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**Obama's Ground Operation for Victory:  
A Letter to a Fellow Progressive  
Think Piece  
By Dr. Horace Campbell, PhD  
BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

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Saturday September 20, 2008

Brother,

As a political activist, you should not follow the media and their preoccupation with the mind of the white voter. These articles that you have re-circulated are part of the machinery of desperation. What you should understand is the massive organization that Obama has placed in motion. Michele and Barack Obama and the team of David Axelrod, David Plouffe, Steve Hildebrand and others, have a clear plan for massive victory. As long as the mainstream media focuses on the old forms of politics, they will awake on November 5, to a new reality - just like Hillary Clinton after Iowa. This is the genius of the "machinery of hope." They are working below the radar and they have out-organized Karl Rove, Steve Schmidt, Mark Salter, and former lobbyists, Rick Davis and Charlie Black.

I went to Denver for the Democratic National Convention. As a historian, political scientist and peace activist, I wanted to understand the political machinery of this Obama campaign. I watched it up close, and I watched the machinations of the opposition who are hoping that the Latinos will not go out to vote. In the Latino caucus I could see the difference between those forces who are opposed to racist immigration

laws and the minority that buys into the images portrayed by the Spanish Language stations. One section of the Democratic Party that is opposed to Obama is seeking to neutralize this massive force of Latino voters in the forthcoming November elections. These internal democratic opposition forces would prefer for the majority of workers to focus on the so-called race issue, while their financial world implode - they are losing their jobs; they are being forced out of their homes by foreclosures and they may not be able to get credit.

While in Denver I learned a lot about the Obama organization. Most of what I learned has been in the media but to see it up close was important. It has, for example, 1.7 million small donors, 2 million volunteers, 5 million e-mail addresses and about 2 million face book partners. The intent is to have between 6-8 million volunteers by October 26th. I learned of the ground operation in which Obama's team has 35 persons in play to every one person on the "helpless team." (This is the team of McCain and Palin that represent the other side of the opposition to Barack Obama). While the media is stirring up old anxieties using the old discourse of the Bradley Effect, I would recommend that you study the power point presentation of David Plouffe that rolled out the essence of the national campaign strategy. This strategy seems to be on target. By the time the press catches up with the strategy, the campaign has moved to the next stage.

The training camps for new volunteers and new offices have been opened up across large parts of the country, outside of the 18 states that the campaign had been aggressively working - even before the nomination had been secured on June 3rd. This was based on scaling principles. When you read in the media hat the Obama campaign has closed its operation in Montana or Georgia, bear in mind that this emanates from the fact that the campaign has achieved its limited objectives in relation to voter registration and building a roster of new volunteers. Already in Florida, the Obama campaign had initiated an organization and plan to register the 630,000 eligible Hispanics, 593,000 African-Americans and 236,000 18- to 24-year-olds not yet on the rolls. The Obama campaign has already spent close to 39 million dollars in this state, and the more than 50 offices are staffed with 300 or more paid staff members, and hundreds of thousands of volunteers.

If you remember the Senate race of Obama in 2004 with the hapless opposition, (remember Jack Ryan and Alan Keyes) we have another hapless opposition and so the media is seeking to mobilize white workers against Obama. But every action the opposition has taken increases the support for Obama.

I would like to give you a couple examples: the nomination of Sarah Palin to the Vice Presidential slot of the Republican Party has helped to push Florida further into the Democratic camp. And, when it was reported that the evangelical church of the Republican Vice Presidential candidate was a supporter of Jews for Jesus, an entirely new dynamic was introduced into the campaign in Florida. When the views of the pastor David Brikner becomes better known, listen carefully as this unfolds. Follow closely the religious debates and the issues surrounding David Brikner. You will hear the results of these debates for yourself, by October 26th.

## **The Convention in Denver**

While in Denver, I attended some of the caucuses. I could not get into the arena as I was not a delegate. Yet, there was enough going on inside these caucuses for the astute to see the forces arrayed against the Obama candidacy within the Democratic Party and the desperate measures they had embarked upon. I also learned of the roll out incremental campaign to register new voters before October 3rd. (This measure intends to register tens of millions of persons, an ambition that I was dubious about until I started to hear the figures.) After October 3rd and up to October 26th, the campaign will then move on to setting up the machinery to manage 6 - 8 million volunteers to work on the voting process. The logistical challenges involved in setting in motion the ground staff, the volunteers and honing the messages, have already distinguished Obama and his team among those who study politics. There has never been an organization of this type in the **history of politics in the USA**.

The key fact is how the self-organization and self-mobilization inspired by this "crowd sourcing" tapped into the information technology tools to move the organization to levels that were unthinkable before. This is self-organization and self-mobilization moving a new constituency from one stage to the next in their understanding of the realities of politics. The **millennials** who are being mobilized will not be reflected in the polls. The new registrants are not being contacted by the polling organizations, and for the moment, this is good for the Obama campaign insofar as, as long as the election appears close, it motivates the team of volunteers to push to extraordinary lengths. Yet, despite the hand wringing of traditional political scientists, (especially the doom and gloom predictions of some of the members of Black Political Scientists - NCOBPS) there is a wave of enthusiasm among the youth. This enthusiasm had propelled Obama to victory over Hillary Clinton, and the incessant newspaper articles about racial voting is intended to erode the new momentum unleashed by these new forces. The young intend to vote.

### **Quantitative Change Leading to Qualitative Transformations**

When I listened to the campaign plans, they were breathtaking. And they have the organizational resources to accomplish their objectives. These organizational resources have been translated into fund raising resources. It is the same organizational and fund raising resource that translates into the transformed political culture. In this culture, every aspect of the campaign is nested into the next. To the public, the most evidence of this transformed culture is the coordinated effort to Get out the Vote (GOVT). Go to Plouffe's missives and you will grasp the broad outlines. Briefly, the Obama campaign is contesting in all fifty states. The media has concentrated on the 18 so called battleground states that the cable channels like to show in their red/blue map reading sessions. What they cannot bring out in these map reading sessions is the reality that in all states, the Obama campaign has the resources to campaign for judgeships, county offices, and lower down ticket offices. These map sessions will reveal information on the 18 so called battle ground states, but the Obama team has established offices in states that are not considered battleground. For example, in Montana, the Obama campaign opened 12 field offices. Once they established their threshold of volunteers, they moved to the next stage. It is in a state such as Virginia where one can witness the full blown operation, with over 40 field offices. Readers of the *Washington Post* have followed the month by month tally of the registration of voters in this state that has not voted for a Democratic candidate for President since 1964. The figures are staggering when one grasps the number of potential voters that

have been registered in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Georgia, Michigan and North Carolina. In a state such as North Carolina, the pendulum is slowly shifting toward the Obama campaign.

The campaign in the South has deepened, with not only field offices, but with a faith-based organization that promises to turn every black church in the South into a field office. Simultaneously, the plans include mobilizing every neighborhood with a large Latino population into new political bases for trade union rights, immigration rights, citizenship rights and all the democratic rights of working peoples. Rural whites and poor whites are not left out in this strategy. The Obama campaign is competing in states such as Alabama and Mississippi, states largely uncontested for decades by Democrats in a Presidential race. The down ticket operation in South Carolina is rewriting all of the old understandings of politics in that state. New forces energized from the primary, have unleashed a level of self-mobilization that is shaking the old establishment in both parties. The Obama team will not reveal the number of paid staff members, or, numbers of volunteers in South Carolina, but, the campaign has a new presence that has brought national prominence to self-organizers such as Anton Gunn. The slogan: *Campaign for Change*, has real meaning for the grassroots community organizers, who are at work throughout the South, in numbers that have not been witnessed since the work of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the sixties.

The example of the campaign strategy in Texas is indicative of the thinking of the Obama team. According to a speech attributed to David Axelrod, the campaign in Texas is not only aimed at this election cycle. The campaign is not planning to win the Presidential electoral votes in Texas, but is planning to pick up congressional seats, while electing Democratic state lawmakers who would help decide election boundaries for U.S. House seats in Texas and elsewhere in later years. While the medium term plans for Texas has changed the momentum in the Democratic Party, there is a renewed energy in states such as Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Montana and Utah. In states such as Nebraska, the campaign is targeting particular congressional districts. One should also pay closer attention to the Senate race in New Hampshire. The Obama campaign is pouring resources into New Hampshire and organizing for an early win in that state of John Sununu as part of the psychological war on the night of the election.

### **I Took Note of the Ambitious Planning**

It is this quantitative organizational capacity that will have qualitative results in the larger political context of rapid changes. Watch this carefully. This is the basis for my earlier analysis of the laws of unforeseen circumstances. This is the essence of quantum politics. Quantum politics alerts us to political and economic philosophies that are more appropriate to the realities of the 21st century where separation and compartmentalization have no meaning. Quantum politics builds on principles of self-organization that is at the heart of true democracy.

From our analysis, it can be seen that the Obama campaign is building a volunteer structure based on the principles self-organization, but one which will have substantial support in new areas of the country. The cascading effect of the process will break old alliances and bring into the politics new social forces.

## Here is the Problem in my Mind

There is no clear progressive left formation at the national level at work to hold the Obama team accountable. Barack and Michelle Obama have both inspired **self-organization** for representative politics. There is a difference between self-organization for representative politics (nested within the party structures) and self-organization for self-emancipation. Those of us on the left have not intervened effectively in the electoral debates, thus far. Hence, when the Obama campaign emerges victorious, the progressive forces are not organized to turn the self-organization into an ongoing formation, to hold the Obama Presidency accountable. At one of the fringe meetings in Denver, I had asked about a rigorous discussion on Nationalization. I was silenced, not by moderates, but by the *Nation* folks who dominated the Progressive Democrats for America forum.

The reality will be that the Obama administration will have more power than the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) administration in the thirties and forties. The recent nationalization of Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac), the nationalization of the American International Group (AIG), and the impending nationalization of the automobile industry and the airlines will make the **US** economy one of the most state controlled in the world. The trade unions need to be more engaged in these discussions, so that the glib media statements on the privatization of profit and socialization of risks are understood by every household.

The working people all over the USA need to understand the lies about market fundamentalism, just as they have come to understand the realities of the lies behind the invasion and occupation of Iraq. As the current debate unfolds, and about the biggest bail out in the history of economic activities takes place, it is not only the politicians and the Treasury Department who should dominate the media platforms. Slowly, the cynicism and hypocrisy of the ruling classes are being revealed to the working peoples. Some churches are already calling the bankers the devil and invoking the images of Jesus whipping the money changers out of the temple.

“Jesus entered the Temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ‘It is written,’ he said to them, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer but you are making it a den of robbers.’”  
(Matthew 21:12-13)

The left needs the appropriate language to inspire the workers to understand what George Bush, Ben S. Bernanke and Henry Paulson are planning in the US \$700 billion bail out to save US capitalism. The planned **financial coup** of the Treasury Department is one more nail in the coffin 'the forms of democratic oversight that still exist in the society. At the same time, while Paulson is testifying before the media and the Congress on the need for regulation in order to save the system, the Treasury is actually relaxing regulations to help save the investment banks and to help the private equity fund industry to take control over struggling banks at the expense of thousands of smaller and regional banks around the Country. The left must help workers to understand that the efforts to use taxpayer money to save certain banks in the name of protecting workers from a recession is really about sustaining the overall system that

caused the crisis, which they lobbied to create, and which keep American financial institutions at the top of food chain in the global financial system. The fact that the USG has stooped so low as to put the interests of foreign central banks ahead of local American banks, and has been reluctantly forced to allow foreign sovereign wealth funds to purchase American companies is just a reflection of the steps they will take to sustain the overall system. The left must make it clear what actions that USG could take involving the military, if the current efforts turn out to be insufficient to sustain the current financial system from the crisis.

In classical double speak, Henry Paulson, former CEO of Goldman Sachs, is using the crisis to implement some of the deregulation moves that the financial capitalists have wanted for years and now they think they can use the 'fear of depression' to get access to taxpayer money. It is clear now more than ever that the financial capitalists are seeking to perpetrate one of the greatest transfers of wealth (from the taxpayer to banks) in recent history in order to save them from the crisis which they created and to sustain the financial system which they built.

The present crisis in the US economy is fundamentally an ideological crisis. It is many sided with the essential contradiction between the ideas of private property (private ownership of homes by workers) and the profitability of the banking system. Within this contradiction lie other contradictions such as the issue of the automatic expectation of mega profits for the oil magnates, irrespective of the implications for the other sectors such as transport, housing and the automobile industry. This same contradiction is bringing to the fore the destruction of the planet earth and the crimes against nature by the oil companies. Many of the youth who have been mobilized for this election are passionate about the struggles over environmental justice.

There is an ideological shift away from neo-liberalism, which has been forced on to this country by the reality of the financial fiction that has now imploded. The tipping point away from trust in US capital markets and bonds will come in the midst of the Obama administration (if not before). This is when the US will be faced with either whipping up jingoism, racism and militarism or a fundamental restructuring of ideas, politics and organization. There are now two roads for the workers, one based on racial chauvinism, militarism and support for the bankers and Paulson or one where the trades union, workers and oppressed communities, intervene with a new energy for democratic accountability and transparency.

The good thing about the present call for more regulation is that the calls are being made and carried out by George Bush and the worst of the neo-liberals such as Paulson. Not that they had any choice. Once they have nationalized, they will seek to use some sort of military skirmish and whip up more racism to divert the attention of the poor away from the real consequences of greed, militarism, war and lies.

### **Militarism as a Last Ditch Effort**

The US ruling class always needs an enemy to mobilize the peoples of the society to support militarism abroad and repression at home. During the cold war it was communism. In the past eight years the enemy has been terrorism, which gave us the "global war on terror." The fictitious nature of this "war on terror" has unraveled while the administration has been stoking the fires of war against Iran. This is the last

desperate action on the part of the Republicans. But, according to my analysis of the balance of political forces globally and nationally, this last ditch military action will be foiled by the US military itself.

In the past five years, there have been numerous commentaries by retired generals that the Iraq war was the wrong war, at the wrong time, with the wrong strategy. It is as if there is a debate in the USA on just wars. These commentaries reflected deep divisions in the military, to the point where serving and retired military officers were not shy in calling for the removal of Donald Rumsfeld. It was this same division within the military and the Intelligence services that wrecked the plans for the covert and overt war against the people of Iran. The resignation of Admiral William Fallon, in March, 2008, made public a deep struggle within the ranks of the US military.

At the present moment, it seems to me that Obama has the support of that section of the military that has been humiliated by Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. From the book of Bob Woodward (appropriately titled, [The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008](#)) one can discern the anger felt by officers such as General Peter Pace. The untimely death of General William Odom, in June, 2008, robbed this section of the military of its most articulate spokesperson against the Bush administration. General Odom had not been shy in rallying the serving Generals against George W. Bush. I cannot but think of how convenient this death has been for the beleaguered Bush. General Peter Pace, and the generals who were humiliated by the Iraq debacle are angry, and one has to read the signals coming from the armed forces - the land troops. These forces are opposed by the air force and the more elite sections.

There is also a division in the intelligence services. This is the most significant division since John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, were killed. It is this division that has ensured that Obama will not be easily assassinated. The arrest of the amateur assassins in Denver, during the Democratic convention, concealed even more dangerous threats against the candidate. According to an analysis of campaign contributions by the [Center for Responsive Politics](#), Democrat, Barack Obama, has received nearly-six times as much money contributed to his political campaign from troops deployed overseas at the time of their contributions, than has the hapless Republican candidate. This is the reality that the incessant articles on racial voting will not reveal.

In my view, in his acceptance speech at Denver, Obama was speaking directly to the military when he promised to rebuild the military. It is the task of the left and progressive forces, to bring to the population the fact that one cannot rebuild the military when the economy of the United States is surviving on foreign funds.

It is the task of the left to grasp the divisions in the military and to deepen educational work, so that the military and their families understand that all forms of unilateralism will have to go. So far, the analysts and pundits have not linked the Wall Street implosion to the military defeat in Iraq. If the US military had not been defeated in Iraq, then they would have been emboldened to resolve this financial crisis by seizing the assets of countries who have the temerity to establish Sovereign Wealth Funds. The IMF and World Bank are now comatose. We have come to the end of the Breton Woods system. Military intervention of the type that was planned in Georgia, or any other kind, such as an escalation in Pakistan, will only bring more humiliation. Military intervention

is a nonstarter, but there are some desperate elements among those in power around Cheney who are afraid of prosecution. Already, in Europe, there have been jurists who are developing the brief on the war crimes committed by the Bush administration. Most US citizens did not know that arrest warrants had been issued for Donald Rumsfeld. On the domestic front, the full details of the dismissal of US attorneys by former Attorney General, Alberto Gonzalez of the Justice Department, is still to be brought before the courts. There are numerous reports and press information on how aides to former Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez committed misconduct, violated Justice Department policy and broke the law by making hiring decisions based on political ideology rather than professional qualifications

Progressives must now raise the question of justice and peace. There can be no peace and justice without demilitarization and conversion of the military industrial complex. Work by peace activists must be revived; instead of the wringing our hands over the predictions of those who want to bring back the old racist ideas. In those days, racism had a material base. The material base is being eroded before their very eyes. The question of the voting habits of white voters, especially white women must be placed in the context of the struggles for rights, especially women's rights. The working people must be reminded of the experiences of the British people under the leadership of such notable right wing women as Margaret Thatcher.

I am confident that the working classes in this country, in this instance, will not work against their own interests. The capitalist crisis is too deep, for those who are using old frameworks, to place race as the central question before the electorate. Workers and their families want universal health care in the midst of the cancer epidemic. The writers of the articles that you have sent are using data that does not take into account Obama's ground operations and ground troops. This also includes the legal and propaganda teams that are at work.

For the first time since the radical reconstruction in 1865, there will be an opportunity to rally black, white, brown and first nation workers (indeed all workers) in this country to participate meaningfully in politics (not just in voting). This begins with thinking beyond elections, so that the collapse of the hedge fund managers and short selling traders are explained. We have to explain to the working peoples that the consumer led economy, and the credit card binge is over. The struggle for democracy involves telling the simple truth to the workers. And the media houses will be a very big part of our work because their material base is also collapsing. The Obama administration will have to cut the subsidies of billions of dollars expended on advertising by the motorcar industry. The reorganization of the economy will force changes at the level of information. We have to prepare ourselves on the left for this moment.

### **Tasks for the Left**

In Obama's own words, "The way to change the political process ... is to change the face of the electorate. Because it's not about getting Barack Obama elected, it's about whether we're gonna' have a progressive majority."

This statement of Obama presupposes that there is a left and progressive constituency in the United States. Those on the left who are not simply concerned with intellectual correctness must engage the political process and create new sites of politics. This task



of deepening educational work on the true nature of the contemporary crisis awaits a new energized left that will start to fight for people to retain their homes, in the same way that Bush and the Treasury is seeking to save the billionaires. While every financial crisis is unique, one must explain to the workers that the day of market fundamentalism is at an end. Chinese and Japanese capitalists are desperate to preserve the US capitalists as the leaders of the global capitalist system. Hence, Paulson is turning to these forces to prop up the financial coup. The ideology that is now appropriate is one where each human is seen as a human, and has the right to all the necessities of a decent standard of living. The begging to foreign banks and foreign states by Henry Paulson should be brought out in the open, so that the US workers understand the real meaning of the 9 trillion dollars of debt.

Reality has intervened. China holds the handle of the knife. It is a real historic irony to see the hard earned savings of Chinese workers being solicited to prop up Wall Street bankers in the USA. In the short run, the Chinese communist party will not allow the dollar to sink, right away, because it is not in their interest for Germany (and the European Union) to be the beneficiary of this US capitalist crisis.

As revolutionaries, we must engage and go out to raise our issues so that the 60 million new youths and former disenfranchised who have been inspired by Obama can be taken to a new level of anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic politics.

They are now receptive because Obama has opened the door.

### **What if?**

And so, the students say to me ... yes, we have heard about the organization, but what if they still steal the elections?

My response was that this election is the culmination of a long process of struggle. If the election is stolen, then every city in the US could have a total transit strike, because black, Latino, working class folks, control the levers of transport in all the major urban areas. The same text messaging can cripple the cities in a general strike that is peaceful, and one that engages the military that are against the mercenary forces of Blackwater and Private Contractors.

There must be contingency planning by the youth and the organized forces in the peace and justice movement to initiate a general strike that can spread to the armed forces. Images of the 12 million activists on the streets in Spain in 2004 must be shown along with the images of the 15 million that came out on February 15, 2003 against the invasion of Iraq.

We have not ended our call for the dismantling of the prison industrial complex. We are now being tactical, because the right wants more money for prisons to continue to incarcerate the youth, instead of holding trials for those who brought the economy to the brink of collapse. The big capitalists and developers at the Convention want Obama to win, and they were there to study his ground operation, but they want him to demobilize these new forces as soon as he is sworn in. Notice, that those such as T. Boone Pickens saw the ground operation and went to beg forgiveness in Denver.


What are we going to do about this?


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**BlackCommentator.com** Guest Commentator, Dr. Horace Campbell, PhD, is Professor of African American Studies and Political Science at Syracuse University in Syracuse New York. His book, [Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney](#) is going through its fifth edition. He is also the author of [Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation](#) and is currently working on a book on Obama and 21st Century Politics. He has contributed to many other edited books, most recently, "From Regional Military de-stabilization to Military Cooperation and Peace in South Africa" in [Peace and Security in Southern Africa \(State and Democracy Series\)](#) , edited by Ibbo Mandaza. He has published numerous articles in scholarly journals and is currently writing a book on the Wars against the Angolan peoples. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Campbell.

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