

Let Us Shed Tears of Gratitude for This Moment of Grace. It Will Be Brief

by Mike Ferner

My friend, Lucy Bohne, an English professor at a state college near Erie, Pennsylvania, wrote to her daughter in New York City the day after Barack Obama's victory. Lucy did a fine job describing how many people felt the day after the Senator's historic success at the nation's polls.

"Thank you for calling last night," Lucy wrote. "It sounded like NYC had gone mad with joy! I spent that night in a roller coaster of feeling, shadowed by despair, counting the days between your birth and MLK's murder -- twelve to be exact. It was a joy to realize that 40 years later your generation would hand the White House over to the leadership of a black American. That is an amazing thing!

"This amazing thing that happened in America, that only we as Americans can understand and share, won't make a difference to the world, to the children of Baghdad, Beirut, Gaza, Teheran, and all other places in the crosshairs of our guns, unless we *make* that difference. Might as well be brave and strong and admit

that there is work to be done, struggles to embrace, disappointments to endure.

"But for the moment, let us shed tears of gratitude for this moment of grace. It will be brief. Love, Mom"

Considering that race has always been the subplot to the American story, many of us surely will "shed tears of gratitude for this moment of grace," no matter how brief.



photo: Mike Ferner

As we move beyond today's fleeting joys, I will recall how often during this presidential campaign people asked if I thought an Obama administration would be a good thing. My response was always this: the best thing about an

Obama victory would not be his policies. He's shown too often they differ little from the status quo. The best thing his campaign and election could do would be to inspire millions of people to become active, to expect more, to work long hours in the company of others toward something larger than ourselves. In short, his victory could fuel a sense of purpose among the people.

Then, if Obama's inspired grassroots campaigners discover in their hearts that citizen vigilance and organizing are every bit as important as elections; that creating democracy from the bottom up is more important than our quadrennial extravaganzas; that marginal change is permissible in our country, but fundamental change strikes fear and loathing; that investments of time and energy must continue long past election day's excitement; that we all need to hope less and demand more, only then will we see change significant enough to make Obama's election more than a historical footnote.

Who knows today what forces the hopes and dreams of this campaign may have unleashed? Who can say what historical events may unfold in the months ahead, or how far those events may take us if we make conditions right for their growth?

More importantly, when our moment of grace turns out to be too fleeting and we must regroup over and over again for the long haul, will these new, hopeful campaigners be savvy enough to overcome the American appetite for instant gratification that today comes only in shopping malls and headache remedies?

That, I believe, is the challenge faced by all of us who want schools and healthcare not empire and warfare; who want to "make a difference to the world, to the children in Baghdad, Beirut, Gaza, Teheran, and all the other places in the crosshairs of our guns."

It is a tall challenge indeed. But if we are not up to it, who is?

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