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Barack Obama and the “ American dream ”

Gérard-François Dumont

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Barak Obama and the “American Dream”

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The “American dream”: an old concept which incorporates a strong demographic component; indeed it is inseparable from the migratory flows involving the United States. Barack Obama’s election also integrated this aspect, with the new president declaring during his campaign that he wanted to keep the American dream alive.

Barack Obama himself is a child of the American dream and a witness of its feasibility. The concept has become so widespread that it is now found in many dictionaries. In the idealised version of the American dream, anyone living in the United States can achieve success, through their hard work, courage and determination. The Dream is based on equal opportunities, opening to each and everyone the possibility of belonging to this unique nation. Indeed this possibility must be offered to every American, *i.e.* to every immigrant, since, apart from the American Indians, all US residents are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. His father coming from Kenya, Obama is the proof that the American dream is not limited to immigrants from Europe, but can also be reached by immigrants from Africa.

Barack Obama’s election came to reinforce the global attraction of the American dream at a time when the United States was being strongly rejected all over the world. The public holiday proclaimed in Kenya to celebrate Barack Obama’s victory is a striking example of this movement, with Africa being galvanised by this historic election. Moreover, because his success also bears witness to the triumph of democracy, Barack Obama presents a marked contrast with a number of African dictators and potentates, who are often more concerned in maintaining their rule than in seeking the common good for their people, as is shown by the many decisions whose sole object was to extend their personal power.

Barack Obama’s election could also have several demographic consequences. The first one concerns the US immigration policy. Even if Obama, like Mc Cain, supported the idea of a wall protecting part of the Mexican border, it is clear that it will not be

By Gérard-François Dumont



Professor at the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne ; President of the journal *Population & Avenir*.

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eternally possible to postpone the regularisation of millions of migrant workers; access to naturalisation could be opened to many people currently considered as illegal residents with respect to federal laws, even though they are affiliated to the social security and are in possession of ID papers in their State of residence.

Another aspect of this trend is related to the enthusiastic reaction raised around the world, and especially Africa, by Barack Obama’s election. Europe is no longer the only destination for African migrants¹ and the migratory flows from Africa to the United States have been rising. Barack Obama’s presidency may reinforce his country’s attractiveness in the eyes of Africans, an active part of whom turn away from the “European eldorado” in favour of the “American dream”, which remains one of the main driving forces behind the migratory flows towards the United States. ☺

(Translation: Sylvie Vanston)

1. Kante, Seydou, « Les Sénégalais émigrent aussi vers les États-Unis », *Population & Avenir*, n° 689, Sept-Oct 2008.