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**What Obama's Democratic Party Nomination Victory Means
Election Analysis**

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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Prologue

It's mid-day Wednesday June 4, 2008, and as I write these brief reflections on "What Obama's Democratic Party Nomination Victory Means," *the first thing I can think of is that this extraordinary achievement ranks alongside "Juneteenth" - the news of the victory of the Union over the Confederacy, news of General Robert E. Lee's surrender to General Ulysses Grant at Appomattox.* That awesome Civil War-ending news reached thousands of Negro communities around the country at varying times during the month of June 1865, and as that awesome God-inspired news fell on the trembling ears of the former slaves - children, mothers, fathers, grandparents - they cried glorious tears and uttered glorious prayer, and these culminated eventually in "Juneteenth Celebrations" across Black America.

In announcing the extraordinary Barack Obama achievement to the nation, the *New York Times* front-page headline read: "After Grueling Battle, Obama Claims Nomination". Here in Boston where I reside, the front-page headline of the *Boston Globe* read: "Obama Clinches Nomination: Clinton Not Conceding Defeat."

The *Boston Globe* was, I felt, bold to inform the nation graphically of the "dark side" of what that *New York Times* headline dubbed a "Grueling Battle" - *namely, that Hillary Clinton couldn't muster enough "basic class-and-decency," let's call it, to extend a simple welcoming congratulation to Senator Barack Obama, a simple welcoming congratulation to America's first African-American presidential candidate of a major*

political party. What makes this instance of Clintonian power-obsessive pettiness-and-rudeness so awful is that the African-American voter-bloc provided the predictable and consistent electoral support that facilitated Bill Clinton's election as president both in 1992 and 1996.

Interface of Barack Obama & Martin Luther King

Be that as it may, with the announcement of Senator Barack Obama's nomination victory on Tuesday evening June 3, 2008, we can all ascent to Obama's comment at a massive victory rally of 32,000 in St. Paul, Minnesota, *that his achievement enables liberal and progressive Americans to fashion "a better future" for our country*. Obama continued:

"Tonight we mark the end of one historic journey with the beginning of another, a journey that will bring a new and better day to America. ...I face this challenge...with limitless faith in the capacity of the American people. Because if we are willing to work for it, and fight for it, and believe in it, then I am absolutely certain that generations from now, we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was the moment when we began to provide care for the sick and good jobs to the jobless; this was the moment when we ended a war and secured our nation and restored our image as the last, best hope on Earth. This was the moment - this was time - when we came together to remake this great nation so that it may always reflect our very best selves and our highest ideals."

With these keen *revitalizing characterizations* regarding what his achievement of the Democratic nomination can mean for the country, Senator Obama *was treading in the revitalization-of-America-footsteps of Dr. Martin Luther King, so to speak*. And few scholars of King's era have characterized *the revitalization-of-America-footsteps of Dr. King* as cogently as his greatest biographer Taylor Branch:

[Dr. King's] appeal was rooted in the larger context of nonviolence. *His stated purpose was always to redeem the soul of America*. He put one foot in the Constitution and the other in scripture. 'We will win our freedom', he said many times, 'because the heritage of our nation and the eternal will of god are embodied in our echoing demands.' *To see Dr. King and his colleagues as anything less than modern founders of democracy - even as racial healers and reconcilers - is to diminish them under the spell of myth*. Dr. King said the movement would liberate not only segregated black people but also the white South. Surely this is true. (Taylor Branch, "The Last Wish of Martin Luther King", *The New York Times* (April 6, 2008)) [Emphasis Added]

Accordingly, Senator Barack Obama's winning the Democratic nomination *is a special proclamation to the millions-on-millions of us Americans who grasp the fullness of Martin Luther King as a "modern founder of democracy."* A proclamation for a new political, civic, and moral activism to revitalize American democracy in order, as Obama put it Tuesday evening, "to remake this great nation so that it may always reflect our very best selves and our highest ideals."

Problem Areas an Obama Presidency Must Confront: (I) Iraq War

Of course, the steps and avenues to this end will be various and debatable, as they should be. Yet I feel certain that with the election of Senator Obama in November to the presidency of the United States, *the road to a revitalized America must address straightaway two enormous problem-areas in American life*. One problem-area is, of course, the monstrous Iraq War. The second problem-area is the horrific incarceration-crisis facing African-American males. *An Obama presidency can, I believe, lay the groundwork for a broad revitalization of American democracy by tackling these two systemically crippling, morally crippling, and American citizens' life-cycle crippling problem-areas.*

Still today, too many of our American countrymen and countrywomen lack full understanding of just how monstrous the Iraq War has been, for us and for Iraq's citizens. For starters, the Iraq War is the second longest war the country has experienced, save the Vietnam War. Not only have nearly 2 million soldiers served in Iraq but 30% have two-plus years of service there. Over 4000 have bravely given the ultimate service - their lives - some 60,000 wounded, injured, etc., many with horrendous injuries.

Beyond the massive loss of life and damage to thousands of American soldiers, the Iraq War's damage to America's economic life and well-being is extraordinary. First of all, it is hard to believe that after World War II the Iraq War is our country's most costly war. As of March 2008, the Iraq War has claimed \$600 billion of our country's wealth. And as a data-rich article by Professor Linda Blimes of the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government ("Another Year - Another \$300 Billion" *Boston Globe* (March 16, 2008)) points out:

That \$600 billion figure ignores four major costs. First, there are additional war-related costs buried in places such as the non-Iraq defense budget. That budget has grown by \$500 billion cumulatively since the beginning of the war. ...Second, the \$600 billion excludes the cost of providing medical care and disability compensation for veterans. ...Third, the \$600 billion does not take into account the cost to "reset" the military - to replace equipment and restore personnel to prewar levels of readiness.

Thus, with the election of Senator Barack Obama as president in November there's something equivalent to certainty that, I think, an end to the monstrous Iraq War will occur. A monstrous war that, according to Linda Blimes, "the cash cost of each month we continue in Iraq is \$12 billion...." And, of course, what's worse are the long-range systemic costs and costs to life-cycle well-being of American citizens. Here, too, Linda Blimes' informs us candidly:

...The war has weakened our economy, increased oil prices, and made it more difficult for us to fund road projects, schools, medical research, and other vital needs. Apart from the oil companies and a handful of defense contractors, the war has not stimulated the economy. Perhaps most painful to consider is the opportunity cost: *the money spent on the war could have fixed Social Security for the next 75 years or provided health insurance to all American children.*

No doubt, ending the monstrous Iraq War will be an uphill battle for an Obama presidency, *given the numerous establishmentarian systemic power-blocs intertwined with and dependent upon this war*. As the Kennedy School of Government's Linda Blimes points out in her study of the Iraq War: "The [Boston] Globe reported recently that the largest private contractor in Iraq, KBR [a company Vice President Cheney once headed] has dodged paying hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes by employing its workers through a shell company in the Cayman Islands." Can you image such power-class skulduggery?

Problem Areas an Obama Presidency Must Confront: (II) Black Imprisonment

Just as the Iraq war must be high on the policy agenda of an Obama presidency, so too must the horrifically devastating and debased plight of nearly one million incarcerated African-Americans, mainly Black males, be high on the policy agenda of an Obama presidency. I was inspired to read in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 29, 2008) that the new executive secretary of the NAACP, Benjamin Jealous - former director of the leading African-American newspaper association, the National Newspaper Publishers Association - places the plight of incarcerated African-Americans at the top of the NAACP's new agenda. In an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Jealous indicated that the most pressing issues for him [as new executive of NAACP] include the country's incarceration rate, particularly of African-American men and boys, which far outpaces the rest of the world. Less than 5 percent of the world's people live in the United States, yet the nation has almost a quarter of the world's prisoners."

If a new head of the NAACP can get this great warhorse of African-American rights and progress to place the country's horrific incarceration rate for Blacks at the top of its agenda, surely an Obama presidency can and must do the same. Today our country has 2.2 million souls in prisons - far beyond any other democratic nation and some authoritarian ones too, such as Russia, China, etc. - some 800,000-plus are African-Americans, Black males.

Research by BlackCommentator.com editorial board member Professor Manning Marable of Columbia University [reported](#) that by 2000 in states like New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan, Black males comprised on average between 50% and 80% of inmates in state and federal prisons. Professor Marable also reported that research by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights revealed the following:

...That while African Americans today [2000] constitute only 14 percent of all drug users nationally, they are 35 percent of all drug arrests, 55 percent of all convictions, and 75 percent of all prison admissions for drug offences. (See *BlackCommentator.com*, [September 27, 2007](#))

Viewed from another vantage point, a Black male born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime, compared with a White male who has a 1 in 7 chance. What is worse - if that's possible - the incarceration rates in this country are directly correlated with education performance, a finding reported this year by the Children Defense Fund in Washington, D.C. The Fund's research uncovered that Black children are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than White children, and such

children, in turn, disproportionately enter the vicious cycle of crime and imprisonment. As a study of this vicious cycle faced by our African-American youth published in the *Boston Globe* observed:

This "school-to-prison pipeline" begins in the nation's neglected and under-resourced public education system and flows directly into the country's expansive ocean of overcrowded, privatized, profit-producing prisons. ...More than 70 percent of the prison population in Massachusetts is functionally illiterate. (See Daniel Meyer, "Problem Students in Pipeline to Prison," *Boston Globe* (May 28, 2008))

Concluding Note

As I remarked earlier in this article, Senator Barack Obama's winning the Democratic nomination might be considered a special proclamation to millions-on-millions of Americans who understanding our country's dire need for a new political, civic, and moral activism to revitalize American democracy. A new activism that, as Obama put it in his victory address in St. Paul, will enable us "to remake this great nation so that it may always reflect our very best selves and our highest ideals." I, for one among progressive Americans, believe that to achieve this under an Obama presidency, the two major problems-areas facing the country today of the Iraq War and the massive incarceration of African-American males must gain a top place in the public-policy agenda of an Obama presidency. Anything less than this will render an Obama presidency a disappointment from where I sit.

Meanwhile, we must still recognize that even with the most optimistic public-policy outcomes by an Obama presidency, *there will remain many barriers to the revitalized American society and culture that the great Martin Luther King entertained.* The tale of one such barrier can be found in the following report in the current issue of *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Spring 2008):

A 55 year-old black woman named Ruth Simmons came to New York on an autumn shopping trip in the first year of the twentieth-first century and chose to examine the finery at Saks Fifth Avenue, one of the city's premier emporiums. She soon became aware that her movements were being followed by the store's security people, evidently fearful that she was a potential, if not likely, shoplifter. "And I greatly resented that," she said in recounting the incident. To add to her distress that day, a taxi driver locked his door as Simmons neared so that she could not get in. What made these slights, endured daily and disproportionately by black Americans, worth noting is that Ruth Simmons is president of Brown University.


Even so, I and many millions of other Americans wish the best of good luck to a future Barack Obama presidency.


BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member Martin Kilson, PhD hails from an African Methodist background and clergy: From a great-great grandfather who founded an African Methodist Episcopal church in Maryland in the 1840s; from a great-grandfather AME clergyman; from a Civil War veteran great-grandfather who founded an African Union Methodist Protestant church in Pennsylvania in 1885; and from an African Methodist clergyman father who pastored in an Eastern Pennsylvania

mill town - Ambler, PA. He attended Lincoln University (PA), 1949-1953, and Harvard graduate school. Appointed in 1962 as the first African-American to teach in Harvard College, in 1969 he was the first African-American tenured at Harvard. He retired in 2003 as a Frank G. Thomson Professor of Government, Emeritus. His publications include: [Political Change in a West African State: A Study of the Modernization Process in Sierra Leone](#) (Harvard University Press, 1966); [Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience](#) (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970); [New States in the Modern World \(Center for International Affairs\)](#) (Harvard University Press, 1975); [The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays](#) (Harvard University Press, 1976); The Making of Black Intellectuals: Studies on the African American Intelligentsia (Forthcoming. University of Missouri Press); and The Transformation of the African American Intelligentsia, 1900-2008 (Forthcoming). Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Kilson.

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