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## POLITICS DAILY

### Toni Morrison's Letter to Barack Obama

BY **TOM MCGEVERAN** | 10:36 AM JANUARY 28, 2008 | TAGS: POLITICS 2008 DEMOCRATS BARACK OBAMA HILLARY CLINTON



Getty Images

Legendary novelist and editor Toni Morrison's endorsement of Barack Obama is obviously not significant for her ability to move voters at the polls, which is not proven and probably not likely to be proven. But given her perceived attachment to the Clintons—Bill, she famously once called America's first black president; and Hillary she has been close to in the past—we thought it worth printing in full the letter of endorsement she sent to the Illinois senator, as released by the Obama campaign:

Dear Senator Obama,

This letter represents a first for me—a public endorsement of a Presidential candidate. I feel driven to let you know why I am writing it. One reason is it may help gather other supporters; another is that this is one of those singular moments that nations ignore at their peril. I will not rehearse the multiple crises facing us, but of one thing I am certain: this opportunity for a national evolution (even revolution) will not come again soon, and I am convinced you are the person to capture it.

May I describe to you my thoughts?

I have admired Senator Clinton for years. Her knowledge always seemed to me exhaustive; her negotiation of politics expert. However I am more compelled by the quality of mind (as far as I can measure it) of a candidate. I cared little for her gender as a source of my admiration, and the little I did care was based on the fact that no liberal woman has ever ruled in America. Only conservative or "new-centrist" ones are allowed into that realm. Nor do I care very much for your race[s]. I would not support you if that was all you had to offer or because it might make me "proud."

In thinking carefully about the strengths of the candidates, I stunned myself when I came to the following conclusion: that in addition to keen intelligence, integrity and a rare authenticity, you exhibit something that has nothing to do with age, experience, race or gender and something I don't see in other candidates. That something is a creative imagination which coupled with brilliance equals wisdom. It is too bad if we associate it only with gray hair and old age. Or if we call searing vision naivete. Or if we believe cunning is insight. Or if we settle for finessing cures tailored for each ravaged tree in the forest while ignoring the poisonous landscape that feeds and surrounds it.

Wisdom is a gift; you can't train for it, inherit it, learn it in a class, or earn it in

The Daily  
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Poll	Obama (D)	McCain(R)	Spread
RCP Average	52.1	44.5	Obama +7.6
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Candidate	Favorable	Unfavorable	Spread
Obama	56.3	39.3	+17.0
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McCain	52.3	41.5	+10.8
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the workplace--that access can foster the acquisition of knowledge, but not wisdom.

When, I wondered, was the last time this country was guided by such a leader? Someone whose moral center was un-embargoed? Someone with courage instead of mere ambition? Someone who truly thinks of his country's citizens as "we," not "they"? Someone who understands what it will take to help America realize the virtues it fancies about itself, what it desperately needs to become in the world?

Our future is ripe, outrageously rich in its possibilities. Yet unleashing the glory of that future will require a difficult labor, and some may be so frightened of its birth they will refuse to abandon their nostalgia for the womb.

There have been a few prescient leaders in our past, but you are the man for this time.

Good luck to you and to us.

Toni Morrison

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**publius says:**

wow. this is hugely surprising and quite disappointing for us in the clinton fold...

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JANUARY 28, 2008 11:10 AM

**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

Superb reasoning and carefully modulated passion. Perhaps now the "simplisticos" in the media and Clinton camps will cease using and twisting the original intent of her earlier metaphor about Bill Clinton, "the first black president".

Sambeaux

[REPLY](#) | [FLAGGED](#)

JANUARY 28, 2008 11:30 AM

**Jeremy (not verified) says:**

Bravo, Toni. I've enjoyed your books and think your letter is remarkably well written.

Only once a generation, or less, do we get an incredible combination of charisma, courage, and substance like Barack Obama brings.

While I respect Senator Clinton's accomplishments, I believe it's time to move forward with a bold vision and heads held high, and Barack Obama leading us.

[REPLY](#) | [FLAGGED](#)

JANUARY 28, 2008 11:42 AM

**Sublime Dialectic (not verified) says:**

Toni Morrison's profundity only matches the high esteem of her letter's subject!!

God Bless America!!

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JANUARY 28, 2008 11:51 AM

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**Jyoti Prakash (not verified) says:**

What a letter! Even if this does not convert a single vote for Barack; the words will educate, uplift and make people think. Bravo Ms. Morrison.  
Jyoti Prakash

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 12:10 PM

**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

I totally agree with Toni, by the way an excellent writer with a lot of wisdom and vision. I believe it is time we looked at who would bring America as one and not Divide us by being an imperialist.

I am a naturalized immigrant and I know that Obama has the philosophy that the American people need, and experience counts but he has enough experience to lead us.

Go Obama!! I don't know if you all believe in re-incarnation but in Africa where I am originally from, Obama is DR King re-incarnated. His mannerisms, the way he talks, the way he sounds, tells me that Dr. King is gone but he is back. Ask any African about RE-INCARNATION and they will tell you that Obama is DR. KING live.

Thanks

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 12:10 PM

**Linda Blount Berry (not verified) says:**

Ms. Morrison of clear thought and sound reason. For those of us at a certain age, Sen. Obama feels like the right person at the right time. It's more than a feel good campaign, it is about restoring faith and hope to the souls of American people. It is also about injecting some integrity into the conversation. Long over due.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 12:13 PM

**Tonya (not verified) says:**

Brilliant! The inimitable author Toni Morrison is supporting Barack Obama. Genius recognizes genius. This is a stellar moment in American history. I wonder if the Clintons will now go after the Stephen King endorsement?

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 12:27 PM

**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

Wow, what a moving endorsement.

"we settle for finessing cures tailored for each ravaged tree in the forest while ignoring the poisonous landscape that feeds and surrounds it."

I found this to be most profound and captures the difference between the two campaigns in a very poignant way. I have been leaning towards HRC, but the various events of the last week have really shown me that electing her is like putting a band-aid on a broken leg.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 12:46 PM

**Jose Castenada (not verified) says:**

I still remember the awful poem she read at Clinton's first inaugural in January, 1993...barf. It dripped with political correctness.

REPLY | FLAGGED

JANUARY 28, 2008 12:52 PM

**Star (not verified) says:**

Well, she writes a remarkable letter which only a great writer can. But alas no one, even she, can know a person just by watching on TV or from a few political speeches. She would not accept it, but at the back of her mind is race. Obama is no genius! Let him be in public life for some more time before entrusting him with the nation.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 1:03 PM

**Leticia P. Carlos (not verified) says:**

I disagree with your decision but respect it. Since you know Hillary I do not need to go there.

I will vote for Obama if he wins the democratic nomination. The priority is to get a democratic president to the White House.

Go Hillary !!!!!

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Thank you, Ms. Morrison.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 1:04 PM

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**S (not verified) says:**

Apparently you don't remember the poem as well as you think. The poet who read at Bill Clinton's inauguration was Maya Angelou.

Toni Morrison's letter to Barack Obama is a gift to us all, as is his candidacy. It is worthwhile for each of us to ponder the question she asks herself: When was the last time this country was led by a leader "whose moral center was un-embargoed?"

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 1:13 PM

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**Probama (not verified) says:**

Thank you, Ms. Morrison. Your letter fills me with the same excitement and hope that Mr. Obama fills me with.

If this man wins the 2008 presidential election, I will go from being someone who is thoroughly disgusted by and ashamed of their leader to someone who is very, very proud of their leader. I've never yet experienced such pride in an American leader. I wasn't yet alive when JFK, RFK, and MLK were around. It's an amazing prospect for me to be able to be proud of a leader...someone like BHO!!! My children deserve this. Our children deserve this.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 2:29 PM

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**D.C (not verified) says:**

If there is one thing I felt while I read and contemplate the words of Ms Morrison, it was honesty. The candor with which she writes was frighteningly palpable. Her level of expression moved me with such a force that made me a believer in the power of words again.

Ms. Morrison, stated quite elegantly what all of us as Obama fans share; inspiration, change and the perception that it is no longer about race but about one people coming together to enact change.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 3:02 PM

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**P.P (not verified) says:**

Ms.Morrison, thanks for writing this letter.

First, I was supporting Senator Hillary Clinton because I wanted to see a woman as a President then I heard Senator Obama and thought I need to vote for the right person to run our country and decided to support Obama. Your letter is also very inspiring.

Thanks,  
Woman voter ( independent)

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 4:01 PM

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**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

That was poet Maya Angelou that made you barf, not Toni Morrison.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 4:39 PM

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**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

The poet was Maya Angelou, not Toni Morrison.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 4:50 PM

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**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

Ms. Morrison,

Your words are deeply moving and inspiring. They definitely lend themselves as rich food for thought. I was planning to vote for Obama because I feel he is a man of integrity and will not base his leading of America on racial issues. I view him as a "man for all the people(s) of America".

God bless you and Obama and America!!

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 4:54 PM

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**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

Brava, brava. Ms. Morrison has captured the very essence of why so many like and support Barack Obama. I like the idea of the "United" States of America and I feel he is the leader that has the ability to bring the American people together.

Go Obama!

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 5:52 PM

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**Dan in St. Louis (not verified) says:**

Someone mentioned the prospect of the Clintons going after the Stephen King endorsement...

Too late, he's an Obama guy too:

[http://www.upi.com/NewsTrack/Entertainment/2008/01/19/stephen\\_king\\_backi...](http://www.upi.com/NewsTrack/Entertainment/2008/01/19/stephen_king_backi...)

As to Ms. Morrison's sentiments about Barack, I couldn't have said it better myself, so I won't even try.

Go Obama!!!

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 5:53 PM

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**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

"Obama is no genius!"

... that's a telling statement.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 6:20 PM

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**Eric W. (not verified) says:**

Jose Castenada wrote: "I still remember the awful poem she read at Clinton's first inaugural..."  
Uh, that was Maya Angelou. Gotta love blog comments: letting the ignorant have their say in the American dialogue.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 7:27 PM

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**renatam (not verified) says:**

Whatever Senator Kennedy's flaws, and we ALL have them -- including the incumbent President and his wife -- he and Caroline take the legacies of his brothers VERY SERIOUSLY. The Kennedy family's flaws did not negate their SERVING the Nation and giving their lives in SERVING it. Two brothers served during WWII and the eldest DIED doing so. The second, our 35th President, was never the same physically afterward and was an actual war hero. Ted Kennedy has never trivially leveraged or invoked the names of his brothers in the last 40 years. Ditto, Caroline, her father. This is an important moment FOR THEM and FOR US. They are "passing the torch to a new generation." It is a beautiful thing to see and it is up to boomers, who have not left a political legacy to be proud of, to use the time we have left as Senator Kennedy is doing -- to help Xers/Yers/Millennials prepare to assume their role in a very different world than the Clintons' left us -- and most certainly the Bushes left us. It is time and we should not mock the Senator for taking a LEADERSHIP role in helping with this transition. The Republicans should do the same on their side in all kinds of ways. The Clintons should leave the stage, with GRACE. They had their chance and the way they left The White House and now, has left a bad taste. 40 years from now, Billary will be remembered for...Bob Johnson's SPECTACLE and the SC circus. Of course they and their surrogates will MOCK this moment, as they do everything. For shame for a retired President. Turn the page.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 8:10 PM

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**Loretta (not verified) says:**

Bravo, Toni ! Well stated !

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 9:26 PM

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**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

How can anyone, even someone as wise herself and as wonderful a writer as our beloved Toni Morrison, possibly know anything of the wisdom of a person she sees via the media? (Since she does not mention spending time with him f2f, I assume she has not.)

It frightens me that "even" Toni Morrison believes she knows this man well enough to know that he is wise -- as our People think they know what any candidate believes and will do once s/he is in the White House -- hey! I heard him say it on TV!

Scary.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 10:27 PM

**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

The noble Quran says:

[2:269] He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever is given wisdom is certainly given a lot of good. Only the people of understanding observe the advice.

So folks, vote for Obama and you will be from the people of understanding!

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 28, 2008 11:52 PM

**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

that was not Toni Morrison reading a poem at the Clinton Inaugural, it was Maya Angelou.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 29, 2008 12:05 AM

**Helmut Hafner (not verified) says:**

Not being able to express my feelings about Obama very well, now I can go to my friends and present them with this letter. Thank you very much Toni Morrison.

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 29, 2008 1:00 AM

**Anonymous (not verified) says:**

hey dan in st louis,

i think the stephen king endorsement remark was because another clinton presidency would end up being a horror story!

REPLY | FLAG THIS

JANUARY 29, 2008 1:13 AM

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