

# Worthy of the Land of Lincoln

By Salim Muwakkil

**B**arack Obama has emerged out of Chicago's boisterous mix of black and progressive politics as a candidate who just may make history as the nation's third elected black U.S. senator. He's an attractive political candidate: well educated and articulate with a history of commitment. He's also an exotic candidate.

First of all, there's his name. The 41-year-old Obama is the son of a black Kenyan father and a white Kansas mother. Obama was born in Hawaii, where he was raised by his mother and her family, and spent his formative years in many unexpected locations. He also lived for a time in Indonesia.

He's a graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Law School, where he graduated magna cum laude and became the first black American president of the Harvard Law Review. From there he settled in Chicago, where he directed a voter registration and education project in Cook County instead of joining one of the many corporate law firms that were beckoning. Obama also began reconciling his hybrid heritage with American realities and found a sense of belonging within the city's African-American community.

We know so much about Obama's inner struggles because he wrote a 1995 book about them titled *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. The book is a lyrical meditation on race, culture and issues of hybridity. In 1993, he joined a law firm, but it specialized in civil rights and voting rights litigation. And in that capacity he served as general counsel to community health clinics and social service agencies throughout Chicago. He also lectures on constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School.

Throughout his life, his name and hybrid identity provided a convenient target for detractors; they still do. A recent Web site, constructed by a Republican political operative, compared Obama to Osama bin Laden. The site was shut down. Letters to conservative publications in Illinois regularly refer to Obama as a radical Muslim, although he

has been an active member of a large South Side Methodist congregation for many years.

But it's not just conservative whites who find Obama troublesome. Chicago's substantial Black Nationalist community also has problems with him. This discomfort stems from a perpetual dynamic within progressive Chicago politics that finds the city's Black Nationalist activists



and theorists often in opposition to integrated activists.

Harold Washington was such a pivotal figure because he was able to fuse the interests of Chicago's influential nationalists with the city's progressives. The inability to forge such a coalition since Washington's death is the primary reason Richard J. Daley has won every election.

Although some nationalists distrust Obama for his close links to progressive political operatives, he still has one of the best opportunities, post-Harold, to cultivate and strengthen those nationalist-progressive links. Within the Black Nationalist community some are now urging all-out support for Obama. In addition to lauding his legislative record during his seven years as senator from Illinois' 13th District, they argue that it's perverse for black nationalists to reject the son of a Kenyan for not being black enough.

He has notched several legislative victories during his tenure in the Illinois Senate, including sponsoring a racial profiling law that requires police departments to record the race of stopped motorists and also sponsoring a law requiring that interrogations and confessions in capital crime cases be videotaped.

In addition, Obama co-sponsored a bill to raise the minimum wage and he was instrumental in expanding Kid Care and Family Care, the children and family health insurance program in Illinois. And he was the first senate candidate to forcefully oppose the Bush administration's Iraq invasion and has been in the forefront of continuing opposition.

Many of the state's more progressive unions and the public interest group Citizen Action have endorsed him. Along with endorsements from U.S. Reps. Danny Davis, Jesse Jackson Jr. and Lane Evans, Obama won the support of liberal icons Abner Mikva, former chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals and former White House counsel, and Newton Minow, former Federal Communication Commission chairman. He's also been endorsed by the Rev. Jesse Jackson and former U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley, (D-N.J.).

Steve Neal, dean of Chicago's political columnists, called Obama "the most intelligent and articulate contender in a surprisingly strong Democratic field." So

**Obama's candidacy is likely to ignite a progressive firestorm. It better.**

far, nine Democratic candidates are running in the primary for the vacated Senate seat of Republican Peter Fitzgerald. Seven Republicans are running in the March 2004 primary. "It is said that Illinois is represented by lightweights in the Senate," Neal wrote. "Obama would be a Senator worthy of the land of Lincoln."

Most serious political observers of Illinois politics share Neal's assessment. "The general reaction to Obama is that he would probably be a great U.S. senator, but that his foreign-sounding name and his race hurt his chances," chimed in Rich Miller, a columnist for the *Daily Southtown*, a suburban publication.

The best candidate for the U.S. Senate from Illinois also happens to be the most progressive. He also happens to be black. This is a convergence so rare it's likely to ignite a progressive firestorm. It better. ■

# THE FIRSTS TO

By Joel Bleifuss

## The South Rises Again

Haley Barbour, the just-elected governor of Mississippi and the former chairman of the Republican National Committee, accepted many endorsements in his recent campaign. George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Bob Dole, Rudolph Giuliani, and Florida Gov. Jeb Bush all visited the state to lend their support to Barbour. He also got some down-home help from the Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC), a St. Louis-based white supremacist group at whose gatherings Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) has spoken.

Up until November 5, the homepage of the CCC website ([www.cofcc.org](http://www.cofcc.org)) featured a photograph of Barbour at an annual barbecue sponsored by the group's Mississippi chapter to raise money for school buses to take white kids to Christian schools. Despite demands during the campaign that he disaffiliate with Mississippi's unreconstructed racists, Barbour refused to ask the CCC to remove the photo, which pictures him with CCC Field Director Bill Lord.

In addition to highlighting the Barbour photo, the CCC Web site explains that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is in fact a compilation of "lectures addressed to Jewish Luciferians" that detail "an incredible plan to overthrow western civilization, subjugate mankind, and concentrate 'all the wealth of the world in our hands.'"

The CCC also frets about the feminist threat: "With thanks to liberal Jews like Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan, [American women] have become foreigners in their own land. Welcome to Amazon America, 'where we celebrate the castrat-

ing of the dreaded White male daily.'"

And the CCC features a proposal that parcels out the United States among the races in what it calls "The Racial Compact" ([www.racialcompact.com/partitionmap.html](http://www.racialcompact.com/partitionmap.html)). Racial separation is needed to protect the genetic integrity of the "Nordish" race (those of northern European ancestry). Not convinced? The article explains, "To describe the situation in biological terms, the habitat of the Nordish race is being invaded by competing life-forms or races." In this partition



Haley Barbour, middle left, posing in July with white supremacist leader Bill Lord, right.

scheme, the "Latin Amerindians" (Latinos) would be relegated to southern Texas and New Mexico. "Congoids" (African Americans) would get Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana and North Texas. Other human "subspecies" would be settled along the Mexican border and in Southern Florida as a racial barrier. The "Nordish-American" race would reside in the rest of the country. The CCC does not spell out where it would put the "extra-territorial non-indigenous European ethnic groups" (Jews and Gypsies). Perhaps it has other plans for them.

Controversy about racist statements is nothing new to Barbour. In 1982, when he was unsuccessfully running for the U.S. Senate, the *New York Times* reported:

The racial sensitivity at Barbour headquarters was suggested by an exchange between the candidate and an aide who complained that there would be 'coons' at a campaign stop at the state fair. Embarrassed that a reporter heard this,

Mr. Barbour warned that if the aide persisted in racist remarks, he would be reincarnated as a watermelon and placed at the mercy of blacks.

## A Brand New World's in Birth

The Socialist International is the global organization of the world's diverse 141 socialist, social democratic and labor parties ([www.socialistinternational.org](http://www.socialistinternational.org)). The most influential of these parties are currently governing, among other places, Germany, the United Kingdom and Portugal. Others members, like the Democratic Socialists of America, try to maintain a socialist leaven in the Democratic Party politic.

In late October, the XXII Congress of the Socialist International gathered in Sao Paulo, Brazil—the first time in Latin America—at the invitation of Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva. Lula's Workers Party has not joined the Socialist International, which some Workers Party members consider too moderate, though negotiations between the two organizations are now under way.

Nicaragua's socialists, however, are members. And the Nicaraguan delegation, which included former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, unsuccessfully tried to get

the British Labour Party expelled for Tony Blair's support for the war in Iraq. The war was a topic on delegates' minds. In his address to the congress, Lula said, "The only war we should be waging is against hunger and inequality. That's a war worth fighting."

Congress delegates issued the "Declaration of Sao Paulo." This 2,700-word manifesto eschews the word "socialist" for "progressive." The lexicon may have changed since the Socialist International was founded in 1889, but a new internationalism similar to that which motivated 19th Century socialists has taken hold.

The "Declaration of Sao Paulo" warns that "neoconservatives are attempting ... to dismantle all forms of global governance, to minimize the role of the United Nations, to undermine multilateral institutions, to promote unilateralism and the consecration of the market and to impose the will of the powerful to decide the future of mankind." To counter this threat, the Congress issued the following call to action: