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Fresno's African American Community Newspaper

HOW OBAMA DID IT:



A FRESH FACE, DISCIPLINED RACE AND A PUBLIC HUNGRY FOR HIS MESSAGE OF CHANGE

BY SHARON COHEN

CHICAGO (AP) —

It was a tumultuous Monday morning in mid-September — two of America's financial giants were near collapse, the Dow was plummeting and the economy seemed to be in free fall — when Barack Obama's campaign manager, David Plouffe, heard a staffer cry out in disbelief.

"No, he didn't!" the worker shouted, as the television showed Sen. John McCain on the stump in Florida.

At that moment, Dan Pfeiffer, Obama's boyish-looking communications director, was walking past a bank of TVs on the 11th-floor Michigan Avenue national headquarters, after the regular morning staff meeting. There was the Republican nominee, talking about the unfolding financial crisis.

"The fundamentals of our economy are strong," McCain was saying.

"You're not going to believe this," Pfeiffer said as he entered Plouffe's office and repeated McCain's "fundamentals" message.

They immediately sensed an opportunity.

"It didn't take a discussion to know that a major moment just happened in the campaign," Plouffe recalls.

The timing couldn't have been better. McCain was edging ahead in the polls, bolstered by a convention bounce and his surprise vice presidential pick of Sarah Palin, who had quickly snatched the celebrity mantle from Obama.

It was Sept. 15, 50 days before the election.

It was the day the Dow plunged 504 points, the beginning of the big financial meltdown that would rattle America.

And it was the day Barack Obama gained speed on the way to the White House.

In presidential campaigns, there often are pivotal moments — a gaffe in a debate, an attack that sticks, a misstep that becomes a headline — that can help change the course of the contest.

For Obama, the turning point seemed to be the economic collapse. As the Dow descended, his fortunes rose. The worse things got, the better Obama seemed to fare in polls that showed Americans increasingly trusted him more than McCain to lead the country out of its financial mess.

Obama's team had already been trying to paint McCain as out of touch, pointing out the Republican nominee had acknowledged the economy wasn't his strong suit and didn't even know how many houses he owned.

Then came the "fundamentals" remark, and that, Plouffe says, "put an exclamation point on the argument."

Never mind that McCain — who was trying to be reassuring — quickly backpedaled and talked about an economic crisis. He had opened the door. And the Obama campaign waltzed right in.

They alerted reporters. They spread the word to Democratic allies doing interviews and to Obama and his running mate, Joe Biden. Within an hour, ad makers were putting together a "fundamentals" commercial. It aired the next day.

Obama speechwriter Jon Favreau composed a few

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President-Elect Barack Obama

REPORT: Obama to Focus on Bin Laden Capture

WASHINGTON (AP)

President-elect Barack Obama plans major changes in U.S. policy on the war in Afghanistan and intends to renew the commitment to hunt for Osama bin Laden, underscoring the fight against al-Qaeda as the nation's highest priority, a newspaper reported Tuesday.

The Washington Post said Obama, who takes office on Jan. 20, wants to explore a more regional strategy in Afghanistan, including the possibility of negotiations with Iran.

"This (al-Qaeda) is our enemy," the Post quoted an unnamed senior adviser as saying. "And he (bin Laden) should be our principal target."

Unidentified national security advisers to the president-elect were quoted as saying Obama believes the Bush administration has played down the hunt for the al-Qaeda leader after years of failing to apprehend him.

The report also quotes U.S. intelligence officials saying the search for bin Laden is as intensive as ever but al-Qaeda's threat would remain large even if bin Laden were neutralized.

Members of Obama's transition team "have yet to examine available military and intelligence resources and how they are currently being used," the Post reported.

Additionally, it said, they have yet to plot a diplomatic approach to Pakistan, where bin Laden is thought to be in hiding. ■

World Leaders Reach Out to President-Elect Barack Obama

BY KATHY KIELY & DAVID JACKSON,

USA TODAY —

President-elect Barack Obama will not attend this weekend's global economic summit but will dispatch representatives to meet world leaders clamoring to make

contact with the incoming administration, one of his top aides said Tuesday.

"We have had requests to have meetings with representatives of the president-elect and the vice president-elect," John Podesta, a co-chairman of the transition effort for Obama and Joe Biden, told reporters. Podesta said Obama's team is trying to recruit

personal acquaintances of the world leaders to conduct the meetings.

"We are arranging to have ... appropriate people meet with those leaders, people they know and that they trust," Podesta said.

The summit was among

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Election Shows Deep Racial Divide in Black & White Churches

White independent none Christian voters more likely to vote for and support Obama than White Christians

BY RACHEL ZOLL

NEW YORK (AP) —

The barrier-crossing election of Barack Obama did little to bridge the deep racial divide in American churches. In fact, some clergy say it has only served to underscore their differences.

While nonwhite Christians voted overwhelmingly for Obama, most white Christians backed John McCain, according to exit polls. Several black clergy said that criticism of Obama by some white Christians over his religious beliefs and support for abortion rights crossed the line, hurting longtime efforts to reconcile their communities.

"I think in the eagerness to protect the right to life issues, there were some things said, not about that issue, that were not always fair and that were insensitive that need to be rethought," said Bishop T.D. Jakes, a prominent African-American pastor and founder of The Potter's House, a theological-

ly conservative megachurch in Dallas. "I would love to see black and white Christians find common ground, and a deeper understanding of each other's needs."

The Rev. Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the denomination's flagship school, said white evangelicals backed McCain because of his opposition to abortion rights, not because of the race of either candidate.

"White conservative evangelicals, not just in this election, but in many successive cycles, tended to vote on the basis of moral issues," Mohler said. "Those evangelicals will still join in celebrating, very eagerly, that America has elected an African-American president and see it as a cause for celebration and recognize its deep spiritual significance."

According to Associated Press exit polls, 34 percent of white Protestants voted for Obama, while 65 percent went with McCain. Obama won the overall

Roman Catholic vote, but white Catholics backed McCain by a slim majority, 52 percent to 47 percent. Among white Christians, the racial gap was most pronounced with evangelicals: 74 percent backed McCain, 24 percent backed Obama.

The pattern is not new and fits the larger trend of white voters overall, the majority of whom voted for McCain. Even so, white Christians were still part of Obama's winning coalition, drawing millions of their votes. However, the racial gaps stood out at a time when African-American churchgoers exulted in the historic first of Obama's victory.

"The contrast between the white religious community and the nonwhite religious community ... is particularly strong this year," said John Green, an expert on religion and politics and senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

White conservative Christians are more concerned than ever about

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"Michelle: A Biography" by Liza Mundy

They say that behind every great man is a woman who's willing to give him a goose in the posterior when he needs it most.

Marc Antony had his Cleopatra. Henry VIII had his Catherine, Kathryn, Katherine, two Annes and a Jane. Harry would have been lost without Bess. Martin had his Coretta.

And Barack has Michelle.

By now, we know a lot

about our future leader, but what do we know about the woman behind the office? You'll find out when you read "Michelle" by Liza Mundy.

To truly know Michelle Robinson Obama, says Mundy, you need to understand where she came from. Born in a then-segregated area on the South Side of Chicago in 1964, Michelle Robinson was the second child of parents who

raised her to be independent and strong-minded.

As a teen, Michelle Robinson attended a magnet school with other high-achievers, including the daughter of Jesse Jackson, Sr. Because the Robinsons encouraged their children to get the best education, Michelle chose Princeton, then went to Harvard and set

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"Michelle: A Biography" by Liza Mundy (Simon & Schuster, 217 pages, including notes)



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How Obama Did It...

► Continued from Page 1

paragraphs to incorporate into the senator's speech. Soon those words were heard by thousands.

"He doesn't get what's happening between the mountain in Sedona where he lives and the corridors of Washington where he works," Obama told a crowd that night in Pueblo, Colo. "Why else would he say, today, of all days — just a few hours ago — that the fundamentals of the economy are still strong?"

"Senator," Obama asked, "what economy are you talking about?"

By the end of Barack Obama's 21-month campaign, it was easy to forget how far he had come.

He had started out an underdog, a relative unknown, a black man with a Swahili name, taking on the seemingly invincible Hillary Rodham Clinton, who boasted a double-digit lead in the polls and a fistful of endorsements by fall 2007.

But Obama had something else: a fresh face, an inspirational manner, enormous political skills — and a campaign that ran like a well-oiled machine.

It tapped into Facebook-generation technology and mastered the art of fundraising, much of it on the Internet, collecting a staggering sum — about \$700 million — from more than 3 million contributors. (Obama had bypassed public financing, allowing him to raise unlimited amounts of money.)

It developed a sophisticated get-out-the-vote effort, melding high-tech wizardry with old-fashioned, pound-the-pavement canvassing, depending on a vast volunteer army that used neighbors to persuade neighbors to vote for Obama. (Its final four-day push targeted 12 million voters in 15 battleground states, with plans to reach each one four times.)

And it never strayed from its message. McCain would zigzag from experience to maverick to tested and halfway back.

Obama pounded the same drum: Change. Change. Change.

He used the word 19 times when he clinched the Democratic nomination in June in Minneapolis, 15 times when he accepted the party's nod two months later in Denver, 19 times when he spoke last week in Canton, Ohio.

He spoke of change, too, on Feb. 10, 2007, when he announced his candidacy at the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Ill.

"There's a lot of similarity between what we said then and now," Plouffe said near the end of the campaign. "That might not be exciting. But that constancy has worn well with voters."

Obama's campaign motto — which morphed from "change we can believe in" to "change we need" — resonated with a disenchanted public. President Bush's ap-

proval ratings had fallen to record lows and polls showed the overwhelming number of Americans thought the nation was on the wrong track.

"We knew that there was a tremendous sense of jaundice about the direction of the country and Bush certainly was part of that," says campaign strategist David Axelrod. "Our strategy was to be the candidate of change ... to challenge Washington and challenge the Bush policies and offer ourselves as a distinct and different approach to governance."

The first hurdle, though, was the Democratic primary.

"In the very beginning, our eyes were wide open," Plouffe says. "Hillary Clinton was the dominant front-runner. One of the reasons we have run such a good campaign is we weren't burdened by those expectations."

Obama's sturdy Iowa victory gave way to a stunning New Hampshire loss, setting off a grueling five-month marathon and a heartstopping moment when the fate of the campaign seemed in the balance.

Six weeks after Obama delivered an impassioned speech on race to tamp down the uproar over incendiary remarks made by his former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, controversy came calling again.

A defiant Wright, appearing at the National Press Club, offered some eyebrow-raising opinions about the U.S. government, praised Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and hinted that Obama was distancing himself from the pastor for political expediency.

Pfeiffer watched the appearance in his office, trying to imagine a scenario where things weren't as bad as they seemed. But they were.

Obama had just been beaten in Pennsylvania. He began losing ground in Indiana and North Carolina.

"That was the only time I ever thought that was a possibility was that our candidacy was so wounded that Barack might appear unelectable and that superdelegates could leave us," Pfeiffer says.

Plouffe, too, was convinced the pastor's appearance was "a disaster." He contacted Obama on the campaign trail, but believed that just repeating Wright's comments wouldn't convey the impact. You had to see it. Obama did that night in his hotel. The next day, he said he was outraged, called it a spectacle and distanced himself from Wright.

Obama's poll numbers leveled off. Superdelegates didn't defect. Soon, the candidates were debating the gas tax.

"If we had lost Indiana and North Carolina, it would have been over," Pfeiffer says. Instead, Obama won big in North Carolina and posted a strong showing (he was narrowly defeated) in Indiana.

It was a nerve-racking time, and far from the last one.

"Every day you're trying to stay upright," Plouffe says. "Every day you sit down and it's like you're on a bucking bronco. Some days you're thrown off, and some days you're able to stay in the saddle."

The convention was deemed a success.

Both Bill and Hillary Clinton delivered enthusiastic endorsements; afterward, when Clinton passed Obama staffers in their temporary convention headquarters, they gave her a standing ovation. And Obama had accepted his nomination before an outdoor crowd of 84,000 at Invesco Field in Denver — an event that doubled as a recruiting event for Colorado volunteers.

But there was little time to bask in the aftermath.

About 12 hours later, Gov. Sarah Palin stole the spotlight when she was tapped by McCain.

Palin-mania soon swept the country, and the phone was ringing at Obama headquarters.

"Everybody was generous with their advice," Axelrod, the campaign strategist, says wryly.

"Our party was in more than a mild state of panic," says Pfeiffer, the communications chief. "Everybody was afraid ... we were about to go the way of previous nominees and lose the race basically in late summer or early fall."

Some party activists were haunted by the ghosts of Democratic debacles past: John Kerry and the Swift-boat attacks; Michael Dukakis and Willie Horton.

But the Obama campaign believed attacking Palin could backfire. It would also divert attention from the real target, McCain, and the dominant issue — the economy.

There would be no dramatic turns.

"Having campaigned for two years and having been counted out so many times, we're practiced at those kind of moments," Axelrod says. "I don't think there's ever been a sense of panic around here."

Obama's staff was aware of Palin, but thought she wouldn't be chosen because a) she'd undermine McCain's message of experience and b) she was being investigated in Alaska for firing her public safety commissioner.

Palin didn't have much of a national profile, but Anita Dunn, an Obama senior adviser, was very familiar with her. Dunn remembered the poised candidate she had encountered while working for Democrat Tony Knowles in his unsuccessful 2006 Alaska gubernatorial race.

"I had a high degree of respect for her political skills," she recalls. "I thought she'd be a good campaigner."

Dunn e-mailed other top Obama strategists with a cautionary message: Don't underestimate her. She's a talented candidate.

And the Alaska governor proved that in the weeks after the Republican conven-

tion, when the McCain-Palin team drew wildly enthusiastic crowds as they touted themselves as mavericks who'd bring sweeping changes to Washington.

They had, at least temporarily, hijacked Obama's theme.

"I was worried about the change vs. change thing ... (even though) I felt we would win that debate," Plouffe says. "If I were them, I would have stuck with that. But they didn't."

Initially, polls showed Palin draining Obama's support among women.

But would it last?

"We had to wait ... to really find out whether she was going to be an enduring asset to the ticket or whether it was just a passing fancy," Axelrod says. "The thing about a presidential race ... is the scrutiny is so intense that you have to be able to prove yourself on the battlefield, and I thought it was unlikely that someone coming from where she was coming from at this late date could be dropped into this media maelstrom and survive it."

A few weeks later, after Palin's shaky national TV interviews became the butt of jokes on "Saturday Night Live," her approval rating began dropping.

Her presence did, however, cause one shift.

Obama had abandoned giant rallies for smaller audiences after returning from a summer European tour highlighted by a speech to a flag-waving crowd of 200,000 in Berlin — something that seemed to benefit a president more than a candidate.

Axelrod sensed there "would be a price to pay" for the splashy tour. He was right.

McCain's campaign skewered the trip in a commercial, portraying Obama as an egomaniacal celebrity, comparing him to Paris Hilton and Britney Spears.

But then Palin became the celebrity, greeted by enormous, adoring crowds.

And Obama's campaign noticed.

"It became obvious that we should go back to doing the big rallies and go back to doing what we do well," Axelrod says. "In that sense, it was a liberating thing for us."

Obama's campaign was caught off-guard when John McCain stepped before TV cameras Sept. 24 to suspend his campaign. The debate two days later, McCain said, could wait: He was rushing to Capitol Hill to deal with the stalled, \$700 billion financial bailout plan.

It was a bold move. But a risky one, too. McCain could ride off a hero — and look presidential — if a deal were reached in Washington and he could claim credit.

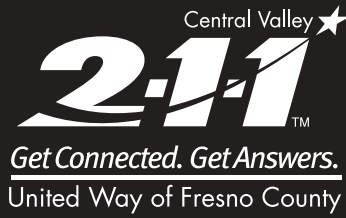
It was like a chess game. Obama had the next move.

He called a news conference to emphasize he had called McCain first to propose a joint statement in support of a bailout package. He also made it clear he was consulting regularly with congressional leaders and Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson.

McCain ended up going to the debate without a bailout resolution. Democrats,

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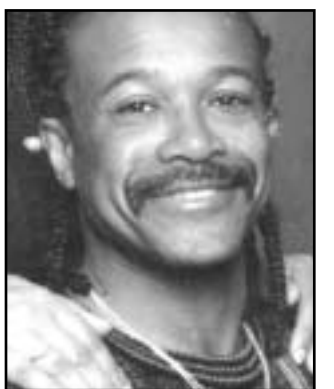


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How Obama Did It...

► **Continued from Page 3**
pundits — even some Republicans — questioned his motives. Another plan to seize momentum had fizzled.

“If he had executed it well, it would have been a much harder fight,” Pfeiffer says.

And Obama, whose team prided itself on long-term strategy rather than tactics, reaped the benefits.

Pundits were saying Obama, the freshman senator, appeared steady and reassuring. The Democrats — led by their candidate — were repeatedly labeling McCain as “erratic.” Soon others were saying it, too.

The next week as the financial markets continued to fluctuate wildly, the McCain camp made a big decision in the battleground Midwest: It decided to pull ads and staff from Michigan, a traditionally blue state the Republican senator had hoped to grab.

The economy was tanking, and so, too were McCain’s numbers in Michigan. “That,” one McCain aide says, “was the death knell.”

Later on, McCain aides seemed to telegraph their moves, telling reporters they wanted to turn the page from the economy because it was a losing issue.

Those statements, Plouffe says, were a “gift.” They allowed his campaign to argue that personal attacks against Obama were simply diversions — and nothing more.

Foreign policy was the topic of the first debate. Obama’s team wanted it that way. This was McCain’s strength. If Obama performed well, it would be a boon.

But debates are about more than what’s said on stage. Spin matters. Before. And after.

Obama’s campaign employed a common strategy: Minimize your candidate’s abilities. Pump up the op-

ponent. (McCain’s people, of course, would do the opposite.)

The Obama camp e-mailed reporters a memo pointing to pundits touting McCain’s debating skills as “unparalleled” and Obama’s as “uneven” and “too professorial.”

Pfeiffer, the communications chief, says it wasn’t a hard argument to make.

“Given our performance in the debates in the primary it was not particularly challenging to lower expectations,” he says.

The night of the debate, Valerie Jarrett, an adviser and close friend of both Barack and Michelle Obama, was on hand in Oxford, Miss.

It had been almost two years since she had sat next to Obama at an Urban League dinner in Chicago and watched people button-hole the senator with one question: Are you going to run for president?

“So what do you think?” he had asked her that night.

“Seize the moment,” she advised him.

Jarrett remembered after Obama lost in New Hampshire, it was he who had consoled her, telling her “this will turn out to have been a good thing.”

An hour before the debate, she knocked on Obama’s door to wish him good luck. She knew much was riding on this night. Her fear was palpable.

“He took a look at my face, he put a hand on my shoulder,” she recalls, and said, “Valerie, I’ve got this.”

Obama was calm, sometimes too much so for supporters, who had urged him to go on the attack.

Axelrod, his strategist, was not.

As he left the green room shortly before the debate began, he recalls: “I was sick to my stomach. I knew the stakes. I’m thinking to myself there’s probably 50,

60, 70 million people going

to watch this thing. We hadn’t debated before. We didn’t know what he (McCain) would bring.”

The campaign had goals: Deliver a clear economic message. Don’t make a mistake. Look presidential.

Afterward, some of Obama’s advisers chartered a plane from Mississippi to Chicago, flying out late Friday night to rush home to be in place early on Saturday. Heading to the airport, they held a conference call with their strategists and advertising team.

Typically, it’s important to highlight one or two debate moments. The Obama team chose not what McCain had said, but what he had not mentioned: the middle class.

An ad team stayed up all night, preparing a commercial.

Across a black screen, the words appeared:

Number of minutes in debate: 90.

Number of times John McCain mentioned the middle class: zero. (McCain’s campaign was equally quick with an ad picking up on the frequency with which Obama said he agreed with his opponent that night.)

The Obama team arrived in Chicago at 2:30 a.m. Saturday and by 6 a.m. the commercial had been delivered to the morning TV shows.

A few hours later, the team was calling reporters pitching the results of instant polls of TV viewers that had called Obama the winner.

But another part of the debate — a nonverbal cue — had also attracted attention. McCain had not looked at Obama.

The next week, when Axelrod attended a Chicago Cubs playoff game, an elderly female usher approached him: “I wasn’t sure whether I was going to vote for your guy or for McCain, but I’m with Obama

now,” he recalls her saying.

“Why?” Axelrod asked.

“I don’t like the way McCain didn’t look at him during that debate,” she said.

Obama’s strength in the polls seemed to grow with each debate and help rebut accusations that he was risky and had dubious associations, especially with a former radical from the Vietnam War era.

“People look at him and say he doesn’t seem very threatening, he doesn’t seem uninformed,” Axelrod says. “The caricature that they’re trying to draw doesn’t square with the reality that they’re seeing.”

In the beginning, there was no chartered press plane, just some budget flights with two aides.

No giant crowds, just small groups on the back roads of Iowa.

No throngs chanting his name, just some people wondering how to pronounce it.

It had been an improbable journey, but for Axelrod there never was any doubt of the final destination.

“We had faith in each other and in him from the very beginning,” he says. “We had the sense that if we did everything right we could win this thing. There was never a time in this when I said, ‘Well that’s not going to happen.’”

On Tuesday night, after Obama had won Pennsylvania and then Ohio, the staff gathered in the campaign’s boiler room and applauded.

After TV networks and The Associated Press declared Obama the nation’s 44th president, top aides rushed over to the Grant Park celebration. Standing near the stage, Pfeiffer saw a sea of 125,000 people, many waving American flags and chanting Obama’s catch phrase, “Yes, we can.”

For almost two years, Pfeiffer had worked for this very moment.

“It felt like it was an end and a beginning,” he says. “The end of a long journey we had been on and the start of something new.”

Katrina Victims Allege Discrimination

BY DONNA LEINWAND

USA TODAY —

Two civil rights groups and five New Orleans homeowners sued Louisiana’s hurricane rebuilding program Wednesday, saying it discriminates against more than 20,000 African Americans whose homes were damaged by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

The class-action suit, filed in federal court in Washington, alleges the Louisiana Road Home program awards smaller rebuilding grants to black homeowners than white homeowners. It says the state program’s formula for calculating the grants — approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development — is biased against homes in predominantly black neighborhoods.

“HUD and Louisiana have failed to honor the noble promise of this program,” says civil rights lawyer Joseph Sellers, who represents the homeowners.

The Louisiana Recovery Authority, which administers the \$11 billion housing redevelopment program, bases grants on the pre-storm value of the house or the rebuilding cost, whichever is less. The authority had awarded \$7.3 billion by Oct. 28, its weekly report says.

The lawsuit says home values in predominately black neighborhoods are lower than those of similar

homes in white neighborhoods.

Sellers says the authority and HUD, which oversees the program, are violating the federal Fair Housing Act by relying on pre-storm value and that grants should be based on repair costs.

Shanna Smith, president of the National Fair Housing Alliance, says the formula does not account for the legacy of racial discrimination in the housing market, which systematically values houses in black neighborhoods lower than those in white neighborhoods. Smith’s group is a plaintiff in the case, along with the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center.

The Louisiana Recovery Authority said Wednesday that the state had tried to address the inequity by awarding an extra rebuilding grant to low-income homeowners. “The Road Home program does not discriminate,” it said in a statement. HUD did not return a call for comment.

Plaintiff Daphne Jones, 58, says she received \$61,000 to make repairs. If the grant were based on actual damage to her home, she says, she would have received \$106,261. Grants are capped at \$150,000.

Few people have returned to her neighborhood. “It hurts to know that part of the reason is that the Road Home says houses in my community are worth less,” she says.

Election Shows Deep Racial Divide in Black & White Churches...

► **Continued from Page 1**
tives had helped fuel false rumors that Obama was Muslim, by questioning whether he was truly the “browning” of American Christianity. Right now, nearly all U.S. churches serve a single ethnic group.

While white and black Christian conservatives generally share an opposition to abortion rights and gay marriage, they often split over how to end social ills such as poverty and crime.

But the rhetoric this year went beyond the usual differences over worldview, said Derrick W. Hutchins, a leader in the Church of God in Christ. The predominantly African-American group is Pentecostal and one of the largest denominations in the country.

Hutchins was angered by repeated accusations that he and other black theological conservatives had abandoned their religious beliefs simply to vote for an African-American. The claims came not only from white Christians, but also from some blacks who backed McCain.

“What they did is insult our biblical understanding,” said Hutchins, who voted for Obama and has backed Democrats in past presidential elections. “The white religious right-wing determined that if you didn’t vote for McCain, you were not meeting a standard of the Bible.”

The Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell, an African-American Methodist pastor from Houston, said that some white Christian conserva-

tives had helped fuel false rumors that Obama was Muslim, by questioning whether he was truly the “browning” of American Christianity. Right now, nearly all U.S. churches serve a single ethnic group.

Caldwell, an Obama supporter who backed President Bush in the past two elections, said other candidates have diverged dramatically from Christian teachings in their policies and personal lives and have not been maligned as Obama has.

“Some members of the Christian community want to label him as the anti-Christ,” said Caldwell. “What has he done to deserve that label, when none of his predecessors are so characterized?”

But Bishop Harry Jackson, an African-American pastor of Hope Christian Church in Washington, D.C., and a McCain supporter, said questions about Obama’s more liberal reading of Scripture was fair game. Jackson noted that Obama became an observant Christian through the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, former pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. Videos of Wright’s sermons that circulated widely earlier this year showed him cursing the government and accusing it of conspiring against blacks. Obama eventually left the church.

“Many, many people question whether Barack Obama had been under a legitimate Christian leadership figure,” Jackson said. “I personally never ascribed any vitriolic character assassination to it.”

World Leaders Reach Out to Obama...

► **Continued from Page 1**
the topics at the transition team’s debut press briefing in an office building about 10 blocks from the White House. Another transition office opened in Chicago, Obama’s hometown.

Podesta, a former chief of staff to President Clinton, praised the “collegial, cooperative” efforts underway between Obama’s team and President Bush’s staff. He said the incoming Democratic president will move quickly to appoint a “strong team” that will include Republicans in top positions. Podesta also signaled that Obama is preparing to overturn a number of Bush executive orders, including one that limits federal funding of embryonic stem cell research.

Though tackling the economic downturn will be Obama’s top priority once he takes office, Podesta said the incoming president believes

he should not undercut the role Bush will play at the Friday-Saturday summit here of the world’s top 20 economies. “It’s not appropriate for two people to show up at this meeting,” he said.

Even so, Podesta said Obama’s team is monitoring preparations for the summit. He said Obama economic adviser Dan Tarullo has a “good channel of communication going” with Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and with Dan Price, a deputy national security adviser directing summit arrangements.

Podesta denied that Bush told Obama he’d back additional aid for the auto industry in exchange for Obama dropping his opposition to a Colombian trade deal when the two men met Monday at the White House. While they discussed the plight of the auto industry and the Colombia trade deal, “there was no quid pro quo,” Podesta said.

That sentiment was echoed by White House spokeswoman Dana Perino.

Still in doubt: the fate of a beefed-up aid package for automakers on the verge of bankruptcy and the trade deal that the Bush administration contends is needed to aid a key ally in the drug war.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., issued statements Tuesday saying they would convene a post-election session of Congress to consider emergency aid for automakers only if Bush will sign the legislation.

Perino said the White House is waiting to see specific proposals. “We’re anxious to see if the Democrats are going to come forward with anything,” she said.

On other transition matters, Podesta said Obama will have teams in place by next week to “complete a

thorough review of over 100 departments, agencies and commissions of the United States government” that will help Obama and Biden make key policy decisions.

Among those decisions will be the names of Cabinet officials. Podesta noted that only one recent president-elect, George H.W. Bush in 1988, named a Cabinet nominee before December. “We’re going to try to accelerate that,” Podesta said. “We’ll make announcements when we’re ready.”

Podesta said the staff is reviewing Bush’s executive orders the new president might reverse and is discussing the closure of the controversial prison for foreign terrorism suspects at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. “Sen. Obama has said that he intends to close the facility at Guantanamo,” Podesta said. “That’s a complicated matter. It’s under review.”

future First Lady.

On the other hand, there are enough “AHA!” nuggets in this book to keep your interest and to keep you turning pages. The interviews seem fresh. Some of the stories weren’t overly familiar. And this book seems to dig a little deeper than you’d get in a fluff-piece magazine article.

If you’ve followed politics for the last twelve months but need to know more about the President-elect’s family, this is a decent place to start. “Michelle” is a good book to get behind.

“Michelle: A Biography” by Liza Mundy...

► **Continued from Page 1**
her sights on becoming a lawyer.

Michelle’s family claims that she was always hard on her suitors. When she brought Barack Obama home for the first time, her brother Craig said, “I was thinking, ‘Nice guy. Too bad he won’t last.’” But last Obama did. They were married in 1992.

Friends and former colleagues say that it was obvious that Obama was meant for a political career; in fact, he told several people that he aspired to high office.

His new wife was an asset to that ideal because she introduced him to people who would further his career, politically. Conversely, he helped her find jobs that made a difference in their neighborhood.

So what can we look forward to when the new Presidential family moves into the White House? Mundy says that Michelle Obama has vowed to help families. She loves children and has always strived to make her life meaningful. Breaking down self-segregation is important to her, as is bringing people

together.

Reading “Michelle” is a mixed bag. There’s an awful lot in here that you already know, and a lot you probably won’t care about.

Author Liza Mundy admits that she wrote this book without the help of Obama’s political team (who discouraged close friends from talking), and without access to Michelle Obama. She eventually found a few people who would talk, but based on her vast notes, much of this book was put together from magazines, newspapers, and other articles written on the

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Black Lawmakers Rethink Support for Hillary Clinton

Spike Lee Backs Barack Obama

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Dr. King's Dream Nears a Reality In Obama's Bid for President

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Obama Meets Iraqi Prime Minister in Baghdad

Obama Arrives to Huge Crowds

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Obama's Strategy: Maximize Black Vote in Election

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Commander In Chief

OBAMA Becomes First Black President In U.S. History

HISTORY IS MADE

Barack Obama: His Election Night Speech

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