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A Year of Extremes

**Kimberly Flint-Hamilton, Senior Editor
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2009 – what an incredible year! A year of almost inconceivable highs, and lows that bore down into our very beings, the time since we met last October has filled us with high hopes as well as dark fears. These conflicted realities are reflected both in our lives and in our work.

For most BCTS members, indeed, for most Americans, the election of our first African American president was one of the most significant moments of our lives. I'll never forget when Obama was declared victor shortly after 11:00 pm EST on November 4, 2008. As late as it was, I picked up the telephone and called my close friends, many of whom were in tears when they answered. We were ecstatic, and wondered to ourselves if this just might be the signal that the U.S. heritage of structured, entrenched racism was beginning to fade away. It didn't take long for us to find out that the face of racism may have changed, but it was far from gone.

I remember racing home from campus on that cold January Inauguration Day so I could tune in to the network coverage of the Inauguration ceremonies. I was so eager to share in the fanfare that I even checked the White House web site for the lunch menu. I imagined the way the room looked as various gourmet dishes were brought out to our first black

President and his First Lady. I prayed for Senator Ted Kennedy when he collapsed midway through lunch, and I prayed even harder that Obama wouldn't collapse next, so fearful was I of nefarious intrigue by racist congressional insiders. It was an afternoon of highs and lows, and I stayed tuned into the coverage until the new President and First Lady graced the ballroom floor for the first presidential dance. I felt like I was a part of those events in a way I never have before.

Yet, not long after Obama took office, we saw the U.S. economy come crashing down, a process that began long before the election. It continued to plunge as we saw the highest unemployment figures for decades, the worst recession since the Great Depression, with many insisting we were actually in a depression. It felt like a depression to many Americans as we struggled to make ends meet after we and/or our spouses were laid off. And as our academic institutions tightened their belts, reduced operating budgets, withdrew funds for travel and research, and sent pink slips to 'nonessential personnel', we all shuddered. The Tea Partiers objected to big government spending even as the economy began to improve, and the Birthers called Obama's citizenship into question despite birth notices in a 1961 Hawaiian newspaper and a copy of his U.S. birth certificate. While all that was going on, the nation reaffirmed our aversion to torture and the Guantanamo detainees began to be released. In the same election that ended with Obama victorious, some states banned same-sex marriage while others overturned existing laws allowing it, thereby robbing GLBT couples of a little piece of their humanity. Senator Kennedy passed away, and the health care debate rages on without him as the fate of the

uninsured and underinsured swings in the balance. This has been quite a year.

The drama of this past year is reflected in Volume III of *The Journal of the BCTS*. Our contributors take a bold look at some of the most controversial issues of the world today, and challenge the comfort zone of Catholic scholars, even many black Catholic scholars. This volume focuses on the margins of the marginalized. Ken Hamilton, SVD challenges the Church's assumptions of a heteronormative sexual identity and shows us that demonization of 'othered' identities as evil have contributed to the suffering of AIDS victims. Daniels-Sykes explores the medical atrocities that lead to the 1979 Belmont Report, and describes the ways in which it fostered a bioethics that relies on the presumption "normativity of whiteness," and thereby failing to consider the ways in which whites are privileged at the expense of blacks. She posits a black Catholic liberation bioethics that is responsive to the needs of blacks. Finally, James Okoye, CSSp describes the ways in which African women interpret the Bible alongside other religious texts and traditions to better understand their lived experiences as a marginalized group. We also include three book reviews – Tim Wise's *Between Barack and a Hard Place* (2009), which presents the new face of racism in the post-Obama era; the controversial Clarence Thomas' *My Grandfather's Son: A Memoir* (2007), which reveals the struggles of a former Catholic and his quest for identity; and *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience*, edited by M. Shawn Copeland with LaReine-Marie Mosely, SND, and Albert Raboteau, which features articles by several of our members that seek to illuminate the many ways in

which our faith has been revealed and articulated from the time of slavery to the present. Volume III of *The Journal of the BCTS* is the most groundbreaking issue yet. The reader is guaranteed not to be disappointed!