

“Bro. Mr. President”

Black Shining Prince or Black Trojan Horse? Progressive Thought on Obama

November 4, 2008 may have represented the most critical Election Day in the history of the United States.

Okay, how about the most important Election Day since Reconstruction?

Would you believe, the most important Election Day in a *generation*?

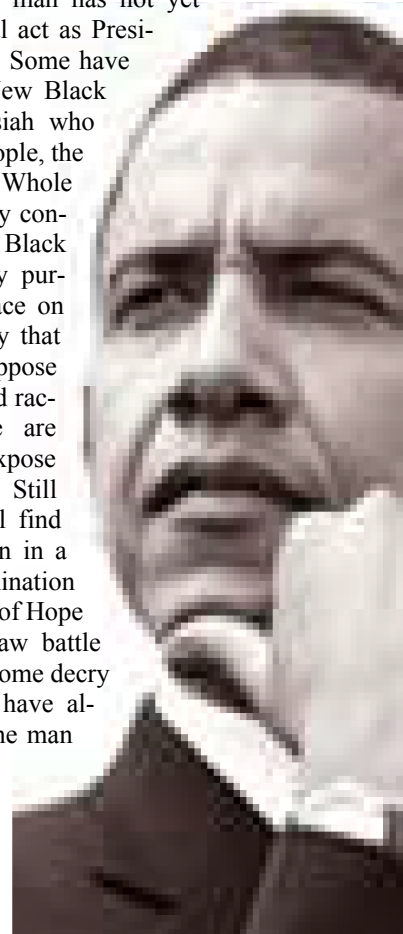
Look, this is the first time we've elected a US President of Afrikan descent, or at least the first time we elected one who was *openly* Black. (There have been some researchers who insist there is evidence of at least five prior Presidents who had Afrikan ancestors, including Washington and Jefferson. But that's another story for another issue.)

That night, as **Barack Hussein Obama** addressed the crowd in Grant Park in Chicago, Illinois, people of every race, creed and color from sea to shining sea, across The Pond in Europe, Afrika and Asia, cried. People around the world danced in the streets. The Eight Years of Darkness were over. The Bush Doctrine would be no more. The rest of the world would grow to like Americans again. And the long-held dreams of Black Leaders everywhere who thought they would never see this day came true, against what at one time seemed to

be insurmountable odds. Who can forget that iconic shot of the **Rev. Jesse Jackson**, almost lost in the middle of that Grant Park crowd, tears streaming down his face? Surely, this was The Day The World Rejoiced.

So, who are you doubters to rain on our World Parade? How dare you question the popular notion that this election was a transcendent one, one that has finally signaled The End of Racism in America?

The battle lines have been drawn and the presumptions have been made, and the man has not yet committed his first official act as President of the United States. Some have anointed Obama as the New Black Shining Prince, the Messiah who has come to save Black people, the United States and the Whole World. Some have already condemned him as the New Black Trojan Horse, whose only purpose is to put a Black Face on imperialism in such a way that White people dare not oppose him for fear of being called racists and Afrikan people are forced to support him or expose themselves as race traitors. Still others predict that he will find himself an unwilling pawn in a larger game of world domination that will use his Campaign of Hope as the fulcrum of a seesaw battle between Good and Evil. Some decry the fact that conclusions have already been drawn about the man before he is even inaugurated, while others say that time is too short to ignore the most disturbing indications from his Cabinet appointments.



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SRDC Notes: Organize, Now More Than Ever

Over the past year, I've written rather extensively about the **Sixth Region Diaspora Caucus (SRDC)** and the **African Union Diaspora Initiative**. I've recounted the chronology: how, in 2001, the **Organization of African Unity (OAU)** was disbanded and the **African Union (AU)** was born. How the essential purpose of the OAU had been the liberation of Afrikan nations from colonialism, and the new mission of the AU was to forge continental unity by working toward the formulation of a Union of Afrikan States, or a United States of Afrika.

I've discussed how, in 2003, the AU made the overture to the Afrikan Diaspora via the rewrite of Article 3(q) of its Constitutive Act, which "... invite(s) and encourage(s) the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African Union." I've detailed the plan for Afrikans in the Diaspora to obtain seats in the AU's 150-seat **Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC)**, the

civil-society (non-profit community activist organization) group affiliated with the AU, and I've noted for our readers in the United States the Diaspora would have 20 seats in ECOSOCC, four (4) of which are allocated to elected representatives from the United States.

I've talked about how the **Afrikan Diaspora** was defined by the African Union: "The African Diaspora are peoples of African descent and heritage living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and who remain committed to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union."

I've even written about the mutual incentives for Afrikans in the Continent and Afrikans in the Diaspora to support the African Union Initiative: political, public health, environmental and so-called "tribal" conflicts in the Democratic Republic of

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In this issue, we will sample some of these perspectives, and, we hope, also give you a little food for thought, as well as some topics to research more deeply on your own. There is entirely too much information, analysis and opinion to fit into this little Newsletter, but we do think it's important to consider these and other viewpoints and not fall into the easy trap of thinking we can become carried away with emotion, awash in the victory of a Black man in attaining the most powerful elective office in the land. We cannot afford to breathe that collective sigh of relief and go back to our trancelike state, firmly planted in front of the Idiot Box, thinking we can stop paying attention now just because Brotha Man is Large and In Charge.

CONCERNED: WILL THE PROMISES BE KEPT?

Our first piece, by Howard W. French (www.howardfrench.com), is also featured on Africa Focus Bulletin (www.africafocus.org).

Obama and Africa: The Change We Have Been Waiting For?

By Howard W. French, Nov. 6, 2008

In the momentary lull that follows a presidential election, between full-out campaigning and real decision-making, the media has a few time-honored rituals that center on parlor games and policy speculation.

This election has been no different. While we wait for an Obama administration to start taking shape, one of the favorite exercises has been gazing into crystal balls about the foreign policy crises the new president will face. Others, a bit more boldly, make forthright statements about what the incoming government's foreign policy priorities should be.

Fred Kaplan's take in Slate [Nov. 5] was a fairly typical offering of this kind. Under the heading, "A Foreign-Policy Repair Manual: Six priorities for President Obama," he went on to detail a fairly typical laundry list of crises and opportunities, from getting out of Iraq to "laying the initial groundwork for renewed Israeli-Palestinian talks."

As priorities, the lists were fine as far as they went. The problem is that for a new leader promising change, they have tended to reflect the most traditional sorts of Washington priorities, neglecting other parts of the world that are starving for American moral and political leadership; places where Obama, by virtue of his unique background, offers particularly compelling potential for impact.

We've placed our sample of commentaries, some in full and some excerpted, into four categories: 1. *Hopeful*, 2. *Skeptical*, 3. *Pessimistic* and 4. *Look, Just Give The Man A Chance!*

Anyway, you didn't pick this issue up just to see what I had to say, did you? Let's hear from our Panel of Commentators: **Howard W. French** is a commentator from New York; **Patrick Bond** directs the Centre for Civil Society in Durban, South Africa; **Larry Pinkney** is a veteran of the Black Panther Party and the Republic of New Afrika, a former political prisoner and a member of the Editorial Board of BlackCommentator.com; **Tim Wise** is one of the White Left's most eloquent anti-racist writers and speakers; and **Mumia Abu-Jamal** may be the world's most famous Political Prisoner.

The most obvious and important omission by list keepers like Kaplan is Africa, a continent of nearly one billion people today that according to United Nations projections will count an astounding two billion people by mid-century.

Today, for example, a new war looms in the Congo, a place where unbeknown to most Americans the United States has played a critical and mostly disastrous role since independence from Belgium in 1960. According to respectable international estimates some four million people have died in the Congo as a result of wars there since 1996, the greatest toll anywhere since World War II.

There is a powerful argument to be made that this disaster, along with the Rwandan genocide that preceded it, is Bill Clinton's most important foreign policy legacy, and an Obama policy toward Africa run by many of the same people and carrying forward Clinton era thinking would be a sign of disdain for the continent and its problems.

The Congo's apocalyptic dissolution began in earnest when Washington gave Rwanda the green light to invade the country, setting off a free for all that sucked in many of the Congo's neighbors.

Washington has spent money on the crisis through the United Nations, but in terms of showing political leadership it has run from the problems of the Congo ever since, leaving a vast and potentially rich country that is the effective crossroads of north, south, east and west in Africa crippled and unattended.

Africa has never long retained the attention of our foreign policy elite, journalists included, and yet today this fast-growing continent, the homeland of our new president's father, teeters on a fulcrum point, credibly capable of veering off in radically different directions in ways that will profoundly affect Americans and indeed mankind.

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An Africa that can douse its conflicts, build functioning institutions and continue to lay the foundations of democracy stands to become an important player in the next phase of globalization, as labor costs rise in much of Asia, and capital begins to prospect for productive opportunities elsewhere.

An Africa pocked by neglected failing states will increasingly become a nexus of catastrophe, and contrary to the wishes of our foreign policy establishment, which always seeks to confine Africa to the realm of our lowest priorities, the blowback from its ever-larger disasters will inflict high costs and pain everywhere. ...

SKEPTICAL: THINGS ARE LOOKING SUSPICIOUS

This viewpoint was rather well summed up by **Patrick Bond**, director of the **Centre for Civil Society** in Durban, South Africa (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs>), in his commentary *Obama's economic advisors: Will well-tested enemies of Africa prevail?*, which he wrote on November 11, 2008. We chose specific passages from his commentary, which examines the exploits of **Paul Volcker**, one of Obama's advisors immediately after his election. The full article can be found on the Internet at <http://lists.kabissa.org/mailman/listinfo/debate>.

Bond begins his commentary with an ominous thought: "One of Barack Obama's leading advisors has done more damage to Africa, its economies and its people than anyone I can think of in world history, including even Cecil John Rhodes. That charge may surprise readers, but hear me out. His name is **Paul Volcker**, and although he is relatively unknown around the world, the 82 year old banker was recommended as 'a legend!' to Obama by **Austan Goolsbee**, the president-elect's chief economic advisor (and a professor at the University of Chicago). Volcker was recently profiled by the Wall Street Journal: 'The cigar-chomping central banker from 1979 to 1987, he received blame for driving up interest rates and tipping the US into the deepest recession since the Great Depression.' ...

"Even the International Monetary Fund's official history cannot avoid using the famous phrase most associated with the Fed chair's name: 'The origins of the debt crisis of the 1980s may be traced back to and through the lurching efforts of the world's governments to cope with the economic instabilities of the 1970s... [including the] monetary contraction in the United States (the 'Volcker Shock') that brought a sharp rise in world interest rates and a sustained appreciation of the dollar.'

"Volcker's decision to raise rates so high to rid the US economy of inflation and strengthen the fast-falling dollar had special significance in Africa, write British academics **Sarah Bracking** and **Graham Harrison**: '1979 marked a radical change in global economic policy, inaugurated with the 'Volcker Shock' (so called after Paul Volcker, then chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve) when the United States suddenly and dramatically raised interest rates, [which] increased the cost of African debt precipitously, since a majority of debt stock was held in dollars. The majority of the newly independent states had been effectively delivered into at least twenty years of indentured labor. From that point on access to finance became a key policing mechanism directed at African populations.' ...

"A few blocks away from the Federal Reserve, one of Volcker's closest allies was World Bank president **Tom Clausen**, formerly Bank of America chief executive officer. As the Volcker

While much of the world has gone sour on the United States' claim of being a beacon of hope, the 53 countries of Africa have by and large remained profoundly attached to a vision of America as land of justice, opportunity and freedom. Obama's election will only make such feelings much more intense, a fact I can attest to from correspondence from friends across the continent of prayer vigils in every faith for his candidacy and for his success in office.

To waste this moment would be more than a lost opportunity. For the United States, for Africa and for the world, it would be a tragedy. ■

Shock wore on, in 1983, Clausen offered his Board of Directors this frank confession: 'We must ask ourselves: How much pressure can these nations be expected to bear? How far can the poorest peoples be pushed into further reducing their meagre standards of living? How resilient are the political systems and institutions in these countries in the face of steadily worsening conditions? I don't have the answers to these important questions. But if these countries are pushed too far, and too much is demanded of them without the provision of substantial assistance in their adjustment efforts, we must face the consequences. And those will surely exact a cost in terms of human suffering and political instability.' At that point, 'Africa was not even on my radar screen', Volcker told interviewers Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin. ...

"Now he is back, and according to a recent profile by the Wall Street Journal, "Obama is increasingly relying on Mr. Volcker. His staff now routinely reviews policy proposals and speeches with Mr. Volcker. ...

"By November 8, the odds of Volcker being appointed Treasury Secretary were 10%. The race was between New York Federal Reserve Bank president **Tim Geithner** and former Clinton Treasury Secretary **Lawrence Summers**. Geithner served under Summers and Robert Rubin in **Bill Clinton's** Treasury Department during the 1990s.

"Summers is best known for the sexism controversy which cost him the presidency of Harvard in 2006. But fifteen years earlier he gained infamy as an advocate of African genocide and environmental racism, thanks to a confidential World Bank memo he signed when he was the institution's senior vice president and chief economist: 'I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that... I've always thought that underpopulated countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted, their air quality is vastly inefficiently low...' ...

"Volcker, Summers and a whole crew of similar capitalist economists are whispering in Obama's ear for a resurgent US based on brutal national self-interest. ... Can **TransAfrica**, **AfricaAction**, the **Institute for Policy Studies**, the **American Friends Service Committee**, **Jubilee USA**, **ActionAid** and other genuine advocates for the continent get a word in edgewise, between fits of cackling from the corporate liberals who think they own Obama? Will the president-elect ever get advice from economists **James K. Galbraith** of the University of Texas or Center for Economic and Policy Research codirectors **Dean Baker** and **Mark Weisbrot**, who correctly read the various financial crises way ahead of time, and whose records promoting social justice would serve Africa far better?" ■

But, in case that wasn't enough skepticism for you, and you're asking "Just who is this Patrick Bond character anyway?", let's turn to a somewhat better-known personality, perhaps the most famous Political Prisoner in the world. I'm talking about the Voice of the Voiceless, Veteran Panther, MOVE supporter, and current Political Prisoner on Pennsylvania's Death Row, **Mumia Abu-Jamal**:

Masks of Empire

[11/23/08] (c) '08 Mumia Abu-Jamal

It would be easy to succumb to the euphoria of the hour.

Easy. Too easy.

Despite this effluvia of euphoria, blown higher by a media that has learned its role of servitude to power all too well, we have seen reasons to be concerned.

Media reportage and cheers of purported cabinet choices (from a media that claimed to have learned its lesson about cheerleading after the Iraq debacle), should give us pause, for they seem designed more for reassurance than to change.

The heavy concentration of Clintonites evokes 'back-to-the-future', more than a new day. And while it's true that, after the madcap governance of George W. Bush, almost anything looks preferable, it's also true that many of the problems facing the U.S. had their beginnings (or exacerbation) during the Wm. Clinton presidency. This may be seen in the promotion and passage of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) under Clinton, through the rubrics of free trade and globalization, which hollowed out national manufacturing, as businesses fled abroad in search of cheaper labor (and more profits).

For while labor gave Clinton their votes he gave his loyalties to the bankers, and served their interests first and foremost.



Similarly, while labor swarmed to (then-candidate) Barack Obama's side, if initial reports are correct, Friedmanites are dominating his economic team. These are economists and pro-business types who fundamentally believe that economies are self-regulating, and thus, their emergence as economic advisers are the continuation of the same policies that led to the present market meltdown.

On foreign policy a Clinton has arisen. Change? Not so much.

So distasteful has been the Bush era, that the '90's look nice by comparison.

Yet, these are not so much policy moves as they are political moves, meant to placate and soothe party rivalries rubbed raw during and intense primary election season.

It is meant to communicate to allies and enemies alike, not change, but continuity.

It is meant to show that although the face at the top has changed, its essence remains the same. ■

Mumia Abu-Jamal has been on Pennsylvania's death row since 1982. He was convicted for the murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner in a trial that has been condemned as flawed and riddled with coercion of witnesses and withholding of evidence that would have acquitted him. Arnold Beverly has confessed to the murder, but officials of the Pennsylvania courts and the Fraternal Order of Police refuse to hear this testimony. Mumia is a Veteran of the Black Panther Party and a prominent supporter of the MOVE Organization, itself a target of Pennsylvania's law enforcement officials. Contact Mumia at:

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PESSIMISTIC: IMPERIALISM IN BLACKFACE

Even the most enthusiastic Obama supporters cannot fully refute the concerns of some that Obama's presidency may be little more than a "cover" for the continuation, and even expansion, of the Police State at home and the American Empire abroad. **Larry Pinkney**, Editorial Board member at **The Black Commentator**, is a veteran of the Black Panther Party, the former Minister of Interior of the Republic of New Afrika, a former Political Prisoner and the only American to have successfully self-authored his civil/political rights case to the United Nations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Space doesn't allow us to print the entire commentary, but we've included the most significant parts here. For the full editorial, go to <http://blackcommentator.com>.

An Obama Presidency: More Of The Same Only Worse

By Larry Pinkney

Assuming that the corporate Wall Street elite and its concomitant opinion-forming, omission, and misinformation machinery of the US corporate media successfully installs their favorite choice - Democratic Party Republicrat Barack Obama - as the first colored President of the US Empire, the majority of people in the United States are in for a rude awakening in the

form of increased economic austerity, internal political repression, deepened racial disharmony, external US military adventurism, and an endless stream of misleading disinformation from the corporate government. The peoples of the world will face intensified imperialistic and military assault and attempts at US hegemony. This time, however, the imperialism of the US Empire will be conveniently spearheaded, condoned and rationalized by its newest and most potent weapon: the dangerously double-talking "Emperor" in black face - Barack Obama. Moreover, in one fell and foul swoop, the corporate/military elite of the US Empire intends to utilize Barack Obama as the "messiah" (created by none other than corporate America and its corporate media) to neutralize and destroy the ongoing Black liberation struggle for justice and equality in this nation, and in people's liberation struggles throughout the world.

In relative short order - inside the United States itself - under a Barack Obama presidency, the living conditions of the majority of Black, White, Brown, Red, and Yellow peoples will continue to steadily and massively deteriorate while the corporate Wall Street barons prolong their glut of the every day people's finances, resources, hopes, and dreams. Under an Obama presidency those non Blacks who stand in opposition to Barack Obama's de facto pro Wall Street backers and their blood-sucking policies will be branded as racists and traitors, while those Blacks who oppose Obama's policies will be ignored and/or branded as fringe radicals and traitors. Thus, the horrors of the

US Empire will continue unabated, and in many respects, under Barack Obama, actually worsen. The blame for the deteriorating economy and continued war will of course quickly be laid by the Obama/Biden regime and the Democratic Party Republicrats on the previous Bush / Cheney regime, despite the fact that it was the complicity of the Democratic Party itself with the Bush/Cheney Republican Republicrat regime that facilitated the despicable policies and practices of the Bush/Cheney regime. The fact is that the Democratic and Republican Parties are de facto Republicrats with the objective of exploiting the majority of people and maintaining US Empire abroad. ...

Those so-called leftist and progressives who were and are collaborators with US Empire will, for a time, try to pretend that their support of Barack Obama was not a sell out, and that they simply need more time to persuade the US Empire's colored corporate emperor to do the right thing. Meanwhile, Black, Brown, Red, Yellow, and White peoples will be enduring an unprecedented rate of economic and social suffering. The anger of the people will ultimately peak and explode, as a result of

having bought into false hope and raised expectations. This is precisely why the US corporate government has already made military contingency plans to contain and massively quash dissension within the United States. Barack Obama will serve to provide his corporate / military masters with colored political cover for political repression in this nation; and he will have already provided a small respite of wiggling room for them in this regard. Nevertheless, as brutal reality forces the proverbial scales of blindness to drop from eyes of the masses, it will become crystal clear that the supposed "change" to which Barack Obama referred in his campaign rhetoric, was nothing more than a vicious ruse of double-speak by him, backed by his corporate and military handlers. Indeed, the emperor will be shown to "have no clothes." But what of the fate of millions of Black, White, Brown, Red, and Yellow peoples inside the US? How many horrible sacrifices will have been, and will yet need to be made by the people in order to get the boot of economic blood-sucking and political repression off their/our necks? ■

HOPEFUL: GIVE THE MAN A CHANCE TO WORK HIS MAGIC

Tim Wise (www.timwise.org) is one of the more eloquent White voices on the lecture circuit, openly challenging other Whites to face up to their often-unconscious racism. He is also a supporter of Barack Obama. Wise believes that the criticisms aimed at Obama before his presidency has even begun are not only unfair, they are also counter-productive:

Are Words (And History) That Hard To Understand?

A Final Response to the More-Radical-Than-Thou Critique of Obama Supporters

by Tim Wise, November 12, 2008

Maybe it's my fault. I think I write pretty clearly, but perhaps I don't. In the last few days, ever since I counseled both excitement at the post-election possibilities for progressive activism, and caution at the risk of over-exuberance, it seems as though some on the left with a heavy investment in their self-righteous sense of radicalism have allowed their personal hatred of all things Democrat and all-things-mainstream-politics to get in the way of deciphering words on a page.

So although I made it very clear that Obama's election by itself would change very little, and that it was up to us to steer Obama's supporters into progressive activism, to hear some tell it, I am a starry-eyed bourgeois liberal who refuses to see the inherent evil of Barack Obama. Whatever. I haven't the time or inclination to play a game of who's the bigger radical with some of these folks: people who have told me that rather than voting, voluntary dumpster-diving is a revolutionary act (or who miss how whites who do it are abusing their privilege, since folks of color who do that \$#@+ are prosecuted for trespassing), or who still use words like bourgeois, and yet can't understand why regular folks can't figure out what the hell they're talking about.

Anyway, I never suggested that Obama was likely to usher in much in the way of progressive reforms or changes. I do

believe he will be nominally liberal, and far preferable to McCain/Palin. But ultimately, I am of the opinion that he (as with any president) will only move left if forced to do so. That work is ours to do, but instead of reaching out and speaking to Obama supporters in a way that recognizes their exuberance, honors it, and tries to move them into more productive activity than mere electoral campaigning, these folks would prefer to mock them, suggest their stupidity, and call them names, such as "listless hipsters" (my favorite), "cultists," "Obamaniacs," "Limousine Liberals," or "shills" for the system. Good move: insult millions of people who--like it or not--have been inspired by Obama, and expect them to join your movement for real social transformation. Good luck with that. Just because we on the left haven't been able to inspire much lately is no reason to hate on those who have, just because they aren't sufficiently down with our view of the world.

Sometimes those who have harshly condemned my position on this matter prove themselves to be rank hypocrites as well. So, for instance, consider writer and activist Paul Street, who has said my criticism of those who see no difference between McCain and Obama is evidence of my being "increasingly unglued." This, coming from a guy who four years ago penned a piece in which he warned the left about making arguments of equivalence between Bush and Kerry. In other words, in 2004, Paul Street thought the left should recognize the real differences between the two parties, even though he (and I) both know those differences are not large enough, but apparently that recognition is no longer valuable. Street even suggested back then that the reason the left should be careful about equalizing the two candidates in 2004 was because doing so would royally piss off black folks, who were quite clear that there was a difference. Oh, but acting like there is no difference between McCain and the black guy should play well with them Paul. Thanks for that clarification. Moving on.

In my previous pieces I made the point that just as JFK was center-right in orientation, and yet, young people inspired by him moved much further to the left over the next fifteen years and made a huge difference in this nation, so too could that happen



now. No one who has criticized my previous pieces has seen fit to respond to that. Because they can't. It is historically inarguable and so they must ignore it. Rather, they point out that when Bill Clinton was president the left didn't sufficiently pressure him to do very much (and even caved on some things). While this is true, they ignore both the possibility that we may have learned something from that sorry capitulation, and that Obama is far more like JFK in his effect on the public than he is like Clinton. Clinton never inspired this much enthusiasm, which is likely why he seemed so bitter on the campaign trail, even on those few occasions when he managed to say nice things about Barack Obama. He knows the difference quite well, apparently, and that's why he's angry.

More to the point, I find this line of argument--that the liberals and progressives will just fold up like a cheap tent in the face of Obama because he promises "change"--to be not only condescending but problematic in terms of where it leads us. If that position is followed to its logical conclusion, one would then have to support only the most right-wing, even fascist forces for president, just on the hope that the obvious clarity of their pernicious plans would "wake up" the masses, as opposed to how they will be lulled to sleep by a well-spoken liberal. In other words, this thinking leads to the classically stupid and venal position that things have to get worse before they get better, and that any reformism is bad because it only props up the system. Not only has this position not been vindicated even once in history--not even once--but it is flatly contradicted by it. When things get worse, they just get worse. People don't become revolutionaries when things are really bad. They are too busy trying to stay alive at that point. Of course, the kinds of people who make up the more-radical-than-thou part of the left tend to be well-educated, and if poor, only so as a lifestyle choice, rather than as a result of systemic oppression. So they won't be the ones impacted most by the kinds of leaders they seem to think will be best, if only because they will highlight for all to see the horrors of the system. It will be someone else who suffers for the fulfillment of their dialectic. How convenient.

And what's especially funny about this "Oh now the libs will all go to sleep and movements will be weaker than ever" routine is that those performing it seem to be suggesting that activism is much bolder and more effective when the enemy is clear. But is that so? Have I missed the ass-kicking that the left has given to Bush these past eight years? Exactly what have we accomplished against this very obvious enemy of the Constitution, and economic justice, and a just foreign policy, which couldn't have been accomplished against, say, Al Gore or John Kerry? Nothing, absolutely nothing. There is virtually nothing on which he has not gotten his way, and none of our epic and redundant (and predictable) antiwar protests have done a thing to change the course of these wars we're in. That Obama may not be pressured any more effectively than W has been (though that

remains to be seen) isn't the point. The point is, we haven't built a mass movement in the repressive and reactionary environment that has existed since 2000, so how could it get much worse?

If these barbiturate leftists would take even a momentary glance at history they would notice that the most effective organizing in this country's past occurred in the '30s when a relatively liberal administration was in power, and in the early-to-mid-'60s, when the same thing was true. And why? Because of an uptick in hope, which allowed people to believe that pressure might pay off for once. It's called rising expectations theory: when expectations begin to rise, people become more active, not less so, and even if those expectations are somewhat dashed, this can often lead to positive outcomes, as frustration mounts, the gap between aspiration and ultimate achievement becomes obvious, and folks decide to ratchet up the protest even more than before. This is why the left was stronger in the moderately liberal '60s than the relatively repressive '50s, for instance.

What is most fascinating to me is that the leftists who rail on Obama seem to be making two oddly inconsistent arguments: on the one hand, that Obama is a shill because he doesn't embrace a left agenda, but on the other, that real change comes not from presidents but from the people. The last of these is correct, but to the extent it is, there is no point in making a big deal of Obama's inadequacies. If it's not about him in the first place, then all that remains is for us to get busy, and meet liberal Democrats where they are. Or, we can preen as moral superiors because we've read Bakunin, and Zerzan, and Chomsky, or because we once called a cop a pig to his face in Seattle or some such thing.

Here's something for the Obama-bashers on the left to ponder: old-line civil rights activists (who have put their life on the line for justice far more often than the critics have in most cases) believe Obama's win is meaningful. Many black nationalists and Afrocentric scholars believe it to be meaningful. Radical scholars in the black community think it's significant. Community organizers in oppressed communities, even though they know that the real work is yet to be done, are overwhelmingly saying it matters, all over the country. Perhaps they're all suckers. Perhaps they, and the millions of folks of color in particular who are excited about this moment, are just stupid. Perhaps the Greens are just smarter, perhaps the white radical anarchist or other left collective down the road has figured it all out in ways the silly folks of color just can't manage to accomplish, or perhaps the Revolutionary Communist Party is every bit as brilliant as they believe themselves to be. But I doubt it.

I just wish that I knew what the barbiturate left's strategy was for building the movement. Hell, at this point, I'd be glad just to know what the hell they even think the movement is fighting for. It doesn't appear to me that even this little detail has been figured out yet. And we wonder why the right has been getting the better of us for years?

Some things just aren't that difficult to understand. ■

CONCLUSION: OUR TAKE

Ever since Barack Obama announced his candidacy for the Presidency of the United States, Afrikan people have had difficulty knowing just how to act. In some cases, dyed-in-the-wool Pan-Afrikanists who would have counseled distrust of the president, *any* president, have suddenly become the most patriotic of all Americans, hanging on the candidate's every word and move

throughout the campaign, expressing offense at the slightest criticism of Obama's political track record, his statements or his political associations, and weeping with joy when it was officially announced that the Great Pinnacle had finally been scaled. Some who had said but a few years ago that "it isn't the person *in* the office, it's the *office itself*" have strangely forgotten those words in their mad scramble to fawn over Obama as though he were a rock star.

Others among us, who may have followed presidential elections with a sort of detached curiosity up until now, are suddenly finding difficulty in containing our critique of the man. This would include conservative Negroes who look for every opportunity to curry favor with the White right wing (such as that sad soul who urged John McCain to “go after this guy” at a Republican rally a month before the election) as well as revolutionary thinkers who never dropped so much criticism on a White president, but are ready to castigate Obama as even more dangerous than the worst slaveholding, war-mongering White Commander in Chief.

Perhaps **Jack White**, regular online commentator on *The Root* and frequent contributor to *Time Magazine*, was right when he referred to “the social, political and psychological vertigo that all of us, and especially black Americans, are experiencing because of Obama’s success. We are all, including Obama, in a place we never really thought we would be, and it has knocked us off our feet. We don’t know how to act. We don’t have a plan. We’re searching for our equilibrium. And until we regain our footing, we can expect all sorts of bizarre behavior from people who ought to know better. Hold on to your hat.” (When The Man Is One Of Us, www.theroot.com, July 10, 2008)

My rather facile analysis goes something like this: Barack Obama has scored a historic victory in becoming the first American President of Afrikan descent. His administration has the potential to accomplish a number of great things for the American people and the people of the world. But the danger that his

achievement can be twisted and used to cause harm is also ever-present, because of the fact that so many of us who are suspicious of the motives of the US are prepared to give him some “wiggle room” that we might not give a European President.

Obama’s choices for his Cabinet are cause for concern in several cases, particularly Education, Interior and Homeland Security. His Chief of Staff is a pro-Israel warhawk. And the fact that he is not so much ending the war in Iraq as he is redirecting it is not discussed often enough. But there are many who hope that Eric Holder, as Attorney General, might be able to reverse some of the damage done by John Ashcroft, Alberto Gonzales and Michael Mukasey. Hillary Clinton, though we might question her temperament to be Secretary of State, could help repair the damage to the US’s image around the world. And Obama’s commitment to do such things as “spread the wealth around” to those who are hurting (or at least the middle class) and to “talk to countries that don’t like us” are cause to hope.

We need to do two things: *Watch Obama*, and *Watch him*. Watch him to make sure he stays true to those more humanistic and pro-peace campaign promises and doesn’t lean too far in the direction of the destructive deeds that have landed so many American Presidents in the Pan-Afrikan Hall of Infamy, and also *Watch him* to make sure that none of the right-wing zealots who would cause him harm have the chance to succeed. For once, we in the Pan-Afrikan community need to learn to do two things at the same time. We need to be able to argue with him, even *resist* him if need be, but also *protect* him.



SRDC Notes: Organize, Now More Than Ever

(Continued from Page 1)

Congo, Uganda, Cote D’Ivoire, Guinea, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Sudan, among others; while the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization enforce draconian “structural adjustment” policies on Afrika’s poorer nations that force them to devote resources to “investment” instead of the good of the people. Afrikans in America subjected to record levels of poverty, criminalization, imprisonment and police brutality in urban ghettos while the big banks here bail out the rich and greedy, leaving us to lose our homes to foreclosures of our predatory mortgages. Droughts and famine in Afrika continue to claim lives, just as did the torrential floods from Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike in the Gulf Coast, and the response of disaster-relief agencies is tainted by the motivations of the land-grabbers and corporate prospectors who simply cannot wait to snatch up prime American real estate or precious Afrikan minerals. I’ve noted that we are still hunted--by western-backed “tribal” militias in Afrika and by racist White vigilantes in New Orleans and elsewhere--while government authorities in the United States and around the world barely lift a finger to stop it. Waiting to exploit this are the ravenous multinational corporations as they hunger for the land we live on in America and the vast resources under our feet in Afrika.

I’ve noted how, if we are to throw off the festering wounds from the Middle Passage (the *Maafa*) that bleed us in the US, in Afrika and throughout the world, we must find a way to unite politically with our Sisters and Brothers in Afrika, not only to help us find a true voice on the world stage, but also to help Afrika alleviate the “resource drain” and “brain drain”--the loss

of natural resources through drilling and mining and of human resources through immigration to the West--under which she and her scattered Black children continue to suffer.

Despite the worldwide euphoria that has accompanied the rise to the White House of **Barack Obama**, there is no rational reason to expect these ills to disappear simply because a Black man has been sent to the White House. In fact, there are those who fear that his very Blackness may provide cover for the continuation of the rapacious, exploitative policies of the United States and its major corporations toward Afrika. Ancestor **Malcolm X** once said we need to stop going to “Uncle Sam’s Court” looking for justice, as this was akin to “taking our case from the wolf to the fox.” By seeking representation in the African Union, we are taking one more step toward placing our grievances with the United States on the World Stage. I’ve made these points too.

HOW DO WE SEEK REPRESENTATION IN THE AFRICAN UNION?

As I’ve written in these pages before, the **Sixth Region Diaspora Caucus (SRDC)** was formulated out of several years of cooperative efforts with AU representatives and Pan-Afrikan activists in the US and throughout the Diaspora to develop a process by which we can organize ourselves to show the African Union that we are ready to engage with it in a positive and organized way. Thus, the roadmap has already been laid out for us. The following process is already being followed in seven states in the US, in Canada, in Central and South America and in Europe.

Pan-Afrikan Town Halls are held in each state, city or town, to gather as many members of the Afrikan Community from that state, city or town as we can. At the Town Hall, the details of the AU Diasporan Initiative are discussed. The people choose (either through Afrikan Consensus or through elections) a **Pan-Afrikan Council of Elders**, as well as **Representatives** (two for each state) and **Observers** (up to five for each state). Normally this is done in *two meetings*, one to nominate candidates and another one two weeks later to formally elect them or choose them by Afrikan Consensus.

The people discuss key issues that are to be included in a Pan-Afrikan Agenda which the Representatives, Observers and Elders will take to meetings with other states to help craft the national Agenda. At this point, the true work of the Representatives, Observers and Elders begins.

Several times each year, there are opportunities for the Representatives, Observers and Elders to meet. The official national meeting occurs (at the moment) in the late summer or early fall, when the elected officials of each participating state all get together to discuss the national agenda and the current status of the effort to gain representation in the African Union. We would also choose four from amongst us who would actually travel to the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to assume the four seats in ECOSOC that have been reserved for the US. These meetings occur in different parts of the US.

There are also Regional Meetings, at which members of the US Delegation will meet with Representatives, Observers and Elders from other countries. These meetings could occur in the US, in Canada, in Central America, in South America or in South Afrika, which has been a strong supporter of the effort. All of these meetings are designed to improve communication, coordination and unity among the scattered communities of the Afrikan Diaspora and to pave the way for effective Diasporan representation in the African Union.

WHAT IF THE AFRICAN UNION ISN'T SERIOUS ABOUT THIS "INVITATION"?

We are proceeding with faith that the AU is sincere about its invitation to the Diaspora, even though there are countries that are not entirely in favor of our participation. But, even if, in the end, our quest for AU membership is rescinded, or even sabotaged by some who wish to prevent us from achieving this goal, by participating in local Town Hall Meetings we will have succeeded in bringing our local communities together. By participating in the National Meetings we will have succeeded in bringing Afrikan people in Maryland together with Afrikan people in New York, South Carolina, Ohio, Washington State, Arizona and California. By becoming involved in Regional Meetings we will have succeeded in bringing Afrikan people in the US together with Afrikan people in Martinique, Nicaragua, Brazil, Canada, the UK and South Afrika. These are all important steps toward actualizing true Pan-Afrikanism and *Umoja*. And isn't that what we all say we want?

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE NOW?

Right now, the main problem is getting *us* involved. For the past year and a half, I have sent e-mails to Pan-Afrikan activists and organizations. I've made phone calls. I've made presentations in front of groups. I've visited people and talked to them while looking them in the eye. And still, it has been difficult to get

many of these people interested in this effort. But we are persistent and we believe strongly that this is a potentially powerful vehicle that can help forge the Pan-Afrikan Unity that we all claim to cherish. Sooner or later, we will crack the apathy that permeates so much of our community, including a number of our activists. It's important that we get over our personal egos and realize that, if *everyone* gets involved with this process, *everyone* can have influence over it, and *everyone* wins. Whether the AU follows through with its invitation or not, when we are able to finally bring all of the Pan-Afrikan organizations together in some form of functional unity, all of them will benefit through increased *Umoja*, *Ujima* and *Ujamaa*.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

If you're interested in learning more about the AU Initiative and the SRDC, if you want to find out how you can get your state involved or are interested in joining the effort that may be happening already in your state, you can contact us by postal mail or e-mail:

KUUMBA Events and Communications

c/o Bro. Cliff, Maryland Representative, Sixth Region Diaspora Caucus (SRDC)

P.O. Box 1723

Baltimore, Maryland 21203-1723

e-mail: kuumba@verizon.net

"The thing to do is to get organized; keep separated and you will be exploited, you will be robbed, you will be killed. Get organized and you will compel the world to respect you."

—Ancestor Marcus Mosiah Garvey

"The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightening. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters."

"This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both."

"The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. In the light of these ideas, Negroes will be hunted at the North, and held and flogged at the South so long as they submit to those devilish outrages, and make no resistance, either moral or physical. Men may not get all they pay for in this world; but they must certainly pay for all they get. If we ever get free from the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others."

—Ancestor Frederick Douglass

