

# Moments to Remember

Yes, it was an unforgettable political campaign. But what people recall most depends on whom you ask. A gallery of voices on the legacies of Campaign 2008



## A Moment in Philadelphia

By Garry Wills

**T**HE MOST MEMORABLE ASPECT OF THE RACE, IN MY MIND, came when Barack Obama stepped back, in Philadelphia, from the standard charge-and-countercharge exchanges of a campaign to take a long look at the problems of race in our history. It was as pivotal as John Kennedy's speech on religion to Protestant ministers in his race for President. But we do not read Kennedy's speech for its content now. I believe Obama's speech will have lasting historical significance, from the moment he could say, as part of a bid for the presidency, that "I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on earth is my story even possible."

*Wills is professor of history emeritus at Northwestern University*

## A Study in Contrasts

By Jay Winik

**I** KEEP THINKING ABOUT that heart-stopping week when the economic crisis broke, a week when Americans were scared, fretful and angry: like a Civil War general itching to lead one last glorious charge, the 72-year-old John McCain broke off his campaign, rushed to Washington, cradled a cell phone to his ear and sought to help pass the financial rescue bill. Meanwhile, there was an unruffled Obama, looking composed and elegant and steady—might one say presidential?—reassuringly convening his economic advisers, many of whom comprise the modern-day Wise Men of the financial establishment. Here, at this Rubicon for the nation, was a profound study in contrasts for the voters to consider, a moment when two images transcended all the talking points and canned speeches. Here, too, in this one moment, was when Americans would decide who their next President would be.

*Winik is the author of April 1865 and The Great Upheaval*

## An Election of Firsts

By the Rev. Jim Wallis

**T**HIS COULD BE THE most transformational election in years. The younger generation, which has cynically dismissed politics as useless, has been energized and engaged as never before. Even poor inner-city youth, usually disengaged from "public life," are excited about an election. Many Evangelicals and Catholics have redefined "moral" issues to include more than abortion and gay marriage, especially poverty and the environment. The economic crisis could open up a deeper national discussion about the relationship of democracy and the market, the need for new social regulation and self-regulation, and the reconnection of personal and social responsibility. And the election of Barack Obama would immediately change the image of America in the world.

*Wallis is a Christian author, preacher and activist. He is president of Sojourners, a national network connecting faith and justice*

**'I will never forget the look on our 2-year-old daughter's face as she watched Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama debate. My wife and I realized that our little girl would only know an America in which every child can aspire to be President. Reflected in her gaze, we saw the faith of generations—men and women of all hues who have never stopped believing that as great as America is, we must be greater still.'**

*—Benjamin Jealous, president of the NAACP*

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**An Encounter in Pennsylvania**

By Bill O'Reilly

**M**Y INTERVIEW WITH Barack Obama during the Republican Convention brought me some insight into the presidential campaign that I certainly did not have before the chat.

For months my producers had been trying to nail down a time and place for the

interview, and finally it came together very quickly. The day before John McCain was to give his acceptance speech in St. Paul, Minn., the Obama people called. I was to meet the Senator in Pennsylvania the next morning. Be there or be square. The timing was obvious: disrupt the Republican flow. Give Senator Obama a high-profile TV slot just before McCain's big speech. Because I knew I would most

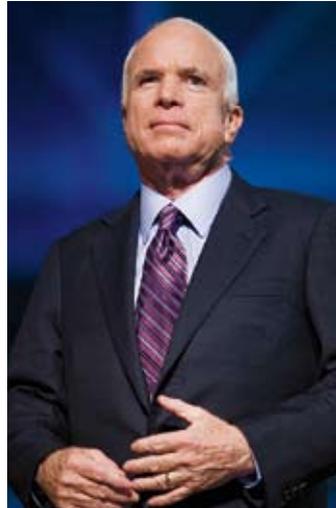
likely not get a second chance to talk to Obama, we hopped on a chartered plane and flew to the Keystone State.

Senator Obama himself was commanding but cautious as he entered the interview room. He knew the talk would be a challenge. He did well, and millions of people saw a spirited back-and-forth.

Whenever a politician is straight with me, I gain a

measure of respect for that person. Obama answered my questions, and we both let the chips fall. His campaign was using me, and my program was using him for high ratings. But our conversation is still being talked about. So we both won.

*O'Reilly is host of The O'Reilly Factor and The Radio Factor; his latest book is the best seller A Bold Fresh Piece of Humanity*



**Wisdom from the Right**

By Laura Ingraham

**O**UR COUNTRY IS ON THE VERGE OF ELECTING THE MOST inexperienced, left-wing politician ever to make a serious run for the presidency. Yet were it not for talk radio and the conservative blogosphere, the American people would have learned little to nothing about certain aspects of Barack Obama's life and political outlook. Old media—network news, most major newspapers and magazines—didn't even bother trying to maintain a pretense of objectivity. They seemed to exist solely to deflect and dismiss criticism of Obama and demonize those who dared to question (enter: Joe the Plumber). Who needs the DNC when you have NBC? Among the Obama stories either not adequately covered or not covered at all: his relationship with Bill Ayers, an unapologetic domestic terrorist; his 20-year friendship with preacher Jeremiah Wright; his view that the Constitution reflects a "fundamental flaw" of America; and his stance as a state senator against a bill that

would have provided medical care to infants born alive after an attempted abortion. (He referred to such babies as "pre-viable" fetuses that were "temporarily alive.") More than ever, talk radio and its friends in the blogosphere are essential to the preservation of an informed democracy. No wonder some powerful figures on the left want to bring back the so-called Fairness Doctrine!

*Ingraham is host of the nationally syndicated talk show The Laura Ingraham Show. Her most recent book is Power to the People*

**A Democratic Awakening**

By Thomas Frank

**W**HAT WE'LL REMEMBER about 2008 is that it was the year the backlash finally broke. For decades, American conservatism has presented itself as a class-based rebellion against a condescending "liberal elite." The argument has laid low liberals from George McGovern to John Kerry; it has sent the mainstream media scurrying in terror; it has fueled fights over such unlikely subjects as the theory of evolution; and it furnished the political cover for the most elitist economic policies since the 1920s. For years Democrats had been incapable of responding in kind. But the enormous economic unpleasantness of 2008 forced them back onto their own, almost forgotten working-class instincts. In response, conservatives escalated the assault on the "liberal elite." John McCain chose as his running mate a woman whose main selling point was her acute sense of cultural victimhood. His campaign marched a platoon of propaganda figures across the stage, like the cartoonishly named Joe the Plumber, to affirm the working man's love for the policies that were killing him. It was grotesque, and soon it will be over. Hopefully, for good.

*Frank, journalist and author of The Wrecking Crew, writes about American culture and politics*

**A Memorable Mood and Deep Disappointment**

By David J. Garrow

**O**NE OUGHT TO FEEL GREAT JOY AS WE STAND ON THE CUSP OF ELECTING A YOUNG LIBERAL Democrat as the first African-American President. But instead, my mood is one of deep disappointment, both with two nominees who've failed to live up to their own prior reputations and with increasingly politicized national news media that have wallowed in what's trite and vacuous rather than featuring policy substance or biographical insight. For two decades, John McCain represented the promise of a Republican Party standing for honest pragmatism rather than destructive ideological rigidity. But this year McCain has run an embarrassingly bad general-election campaign that's insisted America's most pressing issue is Barack Obama's passing acquaintance with Bill Ayers, an aging Chicago radical. Prior to 2008, the brightest gemstone in Obama's political résumé was his championing of campaign reforms that would reduce the insidious role of private money in American politics. But this year Obama threw that commitment under the bus with an alacrity that should have alarmed everyone who thinks they know what policies he'll pursue as President. The news media have highlighted McCain's shortcomings far more aggressively than they've examined what's evanescent rather than enduring about Obama, but disappointment all around is the unexpected mood I'll remember from this campaign.

*Garrow, a senior research fellow at Homerton College, University of Cambridge, is the author of Bearing the Cross, a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Martin Luther King Jr.*

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