



**SELF-REFLECTION V. GENUFLECTION:
OBAMA, JESSE AND GENERATION TALK**
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Even if we maintain our iron-clad embrace of Obama and give him our whole heart, mind and soul, and our total say-what-you-want support, it is not wrong or irrational to save at least a little consideration for ourselves and our larger interests, to pause long enough on our wondrous way to the White House to look below the surface, see beyond the blinding lights of our understandable deep political longing and remember our larger role and responsibility in this country and the world, and perform them with self-conscious strength, dignity and determination. And this joint role and responsibility, of course, has always been and continues to be a key social and moral vanguard whose life and struggle have been and remain an awesome model and inspiration to the oppressed, struggling and freedom loving peoples of the world.

This, of necessity, requires we engage in ongoing serious self-reflection generated from within, not imposed from without by media manipulation nor established-order engineering. And, of course, we must at all cost avoid genuflecting, i.e., bending and bowing in undeserved reverence, undue respect or servile submission and sacrificing ourselves and self-respect on the altar of accommodation to the racial fears, fantasies and fragile egos of others.

In the best of our tradition, it is an ethical and intellectual imperative for us as persons and a people to engage regularly in serious and sustained self-reflection, to think deeply about our destiny and daily lives, about the way we should but actually do walk in the world, the way we relate and love, work and struggle, parent, nurture, build and sustain family and friendships, define and solve problems and forge a future worthy of its name. Thus, beyond the histrionics, heavy breathing and the real and

shallow “shock and awe” assertions and reports surrounding the recent references and revelations concerning Rev. Jesse Jackson and Senator Barack Obama, there are numerous serious issues that need to be addressed.

First, it’s not about Jesse or in the end even about Obama, although this may shock those who have not come to terms with the fact that in this world, if we want miracles, we must make them ourselves through hard work and long struggle and a cooperation in and for community that is as normal, natural and necessary as survival and development themselves. The miracles, then, will be made not in a single election regardless of how historic it promises to be, but in the strivings and struggles of our everyday lives, not through the exceptional one ascending, but through the ordinary many rising; and not through protective support-in-silence of a favorite son or daughter, but in principled, persistent and active insistence on views, values and practices that represent the best of what it means to be African and human in the world.

The established order continues to dare to define reality and make us accept it even when it’s to our disadvantage, but we must resist this. Let’s be honest, there’s nothing new, startling or worthy of refutation in Obama’s recent moral instruction to the Black community. Jesse, Bill Cosby and others have given similar homilies under different circumstances. The concern is why is our beloved brother talking family and community pathology to us and praising and promising assistance to Whites, even overseas. The media calls this his Bill Clinton moment and his necessary message of assurance to Whites that he is not bound to Blacks. But what’s wrong with Whites if they need to hear Blacks stereotypically put

in their pathological place? And if we are going to praise White Americans for their strength, why come to Black people preaching and prattling about weaknesses and offering a litany for lost souls? Maybe there's a mystery in this message. But again, it's not new and certainly seems unnecessary to give to successful middle class churches and members of the NAACP instead of advising and giving concrete assistance to the absent people who need it.

Also we can believe in the generation conflict that the established order paints and peddles for us and rush to repudiate and call for replacement of older generation social justice and movement leaders. But notice how old White men control the wealth and power of this country and how some of them are even helped on the stage to receive standing ovations and how we are taught to respect them for insight and experience and seek their endorsement and even approval. On the other hand, we are taught to discredit, dismiss and discount the rich knowledge, insight and experience our elder statesmen and women bring to the table. Certainly, in the best of our culture we don't talk of replacing the older generation, but of succeeding them, which means following, learning from and building on prior legacies and then adding our own unique contribution as a legacy for those who come after us.

Rev. Jesse Jackson's forty-year legacy is not lost nor is his relevance reduced. He has rightly apologized for his wrongful and acidic aside about Obama that Fox brought

to our attention with a gross amount of gloat and glee. That kind of talk is classic corporate conversation and could be an indication of time spent fundraising and hanging out with "non-homies" whose language is laden with "cut to pieces" and "kill". But it is also a reminder to practice our best values always and that our enemies and oppressor will give us no holiday and no help except onto the road to ruin.

Moreover, it is said that the new leaders bring new ideas, but what is new about placating and pleasing Whites and about fantasies of progress without struggle, and negotiation from positions of weakness rather than power? What new ideas do these new leaders have about the actual restructuring of social and racial relations, especially relations of wealth, power and status in this country? No, it's not being "tough" or "courageous" to stand up *to* Black people, but to stand up *for* them and their struggle for social justice.

But no matter what new fantasies are fed to us on the nightly news and in nice places with bad people, in the final analysis, it's on us and about us as a people; about how we measure and determine the meaning of our lives; how we understand and self-consciously assert ourselves in society and history; what we demand of ourselves *and* others and how we in genuine self-reflection and self-determination, live good lives, rightfully relate to others, struggle to secure justice and dare bring a great good in the world.