

George Wright, "A Black Man as President of the United States! What's Going On?: Why Barack Obama might become President!," The Black Commentator 15 February, 2008.

Internet Source: [www.The Black Commentator.com](http://www.TheBlackCommentator.com)

"An antiwar black President with an Arab-sounding name: See, we're not so bad after all, world!" - Barbara Ehrenreich, The Nation, February 15, 2008

In the past month African-Americans have realized the unthinkable - a black man might actually become President of the United States. After each Presidential primary or caucus the candidacy of Barack Obama has gained momentum, making that prospect seem, not only possible, but also inevitable.

Why is this happening in a society that still hasn't honestly faced its historical national-racist project, and certainly has not eradicated institutional racism?

Has the world actually turned-upside down?

An analyst of the role of African-Americans in United States foreign-policy positions in Government since the mid-1970's provides some insight as to why a President Barack Obama Administration might possibly happen.

President Jimmy Carter appointed the first African-American to a prominent foreign policy position. Andrew Young served as his Ambassador to the United Nations. Young had been a close lieutenant of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement.

During the Reagan Administration, Lieutenant General Colin Powell served as National Security Adviser from 1987 to 1989. (Reagan appointed several black conservatives to domestic policy-making position in the 1980's.

Lt. General Powell also served in the first Bush Administration as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from October 1989 to late-September, 1993. During that period he was involved in managing the invasion of Panama and Gulf War I. Also, University of Denver's Graduate School of International Studies Ph.D., Condoleezza Rice, served on Bush I's National Security Council.

George Moose and Susan Rice are African-Americans who served on the Clinton Administration foreign policy team. Moose, who had been a Foreign Service official since 1967, served as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs between 1993-1997. Rice's initial assignment was as Director for International Organizations and Peacekeeping at the National Security Council (NSC) between 1993 and 1995. Over the next two years she was Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for African

Affairs at the NSC. Between 1997 and 2001, Rice served as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. (She is currently a foreign policy advisor to Barack Obama.)

The second Bush Administration appointed Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice to key policy-making positions. Powell served as Secretary of State until 2005 while Rice served as National Security Advisor. During Bush's second term he appointed Rice Secretary of State after Powell stepped-down. Further, Jendayi Frazier, who has a Ph.D. in Political Science from Stanford University, is the current Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Prior to that position she served as Senior Director for African Affairs on the National Security Council.

What do the appointments of these African-Americans to foreign policy-making positions have in common? First, the individuals mentioned had formal, elite educational background and/or governmental and/or military experience. Therefore, it could be argued that their selections were partisan appointments based on "merit."

However, it could also be argued that segments of the United States ruling class (dominant capital and the political establishment, which includes the foreign policy establishment) that controlled the Executive Branch at the time of the appointments had other motives as well. Those motives included using those individuals as a "sympathetic face" to deal with Third World leaders and issues as well as gain leverage throughout the world for United States foreign policy. Significantly, most of those appointments were made at conjunctural moments when the United States was attempting to promote an assertive foreign policy agenda.

For example, the appointment of Andrew Young occurred at the height of a "crisis of hegemony" the United States faced, which challenged its post-World War II dominance over the inter-state world capitalist system. This crisis undermined the United States' ability to act at will geopolitically, particularly in the Third World.

The "crisis of hegemony" the United States faced commenced with the TET-Offensive in January-February, 1968. Over the next eight years, additional developments occurred which further impacted that crisis. Those developments included:

the emergence of West European and Japanese economic competition;

the rise of Soviet "rough nuclear parity;"

OPEC quadrupling the price of a barrel of oil;

eleven Third World revolutions the United States could not prevent.

Moreover, by mid-1970's, developments in Africa also played a central role in deepening the United States "crisis of hegemony." These developments included successful revolutions in the former Portuguese colonies (Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique) in the mid-1970's. In fact, the United States' covert operation in Angola aimed to defeat

the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) failed. This occurred because the Soviet Union and Cuba aided the MPLA in defeating the United States-South African-Zairian-supported National Front for the Liberation of Angola and Union for the Total Union of Angola.

The United States defeat in Angola was also abated by the United States Congress passing the Clark Amendment which terminated covert aid to Angola. This act was a response to the domestic “Vietnam Syndrome” public opinion, that was opposed to the United States getting directly involved in Third World conflicts.

Also, in the mid-1970’s the anti-colonial forces in Southern Rhodesia intensified their opposition to the white minority-ruled Ian Smith regime. These forces included the Zimbabwe African National Union and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union.

Furthermore, in the early 1970’s, developments in South Africa began to shake the Nationalist Party’s apartheid system. In 1973, black union members began to carry out militant actions against mining and manufacturing firms. Also, in June 1976, African youth initiated a rebellion in the township of Soweto, that rocked the foundations of apartheid. The militancy of the African National Congress was also revived at this time.

In fact, when Carter introduced Young at a press conference in March 1977, he exposed the purpose of Young’s appointment. At that press conference Carter stated: “Third World nations now look on the United States as having at least one representative... who understands their problems, who speaks their language.”

One can surmise that the purpose of Young’s selection was to have him work with Third World leaders, particularly in Africa, to regain credibility for the United States, which might better facilitate Carter’s political objectives. The Sunday Times of London added that the day after Carter’s press conference: “Young’s job was to restrain black African militancy, to buy time until American arm-twisting of South Africa begins to produce results.”

One could argue that the role of Powell and Rice in the Reagan, Bush I, and Bush II Administrations was an attempt to give “colored-legitimacy” to the aggressive militarized neo-liberal policies (deregulation, privatization, cutting taxes, rolling-back social spending, etc.) carried out by those administrations. The same could be said about Frazer in the second Bush Administration. Moreover, the role of Moose and (Susan) Rice in the Clinton Administration was also to project a “colored-face” while dealing with Africa policy.

What does this history have to do with Obama’s Presidential candidacy?

To understand the point being argued about the Obama candidacy, a review of geopolitics over the past seventeen years is necessary. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States has carried out policy approaches aimed to gain absolute hegemony over the world capitalist system. This means gaining access to areas where the United

States had either no/or limited access during the Cold War. Those areas include Middle and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, parts of the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Importantly, there has been consensus support for this objective among dominant capital (oil, Wall Street, the military-industrial complex, insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies, big real estate developers, telecommunications, etc.) and the political establishment regardless of party-affiliation. Increasingly, that objective began to be honed to:

gaining control of the world's energy supplies, with a focus on the Persian Gulf states;

encircling and weakening United States' potential competitors/rivals (Western Europe, Russia, and China);

complementing Israel's regional political agenda.

The first Bush Administration took initial steps to pursue this objective by:

managing the unraveling of the Soviet Union;

challenging the "Vietnam Syndrome" to enable the United States to directly intervene militarily in the world by invading Panama;

attempting to break the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq in the Gulf War I.

However, Bush I was effectively challenged in the 1992 General Election, aborting that administration's control over United States policy.

The Clinton Administration at first deemphasized the military option and pursued neo-liberal economic policies and democratization aimed to create pro-United States client regimes and opened up those economies to United States transnational capital. However, even before the full implementation of that approach, Clinton began utilizing militarized approaches. This was manifested by increased United States military presence and machinations in Middle Europe, Central Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2000, George W. Bush became President under duplicitous means and institutionalized a neo-conservative orchestrated project. Once 9/11 (conveniently) occurred, that project was kicked into gear under the guise of the so-called "War on Terror." That project, with which we are all too familiar, has consisted of a pro-Israeli orientation and an accelerated pre-emptive, unilateral military project, underscored by the promotion of the neo-liberal/democratization model.

However, nearly six-and-a-half years later, owing to the illegality, brutality, and ignorance of the Bush Administration in the application of that project, the United States faces the most serious set of crises in its history. Moreover, it is clear that segments of the dominant capital and political establishment have recognized the failure of Bush II to

achieve its promised objectives. The United States is embroiled in two un-winnable wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; is considered a “rogue-state” throughout the world; and is being circumvented by numerous forces attempting to formulate/implement counter-hegemonic geo-political arrangements/development approaches (The Bolivarian Revolution, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the World Social Forum, etc.).

Furthermore, the Bush II polices have exacerbated a global structural economic crisis that, in the near future, may make the Great Depression look like a weekend at the beach. This is evidenced by the spiraling, out of control sub-prime credit crisis; the enormous trade imbalances and national debt; the decline of the dollar; \$100 a barrel oil; and the growing massive disparities in global wealth and income.

The global crises the United States faces has caused divisions within the dominant capital and political establishment as to how to address them. The transparent stresses among the Republican Party Presidential candidates and the tensions between the Clinton and Obama candidacies reflect those divisions. The several candidates represent competing blocs of the capital and foreign policy establishment.

This is where Barack Obama comes into the story. “Enlightened” imperial segments of the United States ruling class recognize it needs a “new face” to present to the world (See among many: Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower*, 2007; *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 2006.). (It also needs a new voice in an attempt to maintain the domestic population’s belief in the system to blunt a wide-spread social explosion.)

Thus, Obama has been selected to be that “new face.” This is indicated primarily by:

the favorable press coverage he has received from most of the corporate-owned media;

the number of establishment political endorsements he has received;

the total amount of money he has received from establishment/corporate donors in the past year.

That total has amounted to well over \$100 million.

The role the Obama Presidency could serve is also reflected in statements made by his establishment supporters. For example, when Senator John Kerry endorsed Obama in early January he declared, “Who better than Barack Obama to bring new credibility to America’s role in the world and help restore our moral authority? Who better than Barack Obama to turn a new page in American politics, so that Democrats, Independents and Republicans alike can look to the leadership that unites to find common ground.”

Senator Patrick J. Leahy also made the same point when he endorsed Obama. He stated "We need a president who can reintroduce America to the world, and reintroduce America to ourselves."

Interestingly, those statements reflect exactly what Communist Party of Italy leader, Antonio Gramsci, observed about the relationship between the United States ruling class and African-American intellectuals in the 1920's. In his essay "The Different Position of Urban and Rural Type Intellectuals," Gramsci wrote:

"...one further phenomenon in the United States is worth studying, and that is the formation of a surprising number of negro intellectuals who absorb American culture and technology. It is worth bearing in mind the indirect influence that these Negro intellectuals could exercise on the backward masses in Africa, and indeed direct influence if... American expansionism should use American negroes as its agents in the conquest of the African market and the extension of American civilization." [See: Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1971) p.21.]

Despite his perceptive insight, Gramsci probably never imagined that the United States ruling class would put up an African-American for President. That decision indicates that the crises the United States ruling class now faces must be really bad!

Whether a President Obama can actually re-establish global "legitimacy" for the United States is questionable. One thing for certain is that the political, economic, and ecological crises humanity faces today cannot be solved within an imperialist-capitalist framework.

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