

## Opinion

## Election 2004: 'Hope is on the way'

By PAUL ROBESON, JR.

When, on the second day of the Democratic Party Convention, Teresa Heinz Kerry, the outspoken wife of the Democratic presidential nominee, declared that, "In America, the true patriots are those who dare to speak truth to power," she cast aside today's central myth in America's political discourse. The bipartisan political consensus, reinforced by the mass media, rewards those who utter conformist slogans and punishes those who speak truth to power. Her direct challenge to this consensus was studiously ignored by the media commentators. Moreover, they went out of their way to damn with faint praise a speech that conveyed the most insightful, powerful and courageous message delivered from the podium up to that point.

## Obama's oversimplified identity

By AMOS JONES

Peculiar is the manner in which pundits are claiming that Illinois State Sen. Barack Obama, by virtue of his ethnic lineage, could unite America in a way nobody else could. On the heels of his inspiring keynote speech before the Democratic National Convention on July 28, such commentary comes forth with no acknowledgment of the racial dynamic responsible for defining the man's identity in the first place.

As with all biracial Americans born to one white parent and one Black parent, if Obama can say easily and without chal-

On the other hand, the electrifying, inspiring and charismatic speech by Barack Obama, Illinois' Black candidate for the US Senate, was greeted universally by effusive and uncritical praise. This response was well-earned. Barack Obama's speech, the companion piece to Teresa Kerry's, will go down in history as one of the great moments of American political conventions, eclipsing Mario Cuomo's famous achievement by a wide margin.

Both Barack Obama and Teresa Kerry presented their progressive messages within the traditional myth of "one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Both of them probably knew that this illusion has always been, and remains, false. But the vast majority of white voters deeply cherish it, and they would be offended by

lence that he is Black, he also ought to be able to stand on national television and declare without ridicule that he is white.

Of course, we know why that has never happened: Barack's category of biracial people cannot exercise their right to identify themselves; their society already does this for them, often from a very early age.

This automatic imposition of the Black label is the part of the equation nobody wants to talk about, though — particularly during an election year.

If Obama's capacity for racial unification is to be credibly

any message that explicitly rejects it. Therefore, Barack Obama opened his address with the lines: "There is not a Black America and a white America and Latino America and Asian America. There's the United States of America."

Not so. One America is a goal; not a reality. There have always been two conflicting Americas: progressive America and reactionary America; the America of the Union and the America of the Confederacy; wealthy America and non-wealthy America; white America and non-white America; WASP America and non-WASP America.

The national political debate is rooted in unreal assumptions which reflect an artificial melding of contradictory values.

The US is governed on the basis of a centrist compromise between the values of the two

addressed; then his white heritage must be acknowledged at least as equally as is his Black heritage. Instead, he is proclaimed as a historic Black figure throughout America, from the Harvard Law Review to the United States Senate. The man certainly cannot be faulted for identifying himself as Black, since he has no power to identify otherwise and therefore falls in the victimhood traps set for all Black people in America. But Americans nonetheless should stop acting as if the country embodies such egalitarian goodwill that Obama had a choice in the matter. (Notably, in South

different Americas, and this compromise imposes a conformity which recognizes only liberals (the center-left) and conservatives (the center-right). Both the left and the right are officially excluded and are forced to merge into the broad center. The result is a one-party system with two competing centrist factions.

The right wing of the conservative faction is the political enemy of African-Americans, and it pursues radical policies in order to maintain the existing status quo with its sharp divisions. The left wing of the liberal faction is our natural political ally, and its goal is to alter the status quo in order to unite the majority of the American people. The core values of these two nominally centrist groups are fundamentally opposed.

Africa, Obama would be assigned to the more empirically precise label of "colored;" in America the one-drop rule still carries weight.)

It is a national tragedy that Obama and other half-white "African-Americans" have been disallowed from claiming that they are white. Yet, amid the euphoria of this truly great American's speech last week, everybody appeared to be uniformly comfortable with a glaring, obviously racist denial of personhood.

But then, at least one African-American is questioning Obama's hopeful rhetoric in

President Bush, although he campaigned deceptively as a "compassionate conservative," has embraced the conservative right wing. By contrast, Senator Kerry emphatically embraced the progressive left wing at last week's Democratic Convention. Consequently, despite a concentrated media disinformation campaign, this election has become a clear left-right contest which reflects the nationwide conflict over values — progressive values versus reactionary values.

Our values as a people have always been progressive and are symbolized most closely in national politics by the values of Presidents Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy. They are strongly opposed to the values of Presidents Theodore Roosevelt. (Continued on Page 45)

the face of this ethnicity assassination.

"In a way," noticed Holly Clark, my sister and a political science student at the University of Kentucky in Lexington who, like me, viewed most of Obama's message favorably, "it makes his suggestion to hope paradoxical because it looks as if biracial Americans who are Black and white have given up fully embracing both heritages in this America."

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