

Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium

Volume 3

Article 3

12-1-2009

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Recommended Citation

Moore, Cecilia (2009) "What a Difference a Year Makes," *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*: Vol. 3, Article 3.

Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts/vol3/iss1/3>

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What A Difference A Year Makes

Cecilia Moore, Editor
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I'd like to reflect briefly on the election of President Barack Obama and Vice-President Joseph Biden in 2008 and their inauguration in January 2009, on the historical significance of the election, and my hopes for cooperation between the Black Catholic community and the Obama Administration in working for social justice.

On January 20, 2009, I joined my sister, Margaret, my brother, Mark, and a million or more of our fellow citizens on the nation's Mall to witness the inauguration of President Barack Obama and Vice-President Joseph Biden. In freezing temperatures, without access to restrooms for more than 14 hours, and with scant opportunities for food or water, we were on pilgrimage to help initiate what may become the most important presidency for the United States in recent times. My sister and I spent countless afternoons knocking on doors and canvassing voters in Virginia and Ohio. We got to know our respective cities, Danville, Virginia and Dayton, Ohio, so much better and became adept users of Google maps and canvass abbreviations. We learned more about the political process, especially about the differences between primaries and caucuses, super delegates and regular delegates, and key political players in our own localities. We engaged in

community organization. We became addicted to the *Huffington Post* and *Politico* and major fans of Rachel Maddow. Each day we felt more hopeful about the promise of our generation to do something truly positive for the common good.

At school, people knew about my commitment to the Obama campaign. Over the course of the campaign, I worked with many friends from the University of Dayton in various Dayton neighborhoods and in the surrounding suburbs on canvassing and getting out the vote during the Ohio primary and in the general election in November. I spent election eve at a “First Vote Party” for undergraduates that was hosted by faculty. I was thrilled, as were my faculty friends at the “First Vote Party,” when Ohio was solidly added to the Obama/Biden column. I was sure we would go for Obama in Ohio but I really wanted the victory for Virginia. I saved my biggest cheer for when Virginia went blue. The next day, I was especially happy to see a tiny dot of blue in the sea of red that was Pittsylvania County. That tiny dot was the final home of the Confederacy, the site of the Wreck of the Old '97, the birthplace of Lady Astor, Camilla Williams, and Wendell Scott, and a primary battleground of the civil rights movement. That tiny dot was Danville, Virginia going for Obama by 59%. This victory signaled two things. First it showed that a town that for generations reveled in its Confederate history and heritage was ready and willing to assist in bringing forth the first president of African descent of the United States. The second thing the Danville victory showed was that the tradition of political activism fostered by generations of African American religious leaders in Danville

still had the power to make things happen. My sister told me how proud she felt to be at her poll on Election Day and to see so many generations of African Americans there to vote. Many could remember people in their own families who never got to exercise this privilege and responsibility. And, many also never dreamed that they would have the opportunity to vote for an African American for president. It was a time ripe with the fulfillment of things long hoped for. Simply put, it was a wonderful year and we felt very good about all the work we and millions more had done to make that day come. The physical hardships January 20 presented in Washington, D.C. were small prices to pay for the privilege to be there in person for the inauguration.

So much has happened since. When one thinks about it, we have our first Black and Catholic White House. Our president is Black and he credits Catholic community activists in Chicago with helping to form his sense of social justice and his commitment to pursuing it. Our vice-president is a Roman Catholic who seems to have a real voice and influence in the White House. Blacks and Catholics are serving in President Obama's cabinet and on his staff. The appointment of Dr. Miguel Diaz as the United States Ambassador to the Holy See this past August is an important example of President Obama making good on his promise of "change you can believe in" with his nomination of the first theologian and the first Latino serve this important diplomatic post. Ambassador Diaz is a past president of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians in the United States. He has shown his commitment to building and strengthening the relationships of Latino/a Catholic and Black Catholic theologians and

communities of faith. In 2006, he invited the Black Catholic Theological Symposium to meet in *cojunto* with ACHTUS.

President Obama thinks religion has an important role to play in the public square and in contributing to the common good. He has maintained a strong relationship with representatives of various faith communities in the United States and continues to seek their advice in how best to address social, economic, health, and moral issues that concern all of us. After so many years of religion being used as a political weapon in the public square, these new changes are really refreshing. It is a new day that presents us in the Black Catholic Theological Symposium and in the wider Black Catholic community with many opportunities to offer our gifts, time, energy, creativity, experiences, constructive criticism, scholarship and concerns to the service of our country. Concerns that members of the BCTS have been addressing in our scholarship, teaching, and work in our parishes and faith communities for years are on the agenda of this White House. We have a special opportunity now to help bring about changes in our society that will particularly serve the best interests of our many brothers and sisters who have suffered for such a long time. Our president is calling us to help make health care reform a reality in our day, to recommit ourselves to making education work to its fullest potential for our children, and to get involved in our local communities to address the problems and needs of our neighbors. It is my hope that we can transform the passion that so many of us had during the election last year to lend our hands, our minds, and our hearts to the magnificent mission that is presented to us now.