



Election 2008 – The Reality Going Forward

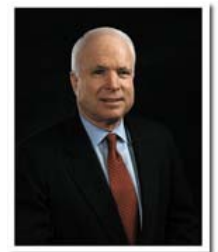
Just weeks after the most memorable U.S. presidential election campaign season it appears every Tom, Dick, Harry, Jane, Susan, and Mary has something to say. Of course this is the United States and everyone is entitled to their freedom of speech and to their opinion. While I wisely opted not to express any comment during the campaign—despite several requests from some of my readers—I am now wisely opting to comment now that the battle is over.

With the (2008) presidential election now behind us the transition back to reality has quickly set in. This is not to say that the period during the campaign—or any previous presidential campaign for that matter—did not reflect reality, but many would agree that it reflected a lot of other things that certainly constitute anything but reality.



The true greatness of a democracy was exhibited on November 4th after confirmation that an African-American—and the first minority—was the newly elected president of the United States. The journey that led to this historic date was marked by many positive and negative landmark moments and events. A few of the positives include the remarkable support and significant votes accomplished by Senator Hillary Rodham-Clinton during the democratic primary, the nomination of the first woman vice presidential candidate—Governor Sarah Palin—by the republican party, and the nomination of the first African-American presidential candidate by either party. These landmark positive events stand to inspire both young women and men across the country for many years to come.

Furthermore, the nomination of Senator John McCain as the republican presidential candidate afforded the country, especially young adults—specifically the Gen Y—to gain knowledge and learn of the lifetime of public service of a true patriot—John McCain. Prior to his nomination many young adults had little, if any, knowledge of Senator McCain's military service and near-ultimate sacrifice for his country.



On the negative front, however, the single and most discouraging moments and events during the campaign include the practice of character assassination and distortion of facts. It appears that the path to political victory in the greatest nation on earth is paved with a detour through neighborhoods of false accusations, character assassination, misinformation, and media bias. There are places in the world today where people who practice character assassination and consciously launch false accusations pay with their lives! Fortunately, the United States is not such a place—thank God. Is it a surprise that many people of integrity and sound qualification choose not to pursue public service?

Author of RESPECT: Gaining It and Sustaining It

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As president-elect Barack Obama prepares to take office in early 2009, I am sure he has and continues to mentally assess the implications of his recent accomplishment. The records show that he won the election with 52.7% of the popular vote, and this implies that 47.3% of voters did not support him—so what does this mean? Here is my analysis from a respectful perspective.

The election result—that is the popular vote result—would indicate that the United States is still highly polarized along the spectrum of political ideology. These results are not very different from the results of the 2004 (approximately 51% vs. 48% in favor of the republican candidate) and the 2000 (approximately 48% vs. 48% with a slight edge to the democratic candidate) presidential election campaigns. The winner's spread remains between a fraction of 1% and 7% for the last three election cycles. The polarity exhibited by these results continues to inflame old wounds while creating new ones. These wounds, if unmanaged, have a tendency to undermine a new administration every time.

The fact that 52.7% of voters supported president-elect Obama implies in one sense that he commanded more respect than Senator McCain—in the eyes of these 52.7%. By the same token, president-elect Obama commanded less respect than Senator McCain—in the eyes of 47.3% of voters. Respect—as I illustrated in my book, *RESPECT: Gaining It and Sustaining It*—is largely about valuation.

For president-elect Obama to succeed in his presidency, I believe he will need to accomplish two basic things. First, he will need to manage the expectations of the 52.7% of voters who supported him. Many of these voters currently have very high expectations due to the many promises and initiatives that then-Senator Obama made and strongly proposed. With a U.S. economy in turmoil and a global economy on the brink of a prolonged recession, many of the promises and proposals put forth during the campaign are likely not possible anytime soon, if at all—this is the reality. For example, a tax cut for the middle class and a tax increase for high earners, in the current economic climate, would be very unwise according to many leading experts—partisan and non-partisan alike. Unless president-elect Obama tactfully manages the high expectations that prevail among his 52.7% voter support, he faces a major challenge of achieving a successful first term.

Second, president-elect Obama will need to earn more respect of many of the 47.3% of voters who did not support him. While some of these non-supporters voted based on non-political principles, perhaps many voted strictly based on political ideology. The strategy and method by which he—Obama—achieves this feat will be just as important as the feat itself. In other words, President Obama will need to heal as many of the wounds that continue to divide this nation; the same wounds that undermine the effectiveness to lead and govern. If President Obama accomplishes these two basic tasks, I believe he will achieve a successful first term in office and strongly position himself for a prized second term.



As president-elect Obama prepares to launch his new administration it is important that everyone bury the hatchet—as difficult for some as this may be—and lend support for him and afford him an opportunity to serve his country. This would be a truly patriotic thing to do. As the president-elect he will soon assume the office of the presidency (of the United States) and he will inherit the enormous respect (appraisal) that this office—the presidency—commands. Over the next four years he will further earn or lose additional respect by virtue of his actions and deeds and this will reinforce or undermine the “positional” respect that the presidency will soon afford him.

As an African-American I have a responsibility to lend my support to President Obama while wishing him well—but not for the reasons that you might think! If, for whatever reason, President Obama “fails” in his tenure as president, the consequences will be very severe and far reaching in more ways than one. The opportunity, the inspiration, and the empowerment—for millions of ethnic minorities, including women—that his election has spawned will be undermined and set back for potentially many years to come. From this perspective you can say, “Failure is not an option.”

For this critical reason it is important (again) that every American, regardless of how each may have voted, give this new President a fair opportunity to lead and govern—not a free pass or an unchallenged tenure, but instead an opportunity for him to earn our respect, now that he will be in charge and will have a view of the country that very few have ever had.

(Reader views welcome: ektimis@ntaiwo.com)

Cheers and thank you – N. Taiwo