

## OBAMARLEY - Barack Strikes Familiar Chord with Message of Change and Unity

US President Barack Obama seems to have fulfilled the theme of Bob Marley's Black Man Redemption, governing a country which once treated blacks as second-rate human beings.

Obama's message and leadership, however, have never been about redeeming the black race, but of all people moving forward together despite race and nationality. Obama articulated this brilliantly in his speech, 'A more perfect union' in Philadelphia last March.

Numerous parallels have been drawn between the two iconic black men. From similarities in facial features to each having a white parent and the likeness of their messages. Obama's theme of 'Yes we can' is prevalent in Marley's songs as he sought to mobilise people towards equality and unity. Marley and Obama's words are so powerful because they are all-inclusive. They appeal to everyone. "Obama, like Bob reached out to all people, nations, religions, creeds, lifestyles," said Colin Leslie of Jamaica's Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports, and former marketing consultant for Marley's Tuff Gong label.

"Barack Obama is the Bob Marley of American politics ... they both had a diverse following because of their message of inclusiveness", Leslie added. He also noted that the Hopi Indians in the Grand Canyon had cassettes of Bob's music; in Tibet, Bob is worshipped as a deity and he is regarded as a reincarnation of the god Vishnu. Bob had pulled a crowd of 500,000 in Milan, Italy. "The Republicans labelled Obama as a rock star during the campaign because of his popularity and the crowds he pulled. ."

From the glitzy inauguration balls in Washington, DC, to the slums of Kenya, the homeland of Obama's father, Marley's global peace anthem, One Love, resonated on January 20 when Obama became America's 44th president. Imagine the magic of the moment if Marley, who would have turned 64 on February 6, performed at the White House?

Music insider and Marley friend, Tommy Cowan, said Marley would have been overjoyed at Obama's election, and would have certainly attended the inauguration were he alive today. Highlighting the similarities in their beliefs he said "They both believed in a lot of the same things, but just said it in a different way."

"One of Obama's messages is that all Americans need to unite. It's the same way Bob said 'Africa unite'. Obama said 'hope we can believe in'. In Coming in From the Cold, Bob said 'when one door is closed, another one is opened'." Cowan added that beyond the message, both men were fighting for a greater cause. "While Bob was fighting against oppression, Obama is fighting to regain the trust and love of the people."

Equally important, both men had grass-roots support. Marley went door to door selling records, Obama started campaigning at the steps of each Chicago home, building the foundation to achieve greatness. Magnetic effect

Leslie added that Obama and Marley's magnetic effect is also due to their favourable racial hue.

"Their non-musical similarity is that they are both handsome and charming men of mixed unions (Obama has a white mother and black father, Marley had a black mother and white father) and that made them appeal to more people. People don't like to talk that way, but it's true," he said.

In an article posted on [www.trinicenter.com](http://www.trinicenter.com) on November 9, 2008, Dr Kwame Nantambu, Professor Emeritus at Kent State University, wrote of 'Obama's Bob Marley effect'.

Senator Barack Obama's run for the United States presidency mirrored Bob Marley's iconic musical cultured legacy. Like Bob Marley, Senator Barack Obama was also able to woo thousands of young white Americans, mainly females, to work for his election. Like Bob Marley, these young American females saw Barack Obama as one of them.

### COWAN

Obama's campaign experience was their political comfort zone a la Bob Marley's concerts.

Like Bob Marley, young white Americans totally identified with Obama's message about their future. They felt Obama's "positive vibration". Like Bob Marley, Obama's youthful, white-looking, physical appearance was the magnetic force to draw young white Americans to his side. They not only saw themselves in his political mirror but also clothed themselves in his rock star persona a la Bob Marley.

In addition, Bob Marley's lyrics spoke to revolutionary change in society between the "Haves" and "Have nots" and exhorted the oppressed/marginalised to "get up, stand up; stand up for your rights".

Similarly, Senator Barack Obama's campaign lyrics/rhetoric spoke to "change" in America after eight years of President

George Bush's failed domestic economic and foreign policies.

Bob Marley and Senator Barack Obama were extremely successful and on target in this endeavour, "Change We Need".

In the final analysis, the common denominator between Bob Marley and Barack Obama is that they both give "the poor a voice the world over".

There are also differences between Marley and Obama, the main being religion. While Obama's Christian faith was thrown in the spotlight during the furore over comments made by his former pastor, Jeremiah Wright, Marley had long been known as an active Rastafarian chanting the name of His Imperial Majesty Hailie Selassie I. Perhaps for political, as well as personal reasons, Obama, while acknowledging his faith, did not make it a topical issue.

The similarities between both men, however, are glaring chiefly because of their words and the conviction with which they are spoken.

"Songs such as Get up, Stand up and One Love apply to everyone and Obama's message is the same way," Leslie stated.

"Obama has become an international leader, even without trying, the same way Bob was because of his message. Bob's music fits right into Obama's philosophy."

When Leslie was quizzed about which of Marley's song best applied to Obama's situation, he replied: "Easy. Bad Card - Dem a go tired fi si wi face, can't get wi out a the race."

Cowan, a Rastafarian who turned to Christianity in the late 1990s, added that the line from Marley's One Drop which says "Give us the teachings of His Majesty, for we no want no devil philosophy", is almost synonymous with Obama's credo.

"If we should go by the teachings of His Imperial Majesty, it focuses on health, education, spiritual upliftment, freedom of choice and that we must live with men of all faith. The devil's philosophy is what divides us and creates war and greed.

"Look at Obama's message," he declared. "He is welcoming everyone as long they come ready to live and work together."

Source: Jamaica Gleaner