

U.S. EMBASSY PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

What hope does U.S. President Barack Obama embody for you as an African youth in the 21st century?”

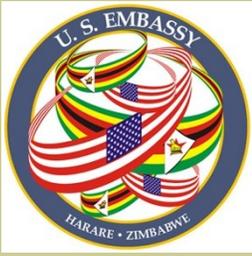


Essays by five Zimbabwean high school students



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The Black History Month Essay Contest

On February 25th 2010, the U.S. Embassy honored five Zimbabwean students for essays about their hopes following the ascendancy to the U.S. Presidency by Barack Obama in 2009.

The students- Joshua Chirambwe of St. Faith Mission in Rusape, Belinda Bell of Chinhoyi High, Munashe Makoni of St. Ignatius College in Chishawasha, Zandile Moyo of Mpopoma High in Bulawayo, and Asher Guni of Mazoe High School respectively, received certificates, books, and cash prizes, while their schools will receive reference book collections for their libraries.

Students wrote a 500-word essay with the title: "What hope does Barack Obama embody for you as an African youth in the

21st century?" Each high school chose their top two essays to forward to the Embassy.

A selection committee comprising graduates of English literature and Zimbabwean students who had studied in the U.S. selected the top ten essays.

These were forwarded to the U.S. Ambassador, Charles Ray, who selected the winners.

Congratulating the winners, U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Katherine Dhanani said the Embassy had received nearly 40 entries from students throughout Zimbabwe. She hailed the quality of the essays received.

"It is gratifying to read about the inspiration and hopes of Zimbabwean youth generated by the



U.S. President Barack Obama

success of President Barack Obama. The U.S. government is committed to continue working with the people of Zimbabwe to ensure a bright future for these bright young students," said Dhanani.

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Dhanani, U.S. Embassy Charge' d' Affaires

Black History Month in the U.S.

Each February, the U.S. honors the struggles and triumphs of millions of American citizens over the most devastating obstacles - slavery, prejudice, poverty - as well as their contributions to the nation's cultural and political life. This time of remembrance began in 1926 when historian Carter G.

Woodson first chose a week in February that marked the birthdays of two individuals who greatly influenced the lives of African Americans. The first was President Abraham Lincoln, a force behind the Emancipation Proclamation, and the second was Frederick Douglas, an ex-slave who lobbied for

the abolition of slavery. Black History Week eventually expanded into a month of commemoration and led to deeper academic exploration of African-American history and culture.



*Joshua Chirambe,
Upper Six student at
St. Faith Mission in
Rusape, Manicaland*

“Obama’s success against odds is a message of hope to struggling Africans.”

For Zimbabwe, Obama brings hope

President Barack Hussein Obama’s victory was celebrated in nearly all countries in the world. He became truly an acknowledged world leader. Dreams that had seemed grandiose have now come to reality. President Obama took the world by storm. Undoubtedly, an inspiration to the world.

While criticism affects virtually every politician, Obama managed to remain firm, unlike other politicians. The odds against him were that he would not become the President of the United States of America, chiefly because he is black. President Obama embodies for me the hope that with determination and defiant zeal, anyone can be successful in life— despite their racial background. I now have a deep, inner understanding that if I develop good oratory skills, I may also become a great politician like Obama one day.

“We face difficult challenges ahead sometimes they may seem insurmountable but I promise you, they will be met,” the political icon said on the 20th January inauguration day. The fact of Obama’s success against odds is a message of hope to struggling Africans.

For a country like Zimbabwe, that hope inspired by Obama becomes even

more relevant. Zimbabwe has incredible challenges – high inflation, unemployment, dramatic drop in standards of living, isolation from the world community and concerns about freedom, human rights and the rule of law. Statistics reveal that unemployment has hovered above seventy percent. The hope inspired by Obama to overcome challenges can also apply to Zimbabwe and I hope as a young person for a turnaround in the fortunes of my country. Obama reminds me of the fact that: “yes we can.” Will Obama help Zimbabwe and other Africans? I hope so. After all, he has got an African background. However, as president of the United States of America has his priorities in his country, and he has many challenges there, for example, the global recession. Despite these challenges, I hope that as a world leader he will go beyond the concerns of his coun-

try to assisting the world. The United States of America is well known for its universal concern for issues of development and freedom.

It is well known that Africa has more problems than any other continent in the world that is why Obama becomes critical. It is a continent where ethnic clashes, terrorism, international conflicts, high inflation, high infant mortality rates, corruption, no rule of law, poor education, poverty and rocketing parental deaths are the order of the day, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. As a youth, I hope Obama will come to our rescue and assist us to bring the change that we need! In conclusion, Obama embodies for me as an African youth in the 21st century a variety of hopes. The challenges I meet in life are surmountable with determination and defiant zeal. Where there is a will, there is a way.



*Joshua talks to
U.S. Embassy
Charge’ d’ Af-
fares Dhanani
in the build up
to the awards
event*

Hope for African Education



Like an unstoppable wind, the Barack Obama fever spread throughout the globe. It reached Africa, for a moment our attention shifted from our own struggles to watch the rise of this visionary leader. Such great euphoria mounted as the world witnessed this African-American man collide with his destiny. The seeds of hope planted in our hearts at that moment of victory have started germinating. For me, and African youth, Obama is the epitome of that hope because he assured us that "Yes We Can!"

The super-power status of America and its influence on the world arena capacitates President Obama as the world leader. His direct link with Africa and vision for education evokes hope in me that African education shall be revolutionised. We have many schools yet some cannot afford them. Due to financial

hardships, some children miss out on the cradle of education-pre-school, only to drop out because they never had a proper foundation for schooling. I believe that President Obama, through the United Nations, can fund African education so that each child can get his or her fundamental right of education. I believe through President Obama every child will be empowered by education to aim high and set their limit beyond the sky.

Obama embodies hope for peace in Africa. He is saying no to war, where else then hope can be? There has been an outbreak of civil wars in Africa, like in Rwanda and Togo. Peacekeepers and relief can be dispatched to such countries and better still negotiators to completely oust war. A peaceful environment fosters belief in the future

unlike in war situations. In a serene atmosphere, youths can dream for a better tomorrow and work hard for it.

The number one killer in Africa is disease. The legendary killer, HIV/AIDS and its accomplices have claimed may lives. Left are scars in the form of orphans, and widows, breathing life to even bigger problems like poverty. Yet today, we have hope in President Obama that awareness campaigns can be funded and basic treatment made affordable to all. Treated and under medication, there is hope for an HIV free generation.

Obama broke new grounds and made history in the process. Judging from his background, he had every excuse to wind up in mediocrity but he settled for nothing less that greatness. He embodies hope for me that I can make it, if he could be the first African-American President of America, then I too can attain greatness. Through him, I also have a dream, to not only be a successful lawyer but the Chief Justice at the International Court of Justice.

The 21st century is my opportunity and platform for greatness. Through Obama, I believe, in this century, the world has been transformed into a suitable environment for my success with hope for better education, peace and health in Africa. I rise with an indomitable spirit and great hope that I shall be the reality of my forefathers as I take on the world because Obama told us that: "YES WE CAN".



Belinda Bell, Upper Six student at Chinhoyi High School in Mashonaland West

"...(President Obama's) direct link with Africa and vision for education evokes hope in me that African education shall be revolutionised"

Hope for African Youth

"You have the power to hold your leaders accountable and to build institutions that serve people. You can serve in your communities and harness your energy and education to create new wealth and build new connections to the world. You can conquer disease, end conflicts and make change from the bottom up," said President Barack Obama in a special message for the youth in Accra, Ghana.

Africa is laden and rife with corruption, disease and violence is on her knees and the youth need somebody to re-inspire and motivate them to overcome these troubles. The United States President, Barack Obama is one such person. He came to the capital of Ghana in July 2009 to address the smooth transition of power between political leaders and it is there that he gave the above speech.

He addressed the youth urging them to take on greater responsibility and be up in arms in the fight for stamping out war, corruption and disease plaguing Africa.

Clearly it is evident that he believes in the in the youth and their capability to and potential to excel in this task. Barack is stirring up within the youth the spirit to fight for a better Africa and this gives us hope of attaining peace and prosperity in our continent.

His foreign policy is very much pro-Africa. This is evident through the donation of money to Uganda to help assist in the country's upcoming elections to be held in 2011. It is said that Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton will be present to monitor the elections and ensure that they are free, fair and transparent. This gives hope to young potential future leaders. The youth of today are strongly discouraged and let down by the tattered

political systems rife with corruption. By providing aid to help in facilitating free elections, the youth might be inspired to also partake in the political scene. This gives the hope of better constitutions, governments, nations and eventually a better Africa.

With global warming and carbon footprints on the rise and resources such as oil on the verge of depletion, Barack Obama heads and signs the Copenhagen Accord of 2010. In the summit held in Copenhagen, international leaders agreed to reduce carbon emissions and introduce new technology to help find alternative sources of fuel. With the rise of technological advancement and the building up of new industries, not much care is given to the environment in which we live. World leaders such as Barack Obama are taking a stand and making a change. The preservation of Earth and her resources embodies a great sense of concern for the livelihood of the future generations to come and for the present youth.

In a predominant white community and nation, Barack Obama beat all odds although they were highly stacked against him, and he became the first black president of the United States of America. He went up against the racial divide and proved to the whole world that no matter what colour or race you belong to anything is possible and achievable.

Youths of color are given hope to desire for any position or goal as they are attainable. He broke the racial barriers and youth of today are no longer held in bondage by the colour of their skin. In Africa we take his triumphs and relate them

to the xenophobic attacks which were rife in countries such as South Africa. We learn to accept ourselves for who we are and not based on hatred or what race we belong to. His triumph is a spearhead for the fight against racism. This gives the youth of all racial divides a sense of belonging and hope for free expression and a life of peace and harmony.

During his term as senator of Illinois, Barack visited Kenya. Together with his wife, Michelle Obama, they got tested for HIV and thereafter publicised their results. This led to increased awareness of the disease. Not only does he lead but he also sets examples for everyone to follow. Talk about AIDS or HIV is only heard in hush tones, but this man set an example by his act. The youth are given a platform to get tested and to know their status so as to ensure healthy lifestyles. He conceived within the youth the spirit to foster an HIV free generation today and in the years to come. In the much publicised television slogan, "it begins with you", Barack Obama is actually taking a stand in breaking the cycle of ignorance. He is showing us that it begins with us. If we want to minimise AIDS-related deaths it truly does begin with the youth who are at the vulnerable stage of development. We can break the cycle, it begins with us.

To get himself through school, Barack actually took student loans. What I learn from this is that struggle, problems or difficulties are universal and that everyone can overcome them. They do not define who we are but we can overcome them and become who and what we are. This gives me hope knowing that I can conquer all this situations that befall my strength and will to carry on revitalised and I know I can succeed!

I have adopted and changed his campaign mantra of "Yes we can" to "Yes I can".



Zandile Moyo, Upper Six student at Mpopoma High School in Bulawayo

"(In Ghana, President Obama) addressed the youth urging them to take on greater responsibility and be up in arms in the fight for stamping out war, corruption and disease plaguing Africa. "



Asher Guni, Upper Six student at Mazowe High School in Mashonaland Central

Hope for International Peace

For as long as I can tell the black man has stood silently in the doldrums, turning a covetous eye towards the Caucasians every time they achieved a milestone in the dynamic history of man. Dating from the human cannibals, tribal wars, slave trade and colonization, the future certainly seemed bleak for what has come to be known as the "dark continent", a situation exceedingly unbearable to the extent that the colour 'black' began to be associated with evil! And yet hope now lies not in change but in the bearer of change, President Barack Obama.

As an African Youth, like many of my unfortunate cronies, I have been made to believe that dreams never get bigger that the brain they occupy unless you are rich. The achievements that U.S. President Barack Obama has made and the odds that he went against suggest clearly that my dreams can come true, that I do not need to

be overwhelmingly rich to be able to get to the targets that I have set for myself.

At one point it seemed absurd to think that America could have a black president. It took forty-three American Presidents before History was made and it could have taken longer if one man had not believed in change and cascaded this idea down to the hopeless souls around the world.

During his campaign, Obama constantly reiterated the point that we can change and it is because of him that I now believe that we can change the sorry state Africa is in. If Obama has the hope and conviction that he would one day become the first Black President of America, then why cannot we as Africans have hope and conviction that one day we will no longer be as impoverished as we are?

The idea of international peace seemed to be hopeless case until Barack Obama came into

power. His foreign policy has given many people that hope that the world can live in peace and harmony, a scenario that seen seemingly elusive as far as history can tell. One of his first initiatives as President was the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, a step that brought the world closer to peace. As an African Youth, I get hope from Obama's policies that peace is not hard to achieve, all we need to do is to put our hearts and mind to it, on top of being totally committed.

Seeing as it is that the world is in dire need of change and an inspirational global figure to perpetuate change, President Obama is with no reasonable doubt the ideal candidate for such a mammoth task. Not only does he inspire me but he also gives us hope as Africans and as the Black community that one day our fortunes will change and that our days will no longer be marred by diseases and poverty but

As an African Youth, like many of my unfortunate cronies, I have been made to believe that dreams never get bigger that the brain they occupy unless you are rich.

Hope for Africa



Munashe Makoni, Upper Six student at St Ignatius High School

The mere fact of the incumbent US President's African heritage serves as a greater stimulant of hope in Africa's youth than all the policies and speeches made with regards to its development to date. The tale of how a man of colour, in a predominantly white society with a history of slave trade, ascended to unprecedented greatness and prominence has sent a clear message to Africa. Yes, we too, can. More importantly, though it may not be in our own lifetimes, yes, ultimately, we will.

In my brief essay I will outline the current woes besetting Africa. I will demonstrate how the phenomenal rise of arguably the most prominent African America (since the likes of Booker T Washington, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and Oprah Winfrey to mention a few), has impacted on Africans, the youth in particular, vis-à-vis their perception of themselves and their situation. Furthermore I will draw attention to Obama's policy and its impact on Africa.

Africa today faces a plethora of challenges. The majority of Africans still struggle to eke out a living even though they might have oilfields or diamond mines in their neighborhood. Sub-Saharan Africa still staggers under the weight of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rate in the world. To make matters worse, the threat of climate change has emerged with its devastating arsenal of drought, floods and global warming. I feel however, that the central screw loose in the African machinery is located in the sphere of governance.

The common fibre in most contemporary politicians is that they seem to mistake politicking for politics. It seems to be the modern convention to agree to disagree. The age of artisan politics has arrived, unannounced. The competition for political mile-

age so as to maintain a stranglehold on power dictates that policymakers remain diametrically opposed. A typical issue is whether Africa should embrace the West as a partner of dismiss it as an imperialist force. The effect of this is that instead of agreeing that *action* must be taken to tackle issues such as health, employment, education and energy, politicians disagree on how it must be done indefinitely.

It is no coincidence then that Africa has stood still, trapped in a time-warp as the global economy has progressed. Twenty years ago Brazil was known for its crippling poverty and drug trade. Now its mulling nuclear energy for its growing industry. Africa is still deciding whether socialism is better than capitalism. Ultimately, it is the common wh neither knows the meaning of imperialism nor Western partnerships, but is all too aware that politicians aren't doing anything about inflation or unemployment, who bears the brunt of partisan politics.

In Barack Obama's cogent narrative, *The Audacity of Hope*, he says, "Perhaps more than anytime in our recent history, we need a new kind of politics, one that can excavate and build upon those shared understandings that pull us together". The fundamental shift in paradigm Obama personifies is a tonic that has exciting prospects as far as African is concerned.

The youth in Africa have mixed hopes. Most do not envisage obtaining professional qualifications on the continent. Fewer wish to be employed here. Obama's pragmatic stance on issues of inner-city children has inspired young people, even in Africa. It has dawned on us that unless we take control of our personal future by finishing school, delaying gratification and the like, then our future becomes a dice with one dot on every side. It can turn either way, but it still has one outcome, disaster. This is why it means a lot when President Obama says education is a top priority, when he disburses \$63 billion to meet such challenges. It is thanks to such initiative that we can begin to dream of a place in Africa for everyone, even young people who want the best education and jobs that match their ambition.

The moment Africans realize they have more in common (AIDS, poverty, unemployment, corruption etc) is the moment they will see how badly the grass has suffered because of the elephants' skirmishing. These shared understandings should pull Africa together, to enable it to make more concessions for the sake of progress. The implications for tomorrow bring a profound sense of hope, a hope for a continent where issues are dealt with and not merely debated. It is a hope for an Africa where politics is not the end in itself but the means to the end. Development is.

And development is the language of Barack Obama. In his Accra speech, Obama pledged American partnership rather than patronage. This is a noteworthy change in foreign policy. America's ethical code has often been two faced. On the same occasion, Obama said, "the true sign of success is not whether we are a source of aid that helps people scrape by, it is whether we are partners in building the capacity for transformational change". It is a fact that the developing world pays more interest on loans and grants than in original capital influxes themselves. With the current status quo, these debts will never be paid back in full. This initiative suggests a departure from this modus operandi to a tighter regime that yield longer lasting benefits in the long run. Africa does not need money for hydro-plants if it does not have the industry to utilize the increased energy output. Obama's policy promises greater accountability in this regard.

In conclusion, Barack Obama typifies the "African Dream". The belief that all ballots are cast equal, the hope for democracy and prosperity. It is a hope that young people from Africa can rise as high as they wish, if they roll their sleeves up far enough. From a psychological point of view, Barack Obama inspires this. Perhaps even more, his policy, which I outlined succinctly, creates an environment for this. Not exactly ideal, but a start. It is this hope which leads us to believe in him when he says, "Now it is your responsibility to build upon freedom's foundation...of you do, we will look back years on places like Accra and say that this was the time the promise was realized-the moment when prosperity was forged; pain was overcome; and now a new era of progress began"

We look forward to this progress. It is our hope.