

# Downside UP

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## Election 2008

The article I first wrote for November was a "worried" article, wondering about all the ways that this election could be stolen from Barack Obama, and how race could rear its ugly head in a manner that would set back unity in this country for decades. But then my daughter called me and talked about how she had watched the Obamamercial and cried -- not because of the content, but because whether Obama wins or not, it fulfills a 400-year dream that this country could some day live up to its ideals, could right the wrongs of slavery and discrimination, could fully be what we dream of it being.

My daughter has it right. This is not just a defining moment in American history; it is a redemptive moment.

In our family, that dream is about a 17<sup>th</sup> century ancestor living outside of Salem, Massachusetts, who kept a horse always saddled so that someone accused of being a witch could escape. It is about a great grandfather whose parents took him down to the enlistment office for the Union Army on his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday because, until he was 17, he couldn't enlist without their permission. It is about a great grandfather who believed that there really could be one world in which people turned their swords into plowshares. It is about an uncle who marched at Selma.

I am not claiming that I never look at an African American, good or bad, and not think about him through the lens of race. Yet, until the last couple of weeks, I have truly not thought about Obama in terms of race. I have not thought about him as anything but an incredibly intelligent, open-minded, warm, and reconciling person who has the capacity to do the world's most demanding job and wants to do it. I thought of him more as a Democrat than an African American and even then I mostly just thought of him as an extraordinary person.

Now at last, I am thinking of him as African American too. I read about how huge numbers of African Americans have put aside all their differences to support him -- and I understand and I am thrilled. I realize that his achievement is their achievement and their achievement, my achievement.

It has long been a hard thing in this country for Southerners to hear a Northern accent and not think "carpetbagger." It has long been a hard thing for Northerners to hear a Southern accent and not think "racist." I have lived in Central Pennsylvania and know that struggle for racial acceptance. Now I live in the Old South, Cotton Country, of North Florida where I have only slowly learned that some of the most radical political voices anywhere can come out of a deep Southern accent. We have a considerable number among our friends. Yesterday, I found out that another of our friends whom I would have least expected to vote for Obama,

did. It's her Northern husband who didn't. She, Southern bred in her roots, over 70 years old, with the deepest and most beautiful of Southern accents.

We can all learn to set aside our prejudices; it is never too late to accept and to reconcile. The unexpected people around me who are voting for Obama are clearly doing it for some reason that transcends party affiliation as well as race. For my daughter, not only her husband but her sister, her sister-in-law, both brothers-in-law, her parents-in-law, her parents, all her uncles and all her cousins are voting for Obama. I am overcome by the wellspring of feeling, the magic, he embodies for so many people.

Here in Florida, I think that all our friends have already voted. My message to you as it would be to all my other readers who vote for him: Don't worry about all the code words of racial and ethnic hatred; don't worry about whether all the votes for him are going to be counted; don't worry whether there are going to be more distortions of his positions. Don't even worry about what it means for the country if he loses. Something has already happened. Win or lose, it is good what you have done and it is good what you have been a part of doing. We have already won.

Amen

**Ronald Woodbury** is the writer, publisher, editor, and general flunkey for all of *Downside Up*. While publication benefits from the editorial advice of one of his daughters, a friend, and occasional other pre-publication readers, they will, for their own privacy and sanity, remain anonymous.

Woodbury has B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees in history, economics, and international affairs from Amherst College and Columbia University. In addition to many professional articles, he has published a column, also called *Downside Up*, in the Lacey, WA, *Leader*. After a 36 year career as a teacher and administrator at six different colleges and universities, he retired with his wife to St. Augustine, FL. He has two daughters, one a physician and one an anthropologist, and six grandchildren.

You may also find *Downside Up* issues from June, 2008 to the present at <http://www.downsideup2.blogspot.com/>