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**The Audacity To Win:  
The Notion of a President Barack Obama  
And What That Really Means**

The euphoria has yet to wear off, and probably won't for a while. The "shock and awe" of the looks of dazed black people walking down the street really says more than could ever be explained. Many folks I talked to are virtually speechless and just walk around shakin' their heads, not so much wondering what has happened or how it happened but overcoming the wonderment of why it *didn't* happen - understanding America as we do - why Barack didn't lose.

What was obviously supposed to be a day of "mass depression," despite mountains of hope, as another disappointment settled in on black America, turned into a day - now a week - of frenzied prayer and praise, as we all still pinch ourselves that this is really real. We are now perplexed as we try to reconfigure our analysis of what America is and what it should mean to us (Black America). We no longer can rest on our analogies of on what America is based, what America was, nor root our perceptions of America totally in race reality, though race is still very real throughout this nation, as the

economy trumped race. Still, we can't believe our eyes, nor wrap our heads around what this really means to us, our children, our country and the world. It's not just auspicious - this occasion of electing Barack Obama President of the United States. It's audacious, or bodacious - as we say in the hood (as in, "That's some bodacious sh\*t, right there). No matter how you say it, it's still unbelievable.

Photos and video of the Obamas being welcomed by the Bushes at the White House, an otherwise almost surreal stretch of the imagination in the transition of power, gave us an unimaginable snapshot of what the next four years will project; a brotha' walking around the White House, that's not a servant, or a staffer, or a tourist, or a diplomat, but the President.

Our psyches, so deeply engrained with the historical prospects of whiteness that it almost looked odd to see Barack Obama at the White House. The privileges to Executive power that were once exclusive to whiteness, at least in this case, can longer be taken for granted in the way that it has over the last 220 years or so. All because one black man not only had the audacity to run but the audacity to win. One week after what the world witnessed what was once thought to be improbable, if not impossible, we now find ourselves wrestling with a new reality in America.

If you think the whole idea is messing just with us, trust me when I say white people are wrestling with this too. Never in the history of America, have things gotten so bad that they would throw white people out of power. That was never a consideration before now. Now, we also know if President-elect Obama had finished fifth from the bottom of his class, like Senator John McCain, or attended six state or community colleges, like Governor Sarah Palin, Obama never would have been a consideration *for* President, much less elected President.

So goes the privileges of whiteness, and as we saw with George W. Bush, pedigree has no limits on achievement and reaches far beyond the deepest dearth of intelligence. Pardon my digression, but it was relevant to the point of Barack being intelligent and audacious enough to play past the historical privileges of race, class and culture to do what no other person of color have ever done: wrestle the mantle of leadership from white cultural dominance.

Though we now see Obama as the head of the government "to be," we are not foolish enough to believe that he will run the country. There's a difference between leading the government and running the country. With many of the historically discriminatory institutions and systems still in place, one slip and the country will run over him. I'm sure he's aware of that, as it was announced that guns sale were up in the South and Mid-west. The cautionary perception here is that America had an election, not a "take-over." Let's be clear about that. But Barack Obama has received a mandate to lead this nation out of its modern day depression - bankrupt and dissolute as it is.

Obama's election is more a signal to the return of intelligent government, as one had to be highly intelligent to navigate this national election and the traps that came one after the other. Obama had the benefit of the economy collapsing in the midst of a national election, which reinforced the concept that dumbness has its limits and we had reached it. Many white people and Latinos jumped off the race ship to save their family's and their personal wealth. The color of salvation is whatever makes the most sense and can

withstand critical scrutiny. McCain's salvation proposal made no sense, and his pick of Palin could not withstand critical scrutiny. In short, white people saw bread lines again and said I'm votin' for the brotha'. Their children, whose prism was not shaped by race - but popular culture - helped them make the adjustment and technology did the rest (made Obama financially competitive). That's what this really was.

Now we all must sit back and watch this take shape before we can understand what it really means. Just know Barack Obama will need us all to make the change he had the audacity to make reality, winning the Presidency - more than a success for himself, but a success for the nation. That's what the notion of a Barack presidency means, and that's a bodacious charge.

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### **"That One": President-Elect Barack Obama And the Fulfillment of Unreasonable Expectations**

The day we all thought we'd never see became a reality this week as the nation took a major step toward racial reconciliation by entrusting the country's government to a black man. President-elect Barack Obama, soon to be President Barack Obama - doesn't that have a fantastic ring to it - a man who John McCain once called "that one" is now *the* one who has been charged with leading the nation, over the next four years, and out of a host of global and domestic quandaries.

The significance of this cannot be quantified. As we've seen over the last few months, race is still a major barrier in America. Affirming one is not the same as affirming all, and President-elect Barack Obama has now risen to that "special" category to where Muhammad Ali, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, Will Smith and Oprah Winfrey (at least until she endorsed Barack) all rose. They weren't viewed in the context of race, being instead viewed as post-racial Supermen or Superwomen, "transformative figures", transcending race by virtue of their dominating excellence. Their skills and public acceptance won't allow for them to be limited to their race (by their reluctance to speak to race) and the negative perceptions of their race.

"That one," President Barack Obama, proved he was special in being able to achieve what few thought was achievable, the first fulfillment of what will certainly be many expectations, some reasonable - many unreasonable - of an Obama administration. Expectations by Blacks, Whites and others, rooted in certain perceptions. The expectations will be larger than the job of President itself.

As we witnessed in this campaign cycle, it's not that negative perceptions of black people/black communities don't exist - it's just many singular examples of excellence rose above what we know to be the constraints of race and racism in America. The perception is that if one is able to do it, all should be able to. In theory, that is correct. In practice, fear of competition and systemic and institutional racism prevent it.

Then there are those who feel that centuries of racial abuse and subjugation should be

ignored, a perception that Blacks should "get over" slavery and segregation, despite advantages passed down to them. Blacks who succeed, do so - not by overcoming equal odds but - by overcoming overwhelming odds in avoiding the traps that often prevent the fulfillment of even reasonable expectations. And they are held to a different standard when they do rise to the top.

That's why this moment is so exceptional. While understanding this great moment in the nation's history cannot be quantified, it most certainly can be qualified in a very real context as to what we all now expect from the nation's latest "Superman." His challenge is greater than that of the others who simply had to transcend sport or entertainment. Barack Obama has to transcend the negative global perceptions of America and the very real socio-economic problems most Americans face. That's pretty heavy lifting. Regardless of who won, the next President faces a host of unreasonable expectations. President Obama certainly will.

Like most African Americans who succeed in the mainstream, President Obama will be under extreme scrutiny. He will be watched by Whites to make sure he's not being "too racial" toward Blacks and other minorities. He will be watched by African Americans to make sure he remains true to the game in addressing issues that most adversely impact black communities, namely poverty (which Barack rarely spoke to in the campaign), joblessness, economic subjugation and educational disparities.

The expectations of Blacks and Whites are divergent and in some instances, opposing. The whole debate around wealth redistribution has deep racial roots. President Obama can stick his toe in that water, and maybe his foot, but certainly not his leg, meaning he can help the middle class get out of their economic quandary but reaching too far toward helping the poor and impoverished could be problematic.

Capital reinvestment in Wall Street will be an expectation to revive the economy, but capital access for Main Street, or the "Average Joe (or Jane)" to whom he and McCain so frequently referred during the campaign, is an expectation that many are waiting to see if an Obama administration can fulfill. Then there are the wars that continue, and the ones yet to come, that President Obama will be expected to exit with dignity, wars for which the current President has exit strategy - certainly the most unreasonable expectation that President Obama will face. You get the picture. The expectations won't stop.

Let's celebrate this phenomenal achievement in American history, but let's also stay rooted in a reality that President-elect Barack Obama is not Superman - just a man who overcame super odds to beat the systemic, institutional and social structures that served as impediments to achieving what no African American had ever been able to achieve: being elected President of the United States. Now comes the expectation that he will be able to fulfill all of the nation's unreasonable expectations. We know it is unreasonable to expect he will solve all the nation's problems. The expectations of this President will be like no other. But we're glad to see this day, that a black man has the opportunity to, at least, try to fulfill these expectations. God is real.

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