

The Future Is Mestizo, The Future is Now

Demetria Martinez | Mar. 6, 2009



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My journey to the White House began Thanksgiving Day, 2006. My parents and I had just seen the movie *‘Bobby,’* based on the life of Robert Kennedy. I walked out of the theater stunned. *‘Barack Obama will be our next president,’* I said. *‘How do you know?’* Dad asked. *‘I know it in my gut,’* I said. *‘It’s like the ‘60s. We’re in a quagmire of a war. Obama will pick up where Kennedy left off.’*

Every Wednesday for the next two years, my family sat around my parents’ table to eat and talk politics. My sister, an attorney who has cracked her share of glass ceilings, endorsed Hillary Clinton. My brother, a frequent flier to Russia to lend his expertise on non-nuclear proliferation issues, imagined a dream ticket: Obama, as Clinton’s vice president, would have eight years to brush up on the basics.

My father urged us to back the favorite son, Gov. Bill Richardson. Mom hedged her bets. *‘They’re all good,’* she said. My family turned to me. *‘Obama will be our next president,’* I said, patting my stomach. *‘I feel it here.’*

I might as well have been reading tea leaves. My family believes in well-reasoned arguments, not prophetic utterances. I think Dad began to feel sorry for me. He revealed that his biking buddy, Fred Harris, had supported Obama from the get-go.

I called Fred for a reality check. A former U.S. senator from Oklahoma, Fred served on President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Kerner Commission, which was charged with explaining why the nation was rife with *‘civil disorder.’*

Fred cited the Kerner report as if it had been issued yesterday. *‘America is moving toward two societies,’* Fred said, his voice rising, *‘one white and one black, separate and unequal.’* He went on, *‘Race and poverty have been the driving concerns of my life.’* Obama grasped the gravity of these issues and had the smarts to address them. *‘He’s the real deal.’*

With Fred’s blessing, I pressed on, gazing into my crystal ball at Obama’s face. I went online and toured the world to see his picture. The man was not just another political candidate. People of every culture were engaging in guerrilla iconography, creating images of Obama that rendered visible their own aspirations and mirrored their own dreams.

Meditating on Obama's face, I saw myself: a mestiza whose veins pulse with the blood of the indigenous peoples of the Americas as well as the Spaniards who nearly decimated them and the African slaves they brought with them. Obama, son of a white mother and African father, would not only be our first African-American president, he would be our first mestizo president.

Browsing my bookshelf, I came upon the writings of Fr. Virgilio Elizondo, author of *The Future Is Mestizo*. His prophetic work examines the spiritual and cultural ramifications of the phenomenon of mestizaje. Obama, beyond who he is or what he might do, symbolizes the hope that multiracial children are signs that racial borders dividing humankind might break down. God summons us to rise above racism, to open the way for God to create something new.

"Through mestizaje, a new body, a new culture with its language, and even a new form of religious expression comes into existence," writes Elizondo. "It does not destroy its own sources of life — the parent races and cultures — but it brings them together into a new form of human existence."

My parents and I began election night at Fred's house and ended at my sister's with shouts, champagne and tears. I cried again on Inauguration Day as Obama raised his hand and stated his full name, the name that had so often been used against him.

This country, in spite of itself, had elected a black man as president. Incredibly, we'd also elected our first Third World president. The future is mestizo? Maybe that future is now.

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