



In this Nov. 4, 2008 file photo, President-elect Barack Obama, left, his wife Michelle Obama, right, and two daughters, Malia, 7, and Sasha, 10, wave at the election night rally in Chicago. AP File photo by Jae C. Hong

Obama's election voted top news story of 2008

by DAVID CRARY
AP National Writer

NEW YORK—The epic election that made Barack Obama the first African-American president was the top news story of 2008—followed closely by the economic meltdown that will test his leadership, according to US editors and news directors voting in *The Associated Press* annual poll.

The campaign, with subplots emerging throughout the year, received 100 first-place votes out of 155 ballots cast for the top 10 stories. Two other political sagas—the history-making candidacies of Hillary Rodham Clinton and Sarah Palin—also made the list.

The vast economic crisis, plunging the US into recession and ravaging many business sectors worldwide, was the No. 2 story, receiving 49 first-place votes. The precipitous rise and fall of oil prices was No. 3.

The top story of 2007 was the massacre of 32 people at Virginia Tech University by a mentally disturbed student gunman.

Here are 2008's top 10 stories, as voted by AP members:

1. US Election: Obama emerged from Election Night as a decisive victor and a symbol for the world of America's democratic promise. But he reached that point only after a grueling battle with Clinton for the Democratic nomination and then an often-nasty showdown with the McCain/Palin ticket in the run-up to the election.

2. Economic meltdown: The bad news kept coming—collapses of Wall Street giants; huge stock market losses; plummeting home prices and a surge of foreclosures; desperate times for US automakers. It added up to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and will cost the federal government well over \$1 trillion in various rescue and stimulus packages.

3. Oil prices: The global economic angst produced hyper-volatile energy markets. The price of crude soared as high as \$150 a barrel in July before crashing to \$33 this month. In the US, the average price for a gallon of regular gas peaked at \$4.11, then plunged below \$1.70.

4. Iraq: The much-debated "surge" of US troops helped reduce violence after more than five years of war, but Iraq is still buffeted daily by bombings, ambushes, kidnappings and political uncertainty. A newly ratified US-Iraqi security agreement sets a timetable for U.S. troop withdrawal by 2012.

5. Beijing Olympics: China hosted the Olympics for first time, drawing praise for logistical mastery and condemnation for heavy-handed security measures. The games themselves were rated a success, highlighted by the record-shattering performances of swimmer Michael Phelps and sprinter Usain Bolt.

6. Chinese earthquake: A huge quake in May killed 70,000 people in Sichuan province and left 5 million homeless. Many thousands of children were among the victims—authorities said about 7,000 classrooms were destroyed in shoddily built schools.

7. Sarah Palin: Few Americans outside Alaska knew much about its governor when Republican John McCain picked her as his running mate. That changed rapidly. To her conservative admirers, she was a feisty, refreshing change from most politicians; to her critics, she was in over her head, and worthy of all the lampooning she endured.

8. Mumbai terrorism: Ten attackers allegedly sponsored by a Pakistan-based Islamic group terrorized India's financial capital in November, killing 164 people in coordinated attacks on hotels, markets and a train station. India's perennially uneasy relations with Pakistan were badly strained.

9. Hillary Clinton: She didn't win, but Clinton came closer than any other woman in US history to becoming a major party's presidential nominee. Her determined primary campaign, waged vigorously even when it seemed a lost cause, inspired millions of women across the country—and helped persuade Obama to choose her as secretary of state.

10. Russia-Georgia war: The two nations waged a five-day war in August ignited by a Georgian artillery barrage on the breakaway region of South Ossetia. Russia responded with a drive deep into Georgian territory, causing severe economic damage and aggravating already troubled Russia-US relations.

Stories that almost made the Top 10 included Cyclone Nargis, which killed more than 84,000 people in Myanmar; Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which wreaked deadly damage in the Caribbean and on the US Gulf Coast; and the seesaw fate of same-sex marriage in California, where a court ruling approving it was later overturned by a ballot measure.

Several write-in votes were cast for two developments that occurred too late to be included on the AP ballot—the indictment of Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich and the efforts of struggling US automakers to get a federal bailout. The alleged financial scam involving Bernard Madoff also was revealed too late to make the ballot.

Several of the editors who voted commented on how two transcendent developments dominated the news in 2008.

"As far as I am concerned, there were only two stories this year," wrote Linda Grist Cunningham of the Rockford (Ill.) Register Star. "Global economy collapses (sending every country into financial, political and personal chaos) and Obama elected US president, changing the way the America does business—financial, political and personal." ■

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Economy slows population growth in South, West

by STEPHEN OHLEMACHER
AP Writer

WASHINGTON—The nation's great migration south and west is slowing, thanks to a housing crisis that is making it hard for many to move. Most southern and western states aren't growing nearly as fast as they were at the start of the decade, pausing a long-term trend fueled by the de-

sire for open spaces and warmer climates, according to population estimates released December 21 by the Census Bureau.

The development could impact the political map when House seats are divvied up following the 2010 Census. Southern and western states will still take congressional seats away from those in the Northeast and Midwest—Florida could gain as many as two House seats and Texas could pick up four. But some seats hanging in the balance could stay put, and California could be in danger of losing a seat for the first time since it became a state.

The Census Bureau released state population estimates as of July 1, 2008. The data show annual changes through births, deaths, and domestic and foreign migration.

Utah was the fastest growing state, knocking Nevada from the top ranks. It was followed by Arizona, Texas, North Carolina and Colorado. Nevada was ranked eighth, after 23 years of ranking in the top four each year.

Only two states—Michigan and Rhode Island—lost population from 2007 to 2008, according to the new estimates. But growth

rates fell in many states, even for those that had been adding residents at a rapid clip.

Foreign immigration has slowed since the start of the decade and fewer people are moving around within the nation's borders.

Florida has attracted more people from other states than any other state in the nation since the start of the decade. However, from 2007 to 2008, more people left Florida for other states than moved in—a net loss of nearly 9,300 people.

From 2007 to 2008, California had the biggest net loss of people moving to other states—more than 144,000 people. It was followed by New York, Michigan, New Jersey and Illinois.

The states that attracted the most people from other states during the period were Texas, North Carolina, Arizona, Georgia and South Carolina.

The population shifts will be felt following the 2010 census, when the nation apportions the 435 seats in the House of Representatives, based on population. Seats in Congress also determine the number of electoral votes states have in presidential elec-

tions. Texas stands to be the biggest winner, picking up as many as four seats, while Ohio could be the big loser, giving up as many as two seats, according to projections by Kim Brace of Election Data Services.

Other states projected to lose single seats are Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

Numerous other House seats are in play, depending on whether the nation's economic problems continue to affect population trends. As many as 13 states could gain or lose seats, depending on population trends over the next two years and the accuracy of the 2010 census, Brace said.

California illustrates the importance of an accurate head count. The Census Bureau estimates California has fewer than 37 million people, putting it in danger of losing a House seat.

"If I was somebody in charge of one of the states sitting on the edge, I would be thinking about how I could improve the census in my state, because it does have an impact," Brace said. ■

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'Ibig at Igib'

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Here in St. Brendan, the smell of cold mornings did not compete with diesel fumes. The cold mornings met the cold temperatures inside the church. But, what touched me in this Los Angeles church was the attempt to keep the cultural traditions alive, explaining what "mano po" meant, how folks respond, and what it means as a manifestation of respect to authority. So, when each volunteer prior to reading the scriptures paid their respects to Father Jerry, took his hand to their foreheads, uttered "mano po." Father Jerry responded "May God have mercy on You!" He was into the Filipino culture, and integrated his behavior with the congregation.

I reflected on the meaning of Father Jerry's homily, "God's work begins with us and ends with us." He brought joy to the faces of the congregants. He got more folks to volunteer to participate in the mass, he made us all feel that we all belong to one church, we are all God's children, and he did not leave out any part of the congregation to share his smiles with. I felt God's presence in him, pretty much what he preached us to do, to consider that "God's work begins with us and ends with us."

I started my reflections. It is deeply magical. I say deep because it allows me to travel and

inhabit my body within, therefore not superficial, not on the epidermis surface of my skin. But, it is also a sense of feeling light, even if I maybe dense with weight, it feels like a load of weight has been lifted off of me. It feels like I am lighter in my feet, able to climb the stairs, able to drive far away places to uplift someone, to bring joy to others. That is what I feel when I do that silent reflection, that silent inhabiting of my own body, getting to that core of where everything is good, I call it a "sacred wellspring" where I drink from.

In Tagalog, there are two words that I came upon: the words are: IBIG and IGIB.

IBIG means Love, and IGIB means to fetch water. I realized this morning that to IBIG, or TO LOVE OTHERS, including myself, means also IGIB, to fetch water from the SACRED WELLSPRING, that Oprah likes to call the UNIVERSAL ENERGY or what Eckhart calls or refers to as CONSCIOUSNESS.

IBIG at IGIB puts me in the circle of God, a wholeness, a wholesomeness that makes one feel complete, a delight passed on from me to another person. It made me realize that I must not do harm to others, that I cannot take away their joy, that I must IBIG so I can IGIB particularly, if God's work begins and ends with me.

I realize even the Universal Energy is smart and has a sense of humor and wit, for S/He interchanged only two letters, B and G, G for God who gives me and refreshes my consciousness and B, for big love to humankind and then, I realized what Oprah does in the BIG GIVE, it allowed me to even appreciate HIS UNIVERSAL ENERGY is even MULTILINGUAL. Just like what Father Jerry did.

The third day took me to the Cathedral of Angels in downtown Los Angeles. I missed the early mass, and settled for noon, officiated by Father Francis. He too communicated his joy to the congregation, much fewer at 100. But, it did not dampen Father Francis' enthusiasm. He spoke of Joseph, and how he contemplated divorcing Mary quietly, until he got a dream that he was chosen to bring up Jesus as his son. Father Francis noticed that St. Joseph was the first figure in the tapestry of saints hanging by the Cathedral walls. He spoke of Joseph as a role model for male caregivers, one who embodied: humility, obedience, purity and integrity.

I questioned: Why did he list those virtues in that order? Can you help me figure that out? E-mail me as to why at prosyad@hotmail.com. Father Jerry affected me, so did Father Francis, and this would make Monsignor Terry happy that we are all making an effort to live our faithfully! ■