

## PREFACE

On February 10, 2007, Senator Barack Hussein Obama II announced his candidacy for President of the United States in Springfield, IL. The 2008 presidential campaign mirrored the title of his book *The Audacity of Hope* as his message of change was thought of as audacious in promoting hope and the promise of uplift while also provoking unsettling in mainstream America. As Barack Obama became the first African American to hold the office of President, the historic occasion was a paradox of great expectation and trepidation. The confluence of Obama's cultural background as a representation of the realities of a changing demography, his political ideologies, and transnational cultural influence heightened perceived threat for many when he assumed office as the 44th President of the United States on January 20, 2009. The incomprehensibility of a Black man as the leader of the "free" world was considered by some as quintessentially un-American — a miscarriage of all that is just, fair, and normal. Hence, there was a perplexing conundrum of a nation in economic free fall, riddled with record joblessness, multiple wars, a poor international image, declining educational achievement and a stalemate in advancing prevailing social justice issues (e.g., racial equality, gender parity, same-sex marriage, universal health, veterans benefits, economic development in urban communities). The litany of domestic ills and international problems facing the new president would be as unprecedented as the new Commander-in-Chief.

History, demography, and politics do not exist in a vacuum. The political activities and policy environment of the Obama administration during his first term and since his November 2012 reelection serve as a litmus for how far the United States has advanced as well as stagnation across a myriad of social issues. This volume on *Obama and Educational Reform* examines the challenges, opportunities, success, and shortcomings of the Obama administration relative to advancing social concerns that bear influence on the betterment of educational organizations and those that they serve. The contributors featured in this book describe and illuminate the multi-layered forces that have served as a catalyst for change and deeper dilemmas toward taking action on the Obama administration's plan for lifetime success through education.

We need to steer clear of this poverty of ambition, where people want to drive fancy cars and wear nice clothes and live in nice apartments but don't want to work hard to accomplish these things. Everyone should try to realize their full potential. — Barack Obama

In order for everyone to become their best self, it is critical that high-quality early childhood education programs are accessible. From early childhood education possibilities and causes for concern, to the insoluble challenge of children in poverty and pretense of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), American citizens are clamoring for solutions and authentic educational reform. The authors share some of the most pressing problems in facilitating college and career readiness in urban communities and the seemingly endless string of racial profiling that fuel the pipeline to prison. President Obama has a progressive vision relative to urban America though it is arguable if he has been able to implement policies and advance initiatives that generate reform in urban enclaves. In this so-called “post-racial” society, President Obama is stuck between the proverbial “rock and a hard place” being criticized for remarking on the 2012 death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17 year old possessing candy and a soft drink who was murdered by a neighborhood watch volunteer for looking suspicious while walking home from the store. There was media frenzy over the President stating, “If I had a son, he would look like Trayvon.” On the other hand, the president was criticized for not doing enough as the nation’s first Black president to ease racial tensions in the recent shooting death of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, that received national attention. Police use of excessive force against men of color is a case in point that the election of Barack Obama has not been the great panacea for race relations.

In taking a deeper look at America “post-Obama,” the chapters in this book provide commentary on the disproportionate effects of the great recession, postsecondary access and attainment, covering the role of community colleges in the economic recovery and need for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBUS), the clarion call of the American Graduation Initiative (AGI), gainful employment rules under the Obama administration, lack of STEM professionals and increasing accountability in higher education. Institutions of higher education should be held accountable for creating, engaging, welcoming campus climates that produce favorable student outcomes across a diverse array of collegians. Also aligned with the Obama college completion agenda is affirming diversity. Diversity as a compelling state interest has received considerable retrenchment during the last several presidencies. However, on July 15, 2014, in a

2-1 ruling, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Federal Appeals upheld the University of Texas affirmative action plan, which continues using race as a factor in undergraduate admissions as a way of promoting diversity on campus. *Fisher v. Texas* case made it to the Supreme Court was sent back for further review at the lower court.

Among other areas on President Obama's agenda that are focused on in this volume are fostering access to higher education and a pathway to citizenship for immigrant students, seeking marriage equality and equal rights for the LGBTQ community. Relative to the latter, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) proposed a rule to change the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to revise the definition of spouse in June 2014 based on the Supreme Court's ruling striking down the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) which interpreted marriage and spouse to apply specifically to opposite-sex couplings in *United States v. Windsor* (2013). The President has also advanced the Working Families Initiative to ensure that all people can access paid family leave. Chapters in the final section of the book touch on the needs of veterans and post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits and the continuing push for healthcare reform.

This volume reflects a heuristic exercise in conceptualizing and examining the dynamics of problems, politics, and potential solutions extended by the Obama administration the bear influence and a dynamic relationship with the educational enterprise. This book illustrates an attempt to showcase significant achievements and missed opportunities in advancing social policies that elevate educational attainment across the P-20 pipeline under the Obama administration. The chapters are representative of different takes on the ambitions, triumphs, and adversities of the Obama administration relative to the advancing social policy that results in improvements in education. Notwithstanding, this book does not present every educational, economic, political, and social development during the Obama years; the contributing authors extend a comprehensive yet narrowly focused body of literature and political perspectives emerging during the first and second terms of President Obama. The chapters offer engaging insights on social/political/educational policy beliefs richly shedding light on problem areas while identifying policy foci and share recommendations for policy and practice.

President Barack Obama has been one of the most diplomatic and productive presidential leaders. During his time in office he passed healthcare reform, extended unemployment insurance, instituted credit card reform, allocated additional money to early education, created partnership programs with community colleges, addressed student loan debt reform,

expanded funding for violence against women, and signed the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Other notable achievements during his time in office include improving the relationship with NATO, taking decisive action to the economy after major collapse, extended benefits to same-sex partners of federal employees, signed an Executive Order establishing the White House Office of Urban Affairs.

The list of the Obama administration's accomplishments extends well beyond the aforementioned. By contrast, it is open to question whether President Obama's missteps are sizeable enough to tinge his good deeds and debatably feats in the midst of what has been insuperable contention, partisan gridlock, and rash of intractable problems many of which previous presidents did not enter office having to fix. Certainly there are many big issues such as failing schools, federal spending, the debt ceiling, deportation policy and immigration reform to cite a few that the President still has to grind through to resolve. It appears in his second term President Obama readily acknowledges the realities of the purposeful holdup by Republicans in progressing any and nearly every initiative he forwards.

What will be the legacy of President Barack Obama? Further, what is an accurate measure of the change President Obama promised to bring to the nation's capital and to educational organizations in particular? History is still in the making.

Where there is no struggle, there is no strength. — Oprah Winfrey

As the President enters the last half of his second term in office, it appears the idealism of the first term has faded and the partisanship he has been known for is dissipating. The President is seemingly less willing to wait for agreement across the political aisle from obstinate members of the House and Senate. The Obama presidential years are a case study in power struggles and strategically working the power structure. It is my hope that the chapters to follow stir thoughtful analysis of the many challenges facing our country alongside consideration of divergent policy opinions, policy making, policy implementation and evaluation of the Obama Administration's goals.

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