



**POST-KATRINA POLITICS AND ELECTIONS:  
RECAPTURING OUR RADICAL SPIRIT**

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Whatever else is fantasized, put forth, fought over, discussed and eventually done, post-Katrina politics should never again be politics as usual. For us as a people, the first and continuing catastrophe of Katrina must have a profound and enduring meaning. It must make us constantly conscious of the cost of freedom, the demands of human dignity and the sacrifice and struggle needed to protect, provide for and promote the best interests of our people. It was not simply about class, but also essentially about race, about the cold callousness of the ruling race/class, and its willingness to watch Blacks suffering and dying, and show a repulsively perverse disregard for the lives and rights of our people and other peoples of color. And it was, as Malcolm said, a sign for those who can see; those who look beyond the surface and look for the deeper and more instructive meanings in the historical unfolding of events.

Indeed, Katrina and all associated with it reaffirmed in stark and undeniable terms that there is something radically wrong with this society we live in; and that we must recover and reaffirm our sense of mission and meaning as a moral and social vanguard in this country and dare recapture that radical spirit of social change that interrupted and altered how White people once ruled and ruined our lives in the most racist of ways. And no election will ever achieve what our people accomplished in the fire and fury of our struggle for freedom and justice and a life worthy of living in this land.

We cannot let others make us uncomfortable talking about our identity, identifying with our people or demanding and struggling to achieve for them the rights and good they are due and deserve. No one tells Jews or even the many ethnic gentiles to

give up so-called identity politics, nor do they tell Latinos, Latvians or Lithuanians. That conversation is reserved for those among us vulnerable to it. And so, if we were ever unsure of the need for our unity and common struggle as a people, the catastrophe of Katrina should have erased that. The need for us is to recognize and respond creatively and resourcefully to the facts that we are our own liberations, that elections aren't liberation, and that neither freedom nor justice is a gift, but each is a hard-won gain, constantly forged, protected and expanded on the battlefield for ever higher levels of human life.

It has been both a blessing and burden of our history to be a moral and social vanguard in this country. For even when we provide the momentum and margin of victory, we are often marginalized during and after the struggle to achieve it. But still, as our sacred texts tell us, we are morally obligated to bear witness to truth, to set the scales of justice in their proper place and to constantly bring and increase good in the world.

It is, then, our responsibility to speak the truth, tragedy, triumph and promise of our own history, to make sense out of the senselessness that surrounds us, and carve out of the hard rock of reality a place in which we and our people can stand, grow and flourish. And so we stand up in the midst of silence and fear and forge a path for those of good conscience to join us. This is the meaning and source of our standing up against the war in Iraq, not because it was unwinnable as some would argue now, but because it was and is unjust, immoral, illegal and unworthy of support by anyone. And it is the source and meaning of our support and solidarity with the Haitian, Palestinian, Iraqi,

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and Afghan and all peoples in their right to self-determination and their right to resist invasion, occupation and murderous oppression.

And so, let us rejoice at the defeat of Bush and his minions, allies and fellow-travelers in this one critical battle. But let's also recognize that the wider war has not been won. Let's pay homage to our people who provided the margin of victory in three key Senate races and five House races. This has almost certainly assured five chairs in the House for African Americans: John Conyers, Judiciary; Charles Rangel, Ways and Means; Juanita Millender-McDonald, Operations; and Bennie Thompson, Homeland Security. But no one seriously thinks this is going to get done all we need to have done in a just and good society. The signs are everywhere that we need to intensify and expand the struggle. Indeed, the right-wing is already rallying around ideas waist deep in self-denials about the reasons for their defeat. The doors to compromise by the Democratic leadership have long been open, and the corporations like James Moody have been there and done gone.

Thus, we must put forth and pursue a self-consciously ethical agenda for ourselves, society and the world. At a minimum, we must continue to struggle for justice for the victims and survivors of Katrina, quality education, universal health care, economic and environmental justice, a com-

prehensive and just immigration reform, the end of the official savagery called capital punishment, and reversal of the Patriot Act and related legislation that paves the way for a police state. And we must struggle against the ravages of globalization and for reparations on a global level, as well as the end of occupation and for self-determination and peace throughout the world. And to do this, we must rebuild the Movement.

So, after all the shouting and show nuff joy, after all the hugging, holding hands and singing songs of struggle and celebration from the 60's and 70's, there is still the greatest part of our work to do. And we are compelled to remember the life-lessons of our ancestors and teachers. As Fannie Lou Hamer taught us, we begin by questioning America; know from Malcolm X, the need to constantly study the lessons of history; remember from Frederick Douglass, there is no alternative to struggle for progress; and keep in mind from Amilcar Cabral, the lesson that we should "mask no difficulties, tell no lies and claim no easy victories." It is, then, on us and the alliances, coalitions and partnerships we build for the long struggle ahead, not simply for the election of 2008, but for a future framed in freedom, rooted in justice, blessed with peace, and dedicated to insuring people have power over their destiny and daily lives, and constantly flourish in possibility, promise and peace.

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