

# A LARGER VIEW

*A Commentary On How Current Events Reflect—  
Or Not—Our Spiritual Search*

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[www.innerlifedirections.com/blog](http://www.innerlifedirections.com/blog)*

*In This Issue: Obama's Right*

*Like The Women in Zorba*

*It's Not Democracy, It's Political Participation*

*Website of Interest*

*To Ponder On*

## Obama's Right

The issue of race underlies this presidential campaign. Periodically it surfaces, and will continue to. There has been much talk usually revolving around what seems two axis, is Obama not black enough, that is mainly for African Americans who want to make sure that issues affecting the African American community will be dealt with, and its counterpart, is he too black, that is mainly for whites who fear that his allegiance to the African Community will color (no pun intended) his presidential decisions, a concern shared by other minorities who want to make sure their priorities will be included. When we think along those lines we place the burden on Obama, not ourselves. It's as if we denied the fact that we live in a society that is still racist-- Colin Powell and Condi Rice notwithstanding. We may have opened the doors to accept African Americans in positions of power including president, but that doesn't mean we're no longer racist. If we were capable of living up to Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of judging people by the content of their character, then Obama's color wouldn't even matter. Certainly it wouldn't be talked about. He wouldn't have had to give a speech on race, and he wouldn't be in the position of having to address or defend race in the future. The questions stem from the kind of society we now live in, a society where race still matters. Barak Obama is bi-racial with an African father and a white American mother. By that standard he's also bi-cultural. We tend to accept that fact and glide over it. It's easy to because we understand bi-cultural far more than bi-racial. If he's both black and white, why should he automatically be classified as black? Where is his right to be white? I know his skin looks dark, but the fact is his mother, half of his gene pool, was white. Oughtn't he to be able to choose what he is, the way people do about their cultural heritage. My niece who has an Italian father is certain to be Italian in an Italian restaurant. The rest of the time it depends on the situation or on what's going on in her life. She isn't labeled, isn't forced to choose, she retains her freedom to be both or either given the circumstance. Not so with bi-racial people, they have to be black. August Wilson,

the late Pulitzer prize winning, himself bi-racial, understood and made a conscious choice. He chose to be black. It may have been only the appearance of a choice, since he really didn't have one in our society, but it was an important message. Barak Obama, as any bi-racial person, should be what he is, what he wants, what he chooses, not what we label him as. When we give him that right, racism will be dealt a fatal blow.

## **Like The Women in "Zorba"?**

There's a scene in the movie "Zorba", where Bouboulina is dying and the women of the town don't even wait for her to draw her last breath before they take everything. Listening to the media each time a public figure has an affair reminds me of that scene which might as well be called "the vultures descend". Having an affair is wrong, but when a public figure has one, does it give us the right to have a gossip fest? It seems every commentator, blogger, et al, can't wait to have a say, to condemn, to judge, to criticize, to chastise, (however disguised through the art of punditry) forgetting that the same spiritual code that tells us an affair is wrong also tells us that these behaviors are just as wrong. We talk as if we are above weakness, as if we had never made a big mistake, as if we had never hurt anyone. What ends up being on display as people keep on talking is the lack of compassion, of understanding, of reasons behind the action, of context, of intent, of forgiveness, of many of the values which make people good Christians, good Buddhists, good Muslims or good Jews. We tend to lose ourselves in our own pronouncements and as we do seem to lose sight of what's important. Suddenly the transgression is magnified as if the individual involved could not have done anything worse. We then justify our form of voyeurism by telling ourselves it goes to character, as if there are no better indices, such as votes cast, speeches, stand on issues, life history or how the person in question handled adversity. We quickly forget that politicians go back on their promises, that they tweak the truth to be acceptable to whatever audience they are talking to, fall prey to believing their own hype, all of which are not much different than the kind of lies involved in having an affair. Still, we seem to excuse one and not the other. Perhaps this ought to be no surprise, as long as we allow our morality to be defined by the tabloids. They pay for the tidbits we are all so eager to learn, dangle money in front of poorly paid (sometimes disgruntled) servants, attendants, and others employed by potential subjects. We engage in the gossip, immune to the source and to the fact that our attention, the nation's, and that of decision makers is being deflected away from more pressing issues.

## **It's Not Democracy, It's Political Participation**

Sometimes it takes a mirror image to see our own condition more clearly. Having just read about the European Union's states experiment with various forms of direct democracy, I began to reflect about our own. The EU members have several ways of accepting, or rejecting, changes to their constitution. Last June Ireland's referendum on the subject failed, and it was said that the no votes could mean the end of the Union. Since, various European leaders have been looking for ways to redo or rethink the Ireland experience. Meanwhile, the whole idea of referenda and what

they mean is also being talked about. One reason is because it is not uniform. There are four models.

- States where voters can call for a referendum and its results are binding for the government: Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Italy and Denmark
- States where the referenda have to be introduced by the Parliament or the government: Sweden, France, Austria, Hungary, Netherlands, Spain
- States where referenda are rare: Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Czech Republic, Belgium, Finland, Estonia and Greece
- States where the constitution in practice contains few or no provision for referenda: Portugal, Romania and Bulgaria.

One's first reaction may be, no wonder the EU is having such a hard time, but there's a more fundamental issue, how each state chooses to practice democracy. In the U.S we are so used to using the word democracy, we tend to slide over what it means. We believe democracy is best, superior to any other form of government and then make a jump to therefore equate our way with what is best. We forget what it is that gives democracy its edge, it is political participation. There are, indeed, many ways and many degrees of participation in the political process, all valid if one applies the criterion of consent of the governed, a criterion which has a long philosophical, legal and spiritual pedigree. We erroneously assume that democracy automatically means direct democracy and that our system of election is best, forgetting all the while that ours is not as direct as we often think, but a representative democracy, whereby we elect individuals to participate in democracy on our behalf. The voters in the first category above, for example, believe in something much more direct than our system, their vote is directly binding on the government. Any way is valid, it seems, as long as two factors are met, one that there is a level of political participation and second that this level be agreed upon--if not chosen. Perhaps the next time a President or some surrogate talks about spreading democracy, we can remind ourselves of the underlying questions that raises and be better equipped to either agree or disagree.

**Website of Interest:** [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

### **Honoring Our Past**

Whether we want to confront the implications or not, slavery is part of American history. The Library of Congress has a collection of slave narratives that will inspire, move, touch, outrage and ultimately inform. Click on American memory, then on African American History and scroll down to the slave narratives. These were collected through the writer's Federal Project during the depression. You might need to steel yourself, but you won't regret reading them. What better way to honor these courageous lives than to know about them and perhaps pass on that knowledge.

## To Ponder On

"The things that will destroy America are prosperity-at-any-price, peace-at-any-price, safety-first instead of duty-first, the love of soft living, and the get-rich-quick theory of life."

*Theodore Roosevelt*

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