The following is part of a letter from Senator Obama's campaign asking for a donation: "Tuesday we will do nothing less than choose a course for our country. And the feeling in the air right now makes me very hopeful that we will choose a different course this Election Day. Now is our nation's chance to finally live up to our promise as a world leader for freedom and democracy. Now is our chance to say "No!" to more divisiveness, more shrinking of our rights, more abuses of power. Now is our chance to take our country back." These are stirring hopes. Who would not wish these wishes could come true.

The Berlin Wall, built to isolate East Germans from the West, was both a symbol and an instrument of violations of the rights of the East German people. The US celebrated the removal of the Wall. But for many decades the US has been building its own walls to similarly restrict the liberties of people here and abroad. The Pentagon and the CIA, although established to prepare for war, were given the titular wall of Department of Defense to contain the Soviet "enemy" of those days. Simultaneously developed McCarthyism, which became the wall of US homegrown repression that has lasted sixty years and recently under the Patriot Act and Homeland Security distinctly worsened. Also during the last sixty years the US foreign security apparatuses—Pentagon, CIA, NSA--functioned preemptively to intervene in and invade other countries. I have been describing the bipartisan US National Security State.

Now with Obama we hope again. Despite the Patriot Act, and deletion of habeas corpus, and the first posting of a military unit on US soil assigned to control civil disturbances, we have achieved another peaceful transfer of presidential power. And who a year ago would have imagined the election of a Negro as President?

"Now is our chance to take our country back"—yes. But this will be more difficult that the enthusiastic campaigner imagines. Back? From the walls of warrantless surveillance, denial of habeas corpus, and torture, from a militarized economy, invasions, and global antagonism, and from financial collapse.

All of us old enough to remember what happened under President Clinton must feel an uneasy hope, despite the nation's financial success under his leadership. Remember his embrace of anti-democratic measures in the dark year of 1996: anti-terrorism legislation (leading to the Patriot Act), ending the aid to dependent children programs (without adequate transition assistance to the mothers and children), the Telecommunications Act (accelerating monopoly). Remember the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, signed by Bill
Clinton in 1999, repealing the Glass-Steagall Act, ending the separation of commercial and investment banks, and leading to the financial disasters and bailouts of 2008. Remember the bombings of Serbia in violation of international law. The same forces Clinton obeyed then remain in power today.

The National Security Corporate-Congressional-Presidential-Warfare-Mainstream Media State remains regnant, and President-Elect Obama only nibbled at only some of its edges. During his campaign, President-Elect Obama repudiated neither the corporate state system nor the surveillance /war system. Given the interrelated, concerted power of both, we know he could not.

Still we yearn to take our country back from anti-democratic forces corrupting our nation with money--with lobbyists and large campaign contributions. We want a president who will return to a progressive agenda designed for the people. But President-Elect Obama for his campaign took in millions of dollars from corporations, to which he is now beholden. Now as President he must listen to the thousands of lobbyists of the same corporations that destroyed the people's movement and its living wages and livable pensions.

No doubt exists in this respect regarding Ralph Nader or Cynthia McKinney. Of Nader, William Greider wrote: "Ralph Nader is a man of political substance trapped in an era of easy lies." Nobody in the country understands as well and struggles as boldly against the pernicious power of corporations.

And we want to hope what the Obama campaigner wrote: "Now is our nation's chance to finally live up to our promise as a world leader for freedom and democracy." But by re-appointing Secretary Gates we know with certainty he listens to the Pentagon. Barack Obama does not, cannot intend to alter anything fundamental in the all-powerful Corporate-Pentagon-Executive-Congress-Mainstream Media Complex that has illegally intervened in and invaded over forty nations since WWII.

"Now is our nation's chance." I understand these words as addressed no more to President-Elect Obama than to me and you and you. The forces of wealth and military power will be too much for our President--unless We, the People now engage in politics like we never have before. You and I exemplify We, the People, the fourth branch of government—the civil society—intended to check and direct the other three. We should stand by our Constitution, look squarely at our country's history and the Corporate-Pentagon System it has produced, understand the strengths and weaknesses of President-Elect Obama and Congress, and organize to help them be wiser, caring defenders of peace, justice, and the environment—to regain a just
social contract, to reconfirm the balance among the branches of government. Exhausted as we may be, we must face the reality that the campaign for Barack Obama as a progressive president is actually only just beginning.

What follows is a collection of writings that lay the foundation for the struggle to persuade President-Elect Obama and Congress to be the agents for peace, justice, and the environment desperately needed by the people of the US and the world.

"Let America be America Again" (Langston Hughes, 1938).
"Let America be America again. Let it be the dream it used to be." (Hear Kelly Mulhollan's beautiful musical rendition of this poem.)

See Cynthia Peters' article on the pressure from the grass roots needed for serious change. 
http://www.zcommunications.org/zspace/commentaries/3673

Here is the email address for Obama's Transition Office. Let's flood it with letters and phone calls beginning today. http://change.gov/page/s/ofthepeople
Tell Dick of any changes.

References
Speth, James G. The Bridge at the End of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability. Yale UP, 2008.

CONTENTS
(Of course these topics do not cover all of even the most important. The third newsletter will fill in gaps. Contact Dick with suggestions; forward good materials about
Obama's decisions, appointments, revisions of Bush laws.

Obama's Hope
Hedges' Critique
Cockburn's Analysis (Nov. 10, 08)
Adolph Reed Jr.'s Analysis (Fall 2008)
"Democratic Vistas" Editorial (Nov. 10)
FCNL: Reclaiming the Balance of Power (Oct. 08)
Book: Undoing the Bush-Cheney Legacy
Editors of The Nation for a Progressive Platform (Sept. and Aug. 08)
Progressive Change
Liberal Critics of Obama
Peace and Justice Movement Engages Obama (Summer 08)
Obama Does It All!

For following contents go to OMNI's website:
www.omnicenter.org

Video Analysis of Obama

Mainly International:
Treaty with Iraq
Pentagon, US Warfare State and Nuclear Weapons
Obama's Voting Record for Military
Appointment of Gates
Nuclear Weapons and War
Nuclear Disarmament
National Security State, Imperialism
Torture
United Nations
Iran
Israel

Mainly Domestic:

Impeachment and Prosecution of B&C
Corporations
Deregulation
Health Care
Unions
Food
Energy, health, environment
Dear friends,
The Global Message to Obama Wall in Washington DC is becoming a powerful symbol of unity and reconciliation between the US and the World. Follow the link to sign it online: Take action now!
In just 24 hours, over 150,000 people from 189 countries have signed and sent a message for Barack Obama to our huge global wall in the centre of Washington DC, and it has been covered on CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera and in the US on front pages of two of the biggest newspapers and on the evening news!
Together, we're helping to seize Obama's election as a major global moment for unity and reconciliation, when the US can finally join with the world community in facing our common challenges together.
Our message congratulates Obama on his election and commitments to stop climate change, withdraw from Iraq, double aid for poverty, ban torture and more.
Avaaz's Global Message to Obama Wall in Washington DC has become THE place for citizens around the world to speak to Obama. If you haven't already, follow the link to add your name, and send this email to friends and family who might want to join in:
http://www.avaaz.org/en/million_messages_to_obama

Change will not come easily to the US or its foreign policy. Entrenched interests -- including oil companies, war contractors, and neo-con ideologists -- stand in the way. But those interests have always sought to divide us -- the greater international unity and goodwill we have, the better we'll be able to confront the challenges head on and make progress as one world. The Global Obama Message Wall is a symbol of change and an investment in the new goodwill between the US and the world -- with major global climate change negotiations
coming up next month, it will not be long before that good will is tested. Let's get to a million messages to Obama!

With hope, Ricken, Graziela, Iain, Brett, Paul, Alice, Milena, Paula, Ben and the whole Avaaz Team.

**PS: here are 10 key campaign promises made by Barack Obama, you can see his full platform here**

http://www.barackobama.com/issues/

1. Reduce the US's carbon emissions 80% by 2050 and play a strong positive role in negotiating a binding global treaty to replace the expiring Kyoto Protocol
2. Withdraw all combat troops from Iraq within 16 months and keep no permanent bases in the country
3. Establish a clear goal of eliminating all nuclear weapons across the globe
4. Close the Guantanamo Bay detention center
5. Double US aid to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015 and accelerate the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and Malaria
6. Open diplomatic talks with countries like Iran and Syria, to pursue peaceful resolution of tensions
7. De-politicize military intelligence to avoid ever repeating the kind of manipulation that led the US into Iraq
8. Launch a major diplomatic effort to stop the killings in Darfur
9. Only negotiate new trade agreements that contain labor and environmental protections
10. Invest $150 billion over ten years to support renewable energy and get 1 million plug-in electric cars on the road by 2015

ABOUT AVAAZ Avaaz.org is an independent, not-for-profit global campaigning organization that works to ensure that the views and values of the world's people inform global decision-making.

Also see: www.factcheck.barackobama.com

Chris HEDGES' LIST of Obama's key votes and other actions (Hedges is author of War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning and Collateral Damage)

1. He's been lauded by the nuclear power industry which is resuming an attempt to build nuclear power plants all over the country (calling it “Green Energy”)
2. He's voted to continue to fund the Iraq war.
3. He opposed Murtha's call for immediate withdrawal.
4. He didn't join the 13 Senators who voted against confirming Condoleezza Rice.
5. He voted in 2005 to re-authorize the Patriot Act.
6. He did not support an amendment that was part of a bankruptcy bill that would have capped credit card rates at 30%.
7. He opposed a bill that would have reformed a mining law of 1872 that essentially allows mining companies to lease federal land for pennies an acre (which is a complete rip-off of the American taxpayer).
8. He did not support the bill Kucinich and Conyers introduced for "Single-Payer health care."
9. He supports the death penalty.
10. He worked to support a class-action reform bill which allows financial firms to escape accountability (a huge lobbying effort by the financial industry who are Obama's second largest donors) by effectively shutting down state courts as venues to hear class-action suits (this has long been a goal of corporations and the Bush administration). This bill effectively denies redress in state courts where most cases have a chance of defying powerful corporate challenges and moves them into corporate-friendly Federal courts which are now dominated by right-wing Republican judges (even Hilary Clinton voted against this bill which allows corporations to engage in flagrant discrimination, consumer fraud, and wage violations).

ALEXANDER COCKBURN, "Against Obama," The Nation (Nov. 10, 2008). Obama is Bush business as usual in several central ways: I. Continuation of Bush militarism/imperialism. He supports the Pentagon budget, the empire, would enlarge the armed forces, pledges to escalate the US war in Afghanistan, to attack Pakistan's sovereign territory if it obstructs US "war on terror," to wage that war in a hundred countries. II. Continuation of assault on constitutional liberties. He voted to reaffirm the Patriot Act and for warrantless wiretapping. The rest of the (one-page) article presents a sweeping, severe attack on Obama. Is it accurate?

"Democratic Vistas" editorial in The Nation (Nov. 10, 2008), contrasts the undemocratic and degrading GOP and McCain to the encouragingly democratic Obama, but reminds us that, "vital though an Obama victory is, it is only the beginning of what's needed to roll back the policies of the Bush years and begin to enact a progressive agenda." Because he "will face massive entrenched power," he will need "a movement that stands up for those without wealth and power," to create "the engaged and expanded democracy that Whitman envisioned a century ago."

Here is the email address for Obama's Transition Office.
http://change.gov/page/s/ofthepeople
FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION'S CALL TO CONGRESS IS EQUALLY A CALL TO PRESIDENT OBAMA (FCNL Washington Newsletter, Oct. 2008).
"Reclaiming the Balance of Power: An Agenda for the 111th Congress." "Congress Needs to Stand Up."
The anti-democratic Congress ceded far too much power to the anti-democratic President. Will Obama turn to democracy? See Undoing the Bush-Cheney Legacy: A Tool Kit for Congress and Activists, ed. Ann Fagan Ginger, analyzing all the Bush laws that must be reversed.

FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM TO THE DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION
SPECIAL NO. OF THE NATION ON OBAMA (9-1/8)
Begins with an editorial praising the Dem. Platform as superior to that of the GOP (on SS, healthcare). It points out what is encouraging to the peace movement that some of the planks of the party so far have been the result of progressive pressures (trade, rights of workers). But the editors describe the platform "tepid," pulling "too many punches," and failing to create a "new social contract." They call on Obama and the Democrats to "do more to distinguish their agenda from McCain's empty rhetoric." Democrats should seize this "teaching moment" and "present a bold governing program," and they list four on energy, infrastructure, jobs, and health/retirement. "As we argue in this special issue, these times demand a popular movement on behalf of a vision as bold as the New Deal, Fair Deal, and Great Society."

EARLIER APPEAL TO OBAMA BY EDITORS OF THE NATION
"Change We Can Believe In," The Nation (August 18-25, 2008). After pointing out his "moving away from the core commitments shared by many who have supported your campaign," the editors state four key positions Obama must maintain.

"Change We Can Believe In: An Open Letter to Barack Obama," The Nation (August 18-25, 08). Calls for Obama to stop compromising and flipflopping, to hold to the key positions that have inspired the vigorous backing of his supporters, the grassroots base that will be necessary to "counteract the forces of money and established power that are a dead weight on those seeking real change.…" (Key positions: war: withdrawal from Iraq by timetable; economy: reduction of rich-poor gap, job creation, infrastructure, etc.; universal healthcare; sig. reduction of CO2.)

Thursday 11.27.08
Left Strives To 'Keep Faith' As Obama Manuevers
http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2008/11/27-0
Obama Answers Liberal Critics on Personnel Choices

OBAMA, MCCAIN, CONGRESS, AND THE PEACE, JUSTICE, and ECOLOGY MOVEMENT (Summer 08)
The pje organizations did not sit on their hands during the presidential campaigns, but have plunged into the middle of them. Since neither of the two major Party candidates are adequate in various ways and degrees, several pje organizations I have checked recently have intensified their "educate the candidates and Parties" campaigns.

Most dramatic is Amnesty International, which displayed a full-scale replica of a Guantanamo prison cell at both nominating conventions, to demand of the candidates emphatic opposition to torture, to prolonged detainment without charge, to unaccountability of high-level officials, and other human rights abuses. Larry Cox is Exec. Dir. of AI.

Like AI, Friends of the Earth believes that we cannot take for granted that a change of Administration or of Congress will change the carbon regime to the degree that must happen if we are to bring down CO2 to 350 PPM quickly enough. The Lieberman-Warner energy bill was proposed, but defeated, and anyway it was deeply flawed and would not require the real changes needed to stop climate change. So FOE is keeping the pressure on not only the Bush Admin. but also on Congress and the presidential candidates, to make sure they face facts and seek real solutions, not greenwashing. Brent Blackwelder is President of FOE. www.foe.org

For a third example, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, in their July/Aug. 2008 Newsletter focusing on nuclear weapons, will not "wait until January," but have already started "urging presidential and congressional candidates to embrace a vision of a world free of nuclear weapons." We cannot count on this president and Congress to reverse US nuclear weapons policy, unless we show them we want that change to be much more than generalities—complete nuclear disarmament, no first use policy, renegotiate START, ratify the CTBT, and rescue the NPT.

Actually these campaigns are not new, for these organizations and hundreds of peace, justice, and ecology organizations have always been in the middle of politics against the special interests that bribe our politicians, rob the people, and endanger the planet, and especially during presidential campaigns. Let us join with them in educating President Obama and our Congressional delegation about
human rights, global warming, nuclear weapons, and other urgent matters, including the power of corporations to determine national policies. If we do not, we can be sure the forces in politics for personal profit and international aggression will fill our vacancy.

Obama's Transition Office.
http://change.gov/page/s/ofthepeople

OBAMA DOES IT ALL!
November 12, 2008 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
SPECIAL NY TIMES EDITION BLANKETS U.S. CITIES, PROCLAIMS END TO WAR

* PDF: http://www.nytimes-se.com/pdf
* For video updates: http://www.nytimes-se.com/video
* Contact: mailto:writers@nytimes-se.com

Early this morning, commuters nationwide were delighted to find out that while they were sleeping, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had come to an end. If, that is, they happened to read a "special edition" of today's New York Times.
In an elaborate operation six months in the planning, 1.2 million papers were printed at six different presses and driven to prearranged pickup locations, where thousands of volunteers stood ready to pass them out on the street.
Articles in the paper announce dozens of new initiatives including the establishment of national health care, the abolition of corporate lobbying, a maximum wage for C.E.O.s, and, of course, the end of the war.
The paper, an exact replica of The New York Times, includes International, National, New York, and Business sections, as well as editorials, corrections, and a number of advertisements, including a recall notice for all cars that run on gasoline. There is also a timeline describing the gains brought about by eight months of progressive support and pressure, culminating in President Obama's "Yes we REALLY can" speech. (The paper is post-dated July 4, 2009.) "It's all about how at this point, we need to push harder than ever,"said Bertha Suttner, one of the newspaper's writers. "We've got to make sure Obama and all the other Democrats do what we elected them to do. After eight, or maybe twenty-eight years of hell, we need to start imagining heaven."

FOR THE WHOLE NEWSLETTER GO TO www.omnicenter.org

THE FOLLOWING CONTENTS APPEAR ONLY IN OMNI'S WEBSITE.
VIDEO ANALYSIS OF OBAMA
PART ONE: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpiUW7Qw07U
PART TWO: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58GHY0dmGoE
HANAAN SARHAN | PRODUCER | INSIDE USA

MAINLY INTERNATIONAL

TREATY WITH IRAQ
From After Downing Street and David Swanson
Ask your Senators to insist that Bush not negotiate a treaty in Iraq without the Constitutionally required approval of the U.S. Senate.
Watch for details on this and other actions at:
http://afterdowningstreet.org/activism

QUESTIONS FOR DISCOVERING WHAT OBAMA STANDS FOR REGARDING THE US WARFARE STATE
President Obama campaigned as the candidate for CHANGE.

Do you think he will significantly reduce the US corporate, imperial, national security state by:
abolishing or chartering the CIA, now the President's secret army?
breaking the hold of the military-industrial complex?
end the secret black budgets that make public oversight impossible?
significantly reducing the number of US military bases abroad, now over 700?
ending Iraq and Afghan wars, now est. to cost $3 to $5 trillion?

Will President Obama significantly oppose Nuclear weapons and war? Will he:
work for complete nuclear disarmament?
adopt a policy of no first use?
renegotiate START/Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty which expires Dec. 2009?
urge Senate to ratify the CTBT/Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty?
rescue the NPT/Non-Proliferation Treaty?

MILITARY/PENTAGON
(from Chris D): I found Obama's voting record at the following address which while not the most hawkish seems to support funding continued US military involvement in Iraq (or at least not oppose US military involvement when he did not vote on some of these bills)
http://www.votesmart.org/voting_category.php?can_id=9490&type=category&category=22&go.x=13&go.y=14
Obama's voting record for Military-Related Bills.pdf
49K View as HTML Download
GATES NOT CHANGE

Obama Puts Faith in Bush's Defence Secretary
http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2008/11/26-8
Frida Berrigan | Can Obama Take on the Pentagon?
http://www.commondreams.org/view/2008/11/26-0

TORTURE
From: National Religious Campaign Against Torture
<nrcatlist@nrca.org>
Endorse the "Declaration of Principles for a Presidential Executive Order on Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty" (google for text) and urge the President-elect to issue an executive order banning torture. How? By emailing President-Elect Obama's Transition Office. Just take these three easy steps: 1. Visit his transition website at http://change.gov/page/s/ofthepeople. 2. Fill out your contact information. Write "torture" in the" another issue" box. 3. In the "Your ideas" box, write something like: As a person of faith, or: as a person who believes our government should follow Constitution, law, and ethics, I am deeply troubled by our nation's use of torture. Please act to end U.S.-sponsored torture by issuing an executive order based on the Declaration of Principles endorsed by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. Then click "submit form." Thank you for your help. Your effort is needed now. (from Friends, Gladys)

No Amnesty for Cheney, et al, Say Torture Opponents
http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2008/11/26-1

NUCLEAR

**NATIONAL SECURITY STATE, EMPIRE CONTINUES**

**UNITED NATIONS**
From UNA/USA E-News Update
Hillary Clinton and the UN: How She Might Approach the Role of Secretary of State
More Optimism for US-UN Relations
Great Expectations: Advice for Obama on the UN
Do or Die for Women's Rights
UNIFEM Tallyes More Than 5 Million Signatures to Stop Violence Against Women
Protecting the Innocent and Instilling Hope for the Future
Governments Set to Gather and Sign Cluster Bomb Ban
UNA-USA Launches Grassroots Voices  (Sorry, I don't understand why these ulr contacts did not record.

**OBAMA AND IRAN**
From VFP Digest No. 1887, "Posted by: "helen skinner" hjs4868@hotmail.com , Thu Nov 6, 2008
"Obama advisers discuss preparations for war on Iran"
By Peter Symonds 6 November 2008. On the eve of the US elections, the New York Times [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/03/opinion/03mon4.html?_r=3&ref=opinion&oref=sloginBy&oref=slogin&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/03/opinion/03mon4.html?_r=3&ref=opinion&oref=sloginBy&oref=slogin&oref=slogin) cautiously pointed on Monday to the emergence of a bipartisan consensus in Washington for an aggressive new strategy towards Iran. While virtually nothing was said in the course of the election campaign, behind-the-scenes top advisers from the Obama and McCain camps have been discussing the rapid escalation of diplomatic pressure and punitive sanctions against Iran, backed by preparations for military strikes. The article entitled "New Beltway Debate: What to do about Iran" noted with a degree of alarm: "It is a frightening notion, but it not just the trigger-happy Bush administration discussing—if only theoretically—the possibility of military action to stop Iran's nuclear weapons program... [R]easonable people from both parties are examining the so-called military option, along with new diplomatic initiatives."Behind the backs of American voters, top advisers for President-elect Barack Obama have been setting the stage for a dramatic escalation of confrontation with Iran as soon as the new administration takes office. A report released in September from the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington-based think tank, argued that a nuclear weapons capable Iran was "strategically untenable" and detailed a robust approach, "incorporating new diplomatic, economic and military tools in an integrated fashion". A key member of the Center's task force was Obama's top Middle East adviser,
Dennis Ross, who is well known for his hawkish views. He backed the US invasion of Iraq and is closely associated with neo-cons such as Paul Wolfowitz. Ross worked under Wolfowitz in the Carter and Reagan administrations before becoming the chief Middle East envoy under presidents Bush senior and Clinton. After leaving the State Department in 2000, he joined the right-wing, pro-Israel think tank—the Washington Institute for Near East Policy—and signed up as a foreign policy analyst for Fox News. The Bipartisan Policy Center report insisted that time was short, declaring: "Tehran's progress means that the next administration might have little time and fewer options to deal with this threat." It rejected out-of-hand both Tehran's claims that its nuclear programs were for peaceful purposes, and the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate by US intelligence agencies which found that Iran had ended any nuclear weapons program in 2003. The report was critical of the Bush administration's failure to stop Iran's nuclear programs, but its strategy is essentially the same—limited inducements backed by harsher economic sanctions and the threat of war. Its plan for consolidating international support is likewise premised on preemptive military action against Iran. Russia, China and the European powers are all to be warned that their failure to accede to tough sanctions, including a provocative blockade on Iranian oil exports, will only increase the likelihood of war. To underscore these warnings, the report proposed that the US would need to immediately boost its military presence in the Persian Gulf. "This should commence the first day the new president enters office....[I omitted the last part because the newsletter had grown so long. Here is the conclusion—D] The emerging consensus on Iran in US foreign policy circles again underscores the fact that the differences between Obama and McCain were purely tactical. While millions of Americans voted for the Democratic candidate believing he would end the war in Iraq and address their pressing economic needs, powerful sections of the American elite swung behind him as a better vehicle to prosecute US economic and strategic interests in the Middle East and Central Asia—including the use of military force against Iran.

http://wsws.org/articles/2008/nov2008/iran-n06.shtml

OBAMA PRO-ISRAEL: RAHM EMANUEL

Ali Abunimah: Obama picks pro-Israel hardliner for top post / The Electronic Intifada, Jewish Peace News 5 Nov, 2008. Obama's first pick – of Rahm Emanuel – for White House chief of staff, is not an indication of "change", but rather of more of the same, when it comes to Israel/Palestine. In addition to being a pro-Israel hardliner, Emanuel has been known, according to Abunimah, as a "prominent supporter of neoliberal economic policies on free trade and welfare reform."

http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9939.shtml

And go to wikipedia on Rahm Emanuel

Obama's Transition Office.

http://change.gov/page/s/ofthepeople
MAINLY DOMESTIC ISSUES

IMPEACHMENT AND PROSECUTION

President Elect Obama has committed to abandoning the practice of rewriting laws with signing statements, to ending warrantless spying, to working with Congress to rewrite the PATRIOT Act, and to asking his Attorney General to investigate the crimes of Bush and Cheney. It will take everything we have to hold him to those commitments, but that will not be enough.

The coming year is our opening to begin shifting power back from the White House to where the Constitution put it: in the hands of our representatives in Congress. If we do not accomplish this under a relatively law-abiding president, we cannot expect to do so under the next outlaw. In this regard it is frightening to see committee chairs behaving as if no oversight will be required in the coming years, and as if all the outstanding subpoenas and contempt citations of the past two years were just campaign gimmicks. We must demand that Congress reissue all outstanding subpoenas in January or, better yet, enforce them itself. Work with us on this at: http://afterdowningstreet.org/congress

We also need to build resistance in the country and in Congress to the possibility of Bush pardoning his subordinates for crimes he authorized. Impeachment is possible, and has been done before, during the final months in office, as well as after the offenders are out of office. And prosecution is now finally possible at the local, state, federal, foreign, and international levels. Improved policies are well worth celebrating and pushing forward, but if the penalty for Bush and Cheney's crimes is merely that Obama and Biden cease committing some of them, we will be guaranteeing ourselves another Bush and Cheney, or worse, down the road. This newly released book includes Congressman Dennis Kucinich's 35 articles of impeachment, a list from Elizabeth de la Vega of crimes committed, and an essay by David Swanson on how we can prosecute the crimes: http://tinyurl.com/3kkwpy

Please get involved in the many aspects of the campaign for accountability at: http://convictbushcheney.org

SIGN THE PETITION http://democrats.com/mukasey-indict-bush-cheney

PROSECUTE BUSH AND CHENEY? What will Obama do? What position should the peace movement take? Option: Truth Commission like South Africa's?

REGARDING DOMINATION BY CORPORATIONS
Will President Obama develop a successful strategy to revitalize the New Deal?
or even be able to hold the line against more attacks on workers by the corporate offensive?
restore the worker/owner balance by enabling workers to organize again into unions?
significantly reduce the grip corporations have over the two main Parties by significantly reducing corporate campaign and lobbying money?
return US manufacturing to the US mainland?
Significantly reduce the corporate control of media by the military industrial complex?
reverse the shift of rising health costs from company to workers?

BARRING PUBLIC'S RIGHT TO SUE CORPORATIONS FOR DAMAGES
Obama should act quickly to restore constitutional and regulatory protections Bush eviscerated. Including: From 2002 to present Bush has inserted pre-emptions/rule changes more than 50 times barring public's right to sue corporations for damages. A momentous case before the Supreme Court—Wyeth v. Levine—may decide the issue. Obama should make good on his promise to use government to protect the public. Ref.: "Regulating Good Government" by Terry Allen, In These Times (Dec. 2008).

The Real News Network: Bailout Costs $8.5 Trillion
http://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2008/11/26-1

ANALYSIS OF CAPITALISM

DEREGULATION [from Dot N].
Here we go, y'all!
Let's stay on our elected representatives to pave a better way forward for the country.
It's going to be quite a challenge to clean up the mess the Bush Admin has created.
To add insult to injury, apparently, the Bushies are going to break as many dishes as they can on the way out.
See "Last Push to Deregulate . . ."
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/10/30/AR2008103004749.html?hpid=topnews
[Dick: Reversing the effects of the long corporate offensive against public regulation of corporations (recounted by Jack Rasmus in The War at Home) is not among Obama's 10 key promises listed by Avaaz.]
That is not a high priority for him? Because now impossible, given the power of corporations?

OBAMA ON HEALTH CARE
Part I.
Health Care on the Mississippi
Real people and the candidates' plans, Part I
By Trudy Lieberman Fri 15 Aug 2008 10:07 AM

This is the first in a series examining how the candidates' health care proposals will affect ordinary people and how the press could cover that angle.

So far, mainstream media coverage of health care during the campaign has been characterized by stenographic reporting—simply transcribing what the candidates say, buzz words and all. Blogosphere coverage has trended the opposite direction—way too much wonk talk, angels dancing on the head of a pin-type stuff.

http://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/health_care_on_the_mississippi.php?page=all

Part II
This is the second in a series examining how the candidates' health care proposals will affect ordinary people and how the press could cover that angle. Part I is archived here.

James Bell III and James Bell IV
Father and son walked into the Dr. Vesudevan Wellness Center, a Delta Area Health Education Center jointly funded by the state of Arkansas and the federal government. The elder James, age sixty-two, looked healthy; his son, age forty-three, did not. James Bell IV was a diabetic and had been for eleven years. He had trouble breathing, and it was almost hard for him to talk.

http://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/health_care_on_the_mississippi_1.php?page=all

UNIONS
"After Push for Obama, Unions Seek New Rules"
By STEVEN GREENHOUSE
WASHINGTON — After making millions of phone calls and knocking on millions of doors to elect Barack Obama, the nation's labor unions have begun a new campaign: to get the new president and Congress to pass legislation that would make it easier for workers to unionize. Unions, delighted that they will have a friend in the White House after eight years of fighting President Bush, also plan to push for universal health coverage and a huge stimulus program to create jobs and counter the downturn....
But corporate America has already declared war on labor's push for new legislation that would help unions organize.
"This will be Armageddon," said Randel Johnson, vice president for labor policy at the United States Chamber of Commerce.

FOOD
Michael Winship |”Michael Pollan's Food for Thought"

ENVIRONMENT  As you recall environmentalists have tried without success to have the current administration (Cheney) reveal the attendees and agendas for the energy meetings which were conducted early in the administration. They even failed after going to court. The results were removal of federal laws regarding oil and gas exploration and production has left us exposed to a rush to develop without the protection of the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Hazardous Waste Law, Superfund Law (cleanup of contaminated sites), and Toxic Release Inventory. The health hazards of drilling take a while to become evident, but those states with more experience than Arkansas are beginning to have serious problems.

Obama recognizes the urgency to develop clean domestic energy resources and is looking hard at natural gas. However, if he follows through with his rhetoric and weighs the science to evaluate health and environmental concerns, we will have a much better situation than the plundering going on now....

Joyce

Global Citizens Rank Climate Concerns Ahead of Economy
http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2008/11/26

ENVIRONMENT

Obama Will Help Resolve the Climate Change Crisis?

Will Pres. Obama make it a priority to combat the global climate crisis? Now is our chance to demand that the next U.S. president is invited to the UN Climate Change Conference this December in Poland. If Pres. Obama goes and makes a strong statement about the U.S. rising significantly to the challenge of the climate crisis, it could dramatically alter the course of the negotiations. But Barack Obama will only go if invited. That's where you and I come in. Let OMNI members speak UP.

Live Earth's friends at 350.org launched a new campaign about inviting the winner of the November 4 U.S. presidential election to go to the international climate conference in Poland in December and get the U.S. back in the climate change game. Please visit www.350.org/invite to send your personal invitation to Obama today.

OBAMA SUPPORTS BUSH'S FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE: CAN WE REVERSE THAT POSITION?
Katha Pollitt, "Flocking to Faith," The Nation (August 18-25, 2008). Despite the serious damage to the Constitution, the millions of dollars wasted, many lawsuits, countless embarrassments (homeless
addicts to Christ), Obama "plans to open the spigot even wider."

WILL OBAMA WORK TO SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE EQUALITY FOR WOMEN?

November 6, 2008, "Women's Vote Clinches Election Victory: 8 Million More Women than Men Voted for Obama: Gender Gap Large in Key Battleground States Where African American Women Make Their Voices Heard." Institute for Women's Policy Research, Elisabeth Crum, email: crum@iwpr.org

"Obama spoke directly to women's issues like pay equity, paid leave, and early childhood development," said Erica Williams, Study Director at IWPR. (Forwarded by Wanda S). What will Obama DO for women?

Feminist Law Professors

When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak. - Audre Lorde


Catharine MacKinnon's Endorsement of Obama

Professor Catharine MacKinnon's editorial endorsing Barack Obama appears in today's Wall Street Journal (of all places!). It is titled "Obama is the Way Forward for Women: Abortion Rights and Equal Pay Are at Stake in the Election" and focuses largely on the way the next President will affect the law of women's rights. Some excerpts:

At stake in this presidential election are the federal courts. Despite inroads, women's status remains characterized by sex-based poverty and impunity for sexual abuse from childhood on. The next president will appoint scores of lower court federal judges who will have the last word in most cases. One, perhaps three, justices maybe named to a Supreme Court that in recent years has decided many cases of importance to women by just one vote. Equality can be promoted in employment, education, reproductive rights and ending violence against women - or not.

Positions on women's rights do not divide neatly along conventional political lines, nor is abortion their sole template. As Justice Sandra Day O'Connor demonstrated, conservatives can oppose sexism they see in operation, including forms of violence against women that some liberals do not see as such. Reaching across ideology can win legal arguments, but who judges those arguments, at this moment in time, could make or break women's equality in law, hence in life, for generations. An Obama presidency could restore that balance in fairness that ideological appointments by past administrations have upset,

and that Mr. McCain has committed to continue. Neither presidential candidate has taken a position on all of these issues. But the decision, in Mr. Obama's words, on "what kind of America our daughters will grow up in" could not be more urgent. At stake is nothing less than whether women will be, finally, equal.- David S. Cohen WILL OBAMA DO IT? WILL HE TRY?

VETERANS

VETERANS FOR PEACE SUPPORT MAX CLELAND TO HEAD VA

V.A. Candidates: Cleland, Brown, Schwartz & Duckworth From: BpVETforPeace@aol.com WHOM DID OBAMA CHOOSE?

WILL OBAMA MAKE OPEN GOVERNMENT A HIGH PRIORITY? WILL HE MAINTAIN PRESENT LEVELS OF SECRECY, REDUCE, INCREASE?
OPEN government and Obama:

FISA
"Obama's support for the FISA 'compromise'" by Glenn Greenwald
http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2008/06/21/obama/index.html
Saturday June 21, 2008 09:53 EDT

League President: Candidates Should Disclose All Information
League president Mary G. Wilson recently wrote a letter to the New York Times, urging Senators Obama and McCain to fully disclose information on fundraisers who bundle money for their campaigns. Read more here.

ADOLPH REED JR.
ESSAY BY ADOLPH REED, JR.
"Where Obamaism Seems to be Going: Presidential Politics 2008 - Obama" by Adolph Reed, Jr., Wednesday, 16 July 2008
Prof. Reed takes us on a tour of transformations and other illusions associated with the Barack Obama phenomenon. "I've attached the Black Agenda Report essay as well as two I did in the Progressive between last November and May, at least one of which should have a mini-catalogue of Clinton's sellouts. And here are links to a really good two-part Aljazeera English program, hosted and produced by Avi Lewis, Naomi Klein's husband, that I participated in as well:

PART ONE: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpiUW7Qw07U

PART TWO: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58GHY0dmGoE

Obama and the Progressive Base
Thursday 10 July 2008 by: Norman Solomon, truthout | Perspective

many websites for researching Obama

Type Obama into the search field at http://www.factcheck.org
http://www.opencongress.org/people/show/400629_barack_obama

Topic pages and databases about Obama

General
- Chicago Tribune - Candidate coverage
- On the Issues - Issue positions
- Project Vote Smart - Candidate information, including issue positions

Disability issues
- Obama answers questions on disability issues
Environment

- **Obama & environmental issues**: Comprehensive review from the League of Conservation Voters.

Foreign affairs

- "Renewing American Leadership" - detailed article by Barack Obama in Foreign Affairs
- Barack Obama's positions on top foreign policy issues - extensive material documented by the Council on Foreign Relations

Health care

- **They've Got You Covered?** - Obama and Clinton ads both claim all Americans would be covered by their health plans. Clinton's would come close. Annenberg Public Policy Center, University of Pennsylvania.
- 2008 Presidential Candidate Health Plan Report Card issued by the National Physicians Alliance
- Envisioning the Future: The 2008 Presidential Candidates' Health Reform Proposals from The Commonwealth Fund

Israel and the Middle East conflict

- **Obama on Zionism and Hamas** - extensive interview with Jeffrey Goldberg
- Speech by Senator Barack Obama

McCain, Obama positions on Mideast issues Associated Press June 6, 2008

Obama's Transition Office.
http://change.gov/page/s/ofthepeople

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OMNI SEEKS A WORLD FREE OF VIOLENCE AND WAR, A SOCIETY WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL, A COMMUNITY WHERE EVERY PERSON’S POTENTIAL MAY BE FULFILLED, AN EARTH RESTORED. GRASSROOTS NONVIOLENCE, WORLD PEACE, HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL LIBERTIES, SOCIAL and ECONOMIC JUSTICE, ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP PROTECTING SPECIES AND THE EARTH. These
are some of OMNI’s ideals as a community of opposition to the displaced power now ruling our land. Read our brochure and our newsletters, attend our Steering Committee, become an active member of one or more of our committees, participate in our activities to see how these broad goals are realized in action. There is nothing vague about Building a Culture of Peace.

"OBAMA AND MCCAIN" BY Edrene McKay

Dick, this is so true. Last weekend, Barack Obama and John McCain participated in an Evangelical forum (the Saddleback Civic Forum) and were asked to respond to a series of questions. One of them was "Is there evil in the world? If so, how would you respond? Ignore it? Negotiate with it? Confront it? Destroy it?"

Obama's responses throughout were thoughtful, deliberate, intelligent, and complex. He said there is evil in places like Darfur, on our streets, and even in our homes (e.g., when parents abuse their children). He said he would confront it.

McCain's responses throughout were crisp, clear, certain, and overly simplistic. He identified evil as our real or imagined enemies (bin Laden, Islamic militarists, Russia) and said he would destroy it. To him, the only "wrong" appears to be a national security threat. He didn't even come close to identifying the evil that exists on our own doorstep.

Although members of the audience were polite to both candidates, they seemed to prefer McCain. I’m convinced his overly simplistic answers were the reason. Why worry about Darfur, street crime, or child abuse, when you can wipe out all evil by winning the War in Iraq?

At the end of the forum, we had two entirely different views of the world. One is complex and real, the other is simplistic and imaginary. Obama’s world is hard to master because it is multi-dimensional and involves complicated relationships and judgments. McCain’s world is easily grasped in the fist of your hand (something he is prone to use) because it is one-dimensional and black and white.

History teaches that over-simplification means trouble. I am reminded of Adolf Hitler who used the Jews as a scapegoat for everything that went wrong in Germany during the interwar years. McCain is repeating that same pattern. It seems that Islamic militants are responsible for all our problems (a declining economy, high energy costs, climate change, high-priced health care, illegal immigration, terrorism, and warfare).

It is clear that McCain has a limited vocabulary (fight, kill, destroy, win). This is not surprising since he had a "D" average and was ranked 894th out of 899 at the Naval Academy. Nevertheless, people like him because he does not make them think.
How would candidate Obama answer Professor Obama's exams? During his years teaching constitutional law at the University of Chicago, Barack Obama favored take-home tests touching on some of the scorchingly hot-button legal issues of the day: gay rights, reproductive freedom, affirmative action and racial profiling.

These exams, unearthed by the New York Times's resourceful Jodi Kantor, are edgy versions of the classic law school "issue spotter." Can a state university's law review expand its affirmative action program to include special treatment for gay students as well as racial minorities? Does a man have any right to stop his ex-wife from using their frozen embryos to try to get pregnant? Can parents whose daughter is in a vegetative state be prohibited from trying to clone her?

To read Obama's exams is to get a glimpse of the supple intelligence he would bring to the presidency and to be impressed by his lawyerly capacity -- perhaps even compulsion -- to see the other side's argument and mine the weaknesses of his own case.

But it is also a reminder of Obama's essential elusiveness, and how little we understand about how the candidate himself would resolve these thorny problems.

For example, one 2003 question describes the state of "Nirvana," where a gay couple, Richard and Michael, want a child. Would Nirvana's laws prohibiting gays from paying surrogate mothers or adopting children, Obama asked, violate the constitutional guarantees of equal protection and due process?

It's easy to imagine President Obama wrestling with a real-world version of Professor Obama's hypothetical. Obama has said that he does not support same-sex marriage. But his exam question involves the same issues that the California Supreme Court addressed in overturning the state's ban on same-sex marriage. If the Constitution protects Richard and Michael's effort to have a child, would it similarly protect their right to marry?

In the model answers he provided for students after another exam, Obama refers to "some persuasive arguments" that homosexuality should be covered by the equal protection clause. How does that square with his opposition to same-sex marriage? Are civil unions a separate-but-equal substitute?
To take a 1997 question, should "Splitsville," a city plagued by residential segregation and failing schools, be permitted to create an all-black, all-male career academy, or is the "Ujamaa School" unlawful discrimination?

Even if constitutional, Obama asked, "is it good public policy? Put somewhat differently, in light of . . . the history of race and gender discrimination in America, is the Ujamaa School a worthy attempt to promote long-term equality, or . . . a dangerous betrayal of the American ideal?"

In model answers, Obama didn't tip his hand. Instead, he noted merely that "I did find it interesting that, based on a justifiable skepticism in the prospect of truly integrated schools and an equally justified concern over the desperate condition of many inner-city schools, a slim majority of you favored the idea of a Ujamaa-type program."

Another question asked students to advise "Utopia" governor "Arnold Whatzanager" on a ballot initiative -- a follow-up to one barring racial preferences -- prohibiting the state "from classifying any individual by race, ethnicity, color or national origin."

Obama sought from the students a "broader perspective on whether the use of racial classifications by the state should in fact be rethought."

You can hear campaign trail echoes of Obama's efforts to grapple with this question. "I have a sister who is half Indonesian, who is married to a Chinese Canadian," he said the other day. "I don't know what that makes my niece."

Obama's part of the Con Law curriculum involved individual rights, so some of the constitutional issues most salient to a president -- the separation of powers, the scope of executive authority -- are not covered.

In one 2001 question, though, Obama asked students to imagine themselves as lawyers in the White House counsel's office, advising the president after an anthrax-like attack. Faced with a shortage of antibiotics, and given evidence that African Americans and women were more susceptible to the toxin, how could the president allocate the medication?

The Obama exams provide no smoking guns for opposition researchers. Rather, they are fleeting snapshots reminiscent of Obama's approach in "The Audacity of Hope," evenhanded in a way that is simultaneously impressive and maddening.
Reading them buttressed my confidence in Obama's capacity to grasp the nuances of any question, no matter how complex. They also underscored my sense that, in the hardest cases, I'm not always sure where Professor Obama, or President Obama for that matter, comes down.

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ESSAY BY ADOLPH REED, JR.
"Where Obamaism Seems to be Going: Presidential Politics 2008 - Obama" by Adolph Reed, Jr., Wednesday, 16 July 2008

Prof. Reed takes us on a tour de force of transformations and other illusions associated with the Barack Obama phenomenon, as interpreted, conjured or hallucinated by the "left" - whoever that is. These certainly may be the End Days - but for what political tendencies? Will "progressivism" be transcended out of existence, along with race (with the exception of whites, of course)? We can all either patiently stay tuned, or we can seek answers from precocious youth, who are blessedly unburdened by experience. Could it be that nothing out of the ordinary is going on at all - just Power maintaining its grip?

"It is ironic that Obama would be the one to complete Clintonism's redefinition of liberalism as conservatism."

A friend called me a few days ago from Massachusetts, astounded at a WBUR radio program featuring Glen Greenwald from Salon.com and Katrina vanden Heuvel of The Nation, in which vanden Heuvel not only unflaggingly defended Obama's open and bald embrace of right-wing positions during the last few weeks against Greenwald's criticism, but also did it from the right herself, calling him a "progressive pragmatist." She affirmed Tom Hayden's insistence on the Progressives for Obama blog that the candidate is a progressive, but a new kind of progressive, or some such twaddle. In response to Greenwald's sharp rebuke of Obama's FISA sellout, she acknowledged that he had "missed an opportunity to lead." Defending his June 30 patriotism speech that included a gratuitous rehearsal of the right-wing line about anti-Vietnam War protesters from the "counterculture" who "blamed America for all that was wrong in the world" and the canard about antiwar activists "failing to honor" returning Vietnam veterans, which Obama asserted "remains a national shame to this day" despite the fact that is an utter lie, vanden Heuvel pointed again to Hayden's endorsement as a sign that Obama's cheap move must be okay because, after all, Hayden was a founder of SDS.
And perhaps most tellingly, despite their disagreements, Greenwald and vanden Heuvel both supported Obama's practice of going out of his way to attack black poor people, most recently in his scurrilous Father's Day speech and again before the NAACP. (And, by the way, he grew up without a father and is running for president, no?) To Greenwald, this is the "Obama we want to see more of," the one who takes positions that are "unorthodox" and "not politically safe." Since when has it been unorthodox or unsafe politically to malign black poor people in public? Who the fuck has been doing anything else for at least twenty years? Public sacrifice of black poor people has been pro forma Democratic presidential strategy since Clinton ran on the pledge to "end welfare as we know it" and made a burnt offering of Rickey Ray Rector, and victim-blaming based on just-so stories about supposed "behavioral pathology" has been the only frame for public discussion of poverty for at least as long. To vanden Heuvel, Obama's contretemps with Jesse Jackson, who, ironically, has his own history of making such attacks, around this issue reflects a "generational division" among black people, with Obama representing a younger generation that values "personal responsibility." She also, for good measure, asserted that Obama has been "nailed unfairly" for his cozying up to the evangelicals and promising to give them more federal social service money. In explaining that he comes out of a "community organizing" tradition based in churches in Chicago, she didn't quite say that the coloreds love their churches. But she didn't really have to say it out loud, did she?

"Since when has it been unorthodox or unsafe politically to malign black poor people in public?"

This is what passes for a left now in this country. It is a left that can insist, apparently, that Obama's FISA vote, going out of his way (after all, he could simply have followed the model of Eisenhower on the Brown decision and said that the Court has ruled; therefore it's the law, and his job as president would be to enforce the law) to align himself - twice, or three times -- with the Scalia/Thomas/Roberts/Alito wing of the Supreme Court, his declaring that social problems, unlike foreign policy adventurism, are "too big for government" and pledging to turn over more of HHS and HUD's budgets to the Holy Rollers are both tactically necessary and consistent with his convictions. So, if those are his convictions, or for that matter what he feels he must do opportunistically to get elected, why the fuck should we vote for him?

I'd been thinking about doing a "See, I told you so" column about Obama; then, especially given the torrent of vituperation and self-righteous contumely I got after arguing that he's not what far too many nominal leftists were trying to make him out to be, I was tempted instead to do a "To hell with you, you deserve what you get"
column. But the smug yuppies to whom I'd address that message -- the fan club we encounter in foundation offices, faculty meetings, soccer games and dinner parties and on MSNBC and in the Nation -- are neither the only people who've listened to Obama's siren song nor the ones who'll pay the price for their self-indulgent idiocy. (And Liza Featherstone deserves acknowledgement for having predicted early that the modal lament of the disillusioned would compare him unfavorably to Feingold.) Among other things, as I saw ever more clearly while watching Rachel Maddow talk with another of that Dem ilk about Obama and his family -- how adorable and "well-raised" or some such his kids are, etc, etc -- a few nights ago on Keith Olberman's show, an Obama presidency (maybe even just his candidacy) will likely sever the last threads of any connection between notions of racial disparity and structurally reproduced inequality rooted in political economy, and, since even "left" discourse in this country seems capable of conceptualizing the latter as a politically significant matter only in terms of the former (or its gender or similar categorical equivalent), that could just about complete purging entirely out of legitimate political discourse the notion that economic inequality is rooted fundamentally in capitalism's political and economic dynamics.

Underclass ideology -- where left and right come together to embed a common sense around victim-blaming and punitive moralism, racialized of course but at a respectable remove from the familiar phenotypically based racial taxonomy -- will most likely be the vehicle for effecting the purge. Obama's success will embody how far we have come in realizing racial democracy, and the inequality that remains is most immediately a function of cultural -- i.e., attitudinal, and behavioral -- and moral deficits that undercut acquisition of "human (and/or "social," these interchangeable mystifications shift according to rhetorical need) capital," a message his incessant castigation of black behavior legitimizes. In this context, the "activism" appropriate for attacking inequality: 1) rationalizes privatization and demonization of the public sector through accepting the premise that government is inefficient and stifles "creativity;" 2) values individual voluntarism and "entrepreneurship" over collective action (e.g., four of the five winners of the Nation's "Brave Young Activist" award started their own designer NGOs and/or websites; the fifth carries a bullhorn around and organizes solidarity demos); 3) provides enrichment experiences, useful extracurriculs, and/or career paths for precocious Swarthmore and Brown students and grads (the Wendy Kopp/Samantha Power model trajectory), and 4) reduces the scope of direct action politics to the "all tactics, no strategy," fundamentally Alinskyite, ACORN-style politics that Doug Henwood and Liza Featherstone have described as "activistism" and whose potential for reactionary opportunism Andy Stern of SEIU has amply demonstrated. Obama goes a step further in deviating from Alinskyism
to the right, by rejecting its "confrontationalism," which severs its rhetoric of "empowerment" from political action and contestation entirely and merges the notion into the pop-psychological, big box Protestant, Oprah Winfrey, Reaganite discourse of self-improvement/personal responsibility.

"An Obama presidency (maybe even just his candidacy) will likely sever the last threads of any connection between notions of racial disparity and structurally reproduced inequality rooted in political economy."

All of the above salves the consciences of our professional-managerial class peers and coworkers who want to think of themselves as more tolerant and enlightened than their Republican relatives and neighbors, even as they insulate themselves and their families as much as possible from undesired contact with the dangerous classes and define the latter in quotidian practice through precisely the same racialized and victim-blaming stereotypes as the conservatives to whom they imagine themselves superior. This hypocrisy, of course, is understood within the stratum as unavoidable accommodation to social realities, and likely to be acknowledged as an unfortunate and lamentable necessity. Yet those lamenting at the same time reject out of hand as impractical any politics that would challenge the conditions that reproduce the inequalities underlying those putative realities. Obama, in the many ways that Glen Ford, Margaret Kimberley and others have catalogued here, is an ideal avatar for this stratum. He has condensed, in what political dilettantes of all stripes rush to call a "movement," the reactionary quintessence that Walter Benn Michaels in The Trouble With Diversity identifies in a politics of identity or multiculturalism that substitutes difference for inequality as the crucial metric of political criticism. It's apt in this connection that even elites in the Mississippi Delta, down to the level of the Cotton Museum in Lake Providence, LA, and the blues museums that dot every hamlet on US 61 in Mississippi between Greenville and Memphis, have come to appreciate the political and commercial benefits of multicultural celebration and even civil rights heritage tourism, without destabilizing the underlying relations of racialized subordination.

Indeed, Obama represents a class politics, one that promises to cement an alliance anchored in the professional-managerial class (including, perhaps especially, the interchangeable elements of which now increasingly set the policy agendas for what remains of the women's, environmentalist, public interest, civil rights and even labor movements) and the "progressive" wing of the investor class. (See, for example, Tom Geoghan, "All the Young Bankers," The American Prospect, June 23, 2008.) From this perspective, it is ironic in the short term -- i.e., considering that he pushed HRC out
of the way -- that Obama would be the one to complete Clintonism's redefinition of liberalism as conservatism. So there's no way I'm going to ratify this bullshit with my participation, and I'm ready to tell all those liberals who will hector me about the importance of voting that it's the weakest, most passive and least consequential form of political participation, and I'm no longer going to pretend it's any more than that, or that the differences between the Dem and GOP candidates are greater than they are, just to help them feel good about not doing anything more demanding and perhaps more consequential.

To be clear, I'm not arguing that it's wrong to vote for Obama, though I do say it's wrong-headed to vote for him with any lofty expectations. I would also suggest that it's not an open and shut case that -- all things considered -- he's that much better than McCain. In some ways Obama would be better for us in the short run, just as Clinton was better than the elder Bush. In some ways his presidency could be much worse in the longer term, again like Clinton. For one thing, the recent outpouring of enthusiastic support from all quarters -- including on black academic and professional list serves and blogs and on op-ed pages -- for his attacks on black poor people underscores the likelihood that Obama will be even more successful than Clinton at selling punitive, regressive and frankly racist social policies as humane anti-poverty initiatives. In a way, I suppose, there could be something useful about having a large strain of the black petite bourgeoisie come out as a militant racial class for itself. Maybe that could be a prelude to a good fight, but unfortunately there's no counterweight. And the black professional-managerial strata, despite their ever more blatant expressions of contempt for black poor people, continue to insist on speaking for the race as a whole.

"Obama represents a class politics, one that promises to cement an alliance anchored in the professional-managerial class and the 'progressive' wing of the investor class."

Lesser evilists assert as indisputable fact that Gore, or even Kerry, wouldn't have invaded Iraq. Perhaps Gore wouldn't have, but I can't say that's a sure thing. (And who was his running mate, by the way?) Moreover, we don't know what other military adventurism that he -- like Clinton -- would have undertaken to make clear that he wouldn't be seen as a wimpy Democrat. As to Kerry, even though like all the other Dem presidential aspirants who voted for it, except Edwards, he claimed later that he thought he was voting for something else, he did vote to invade Iraq, didn't he? And, moreover, during his campaign didn't he say that, even if he'd known then what he knew in 2004, he'd still have voted for it? No, I'm not at all convinced that the right wouldn't have
been able to hound either Gore into invading Iraq or Kerry into continuing the war indefinitely. Sure, neither Dem would have done it as stupidly and venally as Bush, but that's no comfort to the Iraqis, is it? Nor does it suggest a break from the military interventionism - old school imperialism - that's defined our foreign policy increasingly since Reagan. Obama is on record as being prepared to expand the war into Pakistan and maybe Iran, now apparently even generically anywhere in "Mesopotamia" (NYT, 7/14/08), after he does the Randolph Scott move and "talks" to his targets a couple of times. He's also made pretty clear that AIPAC has his ear, which does it for the Middle East, and I wouldn't be shocked if his administration were to continue, or even step up, underwriting covert operations against Venezuela, Cuba (he's already several times linked each of those two governments with North Korea and Iran) and maybe Ecuador or Bolivia.

This is where I don't give two shits for the liberals' criticism of Bush's foreign policy: they don't mind imperialism; they just want a more efficiently and rationally managed one. As Paul Street argues in BAR, as well as in his forthcoming book Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics, an Obama presidency would further legitimize the imperialist orientation of US foreign policy by inscribing it as liberalism or the "new kind" of progressivism. You know, the black is white, night is day kind.

And, as he has shown most recently in his June 30 speech he will similarly sanitize the galloping militarization of the society that proceeds under the guise of "supporting the troops." (How many of you have noticed being called on by flight attendants to give a round of applause to the military personnel on board a flight - it may be only a matter of time before pretending to be absorbed in reading will no longer work, and those who don't cheer them on will be handcuffed - or the scores of other little, and not so little, everyday gestures that give soldiers priority over the rest of us, in the mode of returners from the Eastern Front? Actually, befitting neoliberalism, these gestures are for the image of soldiers, what they get instead of medical care and income support for the maimed.) All in all, I'd rather have an inefficient imperialism, one that imposes some cost on the US for its interventions. Clinton, like Bush père and Reagan, was able to pull it off with "surgical" (i.e., broadly devastating and terroristic to the objects, relatively painless for the subjects) actions and had the good sense both to select targets that couldn't really fight back and to avoid the hubris of occupation. To that extent, no one complained; this was the new Pax Americana that in principle could have gone on indefinitely, with successive US governments creating and lighting up demon regimes abroad as needed.

"An Obama presidency would further legitimize the imperialist orientation of US foreign policy by inscribing it as liberalism or the "new kind" of progressivism."
This brings to mind Lila Lipscomb, the woman in Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11," whose son was killed in Iraq. She had proudly and quite happily sent two or three of her kids into the military before this one because it seemed like a reasonable bet for their being able to make the bases for better lives for themselves from the perspective of borderline poverty and general economic distress in Flint. Sure, the military no doubt lied in minimizing the likelihood of seeing combat and about how, if they had to do it, all their cool gear would keep them out of harm's way as they fired up bad guys all over the world who were threatening our or somebody else's "freedom." And all the politicians, Dems and Republicans, supported every deployment on those terms. And, like the vast majority of Americans, she probably would never have been moved to question the propriety of traipsing all over the world fucking with people - killing them and destroying their lives - who hadn't done anything to us. I don't make light of deaths of American soldiers; nor do I want to make one of those "maybe this will make them understand" points (though we certainly must recognize why people on the receiving end of this country's bipartisan foreign policy would feel that way). I do want to stress that: a) so long as we assign significance only to the death, injury, and sovereignty of Americans and not those of the people on whose countries we make war, we will be all the more likely to repeat wars like this one over and over and over and b) the bipartisan "support the troops" rhetoric that has become a scaffold for discussing the war is a ruse for not addressing its foundation in a bellicose, imperialist foreign policy that makes the United States a scourge on the Earth. Obama, like other Dems, doesn't want such a discussion any more then the Republicans do because they're all committed to maintaining that foundation. "Antiwar" arguments that begin with clauses like "since the troops are there" or "if they're going to be there" are no antiwar arguments at all. To the extent that Obama and his like christen them as such, they legitimize as "responsible" an "antiwar" discourse that reduces to no more than a technocratic focus on fighting interventionist wars in ways that minimize American casualties. If that's a "progressive" foreign policy, then, in the words of Amos from "Amos 'n' Andy," include me out. And, by the way, since Obama is so fond of invoking Vietnam these days, I should remind the faithful that every major party presidential candidate between 1956 and 1972 - except one, Barry Goldwater, who ran partly on his willingness to blow up the world and was trounced for it - ran on a pledge to end the Vietnam War. Every one of them lied, except maybe Nixon the third time he made the pledge, but that time he had a lot of help from the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.

And then there's the issue of the courts, the big joker the liberals wave when all other arguments seem shaky. But hasn't Obama already aligned himself with the right wing of the current Court, three times in the current session, and on three pretty show-stopping
issues? I know, the response would be that he's just posturing and on balance he'd appoint more "centrist" -- as even his running dogs put it -- judges. (This is the "I know he's always out with her in public and looks like he's enjoying himself, but he told me he really loves me and is just sticking around for the kids" argument.) Frankly, the courts bugbear is beginning to look played out. Past a certain point of giving away the store programmatically and ideologically, it doesn't much matter who's on the Court. And the more ideological ground that's given away, the farther right will be the boundary of acceptable "centrism." Could Obama now nominate someone with a record of favoring gun control or late-term abortions for mental health reasons or opposing the death penalty? And this isn't even to raise all the other, property and contract related areas where the Courts' actions are significant with respect to people's lives. There's no reason to expect anything from him in this area, especially when you factor in all the hedge fund and investor class money he gets and his close University of Chicago Law School and Economics Department connections.

I'm increasingly convinced that the courts issue looms so large because the liberals have given away everything else. It feels ever more the property of Dem hacks who have to strain to find any basis for plausible product differentiation during election season. (A friend used to maintain that there's so little difference between the two parties in this bipartisan era that people determine their allegiances in the same ways they sort themselves into Ford and Chevy people. Now I think it's more like Buick v. Pontiac; they have the same structure and frame, same engine, and same chassis design - just different flourishes and labels.) It's a deal-maker only if you accept the premise that formal preservation of Roe v. Wade is the paramount issue, the sine qua non, of gender justice in the United States or that holding on to the shreds of a mangled, "mended" version of affirmative action is the same for blacks. Those two areas don't stand out so much when you add up everything the Dems have caved on that has more directly injurious effects on black people and women, often with more direct and persisting impact on reproductive freedom - or "choice" in the liberals' capitulationist parlance - and economic security than abortion rights, which are exercised, at best, episodically, and affirmative action, the meaningful scope of which is effectively reduced by retreats in other policy areas. For openers, just think of comparable worth, welfare reform, publicly supported child care, cuts in Federal urban aid, education, the War on Drugs, NAFTA, the ethnic cleansing program of HOPE VI, corporate health care, privatization, abetting union-busting, fetishizing deficit reduction, as only among the most obvious areas where they've rolled over. For most blacks and women, most of the time, abortion rights and affirmative action are at best more symbolic than practically meaningful, particularly in a context
in which in all those other areas that affect their lives directly, the Dems have already given away the store. Trying to stoke hysteria around abortion rights and affirmative action looks more and more like a feeble attempt to deflect attention from that fact, and to convince people who don't stand to get much from a Dem victory that they should commit to them anyway - for the sake of those who do stand to benefit. I've finally realized what this move is all about: what makes the Dems every four years "better" is always something that the hacks and yuppies are likely to imagine getting if they win, and their disgusting moralizing about the imperative to vote for their "lesser evil" - which means "I may get what's important for me, but you have to recognize that what you need is naïve or impractical" - is all about bullying the rest of us into believing we have an obligation to vote for what's good for them.

"The courts issue looms so large because the liberals have given away everything else."

Bill Clinton's "successful" presidency underscores this point. Like baseball managers, presidents probably get too much credit for economic growth and too much blame for downturns. Yes, the growth of inequality may have been tempered in some ways during his administration. But how was Clinton able to pull off his triangulation that combined stimulating the economy while sharply reducing the deficit? I may be a little out of my depth here, but it seems to me that part of the answer is his support for another burst of deregulation in the financial sector, which generated the speculative stock market boom and its inevitable bust that wrecked so many small investors' lives and gutted their risky, defined-contribution pensions. Another part apparently was his administration's role in stimulating housing market speculation - which included encouraging in a couple of different ways the proliferation of subprime lending. Thus a longer-term effect in both cases, between bailouts and the concentration that's part of capitalism's crisis tendency, an element of its dynamic of "creative destruction," was upward redistribution. And, by the way, if you add the fact that the steepest cuts in the federal meat inspection program occurred under Clinton (Tyson's Chicken has its needs, after all), then the libs' halcyon, nay Edenic, days of the Clinton presidency lose a lot of their prelapsarian splendor, as its fingerprints are all over three of the biggest domestic crises in this decade. And there's no reason, other than the will to believe, to expect that Obama would be any better, and it's entirely likely that in some ways - including those bearing on racial justice - he'll be worse, again by moving the boundaries of thinkable liberalism that much farther to the right. There is nothing in his record, much less his recent courting of some of the worst tendencies of the right, to reassure us on this front. The argument that he has to give away everything in order to get elected is substantively only an argument
that we have no reason to elect him.

All that said, I reiterate that, although I've been clear about my own decision to abstain from this charade, I'm not arguing that people shouldn't vote for him. Nor do I see any third-party candidate as a serious alternative. I was a Commoner elector in 1980 and voted for Nader in 2000 (I'm proud to declare that, whatever else I may have done in my life, I've voted against Joe Lieberman at every opportunity I've had to do so), but the fact is that third party candidacies are really the same as not voting, just more costly and time-consuming. They aren't an answer to anything. They don't galvanize movements, and unless they emerge from dynamic, powerful movements - like the Republicans in the 1850s - they aren't more than vehicles for collecting and registering protest by isolated individuals.

This can be defensible, so far as it goes, but it is not an alternative or shortcut to building a movement capable of changing the terms of political debate. And that can't happen during the heat of an election period.

The point is that we need to approach this presidential election stuff, and not just this time around, with no illusions about the trade-offs involved and recognize that it's not even as simple a matter as Obama being better than McCain in the here-and-now on a select menu of issues. I could understand the impulse to rally the troops to produce the outcome that's better on immediate tactical grounds, if we had some troops to rally. If we had such a base, it might even make sense to consider an organized boycott of the election, which may be the only way to keep from being treated like a 2 am booty-call for triangulating Dems. However, we don't have it, and it can't be built during an election season.

"Although I've been clear about my own decision to abstain from this charade, I'm not arguing that people shouldn't vote for Obama."

Perhaps the one luxury of the left's weakness now is that we're absolved of the need to hew so closely to such tactical considerations because we can't influence the outcome of the election anyway. Pretending that we can is a convenient excuse for laziness and opportunism, on both intellectual and political fronts. This, by the way, is yet another area where we've been failed by much of the left media that too easily succumb to simple cheerleading, counting up outrages, and engaging in wish fulfillment, indulging the fantasy that there is a coherent political movement out there somewhere that can assert its electoral will.

Here are two sobering thoughts for the "yes, but" left. First, despite all breathless claims about how the Obama campaign "energized" young voters who could remain mobilized to become the
cornerstone of the base that will push him to be more like the fantasy Obama, when all was said and done, 18-29 year old voters were 14% of those voting in the primaries. True, that was up a few points from the last several elections, but it is exactly the average of the "youth" turnout over the past thirty years. Second, the escrow account established by progressive Obama supporters to hold him accountable has, according to the New York Times (July 13, 2008) raised $101,375 from 675 people in nearly a month. By contrast, the campaign's chief fundraiser, Penny Pritzker of the Chicago real estate magnate and philanthropic family, a week earlier scheduled "more than a dozen big-ticket events over the next few weeks at which the target price for quality time with the candidate is more than $30,000 per person" (NYT, July 4, 2008). I guess our side had better get cracking with those bake sales on Democracy Now!

Finally, I recognize that trade-offs would be involved in rejecting the premise that we can't afford to jeopardize the chances for a Democrat's victory, no matter how little he or she may differ from the Republican. Two little items in the July 15 NYT illustrate this point. One is about the Bush administration's effort to push through a regulation requiring any hospital or medical facility that takes federal money not to discriminate in hiring those - nurses or pharmacists, for example - who oppose abortion or contraception on religious grounds. The second is that the GAO has outed the wage and hour division of the Labor Dept for its laxity and worse in handling complaints and apparently not paying attention to low-wage industries at all. When the right is in power, they can push their agenda into the administrative and regulatory interstices insidiously, and a Democratic administration, at least to this point, would be less likely to pursue objectives such as those, which clearly make things substantively worse than they were and at least temporarily more difficult to fight.

When and whether it's appropriate, or not, to accept the immediate costs of such trade-offs is a decision that would be properly made systematically, in the context of a larger strategy for pursuit of political power, not on the fly, by individuals in the heat of the moment. It's an issue that would best be discussed and debated in institutional forums - labor federations, constituent advocacy and membership groups - and through movement-linked media.

"Obama threatens to go beyond any of his Dem predecessors in redefining their all-too-familiar capitulation as the boundary of the politically thinkable."

But here's the catch-22: The left version of the lesser evilist argument stresses that it's unrealistic and maybe unfair to expect anything of the Dems in the absence of a movement that could push
them, and no such movement exists. True enough, but where is such a movement to come from if we accept the premise that the horizon of our political expectation has to be whatever the Dems are willing to do because demanding more will only put/keep the other guys in power, and they're worse? I remember Paul Wellstone saying already in the early '90s that they'd gotten into a horrible situation in Congress, where the Republicans would propose a really, really hideous bill, and the Dems would respond with a slightly less hideous one and mobilize feverishly around it. If it passed, they and all their interest-group allies would hold press conferences to celebrate the victory, when what had passed actually made things worse than they were before. That's also an element of the logic we've been trapped in for 30 years, and it's one reason that things have gotten progressively worse, and that the bar of liberal expectations has been progressively lowered. It's also one of the especially dangerous things about Obama, that he threatens to go beyond any of his Dem predecessors in redefining their all-too-familiar capitulation as the boundary of the politically thinkable, as the substance of "progressivism." He can manage this partly because of the way that he and his image-makers manipulate the rhetoric and imagery of energizing "youth," whose righteous fervor is routinely adduced to demonstrate the power and Truth of Obamaism, rather than evidence that they just don't know any better.

The Obamistas have exploited the opportunism and bankruptcy of adults whose lack of will and direction, and maybe their hyper-investment as parents, lead them to look to precocious young people as sources of wisdom and purpose. But "youth," first of all, is an actuarial and advertising category, not a coherent social group, and one of its defining features is lack of experience. Another, lest we forget, is its transience; youth, by definition, is a status that disappears with time, and rapidly. (I'm reminded of joking with comrades more than three decades ago, after the Student Organization for Black Unity - SOBU -- had become YOBU about what would be the next step in the progression after Student and Youth.) The many organizational debates over the decades about where to set the upper age limit of the "youth" section should have been a signal of how arbitrary and concocted the category is. And these precocious young, mainly middle class enthusiasts, who believe that the world began when they started paying attention, have not had the experience of being sold out by Dem after Dem; they didn't live through their parents' versions of the exact same overblown and unfulfilled enthusiasms for Jesse Jackson, who also supposedly energized youth and was historic, and/or Bill Clinton. They haven't seen the Dems run a slightly different version of the same candidate and campaign as their Magic Negro every four years since Dukakis, or maybe even Mondale or Carter, with almost always the same result. Many of them don't understand the difference between a political movement and a protest march, chat room or ad campaign. And, most of all, they by
and large don't feel adult anxieties about health care, working conditions, pensions and the like. Therefore, they are the ideal propagandists for the fantasy that Obama can transform the political environment through his person, as well as his bullshit about "community organizing" and the real progressivism being that which transcends, even obviates, conflict, and his arsenal of student government platitudes like the notion that "hope" has a self-evident, concrete meaning or that partisanship is a bad thing or that "politics of gridlock" is something more than important sounding filler for use by the male and female news bunny corps and their stable of talking head guest commentators.

"Many young people don't understand the difference between a political movement and a protest march, chat room or ad campaign."

And, no, I don't mean to dismiss young people's role in politics. Because of their point in life and the social location associated with it, they tend to have more social energy and to be more inclined to experiment than older people. These can be valuable attributes for a political movement. They are also reciprocals of lack of experience and immersion in adult concerns. The Obamistas' opportunistic exploitation of the imagery of youth activism, though, makes it especially important to be clear-headed, to avoid mystifications and facile nostalgia about what role to expect from young people in building a movement.

Neither the civil rights movement nor the Vietnam era antiwar movement was the product of precocious youth, least of all the sort who create their own NGOs, though both at various points depended heavily on the energy, flexibility and other talents of young people, however defined. The direct action explosion of the 1960s civil rights movement in the South was the product of years of organizing and institutional political agitation and action that stretched back to the 1930s. The leadership of the Montgomery Improvement Association were adults: E. D. Nixon was more than 50 years old and a long-time activist in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and NAACP; Rosa Parks was over 30 and an NAACP functionary, and King himself, the novice, was a married father and pastor. SCLC, CORE and the NAACP similarly were led by long-time activist adults who shaped those organizations' programs and their directions. James Farmer was 40 at the time of the Greensboro sit-in, and Bayard Rustin was pushing 50. And this isn't even to consider the many labor and other organizations that fed into, shaped, and sustained the movement.

The story of the student and antiwar movements is similar. SDS began as an offshoot of the labor-based League for Industrial Democracy, and the anti-Vietnam war movement in no way is reducible simply to its student or youth component. Labor, civil rights, pacifist and many
other types of activist organizations shaped, pushed, funded and
directed the larger movement. It's telling that the mass youth
antiwar movement collapsed almost immediately with elimination of the
draft.

I recognize also that one reason it's so difficult to have the
discussion about the point at which it makes sense, if not to break
with the Dems at least to stop lying to ourselves about the
cataclysmic significance of voting for them or not, is that the
election year is in a way not the optimal time to have it. This is
precisely because of the immediateness of the stakes and the kind of
politics - i.e., by definition not "transformative," if we take the
term to imply potential to alter the terms of political debate
substantially - elections warrant and require. The problem, though,
is that even within the ineffectual enclaves that pass for a left, as
well as all the more solid left-of-center interest configurations -
labor, enviros, women, civil rights, etc -- "politics"
increasingly has come to mean only getting someone elected or
defeated or some bill or initiative passed or defeated. So elections
are the only context around which it's possible that even politically
attentive people and those who see themselves as activists are
inclined to discuss political strategy at all. And then, because the
frenzy of electoral jockeying stokes passions and leads to
extravagant claims, the discussion becomes overheated, and
distinctions between tactics, strategies and goals blur, with the
first likely to drive the other two rhetorically. The predictably
exaggerated claims that support electoral mobilization, e.g., "Obama
is a transformative politician," etc, strive to channel and
subordinate all political discussion to the immediate goal of winning
what can be won right now and not really entertaining questions about
how much, not to say whether, it's actually worth winning, or even
whether the victory could be pyrrhic.

"How can we hold them accountable once they're in office if we
can't do it when they're running?"

So we "don't have time" to have the strategic political discussion
about how to try to change the terms of debate during the election
year, and "we don't have time" to have it between election years
because (a) there are other, equally instrumental objectives that
consume everyone's time as immediately more pressing - some other 8%
adjustment to fight for or against - and (b) the dilettantish left
persists in the belief that some gimmick - some Special Candidate,
some clever slogan ("No, we're really the ones who 'support the
troops'" or "We need a policy that helps 'working families' and the
'middle class'") - can magically knock the shackles from the eyes of
the majority that already exists as our constituency but doesn't yet
know it, if we could only find the right one. Then we're back to the
next election year, and some new candidate becomes the embodiment of
all our hopes and dreams and the one who'll call that majority together for us.
Frankly, I've begun to suspect that the election year version of the "now is not the time" argument and its sibling, the "get him elected first then hold him accountable" line, as well as their first cousin, "Well, that's what they all have to do to get elected," reflect nothing better than denial of the grim reality that we can't expect anything from them or make any demands of them. After all, how can we hold them accountable once they're in office if we can't do it when they're running, when we technically have something we can withhold or deliver?

The fact is that they know we don't have the power to make them do or not do anything and treat us accordingly, and they will until we develop the capacity to force them to do otherwise. I know this is a difficult message for those who like to believe that politics is about good people and bad people, or that writing really smart position papers that demonstrate the formal plausibility of a win/win agenda that satisfies everyone's concerns should be enough to counter the influence of those $30,000 per head corporate and hedge fund contributors, but that's just not the way the deal goes down.

So the question is: how are we to break this cycle to be able to try to build the movement we need to do anything more than staunch the bleeding? Consider as well that the staunching looks less and less meaningful to the growing population that gets defined as on the wrong side of the triage line and that each iteration of the losing game further shrinks the ranks of the relatively secure economically, drives more and more people to the margins, and shifts the thinkable terms of political debate, as well as the electorate's center of gravity, more and more to the right. We have seen, for example, that after nearly thirty years of bipartisan government-bashing, even in the wake of massive catastrophes like the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the notion of public obligation to provide for the citizenry's well-being is steadily being wiped out of public consciousness. (And, by the way, those precocious NGO engineers are energetically instrumental in doing a lot of the wiping.) And it's crucially important for those who identify with the left to recognize that there is no designated moment at which the crisis becomes intolerable and "the People" either "wake up" or "rise." That is simply not the way politics works.

Absent concerted, organized intervention, it could go on indefinitely, with all kinds of inventive scapegoating available to stigmatize the previous rounds of losers and provide desperate reassurances to the next. And that would be a political situation and social order likely to grow ever uglier and more dangerous.

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Here is the email address for Obama's Transition Office. Let's flood it with letters and phone calls beginning today. http://change.gov/page/s/ofthepeople

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