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Letters to the editor: What the Obama presidency means to me

JANUARY 18, 2009

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Election 2008 was quality's triumph

At the 2004 Democratic National Convention, the message of a scarcely known black man captured my imagination. He was eloquent, reconciling, of presidential bearing. The historic election of '08 became a hopeful sign to people of color that the equality proclaimed in our founding documents might possibly come true. Under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., this kind of hope was lively, but the decades that followed saw an erosion of hope by meager opportunities and ongoing discrimination.

Barack Obama's singular achievement now rekindles that spirit of possibility and opportunity. It

speaks of a movement toward healing past racial division. It offers hope of a greater union with our nation.

Obama was elected by persons of every race, age and faith. Perhaps Americans were weary of leadership that addressed national and world problems in old and failed ways. Obama's approach promised closeness to people and their concerns, a more compassionate leadership, a new way of dealing with world neighbors that would heal existing divisions. How Americans would welcome being well-thought-of among nations!

Why was Obama elected? We saw in him an intelligent, well-spoken person, thoughtful, self-possessed, calm under pressure and remarkably gracious when attacked. This election proved that an outstanding person who happens to be black could be president.

— **Sister Lorraine Julien**, Rochester

The writer is a Sister of St. Joseph.

Chance to repair failed policies

Inauguration Day will signify two important milestones. The first is the ascension of the first African-American president, an event unimaginable two years ago. Obama's accomplishments make us all proud.

The second is the hope for new public policies that reverse failed policies that have placed this nation on a path of economic ruin. The Republican "voodoo" economics that favored copious tax cuts for the wealthy, unconstrained growth, complete deregulation and lax enforcement of existing laws have simply not worked. Rather than continued prosperity, we face the worst depression in nearly a century. The net worth of the middle and working classes has been nearly obliterated.

ABOUT THESE LETTERS

Readers and community leaders were asked their views on this week's inauguration.

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President Obama assumes office on a wave of extreme optimism and expectancy. The fate of many rests on newly constructed policies and efficient implementation. Many will be expecting quick results. Some loyal supporters will waver, and others will defect if their problems don't soon disappear.

It is not certain that he can succeed. If he doesn't, we are all doomed. So, we can give him one great gift as he begins to undertake this awesome challenge: the time, patience and understanding to repair and replace the failed policies of the past 30 years.

— **William A. Johnson Jr.**, Rochester

The writer is the former mayor of Rochester.

Wider tolerance of views must follow

It's wonderful that an African-American has been elected president of the United States. I don't find it all that surprising, because I think fewer people look only at skin color than we are led to believe. My sincere hope is that some day soon a conservative African-American can be elected to high office without facing the ridicule and name-calling that Condoleezza Rice endured; without having the opposition party steal his personal information as happened to Michael Steele; without being called "Uncle Tom" or a "house slave" as liberals have done to so many black conservatives.

None of us, black or white, male or female, can truly be free until we are all free to hold beliefs that are in opposition to those of the political and media establishments.

I like to think that Obama's election will usher in a new age of acceptance — even acceptance of opposing points of view.

— **Kathy Chapman**, Canandaigua

Recognition of our diverse society

Much of the board and staff of the Gay Alliance, like many of the Rochester-area gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community, are excited about the possibilities of change under the presidency of Barack Obama.

The LGBT community knows the challenging priorities facing the new administration, such as our crumbling economy and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our hope is that the Obama administration can address these challenges in a way that is fair to all Americans, of all economic realities, as LGBT people are present in the full spectrum of American life.

We hope to see the growth of a just, inclusive society in which all loving couples may legally marry and all American families are given equal recognition.

We hope for a future in which workplace and gender discrimination, hate violence and bullying are no longer acceptable — a society dedicated to the proposition that all Americans are created equally and deserve respect.

We are optimistic that the administration of President Obama will embrace and promote these values.

— **Joanne Giuffrida**, Rochester

The writer is interim executive director, Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley.

Overdue revival of U.S. liberties

President Obama's inauguration will end one of America's darkest chapters for civil liberties and human rights. It will be an extraordinary challenge to restore the nation's commitment to our core American values and liberties after eight years of abuse. And while our new president provides great hope, his support for some of the Bush administration's intelligence practices is questionable.

To make good on his promise of hope, Barack Obama must: close Guantanamo and ban torture — immediately and without exception, keep our phones free from unwarranted government spying and prying eyes away from our libraries, and renew respect for Americans' right to a vibrant and strong dissent.

Today we can hope, but on Tuesday the hard work begins. We are counting on Obama to take principled positions to restore a tattered Constitution and the rule of law. Nevertheless, no matter what he does, the New York Civil Liberties Union will remain vigilant, as it is every citizen's duty to ensure that our most fundamental rights continue to form the foundation of a strong and just nation.

— **Gary Pudup**, Rochester

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The writer is director, Genesee Valley Chapter, New York Civil Liberties Union.

Obama will strive to fulfill ideals

Hope springs eternal ... that is why I believe President Barack H. Obama will have a profoundly positive impact on our nation at its nadir. Our new president has the "right stuff." His leadership, clear vision, brilliant team and inclusive nature will move our country toward recovery, respect and renewal.

Having grown up in the segregated South, I am thrilled to live at a time when people could come together to elect the first African-American leader of the Free World. We put the sordid history of slavery and segregation behind us as we continually strive to eliminate discrimination. The Obama family and grass-roots America have already taken a giant leap forward for mankind.

The dream is a big one — restoring the financial well-being of the government and the economy, ensuring health care for everyone, educating all of our children to become productive citizens of tomorrow, caring for the environment, protecting against terrorists but ending an unjustified war, and fighting for equality for all citizens. That's a lot for any one person to tackle, but I have hope that the light of Abraham Lincoln's legacy and the spirit of the American people will guide President Barack Obama as he strides to fulfill America's promise.

—**Sandra F. Frankel**, Brighton

The writer is Brighton town supervisor.

The essence of the 'Audacity of Hope'

I, like many of us, have been so caught up in the historical importance of this momentous event that taking a moment to digest the impact had not entered my thoughts.

Answering what it means to me with the singular focus on me or my community may be received as selfish, however well-intentioned. I would rather concentrate on the giant leap forward that this moment in history has afforded all of us.

This inauguration, this new perspective on the American landscape is to be celebrated from all sides of the tapestry that is America.

It is the reaffirmation of the American Dream, the dream that my parents reached for when we came to this great country. It is the reaffirmation that each and every one of us can play out our dreams. It is the reaffirmation of the fairness in America and the goodness that is America.

It's the confirmation that equality, so professed in the Constitution of this country, is more than words neatly carved on a cold granite stone. We can all stand tall and hold our heads high — in unity.

"The Audacity of Hope," indeed. Godspeed Barack Obama!

—**Eduardo J. Navarro**, Chili

It's a new America in the 21st century

I clearly recall, as if it were yesterday, overhearing my mother call out to my father from the living room of our second-floor apartment at 62 Prospect St. in Rochester, that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated. I knew who King was, but at that time in my life, I had not grasped the enormous impact his life would have not only on the United States but on the world.

As I grew older and became more and more interested in politics and government, I wondered what it would be like if America elected a black man. Would justice and equality prevail involving more of "my people"? Fast forward 30-plus years and my question is answered. America has elected and now prepares to inaugurate the first black man to lead the country and influence the Free World. I am biracial and overjoyed that Barack Hussein Obama, a biracial young master orator and thinker, one who truly represents what America looks like in the 21st century, is to be our 44th president. I really have someone who is more like me than I would have expected. This alone does not produce justice but it does offer America a more balanced posture in the world. My grandchildren will grow up with someone who represents all the people and reflects the type of intellect and spirit proclaiming "Yes We Did!"

— **The Rev. Christopher M. Tillman Sr.**, Henrietta

Hope promised change occurs

Jan. 20 will truly mark a historic event for Americans as we will witness the oath of office of a new president. However, I find it important to note that each time we witness the swearing-in of a new president, it is indeed a historic event full of optimism and hope. This day will bring with it many thoughts of the change that was promised by our president-elect throughout his campaign.

People put their faith and trust into the words and ideas that were expressed during the campaign.

We will now watch as these plans unfold. We all want what is best for all Americans and we hope the new direction leads us down that path.

These are not easy times for anyone in elected office. We need to continue to work to get our country on the right track to financial strength, deal with health care and ensure there is a fair climate so our businesses can compete in the world and provide jobs here at home.

To me, the inauguration will signify the chance for opportunity. I am hopeful and optimistic that the change that was promised will indeed be the right change for all of America.

—**Bill Reilich**, Greece

The writer represents the 134th state Assembly District and is the Monroe County Republican Chairman.

New life to the American journey

In many ways, President-elect Barack Obama's whistle-stop tour from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., parallels the arc of American history itself.

We acknowledge that the freedom declared in Philadelphia did not extend to all men and women.

We recall a whistle-stop trek undertaken in 1861 by another son of Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, whose rise to the presidency in a time of grave crisis was perhaps as unlikely as Obama's. Then, as now, the hopes of good people rode the rails toward Washington as well, and this week the seeds sown by the Great Emancipator will bloom as never before.

Obama will stumble as president, and it would do us well to remember that all our great leaders have at times demonstrated their fallibility. Their greatness lay not in some idealized personal perfection, but in their determination to do right, and set right that which they believed was wrong, in order to form a more perfect union.

On Tuesday, Barack Obama will have concluded his journey to Washington. And he will take his place as the leader of that other journey — a journey without end — the American journey.

—**Joseph D. Morelle**, Irondequoit

The writer represents the 132nd Assembly District and is Monroe Democratic chairman.

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