

# ORBIS

Amplifying Vanderbilt's Progressive Voices

Vol. 8/No.3/November/2008



**THE NASHVILLE MOVEMENT for social justice... page 7**

## a note from the editor

So I probably don't have to say that I'm pretty excited about the results of the presidential election last Tuesday. Not only was it a win for a new kind of political campaign, one that embraced the politics of hope and unity over the politics of division; it also affirmed that many Americans really do support a progressive platform. Remarkably, this election marked an end to the post-9/11 culture of fear. Despite the fact that his name was foreign; despite the fact that he was associated with Jeremiah Wright and William Ayers; despite the fact that smear groups tried to paint him as a radical Muslim, the majority of Americans voted to elect Barack Hussein Obama to public office. Instead of giving in to the politics of ugliness and fear, many voters were able to see beyond the attacks, as concerns about the economy, healthcare, and our environment trumped racism, prejudice, and name-calling.

We chose the picture of the Obamas for our cover image this month because, well, how amazing is it that we have a black president? I know this has been said again and again, but really, look at the photo. As McCain said in his concession speech (so eloquently, John!) "he managed to [win] by inspiring the hopes of so many millions of Americans who had once wrongly believed that they had little at stake or little influence in the election of an American president."

In this issue, our writers respond to the Obama win (p. 8). We also look at some sadly retrogressive legislation that passed during this election (5) as well as local progressive activism (7). Because while this is one victory for progressivism, it's just the beginning. -Robyn Hyden

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*Amplifying Vanderbilt's Progressive Voices*

November 2008

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# student

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**88,626** low-end estimate of number of civilian deaths in Iraq, based on well-documented cases from police and military reports

**4193** number of American military deaths in Iraq since March 2003

Cover design: Robyn Hyden and Sam Abney. Photo: Creative Commons

Orbis aspires to change the atmosphere on Vanderbilt's campus and provides a voice for liberal, multicultural and minority viewpoints. This publication strives to inform the public about issues that these groups face as well as to promote diversity and unity within our community. It is a forum for discussion of social, political and religious commentary relevant to Vanderbilt, the nation and the world. Orbis was founded by a coalition of students seeking to raise consciousness about diverse ideas, cultures and backgrounds in our society. We hope to challenge the existing social atmosphere at Vanderbilt and promote a rebirth of acceptance.

# Facebooking the election

*The internet shows a surprising amount of young voter enthusiasm*

By Allie Diffendal  
FEATURES EDITOR

In preparation for November 4th, get-out-the-vote efforts by political advocacy groups like "Rock the Vote" and youth networks like MTV rallied the youth. As a result, "Rock the Vote" doubled its 2004 registration count, reaching an incredible 2.5 million new voters. According to CIRCLE, a nonpartisan organization concerned with the political engagement of American youth, such efforts certainly proved worthwhile; youth turnout increased by an estimated 2.2 million in this election.

News stations across the country have marveled at the youth turnout this year. Young people across the nation resisted hitting the snooze button Tuesday morning and chose to cast their vote instead. But what did they do after 10 PM Tuesday night?

Political advocacy groups reached young voters by meeting them where they live – the Internet – and the American youth seem to be returning to the same location to discuss Tuesday's results. Turning to blogs and online social networks like Facebook, young voters have sought like-minded individuals in hopes of expressing their post-election feelings.

An increase in political Facebook status updates on the days following the election is case in point. Logging in to Facebook the morning after Election Day, I found many of my friends had updated their status to reflect their political standing: "Brad is not proud to be a socialist," "Amy is moving to Canada,"

and "Jerry thinks the world is ending." On the other hand, "Kerry is YES WE DID," "Molly will fight anyone badmouthing that handsome president-elect," and "Daniel wants everyone to know that his middle name is freakin' Hussein."

Not only has Facebook status taken a political leaning, but so too have Facebook groups. After the

Morley Winograd and Michael Hais, authors of "Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics," say young citizens tend to ask each other for their opinions as opposed to asking the experts. "Millennials," those ages 18 to 26, seek peer approval in making their decisions. If Winograd and Hais are right, it is

no surprise that youth voters have flocked to the Internet to express their post-election feelings.

But if group-think isn't young citizens' motivation for online politics, dialogue with those holding opposing views certainly is. I have found that many of the wall posts on the pages of Facebook's political groups reveal a sense of back-and-forth communication. Young people are not only broadcasting their thoughts on the World Wide Web, but they're

also responding to the thoughts of others. Building on each other's comments, most wall posts begin with the name of an earlier poster. In fact, many discussion boards have become reminiscent of instant-messenger conversations – that is, without all of the LOLs.

Sure, some of your Facebook friends' status updates have tempted you to delete your cyber relationship all together. But before you click on that convenient "X" by their name and return to the serenity that is your ideological bubble, I urge you to think twice. Some people may think that Facebook and other youth hubs can be a waste of time, a distraction from your real life. (Indeed, I'm one of those people most of the time.) But, if people are using the technology as a means of self-expression and as a form of political discourse, then who are we to judge?

News Feed   **Status Updates**   Photos   Posted Items   Live Feed   ▾

**Lauren Adams** finds people who attend public universities that whine about socialism hilarious. How's that taxpayer-subsidized education working out for you?  
on Wednesday - 3 Comments

**Julian Wilson** is saying it will be a depressing 4 years.  
on Tuesday - Comment

**Patrick Tappan** is if obama is wrong, i dont wanna be right.  
on Wednesday - 1 Comment

**Thomas P** thinks McCain's concession speech was professional and genuine; and Obama's acceptance speech was inspiring, uniting, and just like a president.  
on Wednesday - 3 Comments

**William Lawrence** is supporting the new president... ya gotta suck it up and do it because a divided country is the last thing we need!!!  
on Wednesday - 1 Comment

**Facebook status updates and comments flew fast and hard on Wednesday, Nov. 5. Who knew all your high school friends were so interested in politics?**

announcement of the new president-elect, the group "One Million Strong for Barack" increased its membership by nearly 15,000 and its discussion board topics by 900. The group "1,000,000 Strong Against Sarah Palin" saw a decrease in 3000 members and an increase in 400 posts. The reason for the loss of members? As one poster stated, "Mission accomplished."

Many Facebook groups have already looked to the future – the 2012 presidential election. Members of "NOBAMA in '08" have already migrated to a new group, "NOBAMA in '12." Wall posts reveal a similar trend. One member of the group "I Have More Foreign Policy Experience than Sarah Palin" wrote, "I know that Africa is a continent (and I've been on it). Will you vote for me in 2012?"

*"Who's Who" in the new Obama administration:*

## Rahm Emmanuel

*Crib sheet on Rahm Israel Emmanuel, aka "Rahm-bo," aka "The Enforcer"*



**Current position:** newly appointed White House chief of staff

**Degrees:** liberal arts BA from Sarah Lawrence, 1981; MA in communications from Northwestern, 1985

**Served as:** U.S. House of Representatives, member from the fifth district of Illinois (North Chicago) since 2003; Chair of Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee for the 2006 election; advisor for Bill Clinton's presidential campaigns.

**About:** Rahm-bo (called thusly for his "take-no-prisoners" attitude) is known for his aggressive management style and prodigious fundraising abilities. His older brother Ezekiel is a bioethicist and oncologist; younger brother Ari, an LA talent agent, inspired the character for Ari Gold on HBO's *Entourage*. It has been suggested that Rahm himself inspired the character of Josh Lyman on *The West Wing* – a witty, brilliant know-it-all. He's probably the smartest guy in the room. (Assuming that Obama is not also in the room.) Before getting into politics, he was an investment banker and a trained ballet dancer.

**Fun facts:** Emmanuel lost half of his middle finger as a teenager working the meat slicer at an Arby's fast food chain, but told people for years after that he lost it serving in the Israeli army. He once mailed a rotten fish to a political pollster who had crossed him. After the 1996 Clinton campaign, in which he was the chief fundraiser, he famously yelled out names of traitors at a banquet, calling them "Dead!... Dead!... Dead!" while stabbing the table with his knife. And when Dick Cheney declared that the VP was not a member of the executive branch, Emmanuel called upon the House to cut the \$4.8 million annual budget for the office of the Vice President.

**Conclusion:** This is one guy you don't want to mess with. Are we happy to finally have our own Rove-ian strategist? Well, yeah. Where Obama is an eminently decent and preternaturally calm fellow who really seems to respect those who disagree with them, Rahm-bo seems like he knows how to get things done, even if it does hurt some feelings along the way. You have to admit, he's a lot better looking than old Turdblossom – and Rahm is even more badass. (Emmanuel is also a triathlon competitor.) *-Robyn Hyden*

*By the numbers:*

## Homelessness

**25** percentage of homeless

people who are also war veterans

**5.7** average number of months that homeless families remain homeless

**50/50** number of cities in a recent survey in which the estimated number of homeless outnumbered spots in emergency shelter facilities

**1.5 million** estimated number of children who will experience homelessness each year

**66** percent of homeless adults who struggle with drug abuse, alcoholism, or mental illness

*See our article on The Nashville Movement (p. 7) for more information about groups working to combat homelessness.*

# T. Boone Pickens: snake oil salesman or savior?

*Can Progressives trust Pickens, or should we look more closely at his motives?*

By Alex Koren  
STAFF WRITER

Just a few months ago, most Americans had never heard of T. Boone Pickens. Then, all of a sudden, people could not turn on their televisions without seeing a commercial about the Pickens Plan.

The Republicans spent the summer promoting offshore drilling as the solution to the nation's energy problems. And while they were chanting "drill, baby, drill" at the GOP convention, this oilman turned energy crusader was undermining their message by refocusing public opinion on wind and natural gas. For many progressives, including myself, it seemed too good to be true.

While Pickens is now singing the praises of bipartisanship, he has a history in Republican politics of the lowest form. Pickens was a major financial backer of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, the group that famously slandered John Kerry's military record in 2004. Though he did not engage in any partisan activity during the 2008 presidential election, Pickens is still unrepentant for funding the group, claiming that he will not apologize until John Kerry releases his military records from 1971 (when Kerry was released from active duty) to 1978 (when he was honorably discharged).

Additionally, Pickens supports energy sources that aren't environmentally friendly and may inhibit more

environmentally friendly long term solutions. He claims that he is for "everything that is American" because breaking our dependence on foreign oil is his goal.

There are also questions about Pickens' motives, given the fact that he stands to make considerable financial gains from his plan. And it's not just progressives who are skeptical. Jerry Taylor of the CATO Institute argues that the Pickens Plan is nothing more than a way for Pickens to rig the markets in favor of his own investments.

This isn't to say that Pickens doesn't have supporters in the progressive camp. Carl Pope, Executive Director of the Sierra Club, has said that Pickens is "out to save America." And while Al Gore and Pickens do fundamentally disagree over whether we should move to natural gas vehicles or electric vehicles, the two have met several times in order to find common ground.

While Pickens has been courting political leaders in both parties, it seems as though the Democrats have been more receptive than the Republicans. Both Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D- Nev.) and Rep. Rahm



Oil tycoon and energy independence advocate T. Boone Pickens turned 80 this year.

Emmanuel (D-Il.), soon to be President Obama's White House Chief of Staff, are supporters of the Pickens Plan.

Pickens has spent \$58 million and several months traveling around the country promoting not only his plan but himself. He markets himself as a straight-talking, folksy Texan. His strategy of marketing himself along with his plan has been very successful. Pickens has enlisted one million supporters for his plan in just a few months. Of course, this slick marketing campaign raises the suspicion that the salesman might be trying to cover for selling snake oil. One of his sales pitches is the particu-

larly disturbing claim that he is the only person in America with a serious plan, which is simply untrue.

There's no definitive answer as to what Pickens' motives are and whether his plan is in the best interest of the country. He may indeed have the answer to our nation's energy problems. But those who have been lured in by Pickens' folksiness and charm would do well to be a little more skeptical. As the old saying goes, "if it sounds too good to be true, usually it is."

## Amnesty International advocates for human rights

*Orbis profiles progressive student organizations monthly. To feature your organization, email [vanderbiltorbis@gmail.com](mailto:vanderbiltorbis@gmail.com)*

By Erika Hyde  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Students interested in international justice should take a close look at the work of the Vanderbilt chapter of Amnesty International. As a local chapter of the global human rights movement, Amnesty has made a name for itself on campus by coordinating international and local advocacy projects.

According to Amnesty executive board member Soo-Ryum Yang, the organization's past campaigns include raising awareness for Congo's rape epidemic, railing against censorship by hosting a Banned Books Week, and advocating on behalf of wrongly convicted death row inmates.

One of Amnesty's most successful programs is the English Conversation Sessions, designed to help international students acclimate to American life. The ECS provides an opportunity for foreign students to practice their English with Amnesty volunteers every Monday at 5PM in the Community Partnership House.

Amnesty also organized earlier this year in response to the high profile case of death row inmate Troy Davis. In the controversial trial, Davis was convicted of the 1989 murder of a police officer and sentenced to be executed. Amnesty International appealed on his behalf in light of new evidence and the recanting of several witnesses. At Vanderbilt, Amnesty members started a letter writing campaign to send to the authorities in the Davis case. "In the mind-

set of justice, the courts play an important role. At the same time, regular people have an important role as citizens to tell the courts and the legislators how we feel. We need to be expressing our opinions," said Yang.

As Amnesty looks to the future, they're considering several projects to help the local Somalian community and to raise awareness on the current devastation in Haiti. "We look for projects at the intersection of local and international issues, where we can help directly with our hands," said Yang. Amnesty's method of operation includes letter writing campaigns, tutoring services, and documentary series.



**Get involved:** - visit Amnesty's website at [studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/amnesty](http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/amnesty)

-volunteer to help with English conversation sessions every Monday night, 5-6 PM at the Community Partnership House

-join in Amnesty's letter writing campaigns to free political prisoners around the world. December 5th through the 14th is the Global Write-a-thon; register to participate online at [amnestyusa.org](http://amnestyusa.org)

-email [vanderbilt.amnesty@gmail.com](mailto:vanderbilt.amnesty@gmail.com) for more information

# States veto civil rights

*California's Prop. 8 and other ballot initiatives rolled back same-sex civil liberties*

By **Evan Didier**  
WEB EDITOR

In what was otherwise a very good election night for activists of the left, gay rights took a pretty heavy drubbing. Arkansas voters barred gay couples from adopting children. Both Florida and Arizona amended their constitutions to state that marriage is between a man and a woman. In California, voters bestowed chickens with more rights (CA Proposition 2) while they eliminated same-sex marriages via constitutional amendment (CA Proposition 8).

I congratulate the chickens on their momentous victory.

As unjust as it may be, the outcomes in Arizona, Arkansas and Florida did not come as a great shock except to the most naively optimistic gay activists and the most fearful Christians who are convinced that gays are waging a covert campaign to recruit people's children and take over the world. To be sure, the polls predicted a close vote in Arizona, the only state to have rejected a gay marriage ban (in 2006), and likewise in Florida, where the amendment needed at least 60 percent of the vote, but few were holding their breath that the amendments would be defeated. Arkansas, home to 2008 Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, was largely written off beforehand as a victory for the religious right.

California's result on Tuesday night, however, came as a shock to many people, both inside and outside the state. After all, California has a reputation for being America's bastion of progressive values and causes. The California Supreme Court ruled earlier this year that same-sex couples had a (state) constitutional right to marriage. Polls taken from May through September suggested that the amendment would fail. October polls painted a much tighter race but still gave the edge to the "no" vote. Both sides sensed a challenge and turned Proposition 8 into the most expensive ballot initiative in American history. Nevertheless, when it came down to it, Californians opted to approve Proposition 8 with around 52 percent in support.

At first blush, the reasons for passage

of Proposition 8 are fairly self-evident. One thing is clear: supporters of the amendment were well organized and well funded. Leaving aside the irony that Mormons were the epitome of "alternative lifestyles" in regards to marriage a little over a century ago, Mormons contributed more than a third of the dollars to organizations supporting the amendment and lent considerable manpower to the effort. There were also some false and provocative suggestions made by Proposition 8's supporters claiming that teachers in California's schools would be forced to devote class time to the topic of same-sex marriage and that all religious institutions would be required to perform same-sex marriages.

At any rate, something apparently worked.

This is not to say that the gay activists opposing Proposition 8 ran a particularly good campaign. Fundraising trailed significantly behind Proposition 8's supporters until the last few weeks before the election and many people have criticized the "No on 8" television advertisements as lackluster. Some overly enthusiastic opponents, such as San Francisco Mayor

***The outcomes in Arizona, Arkansas and Florida did not come as a great shock, except to the most naively optimistic gay activists and the most fearful Christians (who are convinced that gays are waging a covert campaign to recruit people's children and take over the world).***

Gavin Newsom, made it seem like gay marriage was going to be forced down Californians' throats whether they liked it or not. Understandably, people often do not like the insinuation that they have to accept something and this may have turned off a number of people in the middle.

Yet the reasons for Proposition 8's passage may run a bit deeper than the aforementioned factor and are not entirely limited to the state of California.

Some of things working for Proposition 8 were demographics. A solid majority of African-Americans and Hispanics oppose same-sex marriage and they comprised a significant percentage of the electorate in California during this year's elections. Similarly, a lot of older people turned

out, and a majority of them oppose same-sex marriage as well.

On the other hand, Proposition 8 opponents also followed failed strategies and tactics that many other gay rights campaigns have used in the past.

Canvassers often did not venture outside of the safe confines of urban and coastal California, areas that were already leaning against Proposition 8. While it might be more fun to campaign in places where you are already loved in an effort to increase turnout, supporters of Proposition 8 did go into the cities and to places where they were not welcome and it is quite possible that they managed to pick up some votes that way.

Furthermore, the coalition opposing Proposition 8 was composed mostly of gay activists and no one else (with the exception of the state's teacher union). Given that gay rights is usually considered a progressive cause, working with other aligned groups to form a broader and greater coalition may have proved helpful and should certainly have not been too difficult a feat to accomplish in California. True, the amendment's supporters basically only had the support of the religious right, but as it stands, the religious right far outnumbers activists for gay rights.

Belittling and ridiculing (and sometimes physically attacking) those opposed to gay marriage is counterproductive for gay rights activists. There is certainly a sizeable percentage of the population who are bigots and homophobes and nothing anyone can say or do will change their minds. Even so, there is also a



Anti-gay rights activists rally outside San Francisco's City Hall this summer to protest marriage equality.

Photo courtesy **The Bilerico Project**

sizeable percentage of the population who believe in some degree of equal civil rights and non-discrimination policies but feel that marriage is a matter best relegated to tradition and religion. Calling these people names makes them far more likely to show up and vote to ban gay marriage. A better tactic might be to reassure such voters that gay marriage will in no way affect the sanctity of other marriages and that no religious institution will be forced to conduct marriages contrary to its beliefs (which is already the case, as one Christian sect can refuse to conduct a marriage ceremony for members of another Christian sect). Likewise, laying all of the blame on Mormons for Proposition 8's passage and calling for boycotts of Utah (where two-fifths of the people are not even Mormon) is shortsighted, disregarding the fact that Californians, not just Mormons (or even the religious right), passed the ban, and makes the opponents of Proposition 8 look like sore losers. Even if they are understandably hurting from the loss, nobody likes sore losers.

Finally, there is still a silver lining to be found in Proposition 8 and gay rights this election. While anti-gay marriage ballot measures have succeeded in every state where they were offered, support for such initiatives has decreased from routinely exceeding 60 percent (often an overwhelming 70-plus percent) less than

See **Civil Rights**, page 6

# Nashville Kurdish community thrives

*As a part of a series on local immigrant communities, this month we look at the large local Kurdish population*

By Jennifer Dennard  
STAFF WRITER

Outside the Vanderbubble, Nashville is a diverse and cosmopolitan place. The city surrounding us boasts a huge immigrant population, and many of these are political refugees. One particularly significant group, especially considering the current Iraq War, is the local Kurdish population. Many Kurds come to Nashville to escape persecution in the Middle East. The best-known example of this dates to 1988, when Saddam Hussein waged genocide against Iraqi Kurds. Thousands of Kurds were killed by chemical warfare and mass destruction, and even more simply disappeared. This, however, was only the culmination of past persecution and violence against the Kurds in Iraq and elsewhere.

The Kurdish ethnic group originates in various countries in the Middle East including Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Armenia. A large portion also live in Turkey, where they make up approximately 20 percent of the population and are the second largest ethnic group. The area where the Kurds live is sometimes referred to as Kurdistan

**In the United States, the largest concentration of Kurds is right here in Nashville, where the Kurdish immigrant population totals 10,000.**

and encompasses parts of all these countries. Overall, nearly 40 million Kurds live in the area, though some have fled to other countries to avoid persecution.

The Kurds are the largest ethnic group without a nation of their own. Split between various regions, the Kurds have given up their fight for independence and now look for merely autonomous rule within each nation. In the United States, the largest concentration of Kurds is here in Nashville. According to Mwafac

Mohammed, director of Kurdish Achievers, the Nashville Kurdish population totals 10,000. He explained that the first families

arrived in Nashville in the 1970s and friends and relatives have followed. A very traditional people, they have established

a tight-knit community and culture in Nashville. "There are over 70 Kurdish-owned businesses like bakeries, dealerships, you name it," says Mohammed. Although Kurds do live elsewhere in the United States, they often move to Nashville for the spiritual and social support that such a large community provides.

Like other refugee populations,

the Kurds have faced problems in the past, especially with language barriers. However, many of the elderly Kurds now have adult children to aid them with

in touch with family in Iraq, Iran and elsewhere. Mohammed explained that cell phones, in particular, have made this much easier. Kurds in the United States prefer very traditional weddings. They even hold traditional funerals for those who die overseas, utilizing communications technology to stay connected. Some Kurds do wish to eventually return home to Kurdistan, but others, happy with their lives here, plan to stay.

In general, the Kurds have been very successful in Nashville, and groups like Kurdish Achievers will ensure that they continue to be. Kurdish Achievers is a program that helps high school students apply to college and prevents gang activity in

Kurdish communities. This is in response to the gang Kurdish Pride, which has been growing in recent years. The program brings in college students and other mentors to help with SAT/ACT preparation. Vanderbilt STAND volunteers with the group and has been very enthusiastic about the attitudes and work ethics of the Kurdish youth.

If you want to learn more about working with the Kurds and other Nashville immigrant communities, contact Vanderbilt STAND ([studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/stand](http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/stand)), or visit [nashvillekurds.com](http://nashvillekurds.com) to learn more about the local Kurdish population.



The Kurdish flag was first flown during the Kurdish independence movement from the Ottoman Empire. It is flown in Iraqi Kurdistan but is banned in Syria and Iran.

Photo courtesy Nashville Kurds.com

translating. Interestingly, many Kurds now know English before arriving in the United States.

In general, the Kurds have prospered in Nashville and are no longer concentrated in just one area, as they were previously in the Woodbine area. Now, some Kurdish families can afford to buy houses throughout Nashville. The Kurds tend to have large families of six or seven people, and generally all family members work. "[We are] hard working and very independent," says Mohammed of the Kurdish community.

Still, Kurdish immigrants maintain traditional culture and contacts. They keep

## Civil Rights *continued from page 5*

a decade ago to a weak majority of 50 to 60 percent today. A 2000 California ballot measure to ban gay marriage via statute garnered 61.2 percent support; that number has fallen nearly 9 percent to around 52.5 percent for Proposition 8 in 2008. It might not be victory, but it is progress; the number represents a decline of more than a percentage point per year. In the meantime, same-sex (and heterosexual) couples in California can continue to register for domestic partnerships which

provide many of the same advantages afforded to those in a heterosexual marriage.

Most importantly, gay activists should not give up hope that a change in public sentiment and laws will not arrive within the next decade. Almost any state with a desire to ban same-sex marriage has done so by now and thus leaves far less ammunition for any further anti-gay ballot initiatives, although the religious right can still pursue bans on gay

couples adopting children in some states. In addition, the appeal of bashing gays at the polls appears to be losing its most enticing attribute: turning out voters for the Republican presidential candidate in swing states. Florida ended up in the Obama column this year after having voted for George W. Bush twice (or at least once) even though its gay marriage ban passed.

Finally, as macabre as it might sound, a good number of the most ardent support-

ers of gay marriage bans are going to be succumbing to old age and its complications in the next few years. Except in very select elections (1960, Kennedy versus Nixon), the dead cannot vote. Combined with the fact that younger Americans tend to be supportive of same-sex marriage, falling support for anti-gay ballot measures, and perhaps a change in tactics by gay activists, the outlook for gay rights in the United States is still hopeful.

# Nashville coalition fights for social justice

*Local activist groups join together to combat inequality*

By Jon Christian  
ISSUES EDITOR

The south may not be known for its progressive politics, but Nashville now finds itself home to a growing number of coalitions and activist groups devoted to breaking down barriers of race and class in order to make Tennessee a better place for everybody. Leading this trend is The Nashville Movement, a coalition formed in 2007 when the mid-Tennessee chapter of Jobs with Justice joined forces with the Nashville Homeless Power Project, Urban EpiCenter and the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition. These groups believed they could better serve Middle Tennessee by working together towards the long-term goal of creating a broad infrastructure for worker empowerment.

**Mid Tennessee Jobs with Justice** is the local chapter of the national organization Jobs with Justice. Formed in 1987, it seeks to help workers fight for workplace justice through grassroots organization and activism. Central to the coalition's success is the pledge, signed by over 100,000 people nationally, to "be there at least five times a year for someone else's struggle as well as their own." With over 40 national chapters and more than 600 campaigns under its belt, Jobs with Justice is a force to be reckoned with in the modern workers' rights movement.

The political empowerment group **Urban EpiCenter** has seen little over a

year of action, and its exciting message of grassroots activism rings true in today's wintry economic climate. The organization works for racial and economic justice from the angle of a "radical vision of democracy" in which the working class poor and indigenous activists are the fountainheads of social change. "We want a participatory democracy, where all people are involved ... we don't want the citizens' voice to end once they pull that lever; we want to hold politicians accountable," says EpiCenter's Keith Caldwell. EpiCenter continues to

work for a living wage and is in the process of creating an award which will highlight the work of outstanding local activists.

The **Nashville Homeless Power Project** seeks to address root causes of homelessness and to devise innovative solutions. Made up primarily of the homeless and formerly homeless, NHPP believes that

securing civil and human rights such as a living wage, affordable housing and health care will go a long way toward preventing homelessness. The organization also fights back against the abuse of Nashville's homeless by the police force. Although the roots of NHPP stretch back to the mid 1990s, the group was founded in its current form in 2002. Since then the group has grown to receive significant media attention, secured commitments to homeless rights from Mayoral candidates, and held workshops with members of the Nashville police force.

The **Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition** focuses on issue of immigrants' rights. This work

is of unusual immediacy in Tennessee, which has experienced among the fastest rate of immigrant growth in the United States in recent years. TIRRC seeks to give a voice to and to empower immigrants to participate actively in the community, as well as to increase public awareness of issues surrounding the immigrant population.

TIRRC, NHPP, the Urban EpiCenter and Jobs with Justice are working together on several campaigns. The recession, high unemployment, and low wages have affected lower-income families tremendously, and even working families have a difficult time making ends meet. Winning living wages for Nashville workers ranks highly among the goals of the Nashville Movement, as the cost of food, gas and housing has inflated beyond the average wage increase. Especially hard hit by the economic recession are day laborers, who have a harder time finding work as the recession pinches the budgets of the upper and middle class patrons on whom many of them rely for work.

A success story can be found in the Nashville Movement's work with car wash workers. Shur Brite Car Wash, located at 1713 West End Avenue, doesn't discriminate against employees based on felony convictions, but its treatment of workers was appalling: workers were paid as little as \$2.00 an hour, some still awaited extensive unpaid back wages, and their so-called "break room" was comprised of a microwave balanced on chemical barrels. Nashville Movement activists infiltrated the company, generated excitement over improving conditions, and helped to file a lawsuit against Shur Brite. Shur Brite employees are now working for schedules, sick days and a real break room.

The Nashville Movement has also devoted great energy to supporting the



The Nashville Movement helped secure improved working conditions for employees at Shur Brite Car Wash.

Photo courtesy The Nashville Movement.org

Nashville Metro Taxi Drivers Association, an organization of and for taxi drivers seeking more fair and negotiable contracts. They also work to combat negative portrayals of taxi drivers in the media and popular consciousness. NMTDA member Ismail Abdinasir has said, "We work long hours, sometimes 16-18 hour days, just to make ends meet, but we have no say when it comes to the fees we pay to the cab companies for our permits, or the number of drivers out there. The vast majority of taxi drivers provide efficient, courteous service, and speak great English. We are a very important part of this city and the tourism industry here. So why is it that we've been seeing negative portrayals of who we are and the service we provide?"

The Nashville Movement has made its presence known on campus as well, working with Vanderbilt staff members to reinvigorate the Living Wage campaign and cooperating with Vanderbilt Students of Nonviolence to coordinate help for the taxi drivers. VSN is ironing out the kinks in a schedule to help the Taxi Drivers Association staff make its presence better felt in the community, as well as to organize an open community forum on campus to address the needs of Vanderbilt staff members and the state of the Living Wage campaign.

## The Nashville Movement

A Coalition for Economic and Racial Justice [www.thenashvillemovement.org](http://www.thenashvillemovement.org)

# Vanderbilt community celebrates election results

*After Tuesday's election results, we sought the reactions of Vanderbilt's progressive community.*

## Nick Zeppos, Chancellor

Everyone who participated and watched yesterday and throughout this long election journey has to be proud of America and its constitutional system. All elections - but particularly those in challenging times - can appear tedious and often deeply emotional and divisive. But at the end of this process, where our cherished liberties of free speech and debate were on full display as robust and often cacophonous, America went in record numbers to participate in the exercise of that most fundamental of rights, the right to vote for the leaders of our nation.

To see Senator McCain lead and speak so passionately and patriotically in his speech last night, followed by President-elect Obama's inspired and measured speech, made everyone proud of our great nation. History was indeed made, and my hopes and dreams as a citizen, parent, and college president are that our great nation grow, prosper, lead, and continue to live up to the majestic ideals that launched our founding and animate the best in America. And we should never forget Vanderbilt's special place in this American dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We do embrace these truths to be self-evident.

Shameless plug: I am also excited to be teaching a course on The Federalist Papers next semester. As we all looked at the lines of voters, the passionate debate continuing to the end, the immediate joining of hands by these two candidates, and the orderly and inspiring change in leadership, we are reminded again at the genius and vision of our Founders in launching all of us on this historical and continuing journey. I am eager to read and discuss these classic texts with our exceptional students in light of this historic election!

## Haley Swenson, alumna

The election that seemed like it would never end has ended, and it had a pretty happy ending. As a young progressive, I've had few opportunities to celebrate after elections. The cynic in me hesitates to celebrate even when Democrats gain seats or gained Congressional majorities like in 2006. America's two-party system leaves so much to be desired, and it usually seems actual progressive thinking is the exception rather than the rule, even among Democrats.

But Obama is the only candidate ever to break down the shell of my hatred for electoral politics as often as he has. It seems painfully cliché to use words like hope and change right now, after they've been used in almost every speech of the election, both Republican and Democratic, and words like that are completely empty without any substantive action behind them. And Obama's presidency promises big achievements, like less inequality, universal health insurance, and a renewed U.S. reputation of strength and goodness throughout the world. Yet, I also remind myself that he has not even had the chance to deliver, and that if I actually believe the world can be a better place than it is - and I do - I should try being hopeful and optimistic until I have a good reason not to be.

*"To see Senator McCain lead and speak so passionately and patriotically in his speech last night, followed by President-elect Obama's inspired and measured speech, made everyone proud of our great nation."*

My overall hope for the next four years is that Obama's presidency isn't just historic because of the racial barrier he has broken, but that it marks a rare time when a politician who promised improvement delivers on even some of it. But it is also important that we remember being hopeful isn't enough. We must hold our new president to a high standard, and constantly remind him of the things he promised. Every new presidential term comes with the fear that nothing will change for the better, despite the promises we heard on the trail, but in this case, the president-elect gives me as much optimism as I could possibly hope for, and that, at least, is a change worth celebrating.

## Evan Didier, senior, political science major

As cliché as this must sound, Obama's resounding victory does give me hope that our country has come a long way from 1964. And maybe that was Obama's greatest appeal all along; he represented a person who could help Americans look beyond the past in order to build a better future.

This election also repudiated the right's "culture war" and divisive focus on archaic social norms. While this was not certainly always the case at the state level this year, it would appear that the Republican presidential electoral strategy of counting on people's blind and overriding adherence to "protecting" old social norms failed in this election.

More importantly, although the laissez-faire wing of the Republican Party would disagree, Obama's win demonstrates that a majority of American voters have finally rejected Reaganomics and the myth that a completely unregulated and largely untaxed (or regressively taxed) economy is the best option for American society.

To end on a more cautious note, this election did not give an open invitation to the Democratic Party to do anything it pleases, or, worse, to do nothing at all. Within the next couple of years, Democrats will need to establish how they have a healthier vision of America's future that is also achievable within a relatively short time frame. Democrats cannot afford to forget that they won because of who they are not (Republicans), not because of who they are....

*"The cynic in me hesitates to celebrate even when Democrats gain seats or gained Congressional majorities like in 2006. America's two-party system leaves so much to be desired, and it usually seems actual progressive thinking is the exception rather than the rule, even among Democrats. But Obama is the only candidate ever to break down the shell of my hatred for electoral politics as often as he has."*

## Sam Abney, junior, French & philosophy major

Tuesday night, as the next First Family was announced and the four Obamas, hand in hand, took the stage in Chicago's Grant Park for their first appearance since his victory, it was hard not to be overcome with emotion. At that moment, thinking of all the bad choices this country has made and will certainly make in the future, it seemed we had finally gotten one right. The Bush years would finally come to a close, and who could have been more suited to lead us back in the right direction? Our president-elect is a reflection of this country; he represents all of our people, their stories, and their hopes and dreams in a way his predecessors could not.

The jubilant celebration all around the world Tuesday night said everything. This was, in so many ways, a moment of redemption for our nation, and there could have been no better symbol of that than the appearance of the new First Family together. If nothing else, the stunning visual change of a young, vibrant family, an African American family, was a clear sign of a coming American renewal. As clearly as at any time in our history, we showed the

world we can live up to the high standards of our founding principles. For children across America and all over the world, including the students of his own former elementary school in Jakarta, Indonesia, holding copies of his portrait while they watched election returns excitedly with a projector in their classroom, Barack Obama's election makes the mythical American dream, that determination and hard work can get you anywhere you

# Moving toward life sentences

*The death penalty has become less frequent in the United States, but that doesn't mean it will be abolished any time soon*

By Matthew Corritore  
CAMPUS PROGRESS

Last year, New Jersey became the first state to outright abolish its death penalty since 1965. And despite upholding the constitutionality of Kentucky's lethal injection procedure in April of this year, in June the Supreme Court concluded the execution of child rapists is illegal.

By all outward appearances, the death penalty in the United States faces an uncertain future. Ever since the Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in 1976's *Gregg v. Georgia*, its use has been gradually restricted. In 2007, 42 inmates were executed, down from a post-*Gregg* high of 98 in 1999. Fourteen states and the District of Columbia don't have death penalty statutes; 3 more haven't executed anyone in four decades. Meanwhile, Illinois granted clemency to all 167 of its death row inmates in 2003, citing a flawed sentencing process. The emergence of reliable DNA evidence has led to the exoneration nationwide of more than 200 wrongly convicted people.

Courts have limited who can be put to death and outlawed some execution procedures, while New York's court of appeals even ruled the state death penalty law unconstitutional. There's debate among some scholars and death penalty opponents whether the restrictions placed on capital punishment post-*Gregg* have really put abolition within reach.

## The popular opinion factor

The most emphatic way that executions could be stopped is if the Supreme Court found death an inherently unconstitutional punishment—that it violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of "cruel and unusual" punishments. A court precedent can be undone, but that occurs with far less frequency than does the reversal of state and federal laws by legislators. But just because a Court ruling is the key to abolition doesn't mean litigation is the sole mean to this end. The Court's 1958 *Trop v. Dulles* decision established the standard justices would use in *Gregg* and henceforth to assess death penalty challenges: A punishment is cruel and unusual if it is at odds with the "evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society."

This standard made public opinion directly relevant to legal challenges against capital punishment. Death penalty opponents gained a new avenue through which to attempt to overturn capital punishment's constitutionality. So they shifted resources from lawsuits to educating the public and state legislatures about purported problems with capital punishment. "The whole forum changed from the courts to the legislature," said Renny Cushing, executive director of Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights, an anti-death

penalty group. "Gradually there's been recognition that the battle has been taking place on a state-to-state basis."

## Chipping away at capital punishment?

As anti-death penalty groups began more grassroots education and lobbying efforts, the Supreme Court kept a foot in the door by placing limitations on the use of the death penalty. 1977's *Coker v. Georgia* made death for rape of an adult woman unconstitutional. 1986's *Ford v. Wainwright* banned the execution of the insane. In 2002, the Court ruled that the execution of the mentally retarded was cruel and unusual, and in 2005 it ended the execution of juveniles. Despite upholding Kentucky's lethal injection procedure in *Baze v. Rees* in April 2008, the Court just a few months later deemed that punishing child rape with death is unlawful.

Emboldened by these legal victories and some success delaying executions in states, reformers are generally optimistic about the prospect of abolition. "Abolition is inevitable," said Cushing, seeing "the development of a broad political movement that is based in states that has supported legal developments."

This optimistic viewpoint holds that courts are gradually "chipping away" at capital punishment in response to evolving societal views, first banning its more egregious manifestations on its way to striking down the death penalty itself. Justice John Paul Stevens articulated this view in his *Baze* opinion, writing, "Instead of ending the controversy, I am now convinced that this

case will generate debate not only about the constitutionality of the three-drug [lethal injection] protocol...but also about the justification for the death penalty itself."

## The death penalty's real status

In contrast, some commentators challenge the notion that the restrictions placed on capital punishment foretell a steady march towards abolition. Journalist Dahlia Lithwick coined the term "Happy Death Box" to describe the widely-accepted execution procedure that may result from reformers' demands for painless, sterilized lethal injections. "Tender and loving" executions could be detrimental to abolition, she argues, because the Happy Death Box could "mitigate the outrageousness of the state taking a human life."

Nicholas Levi applies the same logic in a law article, arguing that capital punishment was on the verge of abolition in the early 1800s, just

before private execution laws were enacted that have since prevented the public from realizing the brutality of capital punishment.

In the same way, limiting who can be executed to the opinions of those the public perceives as most "culpable" could fuel beliefs that only the worst of the worst criminals are put to death (think about the popular execution of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh), masking other purported flaws in the process that opponents say produce arbitrary, sometimes racist death sentences.

Some in the anti-death penalty movement, like Executive Director of Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty Esther Brown, think there is this slim risk. "There is of course that danger," she said referring to the possibility a restricted but popular application of the death penalty will develop. But she stresses reform "does save lives," leaving her and others few options. Ultimately though, Brown is still confident her organization can persuade state legislators that a moratorium on executions is necessary to study problems with the death penalty (albeit that effort, in Alabama, was unsuccessful this year).

Perhaps the key question is whether campaigns to restrict how the death penalty is used also educate the public about its other alleged flaws. Most death penalty opponents think they do. "The Supreme Court helped just to start dialogue that the practice was going on," said Hooman Hedayati, president of Students Against the Death Penalty (SADP) and a Campus Progress representative, speaking about the Court's ruling against death for child rape. "Even as courts have tried to make it more humane, it still is the

See **Death penalty**, page 10

**Limiting who can be executed to the opinions of those the public perceives as most "culpable" could fuel beliefs that only the worst of the worst criminals are put to death (think about the popular execution of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh), masking other purported flaws in the process that opponents say produce arbitrary, sometimes racist death sentences.**

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## Obama win *continued from page 8*

set your mind to go, seem somehow a little closer to the truth. Our new president is biracial, the child of a single-parent household, the son of a Kenyan father and, yes, his middle name is Hussein, and he never let any of this hold him back. America chose him over every other candidate because he was the right person for the job. If that doesn't get to you, I don't know what could.

President Obama (Doesn't that have a refreshing ring to it?) will not be able to solve all of America's problems. He will have to work with realistic goals. He too will make mistakes. He may not live up to everything some of us expect, or would like. As many times as we have heard him called a "socialist," "the most liberal senator," or prospective "Redistributionist-in-Chief" during this campaign season, Obama remains essentially in the pragmatic center-left. His election does not mean that progressives can stop campaigning for what they believe or that we should no longer be critical of our government. If anything, our active involvement in government is even more important now, when, with a Democratic president and a solidly Democratic Congress, we can realize many of the changes we have hoped for. We face serious challenges, but we have already taken the most important first step.

It really does feel like a new day in America. It feels like our time is here.

*"We face serious challenges, but we have already taken the most important first step. It really does feel like a new day in America. It feels like our time is here."*

## Death penalty *continued from page 9*

same barbaric and cruel practice," he said, emphasizing that the public is more concerned than ever about its flaws.

Abe Bonowitz, spokesperson for the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, agrees. "Anything that limits the death penalty is a good thing. It gets more people talking about it and paying attention to it."

### The obstacles to abolition

The effect of death penalty restrictions aside, other roadblocks may disrupt the drive towards abolition in the long run. For one, it seems unlikely the Supreme Court will soon reverse the 1976 precedent that reasserted the death penalty's constitutionality. And barring an influx of progressive new justices, the Roberts Court is not soon expected to agree to hear a direct challenge of the death penalty itself.

But perhaps the biggest barrier is the Fifth Amendment. It specifically mentions "capital" crime, giving judges license to claim the founding fathers expected death sentences would long be part of American society. A creative ruling that reconciles the Fifth and Eighth Amendments would be decidedly out-of-character for the Roberts court.

Optimists point to a 2006 Gallup poll that showed for the first time respondents were statistically tied about whether life imprisonment without parole was preferable to a death sentence. But the Court's lackluster record interpreting the Eighth Amendment is enough to raise doubts that the Court would take new change into account. Benjamin Wittes, fellow and research director at the Brookings Institution, argues that the Court has failed to even consistently define the Eighth Amendment's meaning; these are hardly fertile conditions for a momentous judicial consensus against capital punishment.

But some death penalty opponents think the Court's erratic jurisprudence could work in their favor if there

was irrefutable evidence of popular opposition to capital punishment. Hedayati argues that "often justices just go by public opinion" when deciding death penalty cases. "When the Supreme Court rules against the death penalty, most American people tend to be against [that application of] the death penalty," he said.

### Building grassroots opposition

But even if substantial popular opposition to the death penalty would satisfy the Court's "evolving standards of decency" qualifier, there may still be serious impediments to amassing high support for abolition. As Wittes points out, current signs of growing public disenchantment with capital punishment may just be a reflection of declines in the national crime rate since 1990. If crime rises again, so could support for executions.

Also, several states are responsible for the vast majority of executions annually. In 2007, Texas alone was responsible for 62 percent of executions; the top six executing states made up 90 percent of the annual total. It is difficult to envision executives or legislatures halting executions in these states. In fact, legislation to abolish the death penalty or enact moratoriums on executions was introduced in a handful of states this year, including Maryland, Connecticut, Nebraska, Virginia, and Alabama. None of the bills passed.

Challenges withstanding, opponents are nevertheless adamant that abolition is coming. "People are concerned about unfairness and protection of an innocent person," said Abe Bonowitz. "We always will have arbitrary facts deciding who ends up with the death penalty and not the worst of the worst."

And to the surprise of some, opponents are making some headway even in what Brown describes as "southern, blood-thirsty states." Last year, anti-death penalty groups in

### Claire Costantino, sophomore

After getting creeped out by Wolf Blitzer and his holograms, I switched my election coverage from CNN to the Daily Show's election special, "America's Choice." I felt like a generational stereotype, but I found their fake reporting less absurd than a hologram of will.i.am. When Jon Stewart interrupted Stephen Colbert mid-joke to announce that Barack Obama had won the presidency, I didn't believe him. It was so early to announce a winner, Jon Stewart makes things up on his show, but perhaps most convincingly: my guy had won! I'm a liberal from Texas, so I don't see my candidate win that frequently. I wasn't really a politically aware person during the Clinton years (I was in elementary school), so my whole history with elections is largely a tale of heartbreak. Now, however, I am excited to adjust my viewpoint from underdog to champion.

Admittedly, I have been an Obama skeptic at times. I supported Hillary Clinton in the primaries, and Obama seemed naïve in comparison to a grounded John McCain. In our ugly political discourse, a man who talks about hope and change seems like a long shot, especially when he is a minority who must brave allegations of "cavorting with terrorists." But on Tuesday night, as I watched Obama's acceptance speech, I let myself feel all the things I once dismissed as foolish or impossible. Barack Obama's victory reaffirms all the best things I like to think about America – that we really do mean all those encouraging slogans. If Obama continues to bring out the best in us as he did on November 4, then I eagerly await the next four years.

Texas convinced Governor Rick Perry to commute Kenneth Foster's controversial death sentence to life-in-prison with chance for parole just hours before his scheduled execution. Describing SADP's involvement—along with the support of others—in the effort, Hedayati said that "we showed last year it is possible to come and stop the death penalty in Texas." In light of such efforts, the future of the death penalty is uncertain. Unless grassroots activists can sway the public, they may come to accept a restricted form of death, making the death penalty an enduring national institution. But only time will tell.

*M a t t h e w Corritore is a senior at Brown University and Editor-in-Chief of the Brown Contemporary, part of the Campus Publications Network.*

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# November–December Events

To submit an event to the Orbis calendar, please visit [vanderbiltorbis.com](http://vanderbiltorbis.com) and click on our 'Calendar' section

9	10 SPEAR general body meeting, 7 PM, Sarratt 325	11 "The Price Tag of Peace," Holocaust lecture series, 7 PM, Sarratt Cinema  Veteran's Day  Orbis meeting, 9 PM, Sarratt 116	12  Asian New Year Festival interest meeting, 7 PM, Commons Multipurpose Room	13	14 Women in Academe Series, 12:10 – 1 PM, Black Cultural Center	15 Diwali by Masala-Sace: dinner at 5 (\$8), performance at 8 (+\$4), Langford auditorium SPEAR tree planting, East Nashville, 8 AM google Nashville Green Drinks
16 "Art and Remembrance," Holocaust lecture series, 6 PM, Sarratt Cinema	17 AASA welcomes Lela Lee: Creator of "Angry Little Girls," 7 PM, SLC Ballroom A	18	19	20	21 VSN trip to protest School of the Americas	22
23	24 Nashville NOW (National Organization for Women) meets at 7 PM, First Unitarian Universalist Church	25	26 T h a n k s g i v i n g	27 B r e a k	28	29
30	1 WORLD AIDS DAY  Lambda meeting, 7 PM, K.C. Potter Center	2 IMAGE meeting, 4 PM, Sarratt 208	3	4 Vandy Fems meeting (every Thursday), 6-7 PM, Women's Center	5	6
7	8	9	10 New Orbis on newsstands!	DEC. 11 – APPLICATION FOR EPA RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS FOR UNDERGRAD ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY DUE (\$8000 AND PAID SUMMER INTERNSHIP). SEE SPEAR WEBSITE		Nov 12 – 14 <b>Vagina Monologues auditions</b> at the Women's Center; all faculty, students, and staff invited to audition; no acting experience needed! Contact <a href="mailto:ginger.r.skaggs@vanderbilt.edu">ginger.r.skaggs@vanderbilt.edu</a>

You are invited to attend public meetings on Davidson county's sustainability, where ideas and strategies will be discussed. Come and contribute your ideas to help shape a greener city!

DOWNTOWN Tuesday, November 11, 2008 5:00 - 7:00pm  
Nashville Convention Center, (Room 209 - 210)

WEST Saturday, November 15, 2008 10:00am - 12:00pm  
Green Hills Library, 3701 Benham Avenue

**On World AIDS Day, (December 1st) at Meharry Medical College's Learning Resource Center, ONE Voice will be presented by a First Person Theatre group. On each evening, HIV rapid screening will be free and available to all. For more information, contact Nashville CARES at (615) 259-4866 or go to [worldaidsdaynashville.org](http://worldaidsdaynashville.org).**

## Are progressives too optimistic about the election results?

*Yes, the American Left has unrealistic expectations of Barack Obama*

By Allison Heiser  
STAFF WRITER

Yes, there is hope. Yes, we can. But will we? Will he? As Obama said on election night, "This victory alone is not the change we seek. It is only the chance for us to make that change." That chance is now present, but our problems have only begun.

Obama faces two wars and a burgeoning recession that drain money from education, health care, and social security, not to mention rising medical costs and a failing social security system. With this mountain of grave problems, one can only wonder if we mere mortals are up to the challenge. These next four years will affect our well being twenty and fifty years on. We should be cautious with any politician, especially one without executive experience, who confronts problems of such import.

His victory deserves praise, not least for breaking racial



**If Barack says we can, then yes we CAN!**

barriers, how far he has come, and what kind of history he has made. After eight years of Bush, we need a change in the White House. Progressives are too eager to see Obama's victory as a policy mandate. Rather, it's a reaction against the arrogant governance of the Bush administration that ran up deficits, damaged our international reputation, and ignored the middle class. McCain simply represented to many voters more of the same kind of Republican government.

Although there is hope he will end the wars, reform health care, and diversify our energy supply, everything on the progressive agenda can not be realized during the Obama presidency. The nation does not seem to be as progressive as many Democrats would hope. Accompanying Obama's win are a myriad of state constitutional amendments and referenda that go against the progressive agenda. Arkansas has banned couples living together but not married – such as gay couples – from adopting. Voters in California, a progressive oasis, banned same-sex marriage. Nebraska approved a constitutional amendment outlawing racial preferences and affirmative action in public universities and by the government. And Republicans still have the power of the filibuster.

There is a multitude of reasons to celebrate our victories. The Democratic Party made great strides on the fourth of November. But in the end, change takes support from all sides – not just from Democrats. I believe the excitement will soon die down and we will be faced with reality once again.

*Of course not! The election was a progressive victory and represents great possibility*

By Nakul Shekhawat  
STAFF WRITER

Don't believe for a second that President-elect Barack Obama will become a stodgily centrist president upon assuming office. Throughout his campaign, he has promised rigorous bipartisanship, even promising to nominate moderate Republicans to his cabinet. But it would be unduly pessimistic of progressives to assume that the man who carried America by a margin of almost 200 electoral votes will renege on his progressive promises. If President Bush's one percent margin of re-election was a "mandate," then Obama's popular vote margin of over six percent is a virtual coronation.

Senate Democrats are just 3 seats shy of a filibuster-proof majority, while House Democrats hold 70 more seats than Republicans. Moderate Republicans are eager to align with the victor, distance themselves from their embarrassing neo-conservative wing, and appear productive in order to hold on to the few seats they have. This is the textbook definition of what Paul Krugman calls a "major political realignment." After the disastrous Bush years, Krugman notes that this election was "a referendum on political philosophy – and the progressive philosophy won."

Less than a week after Election Day, there are already subtle indications of an improvement in national political tone. At last week's press conference on the economy, Obama called reporters by their first names, joked about the selection of the family dog, and even asked a journalist how she'd broken her arm. Over the course of this 15-minute interaction, the president-elect revealed a level of comfort and candor with the press and, by extension, the public that was unheard of during the Bush years.

Disillusioned progressive "culture warriors" should also get ready for some pleasant news. There are already four federal court vacancies waiting to be filled by the president-elect's nominees. It is very likely that there will be at least one, if not more, Supreme Court vacancies over the next presidential term. Reinstating an ideologically liberal majority in the courts would go a long way towards defending, if not advancing, the progressive social agenda.

Legislative and judicial concerns aside, the president is the chief executive, after all, and President-elect Obama is likely to overturn many conservative stances espoused by the Bush administration. Obama expressed strong interest in issuing an executive order to overturn the current moratorium on stem-cell research. Currently, a "global gag rule" bars family planning groups from counseling mothers about abortion. However, an Obama administration would likely reverse this stance, substantially changing the informational dynamics of planned parenthood and advancing the pro-choice agenda.

During the Bush years, subtle but widespread rule-tweaking by the Environmental Protection Agency resulted in major reversals on environmental issues ranging from emissions to pollution to game hunting. Without passing a single bill through Congress, the Obama administration will be able to introduce major reforms that substantially impact environmental regulation. For example, unlike president Bush, Obama will likely allow more progressive states, such as California, to regulate their cars' carbon dioxide emissions more stringently than the rest of the country.

All of the above changes are possible even without considering the strong Democratic majority in Congress. In this time of multiple crises, the nation has undeniably shifted to the left, giving Obama the power to advance the progressive agenda like never before.

## Orbis Asks

*Do you think Obama will follow through on his campaign promises?*



**Paige Harmony**

*Sophomore  
English*

"I hope Barack Obama lives

up to his expectations. I mean, I voted for him. The truth is, though, that anybody is going to have a hard time being President right now."



**Steven Bellows**

*Senior  
Engineering*

"I think he'll follow through

on a lot of them - I mean he's already working hard selecting his cabinet. He'll have to focus on the economy, and then energy."



**Frank Murchison**

*Junior  
Economics*

"I believe that he'll fol-

low through on many promises salient to his main voting block, but it is impossible for a leader to follow through on all promises."



**Maggie Wilson**

*Sophomore  
Neuroscience*

"I think anybody in office

right now will have a really tough time, but he's trying his best."

-Compiled by Jon Christian