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My Audacious Hope

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My audacious hope

US elections 2008: Why I voted for Barack Obama, and what a victory for him could mean for America and the world

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I live in Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederacy, and yesterday I voted for Barack Obama, an inspired African-American, for president. Tears streamed down my face as I left the voting booth. I realised for the first time how much I hope that he wins, and I admitted to myself how vulnerable that makes me.

At the Martin Luther King memorial I went to last month here at the University of Richmond, the speaker read from King's [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#): "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

It hit me how true that was, and how much Americans get right.

I grew up in Israel, and during my last visit there I felt the interconnectedness of the violence of that place in a way I never had before. I felt the hatred and the heartbreak and the hopelessness seeping like sap from everywhere, from the ambient near-fistfight atmosphere in every interaction. I felt it in the venom with which a minibus driver shouted at a migrant worker who didn't want to pay for her five year old son "Go back to Africa," and from the look on the boy's face as he watched their shouting match quietly, resignedly, understanding that this is the world, a battle. I felt the poison walking on the beach in Tel Aviv - beautiful, sunny, blue skied Tel Aviv - because I knew that my mere presence there is so offensive to some people they want to kill me, want to kill themselves in order to kill me. And it hit me in Jerusalem, walking through bucolic, placid streets where Jews live in Arab houses, houses in which people who are still alive have memories.

There are realities, a past that cannot be changed, but in Israel we have no hope, not now. We are in a holding pattern, watching as generals and bureaucrats sink us further into the mud. Imagine, just imagine what a leader with a heart would do for us. We are waiting.

Flying back from Tel Aviv to Richmond was, as always, soothing. Richmond, where you get to a four-way stop sign and everybody stops. And marching through campus with students and faculty on MLK day, I thought: these American feel-good gestures, which the Israeli in me rolls her eyes at, there's something to them. These Americans, and the Richmonders I've met in particular, they get something right. With good will and gentleness, they are working hard, imperfectly, but working hard nevertheless at healing this bloody, bloody history which here in Richmond is so recent.

And what a gift it would be if we had a president who would stoke this flame.

And what a shame these past seven years.

Abu Ghraib and leaving the bodies of Katrina victims to rot in the streets while [Brownie did a heck of a job](#) and [reading My Pet Goat](#) as firefighters climbed up against the tide of fleers to rescue as many as possible.

How have seven years of Bush affected our hearts?

Imagine 9/11 with Obama at the helm?

I woke up that morning in lower Manhattan to the sound of sirens, and I, like others, thought this might be the third world war, and it affected me and my relationships in ways I still do not understand. But I know that if we had someone who left that classroom and [led us](#) - led us with courage and heart - everything would have been different.

Obama will win. We have to believe this.

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