supreme Court justices, both Obama and McCain, after considerable dancing, said yes. McCain said that he could not imagine a qualified candidate who would not want to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and Obama said he could not imagine a qualified candidate who would not defend a woman's right to privacy—making abortion a right.
- *Unions, Third World.* McCain said free trade was great and accused Obama of holding up trade with Columbia. Columbia is governed by one of the worst military dictatorships in world, propped up by the CIA, the U.S. military, and cocaine traffickers. At this time, I do not assume Obama wants to dismantle Plan

Columbia. If he does not, that will be a major post-election confrontation with him we will have to have. But Obama *did* say that he could not support trade with Columbia while its government was imprisoning and murdering trade unionists. This is significant. Obama has campaigned for the right to organize unions for workers in the U.S. and proposed laws to encourage those rights. While that in itself is major, there is no history I know of for a U.S. presidential candidate to openly expose the murder of trade union organizers in a country that is *allied* with the United States and to call for their right to organize against U.S. transnationals. In the middle of a high-profile nationally televised event, just the mention of trade unionists existing and being under attack in the Third World is a moment of rupture in the imperialist ideological sphere. By contrast, McCain is a union buster at home and a supporter of terror, torture, and the suppression of unions and the Left abroad.

- *Equal Pay for Equal Work.* Obama defends equal pay for equal work and McCain opposes it. In the final debate, Obama raised the example of a lawsuit filed by Lily Ledbetter, a woman who tried to sue her employer for paying her less for the same job that a male employee was getting paid more to do. Obama talked of working in Congress to extend the statute of limitations in Congress on her case so that it wouldn't be dismissed. McCain snickered, What do we want to do, keep these cases going 20 or 30 years after the fact?
- *International Relations.* Obama talks about American exceptionalism, American power, and the "responsibility" of the United States throughout the world. In short, his view is imperialist and his objective is still U.S. world domination. But we should not underestimate what is at stake in his proposal for "unconditional conversations" with heads of states that the Bush administration has named in the "Axis of Evil." Obama has held his ground on the importance of "conversations and negotiations" and has challenged the policy of sanctions and invasions. This is a clear signal to people in the Third World, and the European nations who disagree with the Bush doctrine. Under an Obama administration, there may be alternatives for people in the Third World to the decades of napalm, blockades, shock and awe, and invasions that they have suffered under Republicans and Democrats alike. Obama recognizes that the U.S. is a declining empire and is trying to signal that it can't continue to throw its weight around in the failed policies, as he calls them, of Bush and McCain. Obama's argument for greater use of negotiations and discussions—as well as some of his reservations about massive military deployments—is likely to reflect a tactical debate between pragmatic imperialism on his side versus neo-con messianic imperialism on that of McCain. Again, both share the imperialist goal of U.S. world domination and the control of the politics and economy of Third World nations.

But that is a split in the ruling class that is of great importance to anti-war, anti-imperialist organizers in the U.S. and to governments and movements in the Third World. Let's be clear. McCain supports "the surge" and future unilateral military aggression. He talks always about the hard line and views the solution of every problem through a military lens. We cannot allow his unstable hand anywhere near the nuclear button.

I think that most Blacks, women, and trade unionists would argue there is a profound benefit for an Obama victory and a profound danger in a McCain election. I do not think that those who are working to overturn the rightwing clique controlling the Supreme Court that is ruling out of order every civil rights and civil liberties case will argue there is little difference between Obama and McCain. I think trade unionists in Columbia,

militants and governments in Venezuela, Cuba, and South Africa, as well as those governments and NGOs who witness the daily bullying and dictatorial practices of the U.S. at the United Nations—all see a profound difference between the candidates and are deeply invested in an Obama victory and a McCain defeat.

Let's turn out the vote for Obama, Now.

4) Because John McCain is a war criminal.

How do you think McCain ended up in a POW camp in North Vietnam in the first place? Did the North Vietnamese come to the Naval Academy to kidnap him? No, he was flying a mission over North Vietnamese territory, violating their sovereignty, dropping bombs on civilian populations in an attempt to destroy their power plants and utilities, impose terror from the air, and knowingly cause civilian illness, starvation, death and destruction.

McCain was part of a group of air pirates who flew missions of destruction over Vietnam. After already having bombed North Vietnam, as the *L.A. Times* reports, "In August 1967 the squadron he joined had destroyed a power plant in Hanoi. Two months later, the plant had been rebuilt and was back on the Navy's sites. McCain begged for the mission. 'The earlier raid was the pride and joy of the squadron. I wanted to destroy it again. I was feeling pretty cocky as well.'" He flew the mission and was shot down in his efforts to kill. He wasn't feeling as cocky at that point. He was captured by the North Vietnamese. McCain is a war criminal for his actions; for he admits he begged for his mission and felt destroying the power plants of another country to be his "pride and joy."

His actions stand in profound contrast to the millions of people in the U.S. who dedicated and, in some cases, gave their lives to end the war in Vietnam. He is a disgrace to the many GI's who refused to kill civilians, to those who resisted the draft and risked exile and imprisonment, to those who joined the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and who testified in the Winter Soldier hearings (see Clay Claiborne's film *Vietnam: American Holocaust*), and to the courageous veterans today who are speaking out against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The actions of the United States government, the U.S. Navy, and pilots of death and destruction like McCain led to the murder of three million Vietnamese civilians and one million combatants all trying to protect their country from a U.S. invasion. McCain was part of the force that inflicted poison gas, assassination squads, napalm, Agent Orange, rape, and premeditated murder against the people of Vietnam. The U.S. systematically committed crimes against humanity in Vietnam and John McCain was a willing, enthusiastic perpetrator. John McCain should be tried for war crimes in violation of the Nuremberg statutes.

Let's turn out the vote for Obama, Now.

5) Because Sarah Palin's election would turn the women's movement on its head—Palin is a fascist, a racist, a white separatist, and a misogynist

There is nothing funny about Sarah Palin. (Tina Fey's brilliant parodies are the exception.) But do not laugh at Palin any more than you should laugh at Bush. She is not stupid. She is deadly serious, armed and dangerous. She is tied to extreme vigilante groups who want to secede from the United States because they feel it is too liberal and too multi-racial. She uses oil revenues to buy the loyalties of people in Alaska, tying their futures to the global warming that will in fact destroy Alaska and the

planet.

She and McCain will cut social services, already hanging by a thread. They will ramp up the police state and the war on terror. She has broken with John McCain by proposing a constitutional amendment against gay marriage and is moving ever further to his right. Some speculate she is doing this out of a lack of discipline. Others think she wants to position herself even more strongly with the extreme Right base in case McCain loses and she wants to pursue other national elected positions.

She has drawn the fascist mobs to the campaign and operates in the tradition of reactionary demagogues Father Coughlin and Lou Dobbs. She is the hit person against Obama, the warm-up act for McCain that gets the white mob into a racist rage. She will support a police state and will lock us up without a second thought. And the talk of her being one 72-year-old's heartbeat away from the presidency is not a joke. She may be a future president of the United States if we don't defeat McCain.

Governor Palin believes a woman who chooses to have an abortion is a sinner, period. She believes that such is the case even if the woman chooses to terminate a pregnancy forced on her through rape or incest. She is an enemy of the movement for reproductive rights. Her message to desperate, working class women is that being a loyal wife is a woman's best chance for escaping poverty, your subjugation is liberation. She appeals to misogynist men and assures them that their domination of the family is God's will. While *she* has been able to get out of the house with five children to pursue a professional career, her gender politics will prevent most women from doing the same—locking women in the home as single parents or prisoners of their husbands—as she leads choruses of "Stand by Your Man." Her election will be an attack of *Roe v. Wade*, women's reproductive rights, and women's liberation.

Let's turn out the vote for Barack Obama, Now.

6) Because the McCain campaign is an attack on the Left.

The McCain campaign wants to kill the Left in the U.S. and internationally, kill social security, the social safety net, and anything "social" including even the hope of social-ism. Obama is being attacked as an enemy because he is Black and because he is a moderate liberal. The attack on the Left broadly defined must be met by a counter-attack against McCain and for Obama through November 4, 2008.

Look at McCain's targets:

- **William Ayers**, billed a "terrorist" by the McCain camp, worked against the war in Vietnam in which four million people were killed. Ayers is a symbol of the anti-war movement and its most militant wing.
- **Reverend Wright**. Reverend Wright is a respected theologian whose "crime" was saying that racism is "endemic" to the United States and that the U.S. sees the world through the eyes of an empire.
- **ACORN** is being attacked by the McCain campaign for registering Democratic-leaning voters. ACORN may have gotten some bad names in the voter registration process but none of those people could vote or be counted. By contrast, the Republicans prevent people from voting who *are* registered to vote, deny valid signatures and voters, and close down polling places in Black and heavily Democratic districts. They defy the electoral process and have stolen state and national elections.

- **Socialism.** McCain has begun attacking as "socialist" Obama's efforts to make income taxes more progressive and to use some of the wealth to help the poor. McCain said, "At least in Europe the Socialist leaders who so admire my opponent are upfront about their objectives. They use real numbers and honest language." McCain proposes cutting capital gains taxes and giving more subsidies to the rich.

Obama's ties to Ayers were minimal and nothing to apologize for. His ties to Reverend Wright were profound and his disassociation from his mentor deplorable. Obama's distancing himself from ACORN reflects weakness. But, as Reverend Wright pointed out, Obama is a politician running for office; he makes his tactical moves according to his strategic aim of getting elected. I wish that Obama would defend socialism but he is not a socialist and if he were, he would not be the Democratic nominee for president.

Whether or not Obama chooses to disassociate, denounce, or distance himself from the anti-Vietnam war movement, from the rhetoric and analyses of the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movements, from grassroots voter registration, and from socialism —those of us on the Left have our own interests in this election that include but also go beyond Obama's objectives.

Whether Obama chooses to identify with or to renounce these connections, we on the Left need to grasp that these attacks from McCain are against us, not just Obama. If McCain is elected, what do we think he will do to those of us who fought against the war in Vietnam and are fighting to end the U.S. occupation of Iraq? What will he do to those who will continue to speak and act against the endemic racism of the United States, or to those of us who would study and advocate socialist alternatives to capitalism? I fear for those on the Left who do not see the writing on the wall.

Let's turn out the vote for Barack Obama, Now.

7) Because an Obama victory will be a defeat for the Clintons.

Hillary and Bill Clinton have been treacherous opponents of Obama. They are threatened by his possible victory and are doing very little to help him. At a white tie dinner John McCain told a great joke. He brought down the house when he observed, "Even in this room full of proud Manhattan Democrats, I can't shake that feeling that some people here are pulling for me. I'm delighted to see you here tonight, Hillary!" Obama understood only too well the truth of that statement.

The Clinton's opened up the floodgates of racism against Obama during the Democratic primaries. I made the argument then that Hillary Clinton was forming a white bloc with John McCain to defeat Barack Obama. I wrote an article that documented this in great detail: *Hillary and John: The White Bloc That Must Be Stopped*.

Throughout Hillary's campaign she argued that only she and McCain were qualified to be president and Obama was not. She ran that ridiculous ad campaign, "Who do you want to answer the phone at 3 in the morning?" She told the press that she and John McCain had the standing to be commander and chief and Obama did not. As she realized her dreams of victory were slipping away, her campaign reached its moral nadir. She told voters in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and throughout the country that she did not think that "working, hard-working Americans, white Americans" would vote for Obama. Hillary and Bill Clinton have opened up the door for the racism of the McCain/Palin campaign, aiding and abetting their "dear friend" John McCain.

Hillary also made continued false claims that Obama was not supportive of women

(meaning her). Only when it was absolutely clear she was losing did she come out as a born-again feminist, a white feminist, attacking Obama. In so doing she set the conditions for "her friend" John McCain to pick Sarah Palin to mine the anti-Obama sentiment Hillary had agitated among Democratic white women voters. Fortunately, Obama is winning more and more women voters. Needless to say these women include the Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Indigenous women among whom he is also polling strongly. Women recognize how important is his defense of choice and his support for equal pay, and they are impressed with the way he relates to the women in his life, a strong Black partner and his daughters.

The Clinton's, when they were in office, brought us the end of welfare, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Effective Death Penalty Act, and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. They typify cynicism and opportunism.

When Bill Clinton was on David Letterman, Chris Rock was also a guest. During Clinton's interview with Letterman he barely could say anything good about Obama and kept referring to McCain as "my friend" and "a war hero." After Clinton left, Rock went off on him, "Is it me or does Clinton have a problem saying the name Barack Obama? He doesn't get it, he keeps talking about Hillary. Hillary lost! Hillary lost. It wasn't sexism. She ran against a Black guy nobody ever heard of and he beat her. She lost."

If Obama wins in spite of the Clintons' treachery it will strengthen his hand against the Democratic Leadership Council that they control—the hard core of conservative center-right Democrats. It is good to see Hillary Clinton campaigning for Obama. She has no other choice. She too fears eight years of a McCain/Palin ticket and fears her own isolation in the Democratic Party. The Clintons are a Trojan Horse inside the Obama campaign. But Obama is beating the Clintons, Yes He Can. An Obama victory would weaken the Clinton oligarchy.

Let's turn out the vote for Barack Obama, Now.

8) A victory for Barack Obama will usher in a revolution of rising expectations.

If Obama is elected he will do so with the support of 95% of the Black vote and the highest Black vote in U.S. history, along with enormous numbers of white, Latino, Asian, and Indigenous peoples. He will attract a very large and energetic white vote with a strong anti-racist orientation. He will win over the majority of young people who are more influenced by the victories of the Civil Rights Movement than the crimes of the Klan and the White Citizens Councils.

Listen to how in every talk, besides his recitation of the obligatory "the American people" a dozen times, he goes out of his way to say, "My election is for everybody. The red states and blue, for the middle class, for Blacks, whites, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Indigenous peoples." The mentioning of specific oppressed nationality peoples and cultures is in itself a major breakthrough in the public discourse of race in the country. Notice that the Republicans and most Democrats will never acknowledge that those communities even exist because to do so creates a momentary awareness that whiteness is not the norm, that whites are not the boss. It also creates support for group-specific demand development among oppressed nationality peoples.

After an Obama election the entire field of "community organizing" will get a major boost. I was there when Kennedy was elected and Johnson beat Goldwater. Those elections raised hopes that helped the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left and later the Black Liberation, Women's, LGBT, and Environmental Justice Movements. Obama

will have to decide, after he is elected, what policies he wants to carry out. If he betrays his best promises or carries out his worst, I believe he will receive significant organized opposition with demands that he change his policies.

I was also there when John F. Kennedy moved to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs and tried to assassinate Castro. I was there when Lyndon B. Johnson initiated and then tried to disband the poverty programs, when Johnson escalated a genocidal war in Vietnam. These actions by Kennedy and Johnson led to more protests, not less. They led to the emergence of some very principled left liberal Democrats, and the radicalization of many formerly Democratic liberal students who came to see that more radical, structural, revolutionary change was needed.

I hope that Barack Obama understands that the U.S. is a declining superpower in a multi-polar world. I think he knows full well the economic crisis facing U.S. and world imperialism. I think he may propose a less bellicose and a less aggressive foreign policy if only to protect the system itself. Regardless, my argument is not that we work to elect Obama based on an ability to predict all of his actions or choices.

I think every successful organizer has to have an independent program and an independent grassroots base. I am part of the Labor/Community Strategy Center, and the Bus Riders Union. I work in alliance with thousands of grassroots groups reflected, in one instance, by the 12,000 social movement organizers who attended the first U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta in 2007.

I hope that Obama, as a former community organizer, will understand pressure from his left. Even if he does not always respond to our specific demands, it will be the job of the movements to assess his response and figure out our best tactics to win our demands.

I hope that we can make sure that Obama respects the civil rights and civil liberties of protestors and reigns in the campaign of terror against protestors by local police, the National Guard, and the U.S. military. An Obama administration cannot sanction the level of brutality and repression against demonstrators that the Bush police state has perfected. Under pressure from the Left, I believe he could expand civil rights and civil liberties and expand the rights of protest and demonstration, which in turn would help the movement further. Can I guarantee that? Of course not, but I do believe that the entire climate for anti-racist, anti-poverty, environmental justice, immigrant rights, anti-police state, anti-war organizing will be radically improved by an Obama victory.

Let's turn out the vote for Barack Obama, Now.

9) Because I have faith in the Obama supporters, faith in the Black community, faith in the grassroots Left.

Obama supporters

I spent a weekend at a Camp Obama training program in Long Beach and have since been going to phone bank at the local Obama headquarters. They are a wide variety of folk coming from many different points on the political spectrum. They are decent, hard working, motivated, and wonderful people. There is a movement atmosphere among the group. I was deeply moved by the 350 of us who came to the Obama training. We worked together from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday in a very intensive organizer training program. On every break I asked people, What is the most important thing about an Obama victory for you? I was surprised by the number and diversity of answers. "Because he is so intelligent. I am sick of having a stupid president." "He is

the most ethical, the most humane." "He will defeat Karl Rove." "He is the most qualified Black man." "Because he will help me not be ashamed to be an American." "Because I was involved in the Civil Rights Movement and had lost hope. This brings me from 'We Shall Overcome' to 'Yes We Can.'" "Because I want my children to see we can elect a Black president."

Of the 350 people who attended, 100 were Black, 15 were Asian/Pacific Islander, 15 were Latino, and more than 200 were white. This election is drawing a line of demarcation among white people that is very profound—a civil war within a larger civil war, the anti-racist whites versus the racist whites. Just as in the Civil Rights Movement, a large anti-racist white bloc is consolidating itself as a critical ally of communities of color. Remember, these are white folk voting for a Black man for president of the United States. We should not underestimate the good intentions and high levels of activism and sacrifice of the Obama camp and their critical role in history in the years ahead.

The Black community

The Black community is driven like nothing I have seen since the March on Washington, the fight against segregation in the South, the fight against racism and police brutality in the North. The Obama campaign has a mass character to it that is unprecedented in U.S. politics, having sprung from the traditions of Black protest, Black rebellion and Black organizing. In the past months I have spoken with many Black members of the Obama Campaign and the Bus Riders Union. Having grown up in Jim Crow segregation, many say how hard it is to believe that Black people could come from slavery to the possibility of electing the first Black president of the United States. While that makes them very hopeful, in the same sentence they also talk of wanting it so badly they cannot acknowledge it. They do not want to get their hopes up and let the white racist voters crush them. They fear something bad happening to Obama. They fear the white backlash and fear another set of hopes dashed against the rocks of racism by this country. They are working with all their heart and soul for Obama but do not want to acknowledge how much this election means to them because, if he loses, they don't know if they can bear the pain.

There is no community stronger and tougher than the Black community. It has suffered more pain in America than at times is humanly imaginable. Today more than a million Black men are in prison and millions more are being hunted down by the police as we speak. And yet, the Black community has a power and resilience that is legendary, a long history of leading the anti-racist and Left movements in this country. Its capacity to recover and fight back is admired by friend and foe alike. Still, we cannot let a McCain victory happen, we just cannot. An Obama victory will raise the spirits and fighting capacity of the Black community.

There are some who worry that Obama will co-opt the Black community. They think that Black people who are against the growing police state or the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan will look the other way if those policies are carried out by Obama. Some have expressed a fear that Black people will protect and defend Obama in a way that brooks no criticism, giving him a free pass at a time of crisis. But while that is possible, it would contradict everything I have seen in 40 years of organizing. My experience says that it all depends on how you organize and how well you grasp and assert your own independence and initiative in the united front.

I have been in social movements that helped elect and then challenge mayor of Newark Kenneth Gibson, and Los Angeles mayors Tom Bradley and Antonio Villaraigosa. Obama is a brilliant organizer, a brilliant politician. He has his own program, his own

priorities, and he will fight to win support for them. Cooptation is not the most helpful concept, taking the focus off our own role. Obama will do what he has to do. It is for those of us who are organizing in low-income communities of color, those of us who consider ourselves good strategists, good tacticians and organizers—it is for those of us who have a grassroots base to drive our own programs, our own demands, and to develop the tactical plans to win those demands.

After the election thousands of grassroots groups that have been working on life and death issues for decades will be in the much stronger position of being able to place their demands on a more receptive Obama presidency. As just a few key examples of structural demands we must raise:

- Dramatically cut the \$400-billion military budget. Massively expand social services and direct transfers of money to the unemployed, the poor, and those facing foreclosures and evictions.
- Release the vast majority of the one million Black and 500,000 Latino prisoners incarcerated in the U.S. gulag. Provide humane treatment for those who remain, including plans for parole and rehabilitation.
- Remove all combat and occupation forces from Iraq and provide support for the self-determination of the Iraqi people. End the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan. End the military threats against Iran, and Pakistan.
- Provide free, safe, and legal abortions for women. Do not impose parental notification. Provide U.S. funds for birth control and sex education in the U.S. and Third World.
- Pass a new provision of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, strengthening Title VI, that will allow grassroots parties to sue government agencies over racial discrimination and to block federal funding to racially discriminatory projects based on disparate racial impacts.
- Stop the environmental disaster of “clean coal” ethanol and nuclear power. Dramatically expand clean fuel bus transportation and dramatically restrict the auto.
- Stop the ICE raids and surveillance on the 12 million immigrants in the U.S. Offer them amnesty. Take down the wall with Mexico.
- End the blockade of Cuba and stop U.S. subversion of the Venezuelan revolution.
- Support self-determination for the Palestinian people and protect their right to a viable homeland.

Those of us who see ourselves in a united front alliance with Obama and with his millions of supporters should carry out a policy of simultaneous alliance and challenge, defending his candidacy and challenging some of its key policies. The Right is like a pack of attack dogs. They will not stop even after Obama is elected. If they lose the election, they will begin attacking Obama’s the day he takes office. They will try to subvert his presidency at every turn. We want to build an alliance with Obama against the Right, a united front against racism and fascism that never loses sight of our unities with him and with our stand against the barbarians at the gate. At the same time, we want to build stronger grassroots movements to his left that can carry out their own independent programs and tactical plans. As grassroots organizers we are working with millions of other Obama supporters who can be won to a broader progressive and Left

agenda in the process of fighting for an Obama presidency. We need organizers who do not sit on the sidelines of history but see their participation in this historical battle as a major development that can expand the chances for more radical and revolutionary changes in U.S. society.

Let us be able to rejoice in an Obama victory and then face the inevitable challenges together. I am convinced that many of the people who are working so hard for Obama—who are making millions of phone calls, contributing their money, and going door to door for his election—will expect the most of him. They will not go quietly into the night if he betrays their trust. Obama has argued to his supporters that he expects us to keep up the organizing to keep him on track, that the role of those who work to elect him will be to organize to push him once he is elected. There are millions of people working their heart out for his election who will be there to take him up on his post-election offer.

Let's turn out the vote for Barack Obama, Now.

10) Because it's time to act. Here is what you can do.

There are at least four major ways you can take positive action through November 4, 2008 to elect Obama and defeat McCain:

- **Contribute funds to the Obama Campaign.** Over three million people have donated already. Obama raised \$150 million in September from 632,000 people, an average of \$86 per contribution. My wife Lian and I have contributed to his campaign and plan to do so again in the next few days. Whether you give \$25, \$50 or \$100, consider that another 600,000 people will be doing the same. If we each do this, we can raise more money to elect Obama and defeat McCain. Last minute ads to counter last minute attack ads from McCain are needed and funds are essential. Every McCain ad is an ad against liberals, against the Left, against Black civil rights leaders, against socialism, against any progressive future.
- **If you are in a swing state, plug into the Obama Campaign now.** through November 4, 2008 get involved with phone banking and precinct walking. On the weekend before the election and on Election Day, volunteer with Get Out The Vote (GOTV) operations.
- **If you are not in a swing state, phone bank into swing states** with your local branch of the Obama Campaign. Also consider volunteering to travel to your nearest swing state the last weekend before the election or whenever you can to go door to door turning out voters. The more experience you have, the better, but the Obama campaign is good at plugging you in.
- **Become a poll worker.** There are millions of people who will vote for the first time or vote after years of absence. The polls will be jammed. The Republicans will commit any crime under the books to deter voters in Democratic districts and Black voters in particular. We need election protection. People who have signed up as poll workers in L.A. are already saying that South L.A. and East L.A. are understaffed. We can assume that communities of color will need special attention and that this is a critical job.

There is work to be done, and it is great to be an organizer, not a bystander. Obama is making history and so should we. It our job to be part of this historic movement and to come home with a victory in hand.

* * * *

A respectful acknowledgment of the historic presidential campaign of Congressperson Cynthia McKinney.


The candidate with whose views I most agree is former Congressperson Cynthia McKinney, a dynamic Black woman running on the Green Party ticket. I know many people of good faith and good politics who are working for her. I encourage them to carry out their plan to its fullest and wish her campaign the greatest success. She should be encouraged for what she is doing. At this point this is not the choice I am making in my own tactical assessment of the best way to confront racism and empire. When the election is over, whether Obama is elected or McCain, we all have to work together in a broad united front against the war in Iraq and racism at home. Any tactical disagreements on this election, no matter how profound, should not divide us in our broader long-term objectives. At the end of the day, we are sisters and brothers in the struggle.


[Click here to comment on any article
in this issue or see what others are saying in the](#)
The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator Eric Mann is a veteran of the Congress of Racial Equality, Students for a Democratic Society, and the United Auto Workers, is the author of: *Comrade George: An Investigation into the Life, Political Thought, and Assassination of George Jackson*, *Dispatches from Durban: Firsthand Commentaries on the World Conference Against Racism*, and *Katrina's Legacy: White Racism and Black Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*. He is working on his next book, *Revolutionary Organizing in the Age of Reaction, featuring The 25 Qualities of the Successful Organizer*. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Mann or visit his blog (ericmannblog.blogspot.com)

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)
Click Here

[Home](#)

Click Here To
CONTRIBUTE TO  NOW

Click Here To
CONTACT 

Your comments are always welcome.

e-Mail re-print notice

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002 - 2008
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved