

OUR VIEW

Not There Yet

America, and much of the world, is rejoicing in the election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States, the first African-American in U.S. history to hold the reins of the most powerful political office on the planet. It's certainly been a long time coming. America was built on the backs of slaves, who not only laid its infrastructure but powered commerce in colonial times. Blacks shed blood and gave their lives in defense of America's freedom and to give all Americans access to the rights granted by the Constitution. Obama's election, in some ways, completes the circle: the last is now first.

Thirteen years might as well be 300 in America's socio-political psyche. On Oct. 16, 1995, under the guidance of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, more than 1 million African-American men (and nearly 2 million people overall) gathered in Washington, D.C. for the Million Man March. (The U.S. Park Service estimated the crowd at about 400,000). The march's purpose was threefold: to return to spirituality; to convince Black America to atone for its sins; to encourage Black men to be responsible fathers, caring husbands, protectors of the neighborhoods.

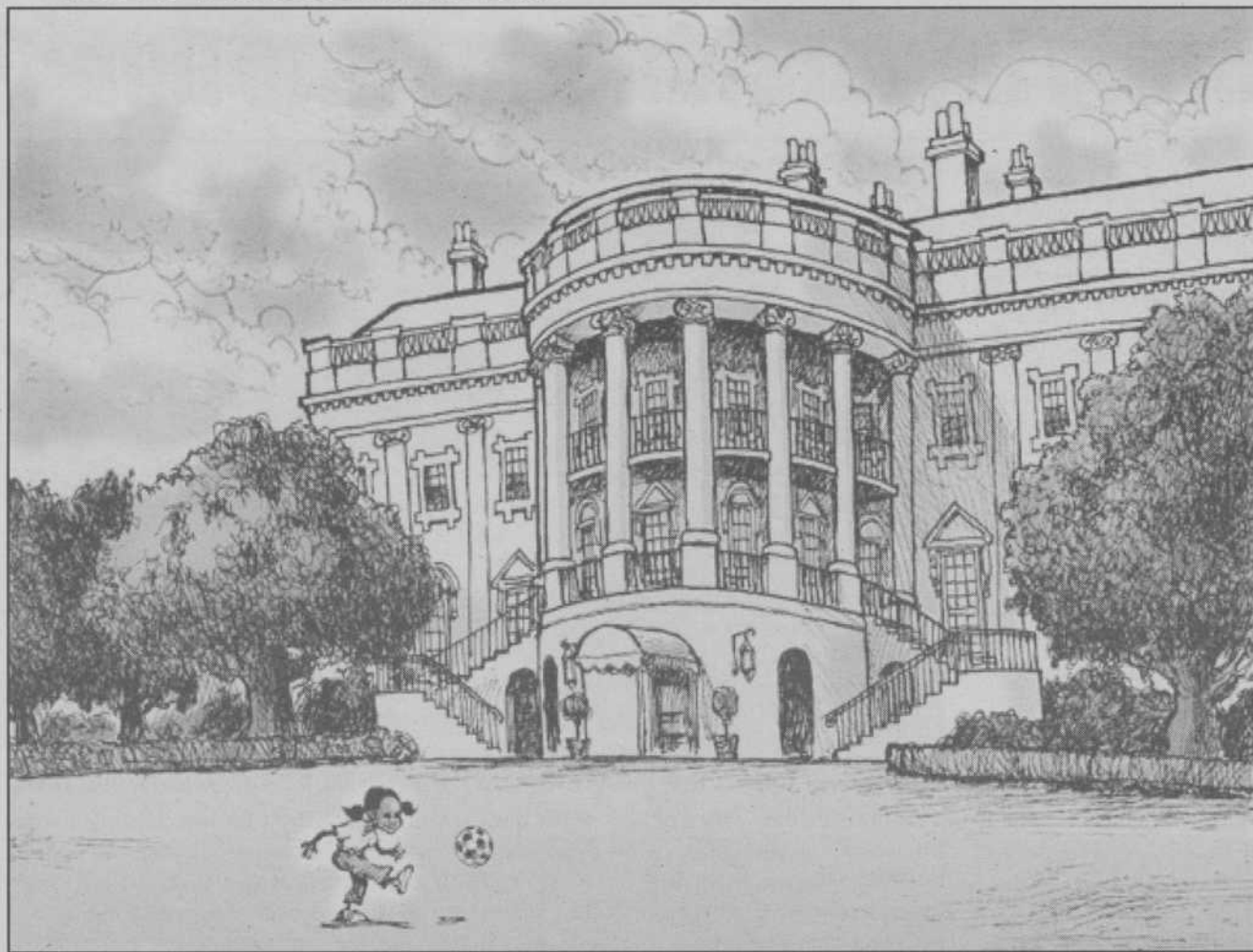
According to voter registration statistics, 1.5 million Black men registered to vote after the march. David Bositis, an analyst for the Joint Center for Economic Studies, a Washington, D.C., think tank that focusing on issues related to African-Americans, credited the surge to the march. "In reviewing the sharp increase in the Black male vote, I might find it highly implausible that there was another factor that rivaled the Million Man March in bringing about this change."

In the days, weeks and months after the march, participants diligently worked to bring about positive change in their home communities. But over time, the momentum died. What was to be a defining moment in Black American manhood became an afterthought. The ills of high crime and unemployment, gang violence and crumbling schools, high incarceration rates and comparatively low life expectancy continued to plague African-American men. The mountain that Black men had climbed via the Million Man March—naysayers said they wouldn't come together at one place at the same time for something positive, and if they did, violence would ensue—revealed itself to be but one mountain in a vast range.

There were successes. Richard Parsons selected to lead Time Warner. Stanley O' Neal becoming the first Black to lead a Wall Street firm (Merrill Lynch). BET founder Robert Johnson buying an NBA team; Kenneth Chennault tapped as the head of American Express; Aylwin Lewis leading Sears Holding; Clarence Otis running the ship at Darden Restaurants; and Ronald Williams in charge at Aetna. And Obama's election fits in their successes, in that he's achieved his at the highest rung of American society. While we can revel in their accomplishments we must not lose sight of the plight of "everyday" Black men, those without the education, pedigree or access to run Fortune 500 companies or get elected president of the United States.

For them, Obama's election may be a mixed bag. It's good that Black fathers can tell their sons they can aspire to the highest office in the land. But it's bad when the law of the land disproportionately discriminates against Black men who commit the same crimes as their White counterparts. Or when Black men get the death sentence more often; are generally relegated to underperforming schools; are underrepresented in halls of power; get manipulated by record companies into selling irredeemable music; are generally seen on television in athletics or in music.

Obama's success will mean little to those who view Black men as violent, sex-crazed, drug-dealing mongrels. They look at Obama, or any successful Black man, and see affirmative action. They look to nightly news clips of criminal suspects for verification of their deep-seated racism. Throughout his campaign, Obama inspired tens of millions of Americans from all races, creeds and socioeconomic backgrounds. Black men by the thousands registered to vote, eager to see him in office. They helped put him there. He's made it, sure, but Black men, as a whole, still have a long way to go.



Obama makes me feel American

By Julianne Malveaux
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Every morning when I wake up I have a conversation with God. This practice goes back about 12 years, at a turning point in my life, when I realized that only recognizing a higher power would make my life work.

Being the contrarian I am, however, I was not prepared for ritual. Instead, my morning with God is as casual as a talk I'd have with a friend.

Morning, God, I said. It's Julianne Malveaux. You know. The sister who tries to serve you.

It's good to be alive today. And then I do some Bible reading, listen to some gospel music and simply pray.

On November 5, I changed my conversation. For the first time, I acknowledged my nation, praying, "It's good to be alive in the United States of America today."

Yes, it is good to finally consider and enjoy the perks that go into being an American.

A man who looks like me will have his face in a history book. An elegant sister will preside over all those state dinners. Two little Black girls, with grins like those of my godchildren and baby cousins, will roll their eggs over the White House lawn on Easter Monday.

It will be our house, not a remote house, accessible, not unattainable. As I saw my face in the mirror called victory, I felt like an American, finally.



Julianne Malveaux

In honesty I have never felt much like an American before. An African-American, certainly, but not flag-waving, Mount Rushmore-embracing, hit the Monument loving American.

For all of my life I've been an American, reluctantly. Came here in chains. Advanced by my brains and by the legacy of struggle and dignity. I sing, "Lift Every Voice" as if it is rap because it is history, poetry, poignancy, and a capturing of every step African-Americans have taken. How can you sing, "stony the road we trod" and feel fully American? How can you put your mouth around the phrase, "treading our way through the blood of the slaughtered" without wondering about the democratic integrity of our nation?

The very lyrics of the Negro National Anthem believe the notion of a level playing field. And still, Sen. Obama won.

This election, in and of itself, will not close racial economic gaps, clean up the environment, address the gen-

der gap, provide healthcare to everyone, end the war in Iraq, or do anything else.

Electing Sen. Barack Obama is simply a step in the right direction. All of us who have held back our faith, belief, enthusiasm, and hard work now need to embrace the Obama team with all of our energy.

They want change. We want change. And the election of Obama makes me want to be a better, and more productive citizen.

So my alter ego, Sister Cynic, is on break for just a minute. She is going to sit on ice while the joyful soul lifts up and embraces this possibility of change.

It is an exciting possibility that was affirmed by a greatly collective vote. I really thought "they" would steal Florida and Ohio and that the Bradley effect would have put Pennsylvania in another column. So I'm wrong, wrong and gleefully wrong.

There has been magic in the air, despite a plummeting

stock market and grim economic indicators. We know that President-elect Obama did not cause this mess, but we know the mess is real.

At the same time, I am observing people greeting each other with kindness and civility, recognizing all that which may happen as our nation moves forward. While it is absolutely clear that differences remain among Americans, aspects of the atmosphere suggest that we are attempting to mute at least a few of our differences.

There is much work to do, but there must be a moment of celebration. And so, as I send Sister Cynic on vacation and put my inner analyst on suspension, I am among those who embrace and admire this moment of history. There is joy in the Obama victory, for the nation, and for me. I am bashfully proud to describe myself as an American, finally.

Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women.



Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.
900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
Telephone (702) 380-8100
Email: lvsentinelvoice@yahoo.com

Contributing Writers:
Parker Philpot
Shirley Savage
Lés Pierres Streater
Kanika Vann

Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

Member: National Newspaper Publishers Association
and West Coast Black Publishers Association