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The Substance of Hope: Barack Obama and the Paradox of Progress

William Jelani Cobb

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For acclaimed historian William Jelani Cobb, the historic election of Barack Obama to the presidency is not the most remarkable development of the 2008 election; even more so is the fact that Obama won some 90 percent of the black vote in the primaries across America despite the fact that the established black leadership since the civil rights era?men like Jesse Jackson, John Lewis, Andrew Young, who paved the way for his candidacy?all openly supported Hillary Clinton. Clearly a sea change has occurred among black voters, ironically pushing the architects of the civil rights movement toward the periphery at the moment when their political dreams were most fully realized.
How this has happened, and the powerful implications it holds for America's politics and social landscape, is the focus of *The Substance of Hope*, a deeply insightful, paradigm-shifting examination of a new generation of voters that has not been shaped by the raw memory of Jim Crow and has a different range of imperatives. Cobb sees Obama's ascendancy as "a reality that has been taking shape in tiny increments for the past four decades," and examines thorny issues such as the paradox and contradictions embodied in race and patriotism, identity and citizenship; how the civil rights leadership became a political machine; why the term "postracial" is as iniquitous as it is inaccurate; and whether our society has really changed with Obama's election.
Elegantly written and powerfully argued, *The Substance of Hope* challenges conventional wisdom as it offers original insight into America's future.

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