

# **The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r**

An independent weekly internet magazine  
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,  
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,  
analysis and investigations on issues affecting  
African Americans and the African world.

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## **The Obama Administration: A Kiss and a Slap Can the progressive movement gain lost ground?**

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**BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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The pomp and circumstance of the Obama Inauguration seemed to be a fitting climax to a campaign of many historic firsts. The longest running Obama campaign broke all political contribution records, developed an unprecedented database of supporters; utilized the internet for messaging and fundraising; and the list goes on. In 2009 and before most predicted, Barack Obama became the first black president.

There are many who are still perplexed about how Barack Obama ascended from obscurity to the US presidency. They will have four years to figure it out. They will also have four years to monitor, critique and analyze his every move.

Meanwhile, the unprecedented outpouring of adoration for the 44th president is unabated and unapologetic. One cannot help but feel the energy been generated by the millions of Americans who believe they have a vested stake in Obama and a hope that his new administration will resuscitate a floundering economy.

I have also been infected with the emotion in the air. I am amazed at the hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who made the financial sacrifice to get to Washington, DC and be part of the historic experience.

My excitement now and throughout the campaign was often jolted by a view or action (or lack of action) by Obama. A kiss and a slap. That seems to be President's approach to keeping everyone happy or at least at bay from a full frontal attack.

For example, I was furious that Obama was mum on the Israeli massacre of Palestinian civilians explaining that there was only one president at a time. He also was silent on

the execution of Oscar Grant murdered by BART metro cop Johannes Mehserle. Putting policy matters aside, it would have been totally appropriate for Obama to express concern about the loss of life in both of these cases. The slap.

Obama's first execution orders included shutting down Guantanamo Bay and to ban torture. Kiss, kiss. Withdrawal from Iraq-kiss. More military forces in Afghanistan-slap. And there you have it.

Progressives don't have a lot of time to bash or bow to Obama; we lost a lot of ground during the campaign when we should have been organizing inside and outside this political wave. This president is keeping his supporter base organized and engaged. He calls his Organizing for America the "largest grassroots movement" in the nation's history. Imagine a US president being able to make such a claim and not a radical organization building power by the people for the people.

The black working class always gets the flu when America sneezes. The economic tsunami that is about to engulf the communities where we work, live and organize will be unparalleled. Even the tenuous black middle class that grew in spurts and spits during the nineties face an uncertain future.

The seismic shock of the housing crash will hit this sector as well as new homeowners from the working class. In its report, "Foreclosed: State of the Dream 2008," a publication by the nonprofit, United for a Fair Economy, a dismal forecast was painted. From Wall Street to Black Main Street to The Hood, the report predicted a devastating ripple effect: "The spillover effect of the subprime crisis affects whole communities negatively, in terms of abandoned houses, increased crime, devaluation of neighboring houses, and erosion of the tax base, causing revenue shortfalls that mandate service cuts." With unemployment in African-American communities escalating to double digits on top of this, we can anticipate a volatile and unhealthy situation if the social movement left doesn't take this wild steer by the horns.

Our work is cut out for us who believe in freedom. It may seem that we don't have the energy or resources to keep the newest face of neo-liberalism on the straight and narrow but that, too, must be part of our strategic agenda. We must hold the Obama Administration accountable, not just to his campaign promises, but to meeting the overall interests of the People.

In [\*Navigating the Storm: A Strategic Orientation for Confronting the Advance of Reaction and National Oppression in the "Obama" Era\*](#), Kali Akuno presents a thoughtful and provocative proposal for organizing in this next period. He states that we should not isolate ourselves "from the mass support for Obama's presidency and initial initiatives" but to rise to the occasion and operate "beyond our silo's, trends, line disputes and criticisms."

How can we identify and recruit some of those creative and bright young people in the Obama camp to our cause before they get sucked up into the post-racial, reformist marsh? How will we reclaim the genuine principles of organizing—that we've strayed from—so that young and new activists understand what it takes to transform a society?

The upsurge of interest in activism is ours to define and to direct if we take advantage of this historic moment and movement. There are colossal challenges ahead but also opportunities for building the organizations that make up our movements for equality, justice and peace. These are indeed exciting times.

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