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## HANDOUT THREE, LESSON THREE

EXCERPTS FROM SENATOR OBAMA'S ADDRESS, BROWN A.M.E. CHURCH  
SELMA, AL, MARCH 7, 2007<sup>3</sup>

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It is a great honor to be here. Reverend Jackson, thank you so much. To the family of Brown A.M.E, to the good Bishop Kirkland, thank you for your wonderful message and your leadership. I want to acknowledge one of the great heroes of American history and American life, somebody who captures the essence of decency and courage, somebody who I have admired all my life and were it not for him, I'm not sure I'd be here today, Congressman John Lewis.

I'm thankful to him. To all the distinguished guests and clergy, I'm not sure I'm going to thank Reverend Lowery because he stole the show. I was mentioning earlier, I know we've got C.T. Vivian in the audience, and when you have to speak in front of somebody who Martin Luther King said was the greatest preacher he ever heard, then you've got some problems.

And I'm a little nervous about following so many great preachers. But I'm hoping that the spirit moves me and to all my colleagues who have given me such a warm welcome, thank you very much for allowing me to speak to you here today.

You know, several weeks ago, after I had announced that I was running for the presidency of the United States, I stood in front of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois, where Abraham Lincoln delivered his speech declaring, drawing in scripture, that a house divided against itself could not stand.

And I stood and I announced that I was running for the presidency. And there were a lot of commentators, as they are prone to do, who questioned the audacity of a young man like myself, haven't been in Washington too long.

And I acknowledge that there is a certain presumptuousness about this.

But I got a letter from a friend of some of yours named Reverend Otis Moss Jr. in Cleveland, and his son, Otis Moss III is the pastor at my church — and I must send greetings from Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. — but I got a letter giving me encouragement and saying how proud he was that I had announced and encouraging me to stay true to my ideals and my values and not to be fearful.

And he said if there's some folks out there who are questioning whether or not you should run, just tell them to look at the story of Joshua because you're part of the Joshua Generation.

So I just want to talk a little about Moses and Aaron and Joshua, because we are in the presence today of a lot of Moseses. We're in the presence today of giants whose shoulders we stand on, people who battled, not just on behalf of African Americans but on behalf of all of America; that battled for America's soul, that shed blood, that endured taunts and torment and in some cases gave the full measure of their devotion.

Like Moses, they challenged Pharaoh, the princes, powers who said that some are top and others are at the bottom, and that's how it's always going to be. There were people like Anna Cooper and Marie Foster and Jimmy Lee Jackson and Maurice Olette, C.T. Vivian, Reverend Lowery, John Lewis, who said we can imagine something different and we know there is something out there for us, too.

Thank God, He's made us in His image and we reject the notion that we will for the rest of our lives be confined to a station of inferiority, that we can't aspire to the highest of heights, that our talents can't be expressed to their fullest. And so because of what they endured, because of what they marched; they led a people out of bondage.

They took them across the sea that folks thought could not be parted. They wandered through a desert but always knowing that God was with them and that if they maintained that trust in God, that they would be all right. And it's because they marched that the next generation hasn't been bloodied so much.

It's because they marched that we elected councilmen, congressmen. It is because they marched that we have Artur Davis and Keith Ellison. It is because they marched that I got the kind of education I got, a law degree, a seat in the Illinois Senate, and ultimately in the United States Senate.

It is because they marched that I stand before you here today. I was mentioning at the Unity Breakfast this morning that my debt is even greater than that because not only is my career the result of the work of the men and women who we honor here today. My very existence might not have been possible had it not been for some of the folks here today. I mentioned at the Unity Breakfast that a lot of people have been asking, well, you know, your father was from Africa, your mother, she's a White woman from Kansas. I'm not sure that you have the same experience.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0703/04/le.02.html>



And I tried to explain, you don't understand. You see, my grandfather was a cook to the British in Kenya. Grew up in a small village and all his life, that's all he was — a cook and a house boy. And that's what they called him, even when he was 60 years old. They called him a house boy. They wouldn't call him by his last name. Sound familiar?

He had to carry a passbook around because Africans in their own land, in their own country, at that time, because it was a British colony, could not move about freely. They could only go where they were told to go. They could only work where they were told to work.

Yet something happened back here in Selma, Alabama. Something happened in Birmingham that sent out what Bobby Kennedy called, "Ripples of hope all around the world." Something happened when a bunch of women decided they were going to walk instead of ride the bus after a long day of doing somebody else's laundry, looking after somebody else's children. When men who had PhDs decided that's enough and we're going to stand up for our dignity. That sent a shout across oceans so that my grandfather began to imagine something different for his son. His son, who grew up herding goats in a small village in Africa, could suddenly set his sights a little higher and believe that maybe a Black man in this world had a chance.

What happened in Selma, Alabama, and Birmingham also stirred the conscience of the nation. It worried folks in the White House who said, "You know, we're battling Communism. How are we going to win hearts and minds all across the world? If right here in our own country, John, we're not observing the ideals set forth in our Constitution, we might be accused of being hypocrites." So the Kennedys decided we're going to do an airlift. We're going to go to Africa and start bringing young Africans over to this country and give them scholarships to study so they can learn what a wonderful country America is.

This young man named Barack Obama got one of those tickets and came over to this country. He met this woman whose great-great-great-great-grandfather had owned slaves, but she had a good idea there was some craziness going on, because they looked at each other and they decided that we know that in the world as it has been it might not be possible for us to get together and have a child. There was something stirring across the country because of what happened in Selma, Alabama, because some folks are willing to march across a bridge. So they got together and Barack Obama Jr. was born. So don't tell me I don't have a claim on Selma, Alabama. Don't tell me I'm not coming home to Selma, Alabama.

I'm here because somebody marched. I'm here because you all sacrificed for me. I stand on the shoulders of giants. I thank the Moses Generation; but we've got to remember, now, that Joshua still had a job to do. As great as Moses was, despite all that he did, leading a people out of bondage, he didn't cross over the river to see the Promised Land. God told him your job is done. You'll see it. You'll be at the mountaintop and you can see what I've promised. What I've promised to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. You will see that I've fulfilled that promise but you won't go there.

We're going to leave it to the Joshua Generation to make sure it happens. There are still battles that need to be fought; some rivers that need to be crossed. Like Moses, the task was passed on to those who might not have been as deserving, might not have been as courageous, find themselves in front of the risks that their parents and grandparents, and great-grandparents had taken. That doesn't mean that they don't still have a burden to shoulder, that they don't have some responsibilities. The previous generation, the Moses generation, pointed the way....

Moses told the Joshua Generation: don't forget where you came from. I worry sometimes, that the Joshua Generation in its success forgets where it came from....

And it reminds us that we still got a lot of work to do and that the basic enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, the injustice that still exists within our criminal justice system, the disparity in terms of how people are treated in this country continues. It has gotten better. And we should never deny that it's gotten better. But we shouldn't forget that better is not good enough. That until we have absolute equality in this country in terms of people being treated on the basis of their color or their gender, that that is something that we've got to continue to work on and the Joshua Generation has a significant task in making that happen.