

**The
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on issues affecting African Americans
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**Obama Blues
Represent Our Resistance
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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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"The effect is again a magical and hypnotic one - the projection of images which convey irresistible unity, harmony of contradictions... People who speak and accept such language seem to be immune to everything - and susceptible to everything."

-Herbert Marcuse. [*One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*](#)

November 3, 2008

The Obama blues dominate the front yards of Black and white homes and apartment buildings. Some yards have several Obama blues for emphasis. In the parking space shared by Dunkin Donuts, Burger King, and KFC, the pigeons have been struggling to maintain the space where they normally search for food left out for them. Overhead are the seagulls flying, sounding off, and disrupting the pigeons' daily routine against a white background of clouds. There's an elderly white man eating from a discarded pizza box over a city trash can.

On Cheltenham Avenue in Germantown, Philadelphia, it seems unusually quiet for this stretch of about four blocks, where Black Americans work alongside Middle Eastern Muslims and Asians as independent vendors or store owners, taxi drivers, and newsstand operators. On this, the eve of the U.S. presidential election, older Black men still huddle on corners; older Black women walk with canes, and young Black women with babies in carriages are shopping for bargains. But my eyes fell on Obama's face draping the vending stands and staring forward from the chest of men and women

walking the street. Everyone seems to be holding their breath, going through the day in silence as to say it is the least they can do. Stay quiet.

The sign O-B-A-M-A and an arrow points toward a store front on Cheltenham Avenue. It is a small room, nearly crowded with Black people walking quickly past each other, talking over ringing phones. Obama posters decorate the walls up front by the door and security officer's desk. Behind the security desk are people leaning over others who are filling out forms. Further behind them are tables with phones and people are calling potential voters. Within a minute, several more people enter the small space asking to volunteer to canvass or to call voters. A woman asks if she could sign up as a driver to bring people to the polls.

This space became too small for volunteer training, said the security guard sitting at her desk. "We sign people up here and send them to Germantown Avenue...Lots of people have come in to volunteer." Finally, she says, "Obama will win. I'm hoping, wishing, praying he will win."

Tonight, I know what they are thinking as they wait. He looks like them and he doesn't look like the other candidate and the other candidates before him. He will come through because they have hope. They are inspired to hold their collective breaths and hope. They want to believe that after enslavement and after legalized segregation and the last forty years, the rulers are willing to let them in the door. They want to believe without asking why now? Why this man? Why would the rulers be willing to accept Barack Obama?

November 4, 2008

A middle-aged Black woman, she is the first to exit from the voting poll where I live. It is 7:15 a.m. "This is incredible." She says only three people were in line for the primaries. Through the glass door, I see the line is long and doubled in the lobby of the building. A little after 6:00 a.m., when I came down to take notes, I found about seven people waiting to vote. The election staff was still setting up. She is smiling as she walks away toward the parking lot, on her way to work.

It is chilly and cloudy again and people do not want to linger. But the people, mostly Black, are smiling, saying "go Obama" as they pass me and three voter protection staffers just in from New York. "It's nice for a change. I'm hoping for the best," says a police officer who lives in the building.

Around 10:00 a.m., five people are in line. I walked back down to Cheltenham Avenue where the buses seem noisy now. "Don't Forget To Vote," they flash. People are walking faster. Everyone is looking directly at everyone. "Hi." Or there's a nod and a smile that is more than a smile. It's a statement about the past, present, and future. "Hi!"

"Have you voted?" At the neighborhood library, the guard and librarian at the counter ask every patron if they have voted. The response is a resounding "yeah" followed by laughter and talk about a "historical" day. Outside on Cheltenham again, "Vote for Obama. Vote for Obama." It's someone with a bullhorn in a red van passing a busy intersection, slowing down to a crowd who stops to cheer.

It feels like Chicago. It feels like 1983 when it was our beloved Harold Washington. And my grandmother and parents and aunts and uncles are alive. We are actively involved canvassing or teaching our older relatives, neighbors, and friends not to fear change, not to fear your own blackness. Our rulers are first and foremost members of the Daley Machine. And Harold is not the Machine. We are not the Machine. Our historical day is about the work we Black Chicagoans have done in our homes, in our communities to change the status quo.

Back in my building lobby, people, one or two at a time, come in walking with a bounce. Everyone is talking at once. "Obama." "Obama." Laughter. "Yeah!" I stand around to listen. The election staff, residents of the building, is enjoying itself, despite the long day. It feels like an Obama win.

I am conscious of standing alone near the security counter in a lobby filled with people - Black people. They suspect I am some back-in-the-day-radical or "militant." Oh you are from Chicago! Oh! I would like to talk about the issues: the war in Iraq and in Afghanistan or single-payer health care. What about education, I think as I look at the people coming in and instantly bonding with the election staff and other neighbors. What about the huge incarceration of young Black Americans? What about that hawkish talk of invasions and keeping troops in Iraq and Afghanistan? What about global warming? What about a national debate to consider abolishing an economic system that has failed the majority of people?

That would sound as if you are talking against Obama! Against Obama?

These are Black workers who want to see a Black man in the White House. Change is a changing of the guard. Obama will bring jobs! But how? It was more than changing guards or the rulers in Chicago - but then, this isn't 1983 anymore. Washington died and Reagan changed the economy and embraced the language of imperialists wholeheartedly. He sent people back to a parochial vision of community that consisted of only their families with dark villains, "evil" villains milling around their doors, plotting to steal everything they own, including their lives and the lives of their children. Black politicians have adjusted to enter the backdoor with a polite knock and a smile. Black citizens too have cautiously followed their political leadership through the backdoor and up the stairs, careful not to upset the china in the hallways. Harold Washington lifted his foot and kicked the china to the floor. Black politicians have restored the china and make sure their followers stay in a straight line.

I am watching Democracy Now's five-hour coverage of the election when I hear it. Women screaming. Yelling. O-B-A-M-A! O-B-A-M-A! Car horns. Then Amy Goodman announces that Sen. Barack Obama is the projected winner! I call my sister in Chicago. She is at work as a security guard with only a radio at her desk. But she didn't hear the announcement, so he screams. "Oh, my God, he did it!" She starts to cry. I have been very critical of Obama - critical of the entire election campaign in the U.S. and the corporate selection of the Republican and Democratic candidates - I cried. *Something is different.* I look at the screen and see ecstatic people and I hear my sister crying. *Contrived emotional response to a dark face. Obama and the corporate rulers depended on this response. It's worth a cry - once - for in this historical moment is the tragedy of Black America.*

I can see a darker face, but one surrounded by the messengers of death. *I can't see my ancestors in this image! I can't!*

My sister and the people I encountered yesterday and today - hope - despite all the warning signs - not so much in some narrative about "transcending race" but in one man reversing the tide that has been against them. One man would free them of the chains of being Black in the U.S. It was at once an unbelievable moment and a deeply sad moment. And would it matter to speak now - at this moment - when the U.S., a nation unable to acknowledge white privilege, has voted for the first African American president?

The people are speaking, rightly or wrongly, in the silence of the Left.

The Left in the U.S., particularly the Black Left, supported the corporate capitalist because they can't imagine real change. Obama, with the help of the Left, turned red blue - for the Democrats! The Left can no longer imagine, anymore than the white rural population (the Hockey Mom's patriotic), a country where the wealth is re-distributed to include the masses of poor and economically distressed.

I started these 18 months thinking about a Cynthia McKinney run for President. I showed the video American Blackout a couple of times in the community while I lived in Madison, Wisconsin. In the subsequent months, however, I witnessed the jockeying for position among the "celebrity" community activists distrustful of the "Dr" before my name or "PhD" after it. An "intellectual" who doesn't have health insurance, doesn't have a steady income, and who has worked for free - how crazy! - within the community for years, is suspect. Too much of one thing - too little of another - pricks nerves!

So I pulled away and watched as Left activists, journalists, and intellectuals wrote article after article and drafted letter after letter in support of the Democrat. He's better than McCain. It's a Republican or a Democrat. It's the election. It's the vote. How many committed, life-long human rights activists, like Jeremiah Wright, were betrayed and excluded by the so-called Black Left in order to see the Democratic Party - not the people - the Party - succeed on November 4th?

The Left could have held its ground. It could have returned to the real hard work of grassroots organizing by teaching the young, one, two, ten, students at a time in teach-in sessions at local cafes or in their living rooms or on front porches. The left could have used these last forty years to educate the people, particularly the young people, about fascism and the corporate takeover of the media and government. The Left could have educated workers about the necessity to organize for their own interests and link their interests to workers globally battling U.S. Empire's capitalism Machine. The Left could have remain vigilant to the tenets of Left politics and denounced the liberal/centrist and corporate-funded Democratic Party. It could have rejected a system that serves only the few and themselves!

While I hold the phone in one hand and wait for President-elect Obama to appear before what we know now is a crowd of 200,000 gathered at Grant Park in Chicago, I am thinking about the old days. At one time in Chicago, where I grew up, the deceased could vote? I am acutely aware that my deceased grandparents, parents, aunts and

uncles can't vote - not in Chicago, not anywhere. Would they have been proud to vote for Obama, whose re-districting resulted in representing less poor and working class Black Chicagoans? Would they have considered the representation of these last forty years to be the post-racial era? The community of my grandparents and parents relied on their experiential knowledge about Black people to write their own narrative about their condition in a white dominated country.

I remember stand beside my mother to see Pope John Paul II and later Luciano Pavarotti at Grant Park. Years before that, I remember watching the news at home, surrounded by my family, as the Chicago Police attacked protesters in Grant Park during the 1968 Democratic Convention. Now I have to describe to my sister what I see on the computer screen. There's the president-elect Obama holding Sasha's hand and there's Michelle holding Malia's hand. (*It's an African American family*). There's a screaming, waving, crying crowd of racially mixed people. Then there's the next president of the U.S. on stage, alone.

One people. One nation, Obama tells the crowd again. One people. One nation. (*The emotional call of the citizens to war*). Obama frowns and looks sternly toward the crowd as he shakes his war rattle: there will be violence! Count on it. (*The announcement of old business as usual*). But my sister doesn't hear this. She is *crying*. I can't speak.

At the end, the stage is filled with Obama and Biden's families. Children white and Black... *A union of white and Black for the convenience of the fascists! Malcolm warned that the rulers in the U.S. can't afford to see Black Americans "too militant" or take "too uncompromising a stand" and successfully regroup or organize "any faction in this country whose thought and whose thinking patterns are international, rather than national."*

November 5, 2008

The day after, the Black Philadelphians on Cheltenham Avenue are still smiling. Still shouting Obama, Obama! It's still incredible. An African American in the White House! In the meantime, President-elect Obama offers Congressman Rahm Emmanuel (D-Ill) the position of White House Chief of Staff. Pro-Israel, pro-war, Emmanuel! And the Left, waving a victory flag, says it will offer criticism - starting in January!

Sounds like an old Blues song.

And so begins a new era of U.S. imperialism!

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and

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