

**B A R A C K  
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**A NEW SYMBOL OF PROSPERITY BY LEAH FURMAN**

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90 percent approval rating? Outside of single-party dictatorships, the figure sounds

like a dubious claim or an impossible boast—unless you're talking about Barack Obama's popularity in the Caribbean, in which case the 90 percent plus support levels make perfect sense.

A beacon of hope for Caribbean nationals both in the U.S. and abroad, the new president has given his island fan base many reasons to celebrate.

A symbol of Martin Luther King's dream, Barack Obama represents the U.S.A.'s triumphant realization of its founding principles of equality and opportunity. While Obama's election signifies much more than the victory of character over racial bigotry, the far-reaching implications of what America's first black president represents to young men and women of color around the world cannot be denied. A shining example of all that education, discipline and strength of character can accomplish, the new president is proof positive that the greatest heights are accessible to anyone who dreams big and works hard—regardless of their skin tone.

Ushering in the dawn of a new age of faith in the system and confidence in ourselves, Obama opened his victory speech by stating, "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

The Caribbean-American community is also excited about what Obama's presidency will mean for U.S. relations with their homelands, as well as the rest of the world. Here, finally, is a president who intends to eschew the alienating and polarizing tactics of recent years by spearheading a foreign policy that is founded not on intimidation and unilateral decision making but on cooperation and mutual respect. Caribbean leaders are already praising Obama's obvious global awareness.

"I don't think any president of the United States of America will have the kind of empathy that he will have with people from different countries and poor people because he understands it firsthand," says Guyana's President Bharrat Jagdeo. "And that is why I think he will understand the difficulties that small, developing countries face."





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Sure enough, Obama has already spoken of the possibility of debt forgiveness for various Caribbean countries, including Haiti, Guyana and St. Lucia. Obama has also championed the rights of illegal immigrants currently living in the United States, outlining a plan by which they can attain citizenship. Since many of these immigrants are a vital part of America’s Caribbean community, the news of the administration’s leniency comes as a welcome relief. Even Cuba can expect to see a kinder, gentler nation under Obama’s leadership, as the new president has espoused plans to ease back on restrictions that forbid Cuban Americans to travel to their native land or send money to relatives still living there.

Former Secretary of State General Colin Powell, the son of Jamaican immigrants, voiced the feelings of many Caribbean Americans when he endorsed Barack Obama on NBC’s *Meet the Press*, saying “Mr. Obama has given us a more inclusive, broader reach into the needs and aspirations of our people. He’s crossing lines—ethnic lines, racial lines, generational lines.”

While Obama’s foreign policy appears to be Caribbean friendly—he has even called the Caribbean the third border—his domestic

agenda is even more aligned with the interests of Caribbean Americans. Given the fact that currently 50 percent of minorities do not graduate high school in the U.S., the promise of a renewed focus on early education and teacher training could not come at a better time. With his American Opportunity Tax Credit proposal, which will reward 100 hours of community service with a \$4000 college tuition credit, Obama plans to help make higher education more accessible to lower income families while at the same time encouraging volunteerism.

Continuing his fight to bolster the middle class, Obama intends to stick by his promise to cut taxes for those earning less than \$250,000 per year and raise taxes for those who earn more. A vow to increase taxes has rarely won anyone an election, but after eight years of watching the Bush administration turn a blind eye to the shortcomings of its laissez-faire economic policies, the country, it seems, is ready for a change. Since the majority of Americans, Caribbean Americans among them, fall into the under \$250,000 category, there is perhaps little surprise that the proposal met with such a positive reaction. And with so many members of the Caribbean community sending money to

relatives overseas, the new president’s tax cuts are expected to help those living far beyond the U.S. borders.

Finally, Barack Obama has also addressed one of the main issues crippling so many middle- and lower-income Americans—health care. With medical bills being the single biggest cause of bankruptcy in the U.S., the situation has reached epidemic proportions. Currently, more than 15 percent of all Americans are uninsured—nearly 20 percent of blacks and more than 30 percent of Hispanics go without coverage. Unfazed by the enormity of the challenge he’s set for himself, Obama has bravely announced that he would make reforming the health care system and making coverage affordable to all Americans one of the benchmarks of his administration.

President Barack Obama’s agenda speaks for itself. Its message is simple: Prosperity for all. No wonder his candidacy inspired such fervor among people everywhere and no wonder so many joyous celebrations broke out in homes and spilled into the streets around the world on the historic night of November 4, 2008.

