Obama Street Party S.E. Portland

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Culture Change Letter #210, Nov. 5, 2008 -- This is arguably the proudest day in American history, at least in our lifetimes. It is fantastic that an intelligent, youthful, activist-minded African-American actually gets elected president in a country that enslaved, committed genocide, invaded sovereign countries without justification, discriminated against women, led the world in pollution for profit, and persecuted greats such as like Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Lennon.

Such misdeeds and twisted cultural impulses were carried out with the greatest hypocrisy and denial. Now we are getting beyond it with one election. Now perhaps the rest of what's good about America, such as our wonderful landscapes and our rich native past, can be all the more appreciated as we see the whole rather than divisions. But it's too good to be true for many of us right now, as shown by an example that follows.

Before describing the Portland street party for Obama's victory, consider what a Culture Change supporter and reader wrote to us on election night after he got our recent checklist of postings:

"I'm mostly right there with you man. Instead of drill baby drill, I'll go with fall, baby fall. The sooner the better at any personal cost I say.
Doubt you'll get a lot of feedback here on election night as the hope addicts dream of someone outside themselves dealing with the cascading crisis'. I refused to vote for the first time in my life. My karma doesn't need the added guilt of complicity and endorsement of the crimes against life a vote in this system implies.
Life is good here on the crashstead, got lots of neighbors all prepping, and planning cooperatively as things devolve..."

I replied,

"I completely respect your position, but maybe it's incomplete or one-sided. I'm too well informed to cheer this country's future when it can't be sustainable -- as a single nation when local economies must take over, and as a nation that has stood for corporate plunder backed up with military aggression. At the same time, I'm totally stoked a multi-cultural non-white man will take over the White House and have his black wife and kids living there. Fills me with joy. You have to admit we as a people can now live down the racism and some of the blatant imperialism the U.S. became known for after 9-11. Obama is very smart, beyond the Clintons, so hope is not misplaced in terms of some better policies. My hope is that he ushers in (probably unintentionally) a lot of social-change momentum that might keep pace with the race to short circuit some of the global warming machine. Obama's probably smart enough to know he and the government have less control and say than some imagine, so the 'clean coal' BS will take a back seat to reality -- the sooner the better. Peace, Jan"

I enjoyed the election-return night in a popular hipster theater in Portland with my daughter, where beer, pizza and popcorn sprinkled with hippie dust (nutritional yeast) are sold to keep down admission cost. As we watched the big CNN screen and heard cheers in the big room, tears came down our eyes in happiness.

I remained fearful of the vote-fraud effect that could twist the election, after reading Greg Palast's analysis of lost votes that would have gone for Obama. So that explains why I'm on the internet late at night, to double check that Barack Obama really won. On the way home I made sure to walk through the heart of Obama territory, in a town where hard-core protesters are counted on to do their thing for many causes. How about some partying? If McCain had won and fraud suspected, there would have been rioting. By the same token, there are probably angry McCain-Palin supporters doing or planning mischief or worse. To his credit, McCain gave a concession speech that went against anything of the sort.

An election-night party erupted in the hippest part of Portland, which is the Southeast/Hawthorne district. (A little yuppified and gentrified of late, much action has moved to Alberta Street in Northeast.)

Hundreds of mostly young people, all white, cheered as they ran and jumped in waves, repeatedly, across the street from the Bagdad Theater at 37th Street to the other side of Hawthorne. I crossed with them once, lingering in the street to encourage others to take it over, but it was the furthest thing from their minds. These young people and dutiful voters were the paragon of politeness and law-abidance.

I felt sorry for them as Americans, for any other people under the sun would have had a real street party, and for all I know some part of Portland was doing just that -- in violation of the law. Where I was, the celebrating was tame, which is fine, but the misplaced respect and extreme deference for passing autos revealed there is no concept as to what really threatens our lives (i.e., greenhouse gases unchecked, asphalted land and killing-machines on four wheels). At this time in our history we still see politics as a mix of issues to care about and fight over, rather than stepping back to see anthropocentric behavior at the root of our problem.

The revelers did their timed crossings, like a dance where boys on one side and girls on the other cross the room on cue, only when the "Walk" sign flashed green. The rest of the time the crowd whooped it up with chants of "Yes we can!" and "Oh-ba-ma!" Sparklers and fireworks lit the sky and spread toxic smoke, while one U.S. flag and amateur percussionists made the occasion festive.

A few people had beers in brown bags, no doubt sucking the bisphenol-A on the top of the bottles. Not a joint added to the smoke present. Almost every driver that passed by obliged with a honk and a victory salute. Somehow, official-looking signs saying "President Obama" were around.

I walked to the neighborhood looking for something like this, and I found it. But knowing too much about the state of the world and the likely fate of the U.S.A. upon petrocollapse and climate disaster, I could not join in with boisterous joy. Instead of "God bless America," the sentiment that comes to my mind is "God(dess) help us." And Go Barack!

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