

# Obama elected America's first Black president

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON(NNPA) — After a fierce fight of two years to change the course of history, U. S. Sen. Barack Obama has been elected the first African-American president of the United States.

His win culminates an American history that expands from Black slavery to Jim Crow to a modern-day Civil Rights Movement still marked by institutional racism.

"America is in the process and has taken the first step of turning from darkness unto light, turning from war unto peace, turning from exploitation of the poor by the powerful to equal opportunity and economic justice," said civil rights icon Rev. Joseph Lowery in an interview. "It's a great moment for America."

In awe, America has paused to celebrate this victory.

"The Black vote has taken the high road," said Ray Boone, editor/publisher of the *Richmond Free Press* in Richmond, Va., the former capital of the Confederacy, which elected a Democratic president for the first time in more than 40 years. "This victory is the fruit of the struggle of many people who've gone by," said National Urban League President and CEO Marc Morial. "People can now quit asking when will the day come when a Black man can be elected president of the United States." The Obama win comes after a hard-fought race over the past two years as he struggled to prove himself; even in the Black community, which initially did not believe he could win due to White racism. The son of a Kenyan man and a White woman from Kansas, Obama initially received a slow reception from Black voters. In January and February of 2007, an ABC News-Washington Post poll showed his Democratic Primary opponent Hillary Clinton at 40 points higher than Obama among African-Americans who had been asked their preference for the Democratic Primary. An earlier poll in December of 2006 showed that 65 percent of Whites to only 54 percent of Blacks thought America would be willing to elect a Black president. "A lot of Black people, especially in the South, really didn't think that a Black candidate could be elected president. And they weren't looking for a symbolic candidate. They were looking for somebody who was going to win," said David Bositis, a specialist on Black electoral politics at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Adding to the Black support for Clinton was the popularity of her husband, former President Clinton. But then there was a shift. "Once he won Iowa, there was some significant movement," Bositis points out. The Jan. 3 Iowa primary caused the world to gasp that a Black man in America could win a presidential primary in a state that was more than 95 percent White. Immediately, the pace of Obama's support among Blacks escalated. An ABC News poll showed him at 60-40 percent Black support over Clinton by mid January. Winning broad-based support, he consistently maintained more pledged delegates than Clinton, a key factor in winning the nomination. After Obama won the South Carolina primary Jan. 26, his Black support skyrocketed and solidified at more than 90 percent. That support remained consistent for the remainder of the campaign. Still, Obama weathered blistering racism, which included criticism of him after the airing of strong statements by his former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright about America's shortcomings and failures in international conflicts. White males have always held the office of U. S. president. But, McCain had an uphill battle. His obstacles were a strongly unpopular war in Iraq, a devastated economy, and a Bush approval rating at its lowest in



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

President-elect Barack Obama's supporters cheer as election results came in on Tuesday. Democratic Illinois Sen. Obama's steamrolling victory over Republican Arizona Sen. John McCain elicited a wide range of emotions, from hugs and smiles to tears of joy.

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icon, watching Obama speak in Chicago. "This victory is the fruit of the struggle of many people who've gone by," said National Urban League President and CEO Marc Morial. "People can now quit asking when will the day come when a Black man can be elected president of the United States."

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two years, 29 percent, according to a Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll.

The race appeared close toward the end, but even polls that periodically showed McCain running close to Obama couldn't be believed, said David Bositis, senior analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. That's because the current telephone polls are not able to survey the cell phones of thousands — perhaps millions — of new youth voters who had become engaged in the race, primarily excited about Barack Obama, who they often greeted like a rock star.

The swell of voters among youth was largely due to the excitement of a new role model, the possibility of making history and also because of the issues, said Melanie Campbell, president and CEO of the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation.

"We tend to vote our emotions, not blind emotions, but we have to feel that this is really meaningful. The issues of the day, such as Katrina and what happened on the Gulf Coast had an impact in 2006. We were upset and angry, but we also understood politically that we had to weigh in on the process," Campbell said.

The aspect of race or

agenda is more than just about the skin, but it's about the experience of disparities, prejudices and discrimination, Campbell said. "It's kind of the pain and the promise. It's the pain of what we're going through and the promise that somehow this vote can help impact that. I feel that we're in that pain vs. promise moment."

In some Black districts, the electorate expanded as much as 188 percent, such as Virginia's Tidewater District during Democratic Primaries, Campbell illustrates.

The Joint Center determined last year that the top issues for African-Americans were the war, healthcare and the economy, including jobs. Youth also talked about lowering tuition rates, increasing Pell grants and the prospects of higher paying jobs when they graduate.

Even after a bitter campaign, it seems McCain — in defeat — finally came to agree with Obama.

"I've always believed that America offers opportunities to all who have the industry and will to seize it. Sen. Obama believes that too," McCain said.

Obama concluded, "It's been a long time coming. But tonight, because of what we did on this day at this defining moment, change has come to America."

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### Maryland Parkway

#### Bus Rapid Transit Study

The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC) has conducted a transportation study of Maryland Parkway. The study's objective was to examine transit improvements such as the feasibility of a dedicated travel lane for Bus Rapid Transit (a dedicated lane for public transit vehicles providing express service).

#### THE RTC WANTS YOUR INPUT

Learn about Proposed Transit Improvement Options

Public Meeting  
Tuesday, November 18, 2008  
4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.  
Cambridge Recreation Center  
3930 Cambridge St.  
Las Vegas, Nevada

Questions: (702) 676-1606 or [rtcsonv.com](http://rtcsonv.com)  
TDD: (702) 676-1834

To request a Spanish or sign language interpreter, please call (702) 676-1606 at least 48 hours before the scheduled meeting.

