

Obama campaign, presidency redefine engagement

Written by Gary L. Flowers, NNPA Columnist
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This marks the 80th birthday of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Inauguration of Barack Hussein Obama as the 44th president of the United States of America (that is, if God's willing and the creek don't rise).

How fitting. Dr. King eloquently extolled a nation at war to hew out of the rock of despair a stone of hope. Today, President Obama challenges a nation at war to possess the audacity of hope. And, between Dr. King and the President, the Rev. Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr. kept hope alive. Whether mass meetings, economic leverage, or telecommunications technology, the three wise men moved America to, in the words of President Abraham Lincoln, appeal to the better angels in all people. Hope has held this nation together. Forty years ago Dr. Martin Luther King used hope to transform America. Our nation's history can be divided into "Before King" and "After King".

Before Dr. King, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson (i.e. Jeffersonian/Jacksonian Democracy) defined American democracy. Under such "Democracy" only White males could enjoy the benefits of citizenship such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. After Dr. King, all Americans - regardless of race, resources, or religion - could fully exercise their citizenship via equal protection under the law with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and the 1968 Fair Housing Act. Hope was reborn.

Twenty years ago, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., after applying civil rights lessons learned from Dr. King to civil rights movement for economic justice, changed the structure of our democracy by aggregating disparate elements of the electorate into a Rainbow Coalition. Dr. King's words of Black, Brown, Yellow, Red, or White, we are all precious in God's sight resulted in Presidential Candidate Jackson running all the way to the Democratic Convention Rules committee to enact proportional counting of primary votes. Proportional vote counting played a decisive roll in then candidate Barack Obama clinching the Democratic nomination for President this past year. Hope was kept alive. Last fall's presidential campaign by Sen. Barack Obama was nothing short of brilliant by every conceivable political measure: fundraising, oratory, organization, issue management, and most importantly, the use of technology. Whether twittering, texting or team canvassing, the Obama model has rewritten political engagement, from the mobilizing apathetic to measuring the aware. Never before were pollsters as concerned about counting global support for a national candidate. Millions around the world in varying languages exclaimed in unison: "yes we can!"

Hope's audacity was actualized. However, hope begins at home. What linked Dr. King, Rev. Jackson, and Obama is sacrificial service (when hope hits the ground of your neighborhood). Hope springs eternal; it does not fall from the sky. Those who called, walked, registered, mobilized, and prayed for a new day in America must begin on their block. Hope begins at home.

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