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Commentary: Courageous Obama poses challenge to America

Editor's Note: Derrick Ashong is a musician, activist and entrepreneur. He recently became a YouTube "phenom" after posting a passionate defense of Barack Obama. Ashong identifies himself as an independent.



Derrick Ashong says Barack Obama spoke with "candor and compassion" about race relations in America.

Like many Americans I watched Sen. Barack Obama deliver his speech titled "A More Perfect Union."

I watched in a state of minor shock, not so much at the deftness with which he defused the sophomoric conflation of his call for national unity with the inflammatory rhetoric of the retired head pastor of his church -- a conflation that would imply that we must each swallow whole the entirety of views expressed by our friends and associates.

It was not his repudiation of small thinking that struck me. It was the fact that here we had an American politician speaking with both candor and compassion about the proverbial elephant in our national living room.

Race is an issue that continues to confound this country. It is an undercurrent that paints our description, understanding and valuation of people in American society whether spoken or not. It is the subtext that places NBA star LeBron James and Brazilian supermodel Gisele Bundchen on the cover of Vogue, in uncomfortable caricature of brute and ingénue.

It is in the minds of some the very reason a person of color would even be considered a serious candidate for the presidency of the nation -- never mind that three centuries into the American experiment there has been to date, only one such person.

I watched Obama's speech with a measure of disbelief that he had the gumption to come out and say what we all know -- that the problem of race remains one that we as a nation have yet to conquer. To be sure we have made strides towards reconciliation. But the hard conversations continue to be harder than most are willing to deal with.

Black America has yet to come to grips with its responsibility to tackle head on the problems that plague our communities. White America has yet to acknowledge the fact that here in the "home of the free," true liberty has evaded many for far too long.

Too often these conversations are ended before they've truly begun, due to the ignorance, intransigence or simple unwillingness of people to acknowledge the validity of what the other side has to say.

Who can honestly argue that [black America](#) is not today contributing mightily to its own social, cultural and economic decline?

Who can honestly argue that white America has not been willfully blind and too often complicit in the injustices that continue to be visited upon people born with darker hue or stranger accent?

Who will have both the courage and the commitment to the promise of universal justice and equity that undergirds our country, to call upon the nation to move beyond the divisive rhetoric of racial "one-upmanship" and to embrace the challenge of fulfilling that promise?

Apparently a junior senator from Illinois by the name of Barack [Obama](#).

For days pundits have pondered whether Sen. Obama could weather the controversy over Rev. Jeremiah Wright's racially polarizing comments. The question at this juncture is not whether the candidate will rise to the occasion, but rather, whether America will.