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Great Black Hope?

The reality of President-Elect Obama.

An NRO Symposium

Is Barack Obama's election good for blacks in America, as distinct from whites in America? Can or should he be? If so, how? National Review Online asked. Ward Connerly, Linda Chavez, and others answered.

**Abigail Thernstrom**

Yes, of course the election of Barack Obama is good for blacks. The tears streaming down black faces as he spoke in Chicago's Grant Park on Tuesday night expressed emotional depths touched by this election almost unimaginable to outsiders. Martin Luther King, Jr. promised a "day when all of God's children" will "sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last! Free at last!" And certainly Obama's triumph must have seemed, for the moment, a realization of King's great "dream" to many blacks across our great land.

Symbolism is important. An Obama presidency—in addition to the pride it evokes—will allow black parents to tell their children, it really is true: the color of your skin will not matter. You can grow up to be our president, the most powerful person on earth, the leader of the free world. The Obama family is also a role model. It's not a "black" family, but an American family, with two loving parents, and two beautiful children.

The message is loud and clear. We are black but we are Americans. What a gift to black (and white) perceptions. At the same time, however, Obama's presidency will not heal the many familiar ills: the too-high crime rates, the too-low levels of academic achievement, the too-many single-parent households. And if President Obama governs hard left, as many whites fear he will, blacks may find themselves both political and economic outsiders.

Today, however, let's keep hope alive. Whatever one's politics, there are grounds to hope that black anger and alienation, so integral to the political landscape, will finally begin to dissipate.

— Abigail Thernstrom is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, and co-author of *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (1997).