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Barack Obama: Only In America

By **Russell Redenbaugh**

Be proud to be an American. Whether you are a Republican or a Democrat, Barack Obama's win last week makes history. Obama was not elected because he is African American, nor was he elected in spite of it. He was elected because many Americans have moved beyond seeing the world, and their lives, through the lens of race.

This moment in history is one I thought I would never see. Born in 1945 and raised in the 97% white state of Utah, my early experiences were in an environment in which racial prejudice was not a direct or first hand experience. My schools were all white, and they were not segregated. As a lifelong believer in Equal Rights, not racial preferences, this election was so clearly won based on the man, not his color. Obama is a man that everyone can respect regardless of political philosophy. His journey is truly a reminder that all is possible in our great nation. Raised by a single mother with a father who was not only absent, but living in a far away country, Obama's climb to the Presidency is the definition of the American dream

As a former U.S. Commissioner for Civil Rights under three Presidents, I celebrate the achievement of my country in electing an African American to our nation's highest office. It is amazing to me that in my lifetime we've gone from Jim Crow segregation to the election of Barack Obama as President. As an economist, I am one of many who worry about the economic costs of President Obama's policies. But also as an economist, I see that there is a substantial benefit to reducing the economic friction of race awareness, ending the "victim" mindset and increasing human potential. .

Discrimination is not over, but Obama's election diminishes the manipulative power of the race card. It takes away the excuses for why, "I can't." It forces the youth of our nation to embrace opportunity instead of falling back on victimhood. Already in communities across my state of California, there is a palpable improvement in the mood between the races. Local leaders are beginning to hold youths who hang out on street corners to a higher standard. Something is already different.

Russell Redenbaugh was a member on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights from 1990 to 2005.