



Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 Races for Presidency in the United States

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Abstract

The analysis of Barack Obama's first term campaign and inaugural speech of 2008 as well as his campaign and inaugural speech of 2012 enables me to discover this former African-American President's will to encourage his people to adopt the process of democracy as their system of governance. His declarations all along his campaigns attested of his commitment to keep safe the planet and give the opportunity to all people to enjoy the full fruition of democracy. As the future President of the United States, Obama evoked a hope for the world inhabitants during his inaugural speeches. His words viewed as a moral lesson towards all the regimes that mislead their own populations, revealed his policy of uniting all American citizens regardless of the color of their skin. It is indeed thanks to this policy that he is counted among those former American Presidents who were able to solve Americans' problems.

Keywords: The United States, Barack Obama, Campaigns, Inaugural speeches, Policy

Introduction

This article examines Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 races for presidency in the United States. This theme handles an African American President's responsibilities in a country where Blacks have long been rejected and victimized by their white counterparts because of their racial belonging which is not shared by the latter. To be accepted and recognized as full American citizens capable of enjoying the full fruition of the American democracy, African Americans fought for the civil rights denied to them for years by their white fellows who used to look at them as second zone citizens due to their physical appearance. The need to be accepted urged them to partake in the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s led by African American leaders like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. viewed as the icons of the Civil Rights Movements. It was, for example, thanks to King that in 1964 and 1965, under President Lyndon Baines Johnson, were signed the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Right Act. The first banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin and racial segregation in schools, workplaces, or in public accommodations. The second insured the franchise for Blacks. The signing of these Acts testified that Martin Luther King's dream of mixing races was not far from being realized, because with the election and re-election of Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 as the Head of the White House,

one may say that King's dream has come true. For, such elections attest of the friendly atmosphere extolled by the Founding Fathers who declared: "*We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*" (the Founding Fathers of United States, quoted by Mellon: 1963, 93). It is indeed with regard to this declaration that, after observing the way the United States is ruled in comparison to what the constitution says, Barack Obama faithfully carries his ambitions further by embracing a political career.

The result of Obama's ambitions is that forty-three years after the signing of the Voting Right Act, all American citizens have come to break the line of their history by electing for the first time a black President. This election is seen not only as the achievement of African-Americans' dream embodied by Martin Luther King, but more as the demonstration of the power of the American democracy which encourages the equality of chance in all the spheres of the United States. Barack Obama who recognizes that the destiny of the democratic nation is bound to the vision of the Founding Fathers, considers his election of 2008 as the answer to all Americans who are still skeptical about the American democracy: "*If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are*

possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer" [11].

For Obama, Americans have shown their maturity by forgetting racial problems and implementing the vision of the Founding Fathers of the United States. One may argue that for this black American President, America may now be counted among the true democratic countries thanks to his arrival at the White House. But it was not so easy for Obama to rule this nation, for when he took its command on January 20, 2009, his administration faced several political, economic and social challenges inherited from President Georges W. Bush. For example, his administration faced economic recessions and financial crisis which made millions of Americans lose their jobs even though he later succeeded in overcoming the crisis by taking great measures.

My choice of Obama's political career for this article is mainly linked not only to his election and re-election as the first black President of the United States, but more to his capacity to face this nation's challenges. Massala and Mpandzou Dianteté who initially analyzed his political endeavors, discover "*his socio-economic and political achievements during his administration in spite of his failure with regard to the persistence of the American police violence against Blacks in the United States*" (Massala & Mpandzou Dianteté: 2023, 111). These achievements urge me to concentrate on the answer to the following question: What are the strategies used by Barack Obama during his 2008 and 2012 campaigns? I hypothesize that to win his elections, Obama well financed his campaigns and made good promises to the people. The coming true of these promises during his first political term enabled him to be re-elected in 2012.

Being concerned with a theme linked to a black personality's episode of life and to the American social reality, I find necessary to resort to the biographical and sociological approaches to conduct the above hypothesis. The biographical approach which "*refers to the life of a person written by somebody else*" [12], helps me understand Obama's life as an African-American President viewed as a witness of racism in the white man's world. The sociological approach, however, enables me to show how Obama's political career intertwines with Americans' social realities, for according to Edgar Mannon: "*Literature tells the story of a given society with its people acting negatively or positively with regard to their interests*" [13].

Two main points are discussed in this article. The first is Barack Obama's presidential campaign and inaugural speech of 2008. The second tackles his presidential campaign and inaugural speech of 2012.

1. Barack Obama's presidential campaign and inaugural speech of 2008

After serving in the state of Illinois as a defender Lawyer of the civil rights and a Senator, Barack Obama did not find satisfaction to his ambition of serving the American citizens, as he said it himself in these terms: "*I might play a small part in building a better America*" [14]. It was with this motivation that he decided to run for the presidency in 2008. To reach his objective, he built big strategies to convince the electorate. It was on January 16, 2007 that he announced the

creation of a committee in charge of collecting private funds to finance his presidential campaign. In fact, the running for the presidency was a true obsession for him, as shown in the Presidential Exploratory Committee Announcement Speech: "*I've been thinking hard about my plans for 2008. Running for the presidency is a profound decision*" [15]. Then, on February 10, 2007 at Springfield, in Illinois, in front of a warm and enthusiastic crowd of people, Obama announced his Candidacy for the United States' Presidency. To finance his campaign, Obama put into practice the policy which consisted in raising funds from several donors whose motivation to support his candidacy was recognized by himself during his presidential victory speech, on November 4, 2008: "*I was never the likeliest candidate for this office. We didn't start with much money or many endorsements...it was built by working men and women who dug into what little savings they had to give 5 dollars and 10 and 20 dollars to this cause*" [16]. The collect of money was made in churches, restaurants and gardens. This means that unlike some African presidential candidates who often consider their campaigns as a concern of themselves, Obama's campaign of 2008 was neither his own affair, nor that of his family, but an affair of the whole nation's inhabitants who wanted change in the United States. Being tired of living in a country where racism was viewed as a mode of life, some white Americans along with their black counterparts found Obama's candidacy as an opportunity to ban such an inhuman practice in the United States.

The role played not only by American citizens, but also by people from different countries in the favor of this African-American presidential candidate brings evidence that his policy really met the demands of his fellows. For, despite his being black bloodily, white Americans found it better to give him a chance to win the election so as to give all the nation's citizens the kind of life that they should deserve regardless of their origins. Such an acceptance of a black American citizen by Whites who have long been opposed to the conception of racial mixing in the United States, evidenced and still evidences not only the maturity of the American democracy, but more of the achievement of Martin Luther King's dream which was viewed as a mere illusion: "*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood*" (King, quoted by Carson: 2000, 85).

By accepting Obama to lead the United States in spite of his origin, white Americans finally shared Abraham Lincoln's opinion concerning the development of this powerful nation: "*A house divided against itself cannot stand (...). I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided*" (Lincoln, quoted by Inges: 1987, 340). The expressions "half slave" and "half free" mean that the United States was composed of two groups of individuals: That of black slaves who were deprived of freedom and that of white Americans who could never be treated as slaves thanks to their racial belonging. Lincoln's use of these expressions is an illustration of Blacks' living conditions which Obama wanted to change positively once elected. Similarly, Obama also worried for racism which gangrened the American society. This means that when he participated

successfully in the presidential election, one of the most important things he did was not only the preservation of peace, but more the fight against racial discrimination in the United States. His policy during his presidential elections recalled that of Abraham Lincoln who refused to be the slaves' master in order to give to all Blacks the possibility to enjoy freedom in the United States: *"As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy"* (Lincoln: 1858, 532). This quotation, as it can be seen, stands for Lincoln's opinion about what democracy should be in the United States. Despite the fact that he was a white authority, *"he did his best to denounce the American democracy which, he thought, was not applied to Blacks wrongly seen as sub men by their white peers"* (N'zambi-Mikoulou: 2023, 143).

Obama who shared Lincoln's political view was eager to let Americans know about what democracy should be in the United States. He appeared, in this respect, as a true democrat who wanted democracy to be applied to all races present in this nation regardless of the skin color. For, he believed that without democracy, all forms of injustice would continue to be observed in American society. Thanks to his good promises, the majority of Americans citizens found it better to give him a chance to become the first African-American President of the United States. To be heard and accepted by his counterparts, Obama used the Medias as a powerful means all along his campaign. Facebook and Twitter were used for the exchange of demands, messages and money transactions: *3 million donors made a total of 6.5 million donations online adding up to more than \$500 million. Of those 6.5 million donations, 6 million were in increments of \$100 or less. The average online donation was \$80 and the average Obama donor gave more than once* ^[17]. Through this quotation, one understands easily how the Medias contributed to the good unfolding of Obama's presidential campaign. In the democrat party, the primary election has a specific interest in the history of the United States because Obama was the first African-American for the presidency and Hillary Clinton, the first woman. In front of Senator John Edwards, Hillary Clinton and Senator Joseph Biden, Barack Obama appeared as the youngest candidate whose experience in political matter was doubted by his challengers. According to the article entitled "Obama wins Iowa as candidate for change", after a hard battle of debates, Obama has succeeded in winning the primaries even in the states more favorable to Whites. In the state of Iowa, for instance, Obama had 38% of suffrages, 30% for senator John Edwards and 20% for Hillary Clinton. This victory which attests of the maturity of the American democracy, shows the capacity of this African-American candidate to convince even his opponents through his political strategies.

On August 23, 2008 Obama chose Senator Joe Biden for the post of Vice-President. August 27, 2008, Obama is officially designated as candidate of the Democratic Party with Joe Biden as Vice-President. He becomes the first African-American to be designated in a major party. The general presidential campaign opposed Barack Obama to the Republican Senator John McCain. Visibly the benediction of Obama came from his appeal to the unity of the American citizens of any race in his speech for the

Democrat National Convention of Boston: *"There is not a black America and a white America and Latino America and Asian America... there is the United States of America"* ^[18]. As Americans needed change after what they faced under Bush's governance, Obama confronted his programs to the Republican policy mainly on the security within the country and over shores. He disagreed with Senator McCain on the war engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan by President Bush after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Obama promised to bring back home American troops from Middle East fields of battle and keep Americans safe on their land. He brought a surprise in the states of Indiana, Virginia and the North Carolina more favorable to the Republican Party, when he defeated the Republican McCain. This means that Americans really needed change. Their confidence on Obama's programs was shown by voting for him on November 4, 2008.

In his first presidential victory speech of 2008, Obama considered his election not as the change they expected, but rather as the chance to reach, implying that it was simply a step to reach the change in question: *"This victory alone is not the change we seek. It is only the chance to make that change"* ^[19]. This statement clearly draws Obama's visions to overcome the citizens' problems. This is a proof that he was aware of the challenges in front of him as President. The inaugural speech is often viewed as a very first experience for a new elected President to his counterparts. Obama succeeded in this experience by ensuring them about the headlines of the policy to lead during the term. He came with the philosophy of change, because he saw his election as the expression of a new generation which wants to rewrite the lines of the United States' history by calling into question the inhuman practice of racism. Being aware of this wrongful practice, he called all Americans to stand together and fight for the unity of the nation:

We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus-and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united ^[20].

As it can be seen, this passage reveals the long fights led not only by African-Americans against segregation, but also by some Whites who devoted their time to fighting for equality and freedom denied to their black counterparts for years in the United States. For, one sees how Obama's message reminds the reader of the contribution of different races to the building of the United States. It is certainly because of this historical reality that Americans found it better to join hands in order to build a united America through Obama's governance. This President's election demonstrates the capacity of Americans to share a common dream by forgetting about their differences which have long been a break to the development of their country. It is indeed in this order of ideas that Obama makes American citizens understand how far their unity comes and how strong they are to accomplish great things together.

The inaugural speech of a president of the United States is carefully followed not only in the United States, but also in the whole world since his responsibilities go beyond

borders. In his inaugural speech, President Obama assured to the American citizens some challenges that they were supposed to face. It was the time to fix everything promised and defended during the campaign in front of an America weakened by the financial crisis, the economic recession and the lack of security:

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of our economy calls for action, bold and swift – and we will act... we will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories ^[21].

This passage shows what Obama was supposed to do for his country. Knowing that the nation's economy was weakened, science and technology were not really promoted, Obama's ambition was to renew things in all sectors so as to give to his citizens the possibility to start a new way of living. It was a kind of new page he was eager to write for the profit of all American citizens. He certainly wanted to the future generations to inherit the achievements of the first black President. One may also argue that Obama's vision for the United States was also to work seriously so as to clean doubts in the heart of those who used to consider Blacks as brainless individuals, as he voiced it out in these terms: *"We will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat, and roll back the specter of a warming planet"* ^[22]. Obama's willingness to reduce the impact of the atmosphere degradation is justified here by the measures he promised to be taken in order to improve the climate.

In the 21st century, peace in the world is threatened by the progression of terrorism and the practice of oppression by some regimes around the world. Obama thought not only to act against such a practice but also to make the United States become a friend of all the victims of this horrible practice: *"For those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken. You cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you!"* ^[23] This quotation attests of the role played by the United States on global policy. As the first world power, this democratic nation has a task to have a look at other countries in order to preserve peace in all the spheres of the world.

Obama's words show how he was determined to call into question all those regimes which mistreat their citizens on behalf of their own interests; the interests which are mainly linked to the need to remain in power, as it is the case in the majority of African countries. Obama appears, in this regard, as a committed politician, for his desire is to see all human beings on earth enjoy the full fruition of life. It is indeed with regard to this commitment that under his allowance, the United States leads a fight against terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama's headlines for his first presidency are visibly carried on economy, security, stability and planet protection. These achievements which appear as a great hope for the future generations finally pushed not only President Mwai Kibaki to declare Obama's first election victory day of November 4, 2008 a national holiday in Kenya, but also Americans to give him again a chance to win the presidential election of 2012, as observed in the section below.

2. Barack Obama's presidential campaign and inaugural speech of 2012

In his first presidential victory speech of November 8, 2008, Obama, being conscious of the challenges he, as a President, had to face not only to please American citizens, but more to teach a moral lesson to those Presidents who still take their counterparts for granted on behalf of power, recalled that *"the road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year even in one term... we will get there. I promise you, we as a people will get there"* ^[24]. This declaration justifies how skeptic Obama was about his mission to meet the demands of people. His ambition to run for a second presidential term undoubtedly derived from such an eagerness to provide Americans with a deserved lifestyle different from the one they lived under the rule of President Bush.

As he was the incumbent candidate of the Democrat Party, Obama did not resist to the attempt of race for the presidency of 2012. For, on April 4, 2011 he officially announced his candidacy for a re-election as the Head of the White House. His will to announce this second candidacy was reinforced by his supporters who, during his first presidential campaign, asked him to rely on them financially. Social medias, being some of the means which helped him convey his political ambitions successfully in 2008, he did not hesitate to use them during his second presidential campaign:

The campaign began accepting online donations on April 4, 2011, the day Obama announced his candidacy. In the first 24h hours after online donations began to be accepted, over 23,000 online donations of \$200 or less were made... On May 10, 2011, Obama attended a fundraiser in Los Angeles home of actor George Clooney, which rose over \$15 millions. The fundraiser was initially estimated to raise about \$10 millions, but Obama's historic announcement of his support for the same sex marriage, the amount went up significantly ^[25].

After passing four years in the oval office, President Obama whose way of leading reached the expectation of the majority of Americans, found it better to partake in the Presidential election of 2012. What motivated his ambitions was nothing else but the different supports that he received from people around the world. Another important reason of his motivation was linked to his awareness of American's new-political maturity. Seeing the way in which he was elected in 2008 regardless of his racial belonging, he ended up understanding that Americans were now ready to ban racism viewed by Martin Luther King as *"a system of a far deeper malady within the American spirit"* (King: 1967, 41). Americans' readiness to call into question their old racist system finally pushed them to keep on trusting Obama so as to give him the possibility to pursue his reforms. Such a readiness was evident through the great enthusiasm noticed from people from different countries to finance his campaign. It was now clear that the United States' citizens were fond of Obama's leadership. For, they looked at him not as a simple son of former slaves whose fate on the American soil depended on their white masters and mistresses, but more as a true patriot capable of being

President of the United States. This new way of seeing a Black by Whites enabled Obama to consider himself as a lucky candidate with regard to his achievements during his first term.

Though challenged by many opponents during the primaries, Obama showed his political endeavors by being officially nominated the democrat candidate on September 5, 2012 after convincing a great number of his political party's members. In the general presidential campaign centered on security, health, economy and energy, Obama was opposed to the former governor of Massachusetts, the Republican candidate Mitt Romney. Then, debates were mainly articulated around both candidates' policies in order to determine the candidate capable of solving the problems faced by American citizens. Concerning security, on September 20, 2012, in Tampa, Florida, Obama kept on showing his capacity to reduce the nuclear weapon proliferation around the world when he voiced it out himself that *"we still threatened by an Iran that is pursuing nuclear weapons and I've been absolutely clear that our policy is not to allow Iran to get a nuclear weapon"* ^[26].

The problem of the future of the world also preoccupied Obama with his vision of the kind of the world to leave to the coming generations. His willingness to avoid the humanity to be confronted to a nuclear conflict pushed him to opt for pro-peace diplomacy. His objective was to give to all countries of the world the possibility to live in peace in spite of their differences. That is why he fought the Iran nuclear program which he considered as a threat to the world peace.

About the question of healthcare, Obama's program appropriately suited with the conditions of millions of Americans who had no health assurance, for he proposed a new health program according to their incomes. Though criticized by his opponent Mitt Romney who considered his program as a program based on the governance spending, Obama found himself accepted and encouraged by a great number of his citizens when on July 25, 2012 in New Orleans, Louisiana, he openly declared that *"we'll improve any aspect of [the healthcare] law, and any recommendations and suggestions"* ^[27]. This Obama's declaration appeared as a great challenge to the establishment of the assurance companies which were viewed as too expensive for people of low revenues. Though challenged by all those American citizens who had trouble to trust his political commitment, Obama finally succeeded in being re-elected on November 4, 2012 in front of Governor Mitt Romney:

Each time we gather here to inaugurate a president, we bear the witness to the enduring strength of our constitution. We affirm the promise of our democracy. We recall that what binds this nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins or names ^[28].

This passage shows not only how lucky Obama was to win this re-election but also how much Americans stepped ahead on the question of the equality of chance in the United States. This event was unimaginable and impossible decades ago, but by the force of democracy, the United States comes to demonstrate its capacity by boosting the line of its history

once more by re-electing an African-American. President Obama himself considered and still considers this new generation of Americans as a specific one. The generation that steps ahead in a nonstop path; the generation that still has a lot to do. For Obama, it was not possible yet to talk about the complete success of the democracy when somewhere in the same country people were still victims of discrimination.

What is worth retaining is that Obama's re-election stands as a proof of the maturity of the American democracy with regard to his racial belonging. This is to say that the American democracy is one among the best in the world. It is one of the greatest legacies inherited by American citizens from their founding fathers who considered the United States as a land of equal opportunities. President Obama is, in this sense, a proof of Americans' efforts to put an end to racial discrimination not only in the United States, but more in all the spheres of world.

His endeavors to join the long list of all those American leaders who devoted their time to fighting against discrimination in this great nation are nowhere more evident than in the following passage wherein he shows his love for his mistreated brothers and sisters: *"Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law-for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well"* ^[29]. Through these words, one understands that Obama was aware of the kind of life denied to Latinos, Asians and African-Americans for years, as confessed by the historian Draper in these terms: *"We want freedom; we want power to determine the destiny of our black community. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace"* (Draper: 1970, 100). It was indeed thanks to this awareness and his capacity to find solutions to Americans' problems that these mistreated citizens ended up giving him a new chance to lead the United States which a black character in *And Then We Heard the Thunder*, qualifies as *"the United Snakes of America"* (Killens: 1993, 87) because not only of the kind of treatment inflicted on Blacks, but more of *"the Court decisions which were illegal and against the rights of the State"* (Hodges: 1974, 230). This qualification implies that black Americans are not only deprived of freedom, but also of power and peace, because they live under the rules of people who, instead of leaving them alone, take them for granted and manipulate them at any time because of their skin color. This deprivation is therefore what Obama was determined to ban in order to give all Americans the possibility to enjoy the full fruition of life regardless of their racial belonging. This means that when running for the presidency, Obama was really conscious of the issue of racial conflicts initially recognized by Martin Luther King thanks to his mother:

My mother confronted the age-old problem of the Negro parent in America: How to explain discrimination and segregation to a small child. She taught me that I should feel a sense of somebodiness but that on the other hand I had to go out and face a system that stared me in the face every day saying you are less than', you are not equal to (King, quoted by Carson: 2000, 3).

Unlike some Presidents of the world countries who do not care about the life of the future generations, Obama also showed his political endeavors by evoking a hope for the present and the future world inhabitants by thinking about the kind of planet to leave to them. Seeing the threats of the climate change, for example, during his second inaugural speech he invited all Americans to partake in the fight against the destruction of the ozone layer: *"We the people still believe that our obligations as Americans are not just to ourselves, but all the prosperity. We will respond to the threat of the climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations"* [30]. Obama's commitment to keep safe the planet for the future generation. These Obama's words are viewed as a warning towards the regimes that take the planet for granted and mistreat their own populations on behalf of power. Such is the case of most of African countries where even the freedom of speaking which is although recognized by their constitutions is unfortunately reserved to those who lead these countries.

Conclusion

At the term of this analysis, I have discovered that Obama's will to begin a political career was to implement his political views for the well-being of all American citizens. Seeing his good performances as a Senator, he found it better to pursue his political ambitions by getting involved in presidential elections of 2008 and 2012. He thought that being elected President of the United States was the only way for him to find solutions to the problems which hamper the evolution of his peers. His determination not only to guarantee peace and apply democracy in all the spheres of the world countries, but also to keep safe the planet for all generations by avoiding the destruction of the ozone layer, as he said to his counterparts during his campaigns and inaugural speeches, are some of his achievements during his presidential career. These achievements finally lead me to classify him into the category of committed politicians, for he stands as a "Moses" for his fellows who were victims of injustice under his predecessors' governance.

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