

Obama campaign a shining example of full democracy

To learn the real, and inspiring, story of the 2008 presidential election, one has to look beyond the insubstantial horse-race theater that ran constantly on cable news and in the blogosphere and experience what was happening on the ground in neighborhoods across the land. Those who did saw something different: democracy in action.

In a republic, politics is the art of uniting diverse people and constituencies behind a common purpose. Both parties had ground organizations that achieved this, but President-elect Barack Obama's campaign was an unprecedented bottom-up effort, built on the time and energy of your friends and neighbors. It embodied the core American ideal of *e pluribus unum* expressed so well by Obama himself in Grant Park and felt by all who were a part of that monumental occasion.

I am fortunate enough to have been part of the movement that elected our 44th president. For the four months leading up to the election, I gathered regularly with a group of dedicated volunteers from within a five-mile radius, forming one small arm of a highly decentralized campaign that perfected neighborhood-level organization.

Greensboro, like hundreds of other cities, was divided into groups of precincts, and each one had its own "staging location," or base of volunteer operations. My nearest staging location was a couple's home, where I became friends with the two dozen regular volunteers with whom I spent many evenings and weekends making phone calls and knocking on doors. We shared good food, laughs, stories and, most importantly, a common cause and a common hope. And on that rainy Tuesday night, we shared in a hard-earned victory in which every vote mattered.

The ability of Obama's campaign to bring so many diverse people together, with each person bringing others into the fold, remains a shining example of the proper functioning of democracy. The act of voting and organizing around electoral campaigns is a cornerstone of civic involvement, but it is only that and not the entire picture.



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No politician, not even the best and the brightest, can be expected to solve all of our problems in a manner everyone can support. It is the responsibility of every citizen to take part in the decision-making process by staying in constant contact with

their elected representatives and to engage in groups, organizations and community efforts that act on issues of concern.

The collective energy that coalesced around our president-elect's historic run needs to be summoned in an ongoing way so that we may collectively address the immense challenges ahead of us, from ending our dependence on fossil fuels and halting global warming to providing high-quality health care for everyone, from creating a humane and sensible immigration policy to revitalizing our communities and revamping our infrastructure for the 21st century.

In marked contrast to the outgoing administration, President-elect Obama has promised "a new level of transparency, accountability and participation for America's citizens." His campaign will keep the online organizing tools at his Web site in place for people to use in taking action on issues. We owe it to ourselves, future generations, and to the founding ideals of the republic to take advantage of these opportunities to exercise our civic power. Each of us should maintain the network of contacts we made over the campaign season so that we can hold those we elected accountable to our desires for the future.

In closing, let us remember what President Franklin Roosevelt said to his supporters after his victory in 1932: "You've elected me, now organize a movement to make me do what you want." Keep in mind also the words of our president-elect: "This victory alone is not the change we seek; it is only the chance for us to make that change. ... So let us summon a new spirit of patriotism, of responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other."

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