

# The American celebration of “democracy”

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The function of elections in a representative “democracy” is to consolidate power for the elites by winning over the populace in an elaborate and expensive diversion. Will inequality increase or will there be an equal distribution of power? Will the values of immigrants be accepted? Are the values of the natural born citizens to take precedence? What will become of the 47 million people without health care, the 40 million living in poverty, the 2.3 million people incarcerated, the largest transfer of wealth (possibly \$3 trillion) from the people to the rich, racial divide, deteriorating infrastructure, social security, pollution, public education, etc.? Do any of these issues really get solved in the elections of a heteronomous society? Not within the hierarchical system of the market economy and “representative “democracy”. Business as usual is the mantra underlying change in this run up to the presidential elections. To this end political parties are large bureaucratic institutions connected with capitalists in the distribution of government patronage jobs and contracts, the advancement of neoliberal globalization and securing their accumulation of power. Representative “democracy”, as the political complement of the market economy, concentrates political and economic power for the elites, who then claim that protecting the interests of the market (i.e. their own interests since it is only they who control the market!) is good for all, because economic growth is needed for a fully functioning democracy and the welfare of all.

No wonder that the platforms of the Democrats and Republicans are almost indistinguishable. Both are filled with social generalities and about defending the national interest while pushing faith in the electoral process: from electronic voting to the electoral college. Like everything else votes are commodities –and who else better to handle the functions of the commodity than professional politicians, the best salesmen/women, of this particular commodity, who pitch to the electorate that their good judgment will produce good change, or so it seems? By building on the fears and dreams of the voters our caretaker politicians connect the market economy with the political as the best way to ensure freedom. So, elections have become superficial popularity contests about who can bring the masses to the polls to vote on the basis of loyalty found on appealing to gut issues and dreams—neither of which have any rational basis. To this end political operatives running for office speak out of both sides of their mouths promising one group something and to a different group the opposite.

However, despite the fact that the commodities of all professional politicians are essentially the same, they know the only way to sell them to the public (the electorate) is by persuading them about the supposed huge differences between them. So, they have divided themselves into two lots (in the US case: the Republicans and the Democrats) and people are converted into spectators, until the election date when they are asked to select one lot over the other.

**The one lot...**

The current occupier of the White House got hold of the presidency as a Washington outsider who didn't play the Beltway game and so would change things by being a uniter. He would unite the people in cleaning up special interests in Washington. George Bush has done the opposite on all accounts by quadrupling the national debt to some \$9 trillion dollars, stealing two elections, presiding over the largest transfer of wealth to the rich in the most corrupt administration in US history, and condemning millions of people to poverty with the unprecedented loss of jobs and the current credit meltdown.

John McCain is an extremely dangerous extension of both Bushes —another war president— who is a war criminal. His claim to the presidency is that of a prisoner of war shot down on one of his many bombing missions during the Vietnam war. His straight talk platform is not very different from the Democrats' platform for change. He is in favor of seizing the opportunities presented by the growth of “free” markets throughout the world, helping displaced workers acquire new and lasting employment, educating our children to prepare them for the new economic realities by giving parents choices about their children's education that they do not have now, and staying the course in Iraq for one-hundred years. McCain's neoliberal agenda will promote job growth by helping businesses become more competitive with lower taxes and less regulation.

## **...and the other lot**

Hillary is riding on her experience from her active involvement as a Goldwater yugend and her establishment-invested adult life to propel her as the most qualified candidate to be the first woman president of the US. Her platform for change includes the perennial election time issues —strengthening the middle class, providing affordable health care, ending the war in Iraq, improving our schools, championing for women, reforming immigration, etc.<sup>[1]</sup> Needless to add that, if elected, nothing will really change, either domestically, or as regards foreign policy. The very fact that her advisors and sponsors represent the main political and economic interests of the US (and therefore the transnational) elite will make sure of that!

But, let us focus a bit more on Obama, who looks well placed at the moment to win the Democratic Party nomination. Barack Obama claims he represents change too. He pledges to bring back the American Dream for the millions of people who are living the American Nightmare, and restoring the perception of America as the land of opportunity. He appeals to the poor by saying all the right things on race, the economy, jobs, health care, education, etc. —things that have been heard before from countless politicians— that they will fix everything given the chance. Even as an Illinois legislator he merely mended gaping holes in the social security net. He is now even repudiating his “radical” past! Claiming that his candidacy is a grassroots phenomenon (supporters, who now number more than one million, donated over \$55 million in February and over \$40 million in March) where people are rising up to fundamentally change society, Obama is making the case for change that will improve the lives of all Americans, uniting Americans from all parties (he's everything to everybody) around a common purpose to change a political process that has been dominated by special interests. No more politics by the same old Washington playbook he proclaims. His is a grassroots campaign to bring in those who remain outside the political process, who are not persuaded by politicians' tired rhetoric. Typically, Obama's grassroots campaign is a production of rallies and hoopla to get out the vote and nothing else. Barack is the fresh new face organized in getting out the vote. The lower economic groups are not involved

in a movement for changing business as usual. Furthermore, they are not the group donating millions of dollars into his coffers. Their \$25 or \$50 are going to make ends meet. They are trying to survive neoliberal globalization. They go from here (ghetto work) to there (ghetto apt.) and there (ghetto apt.) to here (ghetto work) meandering through ghetto streets, ghetto health care, ghetto education, ghetto gangs, ghetto jails, etc. They do not believe any significant change –like the one promised by Obama– will come out of this mega million dollar campaign. Apart from some in the black community who have put their hopes in Obama, the lower social groups do not see, or are part of, any grassroots movement for change.

Those who are donating to Obama’s campaign and supporting his rhetoric for change are liberals, moderates, progressives, unions, students, reform Left groups, and others such as Democrats for Change, Move On, Take Back America, Working Assets, Democrats for America, etc., who are buying into his plan for change where, “corporate lobbyists setting the agenda in Washington are over.”<sup>[2]</sup> But this is not a grassroots movement. It’s all about electability. His—judgment. Hillary’s—experience. However, it is the party elite who reserve the right to determine who the presidential candidate will be. It is the same as the function of the electoral college —the people do not choose the winner. Obama’s change is consolidated in the leadership he offers, not from bottom up even though he says it will be a new way of governing by building a coalition across the divisions that separate Americans with a common purpose, hope, change and good judgment as he offers the greatest hope to first time voters and those who gave up on politics to change the politics of distortion that distract from the bread and butter issues that are impaling peoples’ lives. If Barack’s platform for change were of equality, it would be supported and going hand in hand with a grassroots movement. Obama is not campaigning for democracy.

Obama caved in to racial pressure to speak on race. Rather than talk to the institutionalization of racism/slavery that was written into the Constitution —the “3/5” clause— in his speech of 18 March in Philadelphia, he pointed out the heart of the Constitution is equal citizenship under the law. One hundred ninety-seven years later and there is still no equality, although he admits that the racial “legacy of discrimination —and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past— are real and must be addressed. Not just with words, but with deeds.”<sup>[3]</sup> He does not understand that the root cause of these crises, which reproduce the inequality he identifies, is the market economy and representative “democracy.” What will Obama do to address the prison industrial system that incarcerates not only one in one hundred American adults, but imprisons one in nine black males ages 20-34?<sup>[4]</sup> There is racial polarization, but Obama, instead of identifying deeds, glosses over the racial divide with religion.

His speech was imbued with his faith and religion. “In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more, and nothing less, than what all the world's great religions demand —that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister's keeper.”<sup>[5]</sup> His ethic begins with democracy, but ends in theocracy. Religion brings the irrational into the political mix which clouds democratic decision taking. Democratic ethics is a rational process for equality, justice and freedom.

Barack’s “betrayal” of his, now former, pastor Jeremiah Wright was elemental if Obama wanted to remain in politics. What Wright said that disturbed people was that America brought on 9/11 itself, when he said that the chickens have come home to roost. This is exactly what blowback is, and who, in the intelligence community would deny that 9/11

was not blowback. Osama agrees. So, the reverend is correct on this and his pronouncements that racism is alive and well in America. What is even more disturbing is Obama’s rush to condemn Wright, “But the remarks that have caused this recent firestorm weren't simply controversial. They weren't simply a religious leader's effort to speak out against perceived injustice. Instead, they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country – a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America; a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam.” Obama’s one-dimensional view of race, common threats and the terror wars is dangerous and will lead to further wars as he promises. Bush, Obama says, “is not able to say that I wavered on something as fundamental as whether or not it is ok for America to torture —because it is never ok... I will end the war in Iraq... I will close Guantanamo. I will restore habeas corpus. I will finish the fight against Al Qaeda. And I will lead the world to combat the common threats of the 21st century: nuclear weapons and terrorism; climate change and poverty; genocide and disease.”<sup>[6]</sup> Do not be fooled. The invasion and occupation of Iraq is not to bring democracy to the Middle East, nor is it to secure oil. The objective is to bring the entire region into the New World Order. Furthermore, his stand on Israel is typical American political rhetoric for Israel’s right to self defense as it occupies the Palestinian territories and has created the Gaza Gulag or what others have called Gaza Ghetto. He has not addressed the Palestinian view point, but emphasizes that the Palestinians have created their problems (presumably, they are somehow responsible for the occupation itself!)

## **The politicians’ game will fail (as usual)**

From the inclusive democracy perspective the political elites’ attempt to involve the people in their game will fail. Absenteeism and privacy will once more be the winners of this election. After the presidential election the “movement” will come to a halt, because it does not involve a genuine grassroots project. The elites’ program for change is a non-program, because, as was shown above, these campaigns lack any meaningful questioning of the market economy and representative “democracy” as the cause of the multidimensional crisis we face. The US public must discard the values and institutions that effect inequality and replace them with a democratic ethic where the self-determination of the individual coincide with social individuals “who are both free to create their own world, that is, a new set of institutions and a corresponding social paradigm.”<sup>[7]</sup> To participate in the politics of change it is the duty of the people to choose a conception of democracy for individual and social autonomy in place of the present pseudo-democracy that secures the concentration of political and economic power at the hands of elites. Building a mass political movement for an inclusive democracy, which will recreate society on the basis of the equal distribution of economic, social and political power and would abolish inequality and exploitation is an imperative today.

If in the past the crucial social dilemma was “Socialism or Barbarism” today, more than ever, it is “Inclusive Democracy or Barbarism”!

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[1] <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/>

[2] Matthew Mosk and Alec MacGillis, "Big Donors Among Grassroots", Washington Post, April 11, 2008.

[3] [http://www.barackobama.com/2008/03/18/remarks\\_of\\_senator\\_barack\\_obam\\_53.php](http://www.barackobama.com/2008/03/18/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_53.php)

[4] Pew Press Release, Jessica Riordan, Feb. 28, 2008. A close examination of the most recent U.S. Department of Justice data (2006) found that while one in 30 men between the ages of 20 and 34 is behind bars, the figure is one in nine for black males in that age group. Men are still roughly 13 times more likely to be incarcerated, but the female population is expanding at a far brisker pace. For black women in their mid- to late-30s, the incarceration rate also has hit the one-in-100 mark. In addition, one in every 53 adults in their 20s is behind bars; the rate for those over 55 is one in 837 . [http://www.pewtrusts.org/news\\_room\\_ektid35890.aspx](http://www.pewtrusts.org/news_room_ektid35890.aspx)

[5] [http://www.barackobama.com/2008/03/18/remarks\\_of\\_senator\\_barack\\_obam\\_53.php](http://www.barackobama.com/2008/03/18/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_53.php)

[6] <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/foreignpolicy/>

[7] Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, (London: Casell, 1997), p. 181.