



November 6, 2008

Kirwan Institute Statement on Senator Obama's Victory

On November 4th, 2008, Barack Obama became the first African American -- the first non-white-male of any kind -- President-Elect of the United States. And he did so in style, winning more votes than any other candidate in our nation's history. As Senator John McCain graciously noted in his concession speech, given the deep and troubling history of race in this country, this is cause for celebration.

To be sure, this election cycle also offered ample reason for concern. In Arizona, California, and Florida, voters chose to inscribe anti-gay discrimination into their state constitutions. Voters in Nebraska passed a measure prohibiting the use of race, gender, or national origin in public employment, public education, and public contracting. Misogyny, Islamophobia, and xenophobia made lengthy, dismaying appearances throughout the campaign. And, contrary to a rapidly emerging media narrative, Obama's victory does not signify this country's passage to a "post-racial" state. With respect to race, as with the economy, foreign policy, the environment, issues of war and peace, and so much more, we have a great deal of hard work ahead of us.

However, even as we acknowledge the tough road ahead, it is important to mark how far we have come. In 1958, the state of Virginia responded to federal court orders to integrate its public schools by closing a number of those schools instead. Fifty years later, Virginia gave Obama its 13 electoral votes and a critical victory, the first time a Democratic presidential candidate has won there since 1964. Indiana, the only state ever to elect as governor an open member of the Ku Klux Klan (Edward Jackson, 1925-1929), gave its 11 electoral votes to Obama as well. Perhaps now we can finally bring closure to the Civil War and open wide the door to a truly inclusive society and a more perfect union.

Congratulations to the American people and to President-Elect Obama! The Kirwan Institute looks forward to working with the new administration, and with everyone who seeks to expand justice, prosperity, and opportunity for all.

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