

THE OBAMA IN US AND THE US IN OBAMA  
BY  
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The United States of America goes to the polls today. Without the certainty of results, it is now in the hands of Almighty God and the American voter. Of course if it were left to the citizens of the world, Barack Obama would already have been elected by a landslide. In fact so certain has been the faith of some people in the certainty of an Obama victory that an Irish betting organization started paying out winnings on October 15<sup>th</sup> (about three weeks before the actual election) to those who had placed a bet on Obama. The highest winner took home \$35,000 for a \$60 bet. Talk about putting one's money where one's mouth is. O ye of great faith.

The normal assumption here would be to interpret the "US" in the title to mean Nigerians or in the alternative "Africans and Diasporic Africans". But before jumping to conclusions, it is well to look at the following figures, As of October 26, 2008, in Argentina, there have been 106,000 items on Obama in the media, in Brazil, 371,000 media items, in Egypt, 245,000 media items.13,700 media items, in France, 1,300,000 media items, in Germany, 1,940,000 media items, in India, 1,140,000 media items, in Israel, 236,000 media items, in Japan, 609,000 media items, in Nigeria, 2050 media items, in Russia, 139,000 media items, in South Africa, 54800 media items, and in Britain, 1,970,000 media items. This statistics show a massive if uneven interest in Obama on a global scale.

	CLINTON	OBAMA	McCAIN
ARGENTINA	48,500	106,000	239,000
BRAZIL	165,000	371,000	273,000

EGYPT	2,060	13,700	10,500
ISRAEL	101,000	236,000	145,000
NIGERIA	547	2,050	1,120
JAPAN	269,000	609,000	794,000
SOUTH AFRICA	44,000	54,800	27,600
CHINA	110,000	245,000	243,000
FRANCE	562,000	1,300,000	1,290,000
GERMANY	566,000	1,940,000	1,320,000
INDIA	526,000	1,140,000	806,000
RUSSIA	32,100	139,000	84,300
UK	493,000	1,970,000	1,780,000

But to test the uniqueness of Obama, we would have to apply the same set of exploratory statistics to the other two personalities thrown up in this mother of all historical election battles. (see table above). Because Senator Hillary Clinton dropped out at the end of the primary period, I will omit her from this analysis. Including a table which shows the state of media items at the end of the primary period will make the analysis too complex.

Now looking at the table above, it is only in Argentina and Japan where interest in McCain outranks interest in Obama. Anyone who knows the history of Argentina (how the Black majority there disappeared before the First World War and why it became the haven for Nazis after the Second World War) will understand why McCain outpolled Obama in media interest in Argentina. It is also true that the table does not make a distinction between negative and positive media interests. However, it balances out between both candidates. The conclusion then is that Obama has outpolled McCain in Brazil, Egypt, Israel, Nigeria, South Africa, China, France, Germany, India, Russia and United Kingdom.

Therefore the “US” in the title of this article does not refer to Africans or Blacks but to “US”, the citizens of the world. Of course, one could argue that the election to the office of the most powerful man in the world would attract the most intense global interest but when in this grueling campaign, an open air speech delivered in Berlin, Germany by Obama attracted about 250,000 attendees, then the handshake had gone beyond the elbow. That turnout for a foreign Presidential candidate is a record still to be matched.

As an aside, for some like me who lived through the 1970s and 1980s which were the heady days of foreign affairs, it is symptomatic of the times that Nigeria has the lowest score on the table. With political and economic policies which have impoverished the country and wiped out the middle class, with the universities consumed by cultism and with everyone trying to eke out a living, interest in foreign affairs has become a luxury that few members of the elite can afford, the comical and farcical attempts at setting up proto-Obama organizations in Nigeria notwithstanding.

So, what is it about Obama that has turned on the world? Obviously, the answer is going to be multi-dimensional. The first factor I will deal with is the racial one thus ignoring the wisdom of Shakespeare in Julius Caesar that what touches us most should be last touched. Of course Julius Caesar lost his life in the process. So ignoring this gem of wisdom might be an act of wisdom in itself.

I don't intend to discuss the merits or otherwise of the devastation that slavery wrought on Africa. I take it as given that it is now incontrovertible that the slavery visited on Africa by Europe was the most evil system ever devised by man. Some may argue that it is a toss up between slavery and the holocaust

as which is the most evil. Obviously, my vote goes to slavery, without detracting from the horrendous sufferings that the holocaust inflicted on the Jews. Obviously, Africans were not the first or the only people to be enslaved in the world. A reading of ancient texts reveals that slavery is as old as human creation and perhaps with a touch of hyperbole one can say that there is no group that has not been enslaved in world history. But the whole system of dehumanization based on the colour of the skin was what set the slavery visited on Africa apart. Slavery based on religious differences could get resolved by the victims changing their religions. Slavery based on name differential could be dealt by the victims changing their names. But slavery based on skin colour is the most invidious of all because the victims cannot change their colour. There is no Blackman or woman who can claim that outside Africa, South of the Sahara, he or she has not been made to feel like an uninvited guest on planet earth. Those who seek to diminish the importance of an Obama election victory by arguing that it will not translate into material well being for the Afro-Americans and the Africans miss the entire point totally. And so also does Toni Morrison argument that because Obama does not share the slavery background, his victory, to that extent, is less a victory that Afro-Americans can identify with. A victory for Obama will be the ultimate catharsis in purging the African race (Arabs are not really regarded as Africans) of the stigma of slavery. As of now, even before the election results, every Blackman or woman feels a foot taller because of the Obama syndrome. The election of Obama rather than what he does in office is the ultimate victory. But this must also be said. It is also a catharsis for the white race, purging it of its guilt over the slavery trade. An Obama victory will be the ultimate reparation (compensation). This needs to be emphasized because it was Obama's victory in the Iowa primary (a basically white constituency) that launched Obama to where he is now.

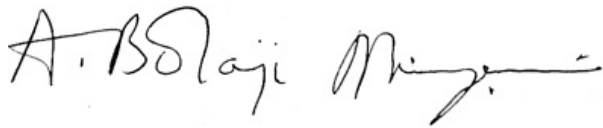
The second factor is the desire for an America that is more global in outlook and less unilateralist in approach. Obama epitomizes this globalist and multi-lateralist outlook and approach. The United States being the most powerful country in the world, with the capability to attempt to impose a Pax-Americana on the world (even when not successful, the object of its attention had been made to pay a terrible price) the rest of the world has a vested interest in who becomes the President of the United States. There is no nation in the world that wants to be despised and the polls do show that most Americans want a return to the Camelot days of President John F. Kennedy - - elegance, grace and high positive world rating. This desire is also evident in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. This is amply demonstrated by that mammoth Berlin crowd and by the level of interest as demonstrated in the table above.

The third factor is a reaction by the world, including the United States, against uninspiring, colourless and unfocussed leaders. This is especially manifest among the youths who seem to have been swept off their feet by Obama. Obama is more like a cult (positive) figure now than a politician. President Museveni of Uganda was so irritated by the fascination of his people with Obama that he had to admonish them to focus on Ugandan problems. It is like what we cannot find in our leaders, we have found in Obama. Poor Obama, now invested with the dreams and aspirations of the world. Such a small frame for such a world burden.

The fourth factor is the defeat of the theory that to have a difficult or dysfunctional background is to be marked for life. Obama's background was a difficult one: A father who was footloose, a mother who was footloose and bohemian, a childhood that was characterized by being shipped all over the place, and being brought up by grandparents who were of a different race. Well any good sociologist or psychologist would

have a written a thriller on how the product ended up in jail as a failure, a reject with a dysfunctional personality. Obama's victory will be more effective than a million sermons with the message that you are what you want to be. Difficulties are mountains to climb and not excuses for lying down and blaming society. I hope on November 5, preachers can say "today, the Scripture is being fulfilled in your sight."

In ancient times, the proud boast was "Civis Romanus sum" (I am a Roman citizen). I hope that tomorrow, November 5, the whole world will be able to say for a day "We are all Americans". And that can only be if it is President-elect Barak Obama

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. B. Slaji" followed by a stylized flourish.

Nov. 1, 2008