

# **Obamanations**

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Among the lists which inundate my e-mail inbox is one on which someone last winter posted an appeal for funds to help the campaign of Barack Obama. Although this list has several thousand members, like many others, only a score or so people regularly post messages. In the exchanges which follow, no one came forward to say “right on” to what I wrote. I can only hope that my posts had some positive influence on the people who merely lurk on the list, reading but not writing.

### **I responded to the fundraising appeal as follows:**

The problem here is not only fundraising for Mr. Obama, but the electoral strategy itself. Any serious gains made by Black people have come from mass struggle, not supporting candidates. It took a bloody civil war to get rid of slavery. Similarly, it took a movement in which tens of thousands of people risked their lives and livelihoods to abolish Jim Crow (the legal version, that is).

The end of slavery teaches us more: the mere and implicit threat to its existence personified by the racist Lincoln drove the slavocracy and most of the U.S. military to stage a coup and break up the country rather than abide by the results of a democratic election.

If Obama—or anyone else—seriously tried to bring freedom and justice to this country, he or she would also be facing a coup. (Parenthetical note: some of the most prominent economic royalists of the 1930’s tried to organise a coup against the reformist Roosevelt because they thought he was giving too much to the working class).

I believe that the U.S. is in a deeper political crisis than many of us realise. Think about it. The corporate pooh-bahs of the Democratic Party are frantically waving the banner of a Black man! Does this mean they have suddenly given up their racism? I doubt it. More likely, they know that another pale face will not save their rotten racist system.

The solution is not electoralism, but revolution. What needs to be discussed is not which candidate to support, but what kind of revolution is necessary.

### **The original poster made no reply, but some-one else did:**

Actually, supporting candidates has made a difference for black folks. Had not black folks supported Dawson in the years before FDR’s final term, Dawson wouldn’t have been around to turn thumbs down on a Southern segregationist and get Harry S. Truman slated as FDR’s vice presidential running mate. Truman made some bold steps that advanced the cause of civil rights, including desegregating the Armed Forces. He was far more sympathetic to uplifting blacks, to the point of advancing the civil rights policies Eleanor Roosevelt attempted to have her husband carry out. Truman, compared with FDR, came from humble beginnings as a Missouri farm boy (his paternal grandmother was a staunch Missouri Confederate who was persecuted mercilessly by Union troops for her allegiance). Speaking of humble beginnings, Clinton’s underprivileged ass and his father wouldn’t have survived if blacks hadn’t traded with his grandfather’s store in Hope, Ark. And he turned out to be a Kennedy Democrat in the worst Dixiecrat center-rightist way. Obama’s father abandoned his white mother and his biracial behind, he grows up to be intelligent, erudite, smooth, well educated, and accomplished. If we’re going to make him a pariah and unfit for the highest office in the land based on that, might as well have book burnings against

DuBois, Alain Locke, Paul Robeson, Jean Toomer, Lorraine Hansberry, Frederick Douglass, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells and Simple's creator.

## **My response:**

The discussion about Obama, Harry Truman, or anyone else for that matter, shouldn't turn around sociological questions as to humble upbringings, parental abandonment, or whether one is smart, erudite, etc. Let's assume all of it to be true. However, in Obama's case, none of it speaks to his programme, his running as a candidate of a capitalist party or, most important, the electoral strategy itself.

As I pointed out in my original post, the latter is a dead end, and whatever Cong. Dawson did in 1944 has to be seen in the context of millions of Black people joining the NAACP, Randolph threatening to march on Washington in the middle of a war, and the uncounted numbers of incidents all over the country caused by Jim Crow confronting Black soldiers who supposedly were fighting for democracy. Again, it was Black folks' mass struggle, not electoral politics, which won the gains which are attributed in white lights to Eleanor Roosevelt, Truman, et al.

Further, as I said in my original message, I think that the political crisis of capitalism in the U.S. is deeper than many of us realise, or else we wouldn't be seeing a significant number of the powers in the Democratic Party campaigning for a Black man. I doubt that any of them are any less racist than they were ten years ago; but what they doubt is that another pale face will be able to save their rotten racist system.

Again: what we should be doing is not discussing which candidates to support in an electoral game, but what kind of revolution is necessary.

## **To which my Democratic Party adversary replied:**

Fear as much as you would Greek folk bearing gifts of antidemocratic rhetoric. Screening presidential candidates via preference primaries and caucuses and also state and national party conventions is a least sinister process for screening those seeking election as chief executive of the land where sovereign power originates with the people and is radiated by their elected representatives.

At this point I responded with a post (accidentally deleted) in which I took issue with the notion of sovereign power originating in the people rather than the state itself. Identifying myself as an anarchist, I explained that both capitalism and the state must be done away with and replaced by as directly democratic as possible, federated, cooperative society. My debater responded that such a society had already been tried in the U.S., with the Articles of Confederation, and it hadn't worked. He or she then went on tout the saintly glories of Dennis Kucinich.

## **I replied:**

The Articles of Confederation had nothing to do with anarchism. Whatever the disagreements may have been between the states at that time, the Articles nevertheless codified a capitalist and slave-owning society. What I advocate is replacing the government and capitalism with a society which I outlined in broad strokes in my previous post.

As to Kucinich, even if he were truly a saint, nevertheless by running for anything in the Democratic (or Republican) Party, he will do nothing more than provide a shimmering cover for a capitalist party which stabs the masses of people in the back. In any case, Kucinich is no saint. His waffling over the years on a woman's right to choose is well known. Less well known is his ambivalent attitude toward political prisoners, in particular Mumia Abu-Jamal. Almost everyone on the Left, from anarchists to liberals, will agree that Mumia's 1982 trial was held in a kangaroo court. In part to protest this the city of St. Denis in France last year named a major street after him. This act, of course, set the organised cops in this country to foaming at the mouth, and they prevailed on the U.S. House of Representatives on 6 December last year to suspend its rules to demand that St. Denis revoke its action. Kucinich voted FOR the resolution. (Parenthetical note: 31 congresspeople courageously voted against it).

My adversary then sent another message in which he posted a dictionary-type definition of anarchism, with which I didn't disagree, together with a reprint of the entire Articles of Confederation. With that, the Obama controversy went dormant on this list. However, several months later it arose again after the the candidates announced the results of their fundraising.

### **Another list member wrote:**

OBAMA ON A ROLL! The proof is in the pudding! ACTIONS ALWAYS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS, and what transpired this June 30 for the Obama presidential campaign speak volumes for anyone who knows a mote about USA politics! Even though Obama has not and will not accept a single dime from any high-powerful, super rich and corrupting lobbyist; and even though his support base include many ordinary common people of all races and poor small contributors, still he managed to set an "ALL TIME" record for the most money that a democrat has ever raise in a six month period—not to mention that he is black, a person with Muslim roots, a upstart first term Senator, and an opposer to the Iraq war! This indeed is phenomenal, and a sign that indeed Obama's campaign is a force to be reckoned with! He said that he has the largest grassroots campaign in history and now, few can muster the courage to try to dispel or argue against his claim! Praise God!

### **To which I replied:**

Yes, actions do speak louder than words, and the action you describe is others giving lots of money to his campaign, not what he is actually doing to carry his programme. Or is his programme raising and spending a lot of money like the other Republican and Democratic candidates. Our eyes should be on the prize, which is freedom and dignity, not campaign contributions, and our actions should follow.

### **The Actions Speak Louder Than Words writer also got some flack from others on the list. He went on to explain:**

Please understand me Dear sir, as I must be brief. Dearly beloved Barack Obama has to steer v-e-r-y cautiously and with a great deal of precision just as Brother Tiger Woods must keep at

a certain level of concentrated focus such as not to make unnecessary waves which may super inflame those who are structured in power and purse! The reality is, Barack has a special mission, and most likely he'll succeed! He is adept beyond our imagination for sure, and you can be sure at times he'll have conflicts or contradictions in policy lwhich will seem to run counter to what we as Afro-americans would consider antithetical particularly to our progress! Winfrey Oprah [sic], even the Beloved Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan at times has appeared to do the same in their WORDS. Brother Barack, the task he has volunteered for is highly ambitious and dangerous. let us put aside the frivolous criticism of him and get behind the beloved brother! All for one and one for all—that is, at least open yourself up to the reality that Barack is FAR more GOOD and GODLY than bad! Praise the Creator for this Beloved Brother!

### **In another post Actions went on to describe Obama as “Angelic.” I responded:**

Why are we messing around in the cesspool of electoral politics anyway? No significant change has ever come about through elections. Slavery wasn't abolished that way. Nor was legal segregation. Our unions weren't built that way, either. Rather all of those victories were won through the direct actions of hundreds of thousands of people who risked their lives and livelihoods in mass struggle.

Just think if everyone of African descent stopped work even for an hour to protest the garbage which the corporate electoral system presents as “choices.” The organisation and power of such an action would do ten thousand times more for freedom, respect and dignity than all of the mealy-mouthed promises of the corporate candidates.

Rather than speculating as to whether Obama is “angelic” or on some in-the-closet divine “mission,” our time would be better served by discussing ideas such as that in the preceding paragraph.

### **Later the communications director of a well-known Black congressman posted the following note:**

Is he black enough? This question has been dogging U.S. Senator Barack Obama since he decided to run for the highest office in the country earlier this year. Ironically, no one is asking if Hillary Clinton is female enough or if John Edwards is white enough or if Bill Richardson is Latino enough.

As for Obama, most people know something of his background, by now. His mother was white American and his father was Black African. He grew up in Hawaii and Indonesia. After graduating from Harvard he came to Chicago to do community organizing and got into politics by way of the Illinois State Assembly. He unsuccessfully challenged U.S. Congressman Bobby L. Rush back in 2000. Then he ran for the U.S. Senate and won. Finally, he announced plans to run for president of the United States and the campaign coverage became absolutely ridiculous.

Obama must have felt as if he was on an episode of MTV's Punk'd. Did your mother's ancestors own slaves? What color is your Jesus—Black, white or papersack brown? Do you participate in ALL of Black History Month? How do you feel about zebras? Do you think they are white with

black stripes or black with white stripes? Here's a newsflash: some journalists simply refuse to let good reporting get in the way of a good story.

Basically, with the question of whether Obama is Black enough, White America wants to know if Black America trusts and accepts him. Now Black Americans are asking that very same question, but for a completely different reason. The implications and connotations of this question are quite different when passed through the lips of a Black American.

Black people already know he is black enough. Years ago, he married a sister from the south-side of Chicago, he can play the dozens, and gets his hair cut by a black man in a black barber-shop. Enough said. When a black person asks that question, they really mean "are you gangsta' enough?" Barack, are you gangsta' enough to be the first black president?

For example, Obama, if you were president during Hurricane Katrina would you have been gangsta' enough to fly over New Orleans and reach down with your own two hands to pull people up to safety? If you saw a 400lb brother on a roof crying for help, would you have said, "he ain't heavy, he's my brother" and snatched him up into Air Force One while wearing a fresh pair of Nike's Air Force 1's?

Would you have been gangsta' enough to open hand slap former FEMA head Michael D. Brown across the face on national television? "Brownie, you're doing a horrible job!" WHAM! Would you have blasted the media outlets who said white survivors were finding food while black survivors were looters? That's what black people want to know.

The biggest cause for concern that I have is that Obama graduated from Harvard. Now here's an institution that has messed up more black folks than crack cocaine! A crackhead has more sense than most Harvard educated black men.

I'll prove it. If a crackhead and a young Harvard educated black man were standing on the corner waiting for a bus and the police drove up and said, ya'll better be off this corner by the time we return. That crackhead has enough sense to scurry off. But that Harvard man... "How dare he talk to me like that? Why, I'm going to call my lawyer. Blah, blah, blah," he would say. The next day the headline would read: "Black man shot by police." And that crackhead would just shake his head. "That fool did not have enough sense to leave."

Clinton knows how to take a punch so she is gangsta' enough. And as for Edwards—anyone who can spend \$400 on haircut is gangsta' enough. So forget the black enough question. Let's see if Obama will exercise more sense than a crackhead and be gangsta' enough to handle his business like a true playa'.

## **My response:**

Why should "Black enough" be made synonymous with "gangsta' enough" when the real gangsters reside in the overwhelmingly white office towers of banks, corporations, hedge funds and government? The real problem with Obama and all the other candidates, for that matter: (1) lies in their running for office on the ticket of a capitalist party; (2) diverting our attention to the illusion that electing candidates to office will make any kind of real difference in our lives. Instead imagine if everyone of African descent stopped work for even 15 minutes. That organized action would go a thousand times farther in winning dignity and respect than anything Obama could do, even if he won.

Peace,

Bill

Still wondering whether anyone was reading any of this, I felt happy when someone forwarded my response to another list.



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