

# Obama's an unstoppable force

Under the scrutiny of reporters, cynical voters, salivating hate-mongers and right-wing conservatives, Barack Obama proved to the nation last week that he is not defined by his skin color in an unprecedented, courageous — albeit risky — speech on race. He also proved once again that African Americans are not a homogeneous, monolithic group of people. From the onset of his presidential campaign, Obama has had to walk a fine line. He has had to prove that he is “black enough,” that he understands the plight of African Americans despite being biracial, and he has had to do this without alienating white people.

The fact that Obama's “blackness” or lack thereof has been such a major issue in this campaign, illustrates how ridiculous it is to suggest, as Geraldine Ferraro did, that being black gives him an advantage.

Obama's ethnicity has been a major hurdle for him to overcome in this campaign, and if Obama was not a man of color, this country would not be mired in a debate about race.

African Americans only make up about 13 percent of America's population, so even if all of the black people in America voted for Obama, he could not win the presidential election with their votes alone.

What makes Obama amazing is that he has managed to bridge the gap between the races and get people to look beyond his color — a feat many thought was impossible.

This is a testament to how far we have come as a nation.

Unfortunately, the closer Obama gets to victory, the more his detractors are intent on tearing down those bridges by using race as a divisive tool to divert his attention away from important issues like our ailing economy, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the need for affordable health care.

This old game of “divide and conquer” has a familiar ring in the African-American community that dates back to slavery.

As I watched Obama deliver his speech, I was consumed with pride, that he had the courage to tackle the sensitive issue of race at such a critical



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time in his campaign and that he did it with such eloquence and candor.

The fact that Obama refused to succumb to the pressure to disown a beloved friend, even though he knew it would cost him politically, says a lot about Obama's character. However, I was profoundly saddened by the possibility that Obama's campaign could be derailed over statements made by a trusted friend that clearly do not represent his views.

Although I do not condone the incendiary statements made by Obama's former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright Jr., I understand Obama's refusal to disown a man who has been like family to him. We all have relatives or long-time friends whose views are completely different from our own.

As a biracial person — my father is black and my mother is white — I can empathize with Obama's lifelong dilemma of being caught between two races. As a native Virgin Islander, I did not have to endure the biases that many biracial children encounter on the U.S. mainland, but when I rhoved to the states for college, my skin color and race definitely became an issue.

I was often asked, and still am: “What are you?” Some asked the question out of sincere curiosity, others saw it as a test — do I see myself as black or white. If I said I am biracial, I sometimes got snide remarks, implying that I was denying my “blackness.”

I was violating the “rule.” In elementary school, I remember telling my teacher that I did not know what box to check in a questionnaire I was given on race. She then informed me of the “rule.” “If you have any black in you, you're black,” she said. When I told my father, he was livid. He said: “You are a human being.”

As I got older, I realized how ridiculous that rule was. I am a composite of both my father's gene and my mother's genes; to say that I am only black would be denying my mother who is of French descent.

Although I identify completely with the black race, I am biracial and proud of it. Why should I have to deny my mother's ethnicity to be accepted by society? Why should I have to choose?

Yet, this is exactly what Obama has repeatedly been asked to do.

Like Obama, I have heard close relatives on both my black and white sides make racial remarks that made me cringe — and they appear to have no idea of how offensive or racist their statements sound. But I cannot disown them. I know that their views are shaped by racial stereotypes and a long history of racial injustice.

Personally, I am not comfortable with pastors injecting their political views into their sermons, but the ongoing struggle for justice and equality in this nation has compelled African-American churches throughout history to address many controversial issues.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said “any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried.”

Obama continues to take the high road in this campaign, refusing to engage in the mudslinging that his opponents seem to thrive on. I hope that the voters in the upcoming primary will appreciate his integrity and forthrightness and judge him on his character; firm grasp of the issues; his intellectual and leadership abilities; and his capability to develop feasible solutions to this country's domestic and international problems.

His candidacy has the potential to propel us forward as a unified country, but if it ends because of race this country may retreat behind the old racial boundaries that have divided us for generations.

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