

# Operation Black Vote: Inauguration celebration

## Speech by Trevor Phillips to celebrate US President Barack Obama's Inauguration Day

Tuesday 20th January 2009, London

'Nims, thank-you very much. I'm going to take the instruction not to speak very much because I just wanted to show up. Simon said we've got a problem; we need a tall, black, handsome, charismatic, funny, modest guy. So he said we need this guy, but unfortunately we haven't got one so you're going to have to do.

I just want to say, I can't summon up the words today really because actually there's only person that you all want to hear from today and he's not here; he's going to be on there.

I was looking at the changing slides there and I saw the slide of Curtis Mayfield and it made me think of the song that people my age will remember: "A Change is Gonna Come". And on November the 4th when we got together and saw what happened, many of us were thinking maybe it is coming? And actually by the morning, a change had come.

We now have this incredible superstar; this charismatic political genius who breaks all the rules. Confounded everybody, including me. All of the things that people said you couldn't do, he's done. Couldn't raise

enough money; couldn't get white people to vote for him; couldn't beat the Clinton machine. One by one he's done them all.

And I think we're going to see after today that again he will break the rules. You can't solve the economic crisis; you can't get people together in the Middle East; you can't bring America together. I'd be willing to bet today that in a year's time we will be saying how did he do it? Because this is a phenomenon that we have never seen the like of before and we may not see again. But the truth is that I think that in three or four years time we won't continue to say a change is going to come; we'll be saying this change has come.

The important thing is to celebrate today but to remember that this is a stage along the way as Rosa Parks was a stage along the way; as Martin Luther King was a stage along the way; as Malcolm X was a stage along the way; Mohammed Ali, all stages. Giants on whose shoulders we stand today. Barack Obama, whatever he does, has made history, but he is also an example and a challenge to every one of us today.

And I listened to what Harriet said, because actually the Government's doing the right thing. But I'm going to mention something she herself has done, which is to create the Speaker's Conference which is to investigate and look at how we here can have a more representative Parliament. It cannot continue to be right that we have only 15 minority Members of Parliament in this country.

I want to say that all of us really owe a debt of gratitude to Harriet for opening this door. But I'll say one practical thing. If Barack Obama showed us anything it is that when the opportunity is offered to us, let's go and take it. So everybody here who is going to think about politics, it is our duty to open up our parliament to make it more representative. And that means everybody here has to speak out; everybody here has

to offer their ideas; everybody here pile in, each and every one of us, to open up our democracy in a way it's never been opened up before.

I don't want to still say a change is going to come. When we do it again, let's not be saying that; let's work harder. Because in two, three years time we want to be able to say the change has come here too.

Thank-you.'

More details on the event are available on the [Operation Black Vote website](#).