

**Beyond Political Rhetoric and Discourse: What type of educational, socio-economic, and political change should educators expect of President Barack Obama?**

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## **Abstract**

This article critically analyzes Obama's singular political victory. The author begins by laying out current racial, socio-economic, educational and political challenges that await President-elect Obama. He goes on to analyze Obama's political discourse and then questions whether or not Obama would be able to meet these challenges. The author acknowledges the historic significance of Obama's remarkable victory and states the victory is worth celebrating. However, he argues that Obama's victory does not necessarily guarantee fundamental educational, socio-economic, and political changes, as he is surrounded by many of the same opportunist, conservative and privileged white males who have maintained and profited from the U.S. political system for centuries. The author, therefore, invites people involved in grassroots and progressive socio-political movements to continue to mobilize, organize and use Obama's political slogan "change from the bottom up" to make him accountable for decisions that he would make in the months or years to come.

**Key Words:** racial segregation; racism; capitalism; education; people of color; political discourse; status quo; change.

Given the history of the United States where only white males have dominated the political system for centuries, it can be argued that Barack Obama's remarkable victory is a shift in the political paradigm (Giroux, 2008). Furthermore, because of the magnitude and historic significance of Obama's victory, one may prematurely state that we are now living in a post-racial era, especially when one remembers the Jim Crow era during which white supremacist groups such as Ku Klux Klan ruthlessly brutalized black/brown people. Admittedly, a few people of African descent have advanced economically and politically, and their plight may not appear as bad as it was before. However, the poorly funded schools that underprivileged minority children are attending, the segregated neighborhoods where millions of them are living, and the socio-economic, political, and legal challenges that people of color are facing in their daily lives suggest that fundamentally not much has changed for them (Fredrickson, 2002; Kozol, 1992; Brown et al., 2003; Giroux, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003; Bell, 2001).

As people continue celebrating Obama's singular political victory, millions of people of color are disproportionately unemployed and facing foreclosure on their homes. According to a report released this year by National League Urban Institute, "Unemployment increased for all groups, but continues to impact blacks and Latinos the most. Whites saw their unemployment increase 0.4% to 7.3%, blacks 0.8% to 13.4% and Latinos saw their unemployment rate increase 1.2% to 10.9%." Moreover, the National League Urban Institute reported in April 2008 that, "Foreclosures are expected to impact the African-American community disproportionately—the Center for Responsible Lending (CRL) estimates that 1 in 10 recent black borrowers may be affected. This is due in part to the increased likelihood that blacks will have a subprime or high-priced loan: 54% of all loans to blacks were high-rate in 2006, compared to 47% for Latinos and only 18% for whites." Furthermore, since *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 intended to desegregate schools, racial segregation in schools has resurfaced in most U.S. cities. Blacks, Latino/as, Native Americans, and Whites continue to attend for the most part "white" and "black/brown schools" (Tatum, 2003, 2007; Brown et al., 2003; Anyon, 1995a, 1997; Kozol, 1992) and live in their respective neighborhoods (Massey and Denton, 1993; Winant, 2001; Logan, 2002; Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Racial segregation at schools is a crucial issue that needs to be brought to the fore of debates revolved around social justice issues, for it has negatively impacted students, particularly students of color (Tatum, 2003, 2007; Nieto, 2004). Being embedded in the fabric of the U.S. society, racial segregation has also been the root cause of educational and socio-economic problems people of color have faced (Dyson, 2004; Brown et al. 2003; Winant, 2001; Massey and Denton, 1993). As Massey and Denton (1993) put it,

Because of racial segregation, a significant share of black America is condemned to experience a social environment where poverty and joblessness are the norm, where a majority of children are born out of wedlock, where most families are on welfare, where educational failure prevails, and where social and physical deterioration abound. Through prolonged exposure to such an environment, black chances for social and economic success are drastically reduced. (p.2)

In light of these issues mentioned above and drawing on critical race theory conceptual framework (Leonardo, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Tatum, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Bell, 2001; Winant, 2001; Haynes Writer & Chavez-Chavez, 2001; Gilborn, 2001), this paper examines (1) whether or not with Obama's political victory fundamental, critical change is possible within the existing socio-political structures of a capitalist and racist system; (2) to what degree conservative dominant white males may use President Barack Obama as a token to continue defending their own interests; and (3) to what extent Obama's political victory can be utilized as a political symbol to mask the ongoing misery of people of color and other marginalized groups.

In the sections that follow, I begin by critically examining the two major oppressive systems, racism and capitalism, and showing how these systems would most likely continue impacting people of color and other marginalized groups regardless of Obama's ascendance to the presidency. Furthermore, I explore to what degree Obama's political decision appointing many conservative white males in his administration reflect the type of change he talked about through his campaign. Moreover, I do an analysis of some of President Barack Obama's political speeches examining to what extent the content of these speeches addresses educational, racial, socio-economic, and political issues confront people of color and other oppressed groups. I end this essay by making an appeal to concerned citizens to organize through grassroots and progressive socio-

political movements to continuously support President Barack Obama while at the same time making him accountable for his political decisions and actions.

### Racism and Capitalism: Twin of Inequity

Subordination and exploitation of poor black/brown people and other oppressed groups do not happen in a vacuum; this subordination and exploitation has been orchestrated through two oppressive joint systems, capitalism and racism (Williams, 1966; Rodney, 1974; Young, 2001; Callinicos, 1995). Just as the capitalist system cannot survive without oppressing workers (Gramsci, 1971; Hill, 2002, 2004a; McLaren, 2005, 1997; Anyon, 2005; Apple, 2001), the racist system that sustains white supremacy cannot survive without brutalizing people of color (Brown et al. 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Young, 2001; Callinicos, 2001; Gilborn, 2001, 1998; Mills, 1997; Fanon, 1967). As Callinicos (2001) observed, “Racism remains one of the main features of the advanced capitalist societies. It is institutionalized in the systematic discrimination which black experience in jobs, housing and the education system, and the harassment they suffer at the hands of police and immigration authorities” (Callinicos as cited in Young, 2001, p. 34).

Like capitalism, racism is primarily based on profits. In fact, it is an economic and historical construct conceived and established by white supremacist groups to exploit and oppress people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Brown et al. 2003; Winant, 2001; Kelley, 1990; Gilborn, 2001; Baron, 1982; Bell, 1992; Cesaire, 2000). Here I am not referring to individual racism. That is, the form of racism that a person of color might experience while interacting with an individual white person, or while shopping at a store. Rather, I am referring to institutionalized racism, which is often subtle and whose effects are far more destructive than individual racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Brown et al. 2003; Winant, 2001; Fredrickson, 2002; West, 1993). For instance, racism that people of color encounter in their search for housing and employment, in job promotions, and in college admission is a form of institutionalized racism. Specifically, an employer that denies a qualified person of color employment based on his or her skin color is a form of institutionalized racism. In addition, granting people of color the worst mortgage loans based on their racial background constitutes a form of institutionalized racism. Brown et al. 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Winant, 2001; Gilborn, 2001, among others, have explored

various and vicious ways institutionalized racism has negatively impacted people of color. For instance, Brown et al. (2003) maintained that, “While young African American men may have the opportunity to obtain the same education, income, and wealth as whites, in actuality, they are on a slippery slope, for the discrimination their parents faced in the housing and credit markets sets the stage for perpetual economic disadvantage” (p.21). Similarly, Austin (2009) argues that, “The disparities among the college-educated and other evidence strongly suggest that even if the black educational attainment distribution was exactly the same as the white distribution, blacks would still have a higher unemployment rate than whites. Without a renewed commitment to anti-discrimination in employment and job creation in black communities, high rates of black joblessness will likely persist” (p.1).

Building on Brown’s and his colleagues’ argument, I argue that racism is the very root of human tragedy and the source of much the social, economic, and political misery that people of color and other marginalized groups have experienced. The negative effect of racism on people of color and other suppressed groups needs be critically analyzed and made known to students, but canonical textbooks would not help much because they were and still are mostly written by conservative privileged white males (Apple, 2000, 2003; Kincheloe & Semali, 1999; Loewen, 1995; Lipman, 1998; hooks, 1994). Furthermore, I argue that privileged and educated people of color who have been used as tokens by the U.S. capitalist and racist systems would also be helpless, for they might be reluctant to tell any truth that can endanger their privileged position in the white world. Cornel West (1993) brilliantly captured the reluctance or the refusal of these educated people of color to ally with other blacks who have been fighting against institutionalized racism. West (1993) maintained, “only certain kinds of black people deserve high positions, that is, those who accept the rules of the game played by white America” (p.42).

Given the above, it is worth asking what to do? Should one go to powerful black people like President Barack Obama, Colin Powel, and Condoleezza Rice seeking help? This option seems problematic, as many of these blacks might be afraid of overtly speaking against the racist and the capitalist systems for fear of jeopardizing their political career. Moreover, it might be naïve to rely on these black/brown people whose human consciousness and dignity may have been bought by these systems. Should one

then go to so-called liberals and defenders of democracy like former President Bill Clinton? As alienating, oppressive, and inhuman as it might be in the eyes of many white conservatives and self-proclaimed liberals, I argue that it would be economically and politically unwise for them to end racism. In my view, their white economic and political world has been built on racism, that is, on the backbone of black and brown people and other subordinate groups. Many of them also use capitalism to maximize their profits (Wolff, 2002; Apple, 2000; McLaren, 2005; Hill, 2001c). This fundamentally explains why one cannot truly understand racism without having a clear understanding of how capitalism operates (McLaren, 2005; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001a; Baron, 1982; Kelley, 1994; Anyon, 2005; Hill, 2001c; Williams, 1966; Callinicos, 1995). White conservative dominant and racist groups have used racism as an ideological tool to perpetuate the economic exploitation of people of color and inflict “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1990) on them. I argue that by using racism as an ideological tool to strengthen their economic and political power, these groups have rendered alienation, oppression, and famine the *raison d’être* of people of color.

My contention is that unlike many privileged whites, black and brown people have been victimized both by the capitalist and racist systems. Montague (2000) stated that, “The idea of race was, in fact, a deliberate creation of an exploiting class which was seeking to maintain its privileges against what was profitably regarded as an inferior social caste” (Montague as cited in Lang, 2000, p.17). As Montague pointed out, the root of the inhuman plight of black and brown people lie in the structure of a capitalist system that uses racism as its spinal column to make higher profits. Although capitalism is not always a racially based-system, in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, capitalism is paired with racism to maintain the unequal distribution of wealth and power of which black/brown people are the main victims (Hill, 2001c; Gilborn, 2001). As Joyce A. Ladner (1998) brilliantly put it:

Throughout its history, White America adjusts its expression of racism to accord with its economic imperatives and modifies its myths of racism to take into account the shifting economic circumstances. That is to say, racism remains a persistent value expression depending upon economic opportunities; White

America generates a new ideology to sanction any fundamental alterations in race relations growing out of basic economic modifications. (pp.154-155)

For example, while African Americans constitute approximately fifteen percent of the U.S. population, the level of poverty among them is higher than among any other ethnic group (Anyon, 2005; Bonilla-Silva, 2001). This suggests that racism is the major factor of the unspeakable inhuman conditions of millions of African Americans living in ghettos. African Americans have contributed to the socio-economic and political advancement of this country (Brown et al. 2003; Anyon, 2005). While many serve in the army; are public school teachers and college professors; are lawyers and doctors; others are blue-collar workers working in factories, Burger Kings, and McDonalds and, worse yet, are selling their labor while being incarcerated (Anyon, 2005; Muhammad, 2008; Brown et al. 2003). As Muhammad (2008) states, “Inmates produce items or perform services for almost every major industry. They sew clothes, fight fires and build furniture, but they are paid little or no wages, somewhere between five cents and almost \$2” (p.1). However, for many the so-called American dream remains a dream that might not ever come true. As Malcolm X (2003) observed, “I’m speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don’t see any American dream; I see an American nightmare” (Malcolm X as cited in Marable, 2003, p. 429).

In my view, Malcolm’s observation is still relevant today as it pointedly speaks to the current social and economic realities of many black/brown people. For example, Austin (2009) notes that

Fifteen months into a deep recession, college-educated white workers still had a relatively low unemployment rate of 3.8% in March of this year. The same could not be said for African Americans with four-year degrees. The March 2009 unemployment rate for college-educated blacks was 7.2%—almost twice as high as the white rate—and up 4.5 percentage points from March 2007, before the start of the current recession (see chart). Hispanics and Asian Americans with college degrees were in between, both with March 2009 unemployment rates of 5%.

Along the same line, Heidi Shierholz (2008) reports that, “The overall unemployment rate masks large differences in unemployment among subgroups. The unemployment rate for blacks remains extremely high at 11.1%. The unemployment rate

for Hispanics continued to rise last month, increasing a full percentage point to 8.8% unemployment “ (p. 2). Examining what blacks have endured in their own country, Rose (1974) stated that their situation is unique. Rose (1974) went on to provide a historical and sociological insight that explains the uniqueness of African Americans’ situations. In Rose’s terms:

The experience of blacks in America is unique-it has no real parallel. Paradoxically, they may well be at once the most alienated and least foreign of all our citizens: most alienated because of their special history, which began in subjugation, continued in segregation, and persists to this day under the legacy of both; least foreign because, ironically, having been cut off from many of their native roots, they had few guides but those of the master and his agents. (p. 24)

What can then be inferred from this is that many white conservative dominant groups have been profiting greatly from racism. It is, therefore, reasonable to state that as long as the racist system continues to be fed and fueled by capitalism and vice versa, the nature of the relationship between black/brown and privileged white people will remain a relationship between an oppressed and an oppressor (Freire, 1970), rather than the relationship between a free men and woman with their free fellow human beings (Cesaire, 2000; Mills, 1997). Thus, as Lenin (1975) once said: “que faire (what to do)?” Again, should we count on President Barack Obama to bridge the socio-economic gap between the have and the have-nots as well as the racial divide between white, black, and brown people?

Deconstructing Barack Obama's Political Rhetoric and Decisions.

Before examining whether or not President Barack Obama would be able to navigate through the U.S. capitalist and racist systems to effect socio-economic, educational, and political changes that he promised throughout the presidential race, I wish to briefly analyze excerpts from some of his political speeches. Politically, Barack Obama became visible nationwide when he first addressed the nation at the Democratic Convention in 2004. In the speech that Obama delivered there, he stated that:

Now even as we speak, there are those who are preparing to divide us, the spin masters and negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of anything goes. Well, I say to them tonight, there's not a liberal America and a conservative America; there's the United States of America. There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America. (p. 2)

In my view, this excerpt from that speech does not seem to pose much of a threat to conservative white individuals. Specifically, the language that he used in this excerpt does not appear to constitute a danger to the hegemonic interests of conservative white people. Had Barack Obama used the rhetoric of, say, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, at the Democratic Convention in 2004 and during the presidential campaign, most likely he would have been forced out of the presidential race before receiving the national and world attention. He would have been harshly criticized like Reverend Jeremiah Wright, who dared to speak against the status quo. In one of Reverend Jeremiah's speeches about U.S. imperialism, he stated that,

America is still the No. 1 killer in the world. ... We are deeply involved in the importing of drugs, the exporting of guns and the training of professional killers. ... We believe in white supremacy and black inferiority and believe it more than we believe in God. ... We supported Zionism shamelessly while ignoring the Palestinians and branding anybody who spoke out against it as being anti-Semitic. ... We started the AIDS virus. ... We are only able to maintain our level of living by making sure that Third World people live in grinding poverty.

Being attacked by the mainstream media and many white conservative groups for being associated with Reverend Wright, Obama was forced to address the nation about

the race issue through a speech he delivered in March 18<sup>th</sup> 2008 in Philadelphia. In that speech, he stated that:

... We do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist in the African-American community today can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. Segregated schools were, and are, inferior schools; we still haven't fixed them, fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the inferior education they provided, then and now, helps explain the pervasive achievement gap between today's black and white students. Legalized discrimination - where blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property, or loans were not granted to African-American business owners, or black homeowners could not access FHA mortgages, or blacks were excluded from unions, or the police force, or fire departments - meant that black families could not amass any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations. That history helps explain the wealth and income gap between black and white, and the concentrated pockets of poverty that persists in so many of today's urban and rural communities. A lack of economic opportunity among black men, and the shame and frustration that came from not being able to provide for one's family, contributed to the erosion of black families - a problem that welfare policies for many years may have worsened. And the lack of basic services in so many urban black neighborhoods - parks for kids to play in, police walking the beat, regular garbage pick-up and building code enforcement - all helped create a cycle of violence, blight and neglect that continue to haunt us.

The excerpt of this speech above speaks to the socio-economic injustice that Reverend Wright, many black leaders such as Martin Luther King, and ordinary black people have talked about and suffered from in this country for centuries. However, being forced by the mass corporate media and many powerful conservative white males who fear that he might be just one of those "angry" black men, Obama found a strategic way to appease the racial tension that Reverend Wright's comments triggered. In my view, the political challenge for Obama was to maintain a philosophical solidarity with Reverend Wright and other anti-racist theorists and activists while at the same time crafting a political rhetoric that "would pass," as he seemed to fear that Reverend Wright's comments would make it challenging for him to continue with the unity and hope messages that he wanted to carry throughout his presidential campaign. One of the

tactical ways whereby Obama was able to calm this divided nation was to reassure conservative white folks that he does not share the radical view of his good friend and spiritual mentor. Obama, who was compelled to show to the American white audience that he dissociated himself from Reverend Wright, said in the same speech that:

... Reverend Wright's comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity; racially charged at a time when we need to come together to solve a set of monumental problems - two wars, a terrorist threat, a falling economy, a chronic health care crisis and potentially devastating climate change; problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all.

Even though Obama's speech addresses some of the social, economic, educational, and political inequalities that black people have suffered for decades in this country, it appears that his speech was essentially designed to appease the mind of white conservative and supremacist groups who were infuriated by Reverend Wright's comments. These groups who are dominated by conservative white males often feel uneasy about any black who dares to challenge a racist and capitalist system that has served their interests for centuries. In my view, both Obama and Wright are two good citizens; however, the mainstream media has portrayed the former as a civil and good black man and the latter as an angry black man who hates whites.

This form of ideological practice can be traced back to slavery where slaves who were not perceived as a threat to, or who chose not to challenge white supremacy were used as tokens by the white masters to demonize and punish other slaves who dared to do so. The practice of tokenizing people of color in this country is not new although the election of Barack Obama and the public, political rhetoric around his election appear to be an example of racial tokenizing on an exceptionally grand scale. In fact, I argue that the election of Obama may be read as an interesting case of tokenizing because of the ways in which Obama's political rhetoric both draws strength from and simultaneously denies the racially charged lived experience of people of color within the United States and the ways in which Obama both seeks nomination and is nominated in an unsolicited sense as a Black man.

Further, I argue that what may have helped Obama navigate the white political world is his long apprenticeship into the white dominant discourse. Obama was raised by a white mother and two white grandparents. In addition, he graduated from an elite institution, Harvard University, which, in my view, has been a training ground for the ruling class. This apprenticeship has enabled him to speak back to the white world in way that may not be threatening. Although Obama's blackness is an inescapable and a visible marker, his ideological and political performance and charisma have enabled him to rally middle class and poor working class white men and women.

### **Obama's Political Victory: What to Expect Next?**

Some may argue that Obama's intellectual and political ability to rally a plethora of white, black, and brown people behind his campaign is an indicator that he can potentially bridge the racial divide and unite the nation. However, others may state that many white people who supported Barack Obama did so for their own political and economic gains and therefore have no plan to help him improve race relations in this country. Still others may go further arguing that Obama's political success can be used by the white dominant class to put a veil on social inequality and the resource gap that has reduced many people of color to poverty.

Holding a realistic and critical view about Obama's historic victory, I argue that his victory would most likely lead to white backlash on a larger scale. Furthermore, I anticipate his political success story being appropriated and used by right wing groups to blame poor people of color and other oppressed people for their own victimization. Historically, these groups are notorious for drawing on the success stories and achievements of a few blacks to blame those who have not achieved much accusing them of being lazy, deficient, and socially unfit (Ryan, 1976). Moreover, I argue that Obama's presidency is far from stopping privileged white males from running the U.S. political machine. Finally, I contend that these privileged white males may have decided to endorse Barack Obama because they realized that they could not stop a persistent, charismatic, and an extremely intelligent black man. Had President Obama been a

mediocre political figure like his predecessor George W. Bush, most likely his blackness would have been associated with it and he would not have been elected as president. I doubt conservative and privileged white male appointees in Obama's administration have the political will to help him fundamentally change the capitalist and racist systems that have been oppressive to poor black/brown and white people. These conservative and privileged white males have yet to show, if ever, a genuine interest in alleviating the horrible economic, educational, social conditions of poor brown/black and white people. The question then becomes: How would President Barack Obama navigate these capitalist and racist systems to fulfill the promises that he made to poor people of color and poor whites?

Unlike many previous and current black male leaders who have unsuccessfully tried to penetrate the U.S. political gate system, Obama has managed to do so successfully. Indeed, Obama has gone beyond male black leaders who preceded him in that he has been able to perform politics the way many privileged white males have performed it. He was able to do so by using, among other things, his biracial identity to reach out to black/brown and white men and women. Furthermore, Obama has used throughout his speeches a language that does not appear to challenge the long-established white status quo. Finally, he has performed a type of black masculinity that does not seem to be threatening. Therefore, Obama has been intelligently able to navigate through two worlds: the "black world" and the "white world." Because of this, he has not only impacted the U.S. but also the world.

However, Obama's political performance and victory do not erase the possibility that conservative privileged white males would still influence and profit from the political apparatus of this country at the expense of poor black/brown and white people. Hence, while celebrating Obama's victory, it is imperative that we incorporate in our analysis factors such as race and social class and look at their impact on the political, educational, and economic conditions of poor people of color and poor whites. To do otherwise is denying that poor people, particularly poor people of color have been victims both of capitalism and racism. As Anyon (2005) reported that, "Over 50% of Black and Latino families earn less than 200% of the poverty level, compared to only 20.3% of White

families, even though White families make up the majority (50.5%) of families that fall below 200% of the poverty level” (p. 27).

Although Obama’s access to the country’s highest political post is historically unparalleled, it does not necessarily mean that the socio-economic, educational, and political conditions of poor black, brown and white people would fundamentally improve. In fact, I argue that it is unlikely that President Barack Obama would profoundly change the U.S. political and socio-economic system for the following reason: conservative and privileged white males, who have controlled the wealth of this country for centuries by exploiting marginalized groups through corporate industries and business, dominate the ideological and political club to which Obama currently belongs. Therefore, by association Obama politically reflects the hegemonic interests of these white males. It is not surprising that many of these men, their wives, and other family members endorsed Obama. This became more evident during the Democratic Convention in August 2008. At this convention, both conservative and so-called liberal privileged white men and women stood on the podium and spoke “with pride” about Obama, whom they claimed they endorsed because he represented the interest of every American. Would they have supported Obama had he unequivocally represented the interest of every American, including the marginalized? When was the last time in American politics did we have a candidate or a political leader who truthfully championed and represented the interests of the have-nots was sincerely embraced by conservative privileged white men and women? Candidates and political leaders such as Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Robert F. Kennedy who were perceived to be a real threat to the status quo were unfortunately assassinated.

In my view, conservative and ‘liberal’ privileged whites who now claim they stand behind Obama because they believe in what he represents decided to become part of a political and historical phenomenon when they realized they could not stop it: the Obama’s phenomenon. My fear is that they might just allow Obama to run the show while influencing the political and socio-economic apparatus to satisfy their own interests. Or, to bluntly put it, they might use Obama to put on a political show giving people of color and poor whites the illusion that they are at last entering a participatory

democratic era after decades of political and economic dominations by conservative privileged white males.

Should one trust Obama's political discourse and rhetoric of change as the majority of his appointees are the same conservative political figures such as the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan; the Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates; the retired General, James Jones; and former Secretary of Treasury, Larry Summers, who have maintained and profited from the U.S. socio-economic and political system for decades? For example, Obama's Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, who was the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, has a long standing record of corporatizing and militarizing the third largest school system in the nation, the Chicago public school system that has approximately 90 percent of poor minority students (Giroux & Saltman, 2008). Giroux & Saltman (2008) stated that, "Under Duncan, Chicago took the lead in creating public schools run as military academies, vastly expanded draconian student expulsions, instituted sweeping surveillance practices, advocated a growing police presence in the schools, arbitrarily shut down entire schools and fired entire school staffs" (p.2).

What can educators and parents expect of a Secretary of Education who has such a record? And what should they then expect of President Obama who appointed him? We yet have to see Obama moving from his rhetoric of hope, change, and unity to make substantial educational, socio-economic, and political decisions that would improve the hideous conditions of poor black, brown, and white people. In order for this to happen, however, people involved in grassroots movement and progressive social and political organizations need to continue to mobilize and organize so they can make Obama's slogan "change from the bottom up" become a reality. One of the ways in which they can do so is by pressing him to provide quality education, health care, and socio-economic opportunities for everyone. Without continuous political pressure from people involved in these movements and organizations, it is unlikely that fundamental changes will occur during Obama's term. However, while pressuring Barack Obama to be accountable for the welfare of everyone, he needs to be supported like he was during his campaign, for he alone cannot effect the educational, socio-economic, and political changes that are expected of him. But the unanswered questions remain: Would President Barack Obama create space in his administration for the voice of progressive educators and intellectuals,

social activists, ordinary and concerned citizens to be heard before making decisions that educationally, economically, and politically would impact their lives? Or, before he acts, would he only listen to those conservative and privileged white males in his cabinet who have maintained and greatly profited from this capitalist and racist system? Only time will tell, and history will certainly be there to judge.

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