

On the nomination of Barack Obama as the Democratic Party's Presidential Candidate in 2008

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Statement by Cynthia McKinney, Power to the People Candidate for U.S. President, on the nomination of Barack Obama as the Democratic Party's Presidential Candidate in 2008

[Cynthia McKinney is a Candidate for the Green Party Nomination]

Statement issued June 9, 2008

On Saturday, June 7, 2008, Hillary Clinton announced that her 2008 presidential bid is over, making Barack Obama the first-ever Black presidential nominee of a major party in the history of the United States.

Congratulations to Senator Obama for achieving such a feat!

When I was growing up in the U.S. South in the racially turbulent 1960s, it would have been impossible for a Black politician to become a viable Presidential contender. Nothing a Black candidate could have done or said would have prevented him (or her) from being excluded on the basis of skin color alone. Many of us never thought we would see in our lifetime a Black person with a real possibility of becoming President of the United States.

The fact that this is now possible is a sign of some racial progress in this country, more than 40 years after the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. But it is also a sign of the deep discontent among the American people, and particularly among African Americans, with the corporate-dominated, business-as-usual politics that has prevailed in Washington for too many years.

Coming from Barack Obama, the word "change" did not appear as just another empty campaign slogan. It galvanized millions of people -mostly young people-to register to vote and to get active in the political system. The U.S. political system needs the energy and vision of all its citizens participating in the political process. Citizen participation is always the answer.

Senator Obama called for healing the wounds inflicted on working people and the poor in our country after eight years of a corrupt and criminal Bush-Cheney Administration. Just as in November 2006, people full of an expectation for change, including those the system has purposefully left out and left behind, flocked to the polls to vote for Senator Obama. Across a broad swath of the people of this country, and from those who are impacted by U.S. foreign policy, there is a real expectation, a real desire, for change.

While congratulating Senator Obama for a feat well done, I would also like to bring home the very real need for change and a few of the issues that must be addressed for the change needed in this country to be real. First of all, a few of the more obvious facts:

United for a Fair Economy (UFE) produces studies each year on the anniversary of the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. entitled, State of the Dream reports. UFE has found that on some indices the racial disparities that exist today are worse than at the time of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For example, infant mortality, where the overall U.S. world ranking falls below Cuba, Israel, and Canada. They also have found that, without a public policy intervention, it would take over 5,000 years to close the home ownership gap between blacks and whites in this country, especially exacerbated because of the foreclosure crisis disproportionately facing Blacks and Latinos today. They have found that it would take 581 years, without a public policy intervention, to close the racial gap in income in this country. UFE has found unacceptable racial disparities extant on economic, justice, and security issues. After analyzing the impact of the Democratic Party's "First 100 Hours" agenda upon taking the Congressional majority, UFE concluded in its 2007 report that Blacks vote in the Blue (meaning, they support Democrats in the voting booth), but live in the Red (they do not get the public policy results that those votes merit). And UFE noted that Hurricane Katrina was not even mentioned at all in the Congressional Democratic majority's 2007 First 100 hours agenda.

United for a Fair Economy is not the only organization to find such dismal statistics, reflecting life for far too many in this country. In a study not too long ago, Dr. David Satcher found that over 83,000 blacks died unnecessarily, due to racial disparities in access to health care and because of the disparate treatment blacks receive after access. A Hull House study found that the racial disparity in the quality of life of black Chicagoans and white Chicagoans would take 200 years to be eliminated without a public policy intervention. The National Urban League in its annual "State of Black America" publication basically concludes that the United States has not done enough to close long-existing and unacceptable racial disparities. The United Nations Rapporteur for Special Forms of Racism, Mr. Doudou Diene of Senegal, just left this country in an unprecedented fact-finding mission to monitor human rights violations in the United States. Dr. Jared Ball submitted to Diene on my behalf, my statement after the Sean Bell police verdict. The United Nations has already cited its concern for the treatment of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita survivors and the extrajudicial killings taking place across our country, that especially target Black and Latino males, and especially at the hands of law enforcement authorities.

I hope it is clear that the desire for change is so deeply felt because it is deeply needed. Politics, through public policy, can address all these issues and more in the favor of the people. We do not have to accept or tolerate such glaring disparities in our society. We do not have to accept or tolerate bloated Pentagon spending, unfair tax cuts, attacks on our civil liberties, and on workers' rights to unionize. We don't have to accept or tolerate our children dropping out of high school, college education unreachable because tuition is so high, or our country steeped in debt.

The 21st Century statistics for our country reflect a country that can still be characterized as Dr. King did so many years ago: the greatest purveyor of violence on the planet.

It doesn't have to be that way. And the people know it.

I have accepted as the platform of the Power to the People Campaign, the 10-Point Draft Manifesto of the Reconstruction Movement, a grouping of Black activists who came together in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to advocate for public policy initiatives that address the plight of Blacks and other oppressed peoples in this country.

Among its many specific public policy planks, the Draft Manifesto calls for:

- * election integrity, if our vote is to mean anything at all, all political parties must defend the integrity of the votes cast by the American people, something neither of the major parties has done effectively in the past two Presidential elections;

- * funding a massive infrastructure improvement program that is also a jobs program that greens our economy and puts people to work, and especially in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, Hurricane survivors, treated as internally displaced persons whose right to vote and right of return are protected, play a meaningful role in the rebuilding of their communities;

- * recognizing affordable housing as a fundamental human right, and putting a halt to the senseless destruction of public housing in New Orleans;

- * enacting Reparations for African Americans, so that the enduring racial disparities which reflect the U.S. government's failure to address the reality and the vestiges of slavery and unjust laws enacted can be ended and recognition of the plight of Black Farmers whose issues are still not being adequately addressed by USDA and court-appointed mediators despite a US government admission of guilt for systematic discrimination;

- * acknowledging COINTELPRO and other government spying and destabilization programs from the 1960s to today and disclosing the role of the US government in the harassment and false imprisonment of political activists in this country, including Mumia Abu-Jamal, the San Francisco 8, Leonard Peltier, including restitution to victims of government abuse and their families for the suffering they have long endured;

- * ending prisons for profit and the "war on drugs," which fuels the criminalization of Black and Latino youth at home and provides cover for U.S. military intervention in foreign countries, particularly to our south, which is used to put down all social protest movements in countries like Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and elsewhere;

- * creating a universal access, single-payer, health care system and enacting a livable wage, equal pay for equal work, repealing the Bush tax cuts, and making corporations and the rich pay their fair share of taxes;

- * establishing public funding for higher education-no student should graduate from college or university tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt;

- * ensuring workers' rights by 1) repealing Taft-Hartley to stop the unjust firing of union organizers, ban scabbing, and enable workers to exercise their voices at work and 2) enacting laws for U.S. corporations that keep labor standards high at home and raise them abroad, which would require the repeal of NAFTA, CAFTA, the Caribbean FTA, and the U.S.-Peru FTA;

- * justice for immigrant workers, including real immigration reform that provides amnesty for all undocumented immigrants;

* creating a Department of Peace that would put forward projects for peace all over the world, deploying our diplomats to help resolve conflicts through peaceful means and overseeing the orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops from the more than 100 countries around the world where they are stationed, and an immediate end to all wars and occupations by U.S. forces, beginning in Iraq and Afghanistan, and slashing the budget for the Pentagon.

The Power to the People Campaign has visited 24 states and I believe there is already broad support across our country for these policy positions. The people deserve an open and honest debate on these issues and more. I encourage the Democratic Party and its new presumptive nominee, Senator Obama, to embrace these important suggestions for policy initiatives.

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