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**Obama: An Historic Moment**  
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On August 28, 2008, Barack Obama made history by standing before an audience of 85,000 in INVESCO Field at Mile High stadium accepting his nomination as a presidential candidate of the Democratic Party. At least 35 million people were watching on television while Barack Obama and family stood before the world and declared a new day has arrived with a sense of hope and purpose. But for 36.4 million people of African descent, they will break down in tears of joy knowing that life in the United States has not been a crystal stair. They know that for Barack Obama and for another 36.4 million people of African descent this moment in history was not easy or clear.

**Why is this moment historic?**

To people of African descent living in the United States, Obama represented many years of hope, false starts, failures and fears. Let me begin with hope. Peoples of African descent in the United States have known capture by slave traders, the middle passage and enslavement for almost 300 years. During those terrible periods, African Descended people maintained hope for a better life. They did not give up hope and sometimes they fought back in open rebellion or quiet resistance. As one spiritual song said:

**O freedom, O freedom,  
O freedom after a while,  
And before I'd be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave,  
And go home to my Lord and be free.**

The Civil War ended formal slavery and for the short period of Reconstruction African descended people burst forth into United States politics. Laws were passed providing

for public education for all, equality of voting, and economic development. The reconstruction period ended with massive violence which forced African Descended people back into a new form of slavery – Jim Crow. For the next sixty years African Descended people were faced with the most brutal forms of exploitation, segregation, and racial subordination. During the Jim Crow period, African Descended people never once gave up on hope for a better life. They traveled north to Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, New York and the West coast (Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, and Seattle). They fought battles on the legal front, political front, from the school to the hospital ward. Or as W. E. B. Dubois wrote in 1897, that African Descended people:

**"still press on, they still nurse the dogged hope, - not a hope of nauseating patronage, not a hope of reception into charmed social circles of stock-jobbers, pork-packers, and earl-hunters, but the hope of a higher synthesis of civilization and humanity, a true progress, with the chorus 'Peace, good will to men'"**

By 1954, the Civil Rights movement exploded on the scene. Once again hope was in the air. Commencing with the Brown vs Topeka Board of Education and the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott launched a massive wave of mass protest that did not end until the Vietnam War. The passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Civil Rights Act of 1964, and affirmation action laws were all tools of hope that gave rise to the new black middle class and hope for African Descended people. The Black power movement and the rise of the Black Panther Party gave both militancy and hope for the youth. By the 1980's, the rise of crack, gangs, poor schools, no jobs, the collapse of the inner city, the poor and working poor African Descended people were faced with new challenges – Post Civil Right capitalism. During the 80's, 90's, and 2000's, Black youth were incarcerated at greater rates than white youth. Funding for the criminal justice system increased 600% while funding for schools increased a miserable 25%. The poor and working poor African Descended people are faced with triple trap doors of incarceration, lack of employment, and inadequate education. But in the midst of all that pain and difficulty African descended people still had hope. 2Pac said this best:

**Baby don't cry, I hope you got your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up  
Baby don't cry, I hope you got your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up -Keep ya head up**

Since 1619, African Descended people arriving in the United States had only hopes to keep them going. August 28, 2008, Obama now has given many African Descended people's a new level of hope to stand up for change.

### **What about false starts and failure?**

By 1964, a major political re-alignment occurred when African Descended people gave 95% support behind the Democratic Party and opened a new arena for political leadership. In 1968, an unknown African Descended woman named Shirley Chisholm ran as the Democratic candidate for New York's 12th District congressional seat and was elected to the House of Representatives. Shirley Chisholm would become the first African Descended woman to go Congress. In 1972, she made a bid for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Shirley Chisholm won 28 delegates during the primary process. Shirley Chisholm campaigned hard and long but it would only become a symbolic act. Shirley Chisholm proved that running on a Democratic ticket can be done

and that African Descended people do have the capacity and the ability to run a national campaign.

By 1984, Jesse Jackson understood that in order to build a national campaign he would have to build a base outside of the Democratic Party. Jesse Jackson's campaign was founded on building a Rainbow Coalition as a base of support and as a vehicle to capture the nomination of the Democratic Party. During the 1984 campaign, he and the Rainbow Coalition were locked out of the Party. The Black politicians remain committed to white candidates and viewed Jackson's campaign as a one-time effort. However, Jesse Jackson came back in 1988, with the Rainbow Coalition and a national campaign (institutional structure, money, and staff) to take to all fifty states. Jesse Jackson was on his way to becoming the first serious Black contender for the nomination after the Michigan Democratic caucus. But with his defeat in Wisconsin primary race, whites viewed Jesse Jackson as a Black candidate and white racism was not going to allow a person of African Descent to win the nomination. Although Jesse had captured 6.9 million votes and won 11 contests; seven primaries (Alabama, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Puerto Rico and Virginia) and four caucuses (Delaware, Michigan, South Carolina and Vermont), he was still a person of African descent.

Barack Obama was able to learn from these experiences. Living and working as a community activist on the South Side of Chicago, he understood that you need to have your own institutions and a broad base of support. To people of African Descent we understand that we cannot have a person of African Descent speaking only for us, but the candidate needs to understand that to obtain African descended support you have to support our core positions and serve as a defender against right wing attacks. Obama represents the culmination of failure and false starts of African Descended people's historical mission to nominate a person of African descent for president in the United States. Today, Obama is standing on the history of false starts and failures.

## **Our Fears**

Most elders of African Descent carry the fears of what racism can do to Black leaders in the United States. The first and most obvious fear was that Obama would be killed before he got to the White House. White racism is very deep in the United States; African Descended people love Obama to such a degree that they prefer him alive not winning the presidency than dead and killing a dream. To many Blacks the word is "we cannot afford another Martin Luther King and Malcolm X to die".

But an even greater fear of African Descended people is covert racism. Covert racism prevented Shirley Chisholm from having institutional resources to run a campaign. Covert racism prevented Jesse Jackson from winning the nomination by viewing Jesse as a Black candidate. Black folks did not forget the Chisholm and Jackson experiences and believe that covert racism would befall Obama as well. In the beginning, no pundits, political advisors and many people of African Descent believed that Barack Obama could overcome all the obstacles that would be put in front of him.

On January 3, 2008, Barack Obama won the Iowa Caucus in a state with African descended people constituting 2.5 percent of the Iowa state's population. After the Iowa win, covert racism was put into high gear in the United States. The first challenge Obama had to face was in January, 2008, when Bill Clinton stated, "And there's no difference in your voting record and Hillary's ever since. Give me a break. This whole thing is the biggest fairy tale I've ever seen." Next Obama would face another attack from one of his own people. Robert L. Johnson, the founder of Black Entertainment Television, raised the so-called specter of Obama's past drug use.

Again, in March of 2008, Geraldine Ferraro made racist statement that "If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position. And if he was a woman (of any color) he would not be in this position. He happens to very lucky to be who he is. And the country is caught up in the concept." It's clear for Ms. Ferraro that Obama's background has no value. The fact that Obama is a graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Law School, where he served as president of the Harvard Law Review is of no importance. The fact that Obama worked as a community organizer and practiced as a civil rights attorney before serving in the Illinois Senate from 1997 to 2004 is of no importance. The fact that Obama taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School from 1992 to 2004 is of no importance. To Ferraro he is simply lucky, but to every person of African Descent there is no luck involved but overcoming the racial odds and hard work.

Once again Bill Clinton could not keep his month shut when he compared Obama's win South Carolina to that of Jesse Jackson. On May 8, 2008, Senator Hillary Clinton made a statement that, "Senator Obama's support among working, hard-working Americans, white Americans is weakening again, and how whites in both states who had not completed college were supporting me." In other words, white electors will support a white woman before they will support a person of African Descent. Next, Obama had to pass a racial litmus test. In 1984, Jesse Jackson failed the racial litmus with his connection with Louis Farrakhan. Obama was forced to disavow any connection with Rev. Jeremiah Wright. At a news conference on April 29, 2008, Barack Obama stated that Wright's remarks were "a bunch of rants that aren't grounded in the truth". To the white electorate he had passed the racial litmus test. The African American community understood that Rev. Jeremiah Wright was speaking truth to power. However, speaking truth to power is un-welcome in United States politics.

The Clintons, Johnson, Ferraro attacks and the dumping of Rev. Wright were all designed to undermine Obama's broad base of support. The media was on a constant drumbeat to racialize Obama. The media attempted to wrap Obama in the so-called elites, inexperienced, and not acceptable to white people cloth. The fear of covert racism gave many people of African Descent reasons to be concerned that Obama would be robbed of the nomination. Today, Obama has people of African Descent's fears on his shoulder.

When on August 28, 2008, Barack Obama walked into the convention and declared, "America, This Is Our Moment"; people of African Descent interpreted the declaration as "This is our Historic Moment".


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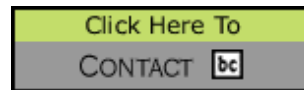
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