

Springtime in America

We have survived the Contract on America and have elected a black man president of the United States. Can there be anything at all beyond the reach and will of the people?



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In New York each year, usually in the month of May, there comes a warm, bright day when people on the streets, who had been bundled up for months, hugging themselves and hording their body heat beneath layers of wool and down, suddenly throw off their clothes, baring themselves to a radiant sun in an annual rite of spring. Something similar happened on November 4th as people all over the world followed the U.S. presidential election with crossed fingers and bated breath. Time zones collapsed

toward the much-anticipated moment as millions watched and waited through the long night into the promising dawn. The whole world seemed invested in the outcome. And when the election was called, the global village flooded into the streets to shout hallelujah and dance like there would be a tomorrow after all. Africans waved American flags. Students in Indonesia danced in the rain and chanted, "Obama! Obama!" In France, the French minister for human rights proudly proclaimed that "On this morning we all want to be American so we can take a bite of this American dream unfolding before our eyes." At 11 P.M. EST, the congratulatory calls started pouring in from friends in London, Trinidad, Toronto, Jamaica, New Delhi and Cape Town. And around the world, mingled amidst the celebrations, one sensed a collective sigh of relief. When you're an 800-pound guerilla and criminally insane, the community of nations has good reason to be wary and cause to rejoice when at last you come to your senses.

It's springtime in America, and millions of Americans are once again warming to the limitless possibilities that spring represents – the hope of regeneration, of a resurrection, of a world growing green with the imminent thaw of America's political "nuclear" winter. Like survivors of a near-death experience, we're practically giddy with gratitude for continuing life and limb. Despite a deficit deeper than the Mariana Trench, an economy in collapse and corporate vultures still circling beneath the dark clouds, we are amazingly hopeful, awed by our own resilience and perhaps a little intoxicated with a renewed sense of the power of the people. If we can elect a black man named Barack Hussein Obama president of the United States, what can't we do? Turn the economy around? Reduce the deficit? Yes we can. Fix a broken education system, dismantle the

prison industrial complex, make government responsible to the people? Yes we can. Respect the sovereignty of other nations? Yes we can. Stop pretending to be from Canada whenever we have to travel abroad. That too.

There has never been another time in history when so many people were invested, engaged and so hopeful of making the world a better place for all. By one estimate, more than a million organizations around the world are working on environmental issues, securing peace, ending poverty and ensuring social justice. Collectively, they comprise a global immune system at work on healing the planet. President-Elect Barack Obama is both a sign of America's beginning recovery and a powerful prescription for the failing spirits and ailing health of economies and communities throughout the world. Such is the power of the American dream in the minds of people in far-flung nations. When hope is alive in America, the effect on others is potent and salutary. As with individuals, so too perhaps with communities and nations, hope, faith and a positive outlook make for a favorable prognosis.

Barack Obama stands at the vanguard of a global zeitgeist for positive change. His historic successful bid for the presidency has forever changed the way campaigns will be run. His use of the Internet to engage the electorate has brought the idea of democracy one giant leap forward toward realization. He and a newly energized younger generation of voters have pointed the way to the future. The Internet and our increasing global connections, through cell phones, satellites and cable of every kind, are allowing millions of them to coordinate their efforts and by concerted action bring about those things that seem best for all that can never be accomplished by the unilateral bravado and preemptive strikes of chauvinists and jingoists.

Until November, the world had come to expect Americans to elect "pompous yahoos," one commentator recently opined. Instead we have a shining black prince and a second chance at life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, snatched from the brink of the abyss to which the nation had been delivered by the disastrous duo of the blissfully ignorant and the resolutely malevolent. Roundly rejecting the dubious virtue of a shared beer as the criterion for leadership of the free world, America instead has wisely elected a president with whom other world leaders can have intelligent, constructive dialogue.

The wonder of it all will continue to inspire, even as the present euphoria subsides and the magnitude of the challenges before us comes sharply into focus. But the magnitude of what we have already accomplished is a compelling, empowering confirmation that we are more than equal to any challenge: We have survived the Contract on America and have elected a black man president of the United States. Given that, can there be anything at all beyond the reach and will of the people?