

From Soulard's Notebooks

*Letter to United States Senator
Barack Obama
(Democrat, Illinois)*

June 22, 2008

12:03 a.m.

Coffeetime Coffeehouse—

my armchair

Portland, Oregon

Dear Senator Obama,

I am writing to you tonight in the full & hopeful expectation that come about seven months from now, you will be sworn in as the next President of the United States. You'll take the vow to defend the Constitution, be nodded toward by a group of important faces, & a cheer will ring the globe. You will be a kind of new bride not just to this nation, but also to the six billion souls around the world your words & actions will affect from that winter's day on.

The nightmare of George W. Bush in elected office will be over. He & his criminal brothers will be pushed off the world stage. Perhaps to continue their treacherous pursuits further in the shadows. But you, sir, will be the man chosen by a nation to bring its highest office back into common light.



MP: KS

Let me say several things as preamble here. First, I would have rathered that Al Gore take his rightful office at last next January. It was his to take, in my view, not yours or Senator Clinton's or Senator Edwards. Certainly not John McCain's. He chose to defer; millions sighed, & respected this choice.

Second, much of what I think & feel toward you involves your own word: hope. As a Senator, you did not stick out so very much. None of the Democrats have this decade. There is something of the coward in you each & all, that you saw the nightmare of George Bush & Dick Cheney & did not act beyond smoothly worded protests to bring them down. The wounds of this country & the world lay at your feet, & afresh each time soldiers die in Iraq, each time the American economy is raped new by the corporate elite. Each time the corporate media whores reduce the complexities of human lives to an embarrassing photo or an intense argument about principles of law & morality few if any of them understand, much less care for when the day's headline moves on.

Hope. You came into our lives using that word. *Hope*. It is a word for wishes, for suffering, spoken by the vulnerable, the desperate. You said it over & over until many of us became willing to keep listening. To allow hope again.

We didn't lose it when the World Trade Towers fell on 9/11/2001. *However it came that they fell*. No, we began to lose hope more when we saw Bush obliterate Iraq for no reason, & nobody stopped him. Not the United Nations. Not the Constitutional separation of powers that says that Congress shall declare wars.

We lost more hope when Bush stole another election in 2004 & nobody blinked. We lost more as the death toll in Iraq climbed into the many thousands & was forbidden to be seen even on our televisions.



MP: MVK

We lost hope when we were told we could be locked up forever, when we were told we were being spied on, when our costs for bread & gasoline skyrocketed while the few made billions.

So, Senator, you said hope & we salivated, our souls sweated for it. Hope, like faith its close kin, raises even when there is no logic to it.

This draws me near to my point. I don't expect you to cure every ill or solve every woe. Men will still hate for reasons of skin, ethnicity, sex, countless other even more ridiculous reasons.

Children will still cry, adults will still get lonely & drink til the pain numbs. The elite of this world will still find ways to suck the planet's varied & plentiful tit like it was theirs more than others' by divine right.

No, you are one man, with finite powers of office & intellect. And a big, big shitheap to go at. Eight years of George W. Bush's smiling okie-dokey pard'ners as he squats upon every creature in this world & lets his private shit-storm of demons fly in every direction. Walk off hitching up his drawers & saying "y'all remember what all I done for you."

Senator, Mr. Obama, *Barack*: it's simple. *Don't fuck it up*. We will get you into office, by the millions will we get you there. Right now there's no real fight left in Bush's remains. Oh, like Jack Nicholson says in *Easy Rider*, "they'll talk to you & talk to you & talk to you" but they are re-trenching. Even a gang of rapists will take a break for a piss & a cold brew.

We'll get you to next January when you will take that oath on that bright winter's day. Then we'll do more than watch: We'll keep doing what's getting you to that day, what's pushing opposition from your path.



MP: MVK

See, being our hero right now is hard work but I think it's kind of easy too. Lots of pretty speeches, lots of perty promises. No, sir, wait until you are *our President*, the one we blog & shout & phonebank & argue & canvass & donate for. *Just wait.*

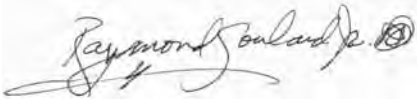
You *will* end the War in Iraq. You *will* stop the spying on American citizens. You *will* get us out of the prison cage of petrocrats. You *will* help the *poor* & the *sick* & the *vulnerable* of this nation, & you *will* rejoin this nation to the world of nations. You *will* become the world's number one advocate for peace among all men & women, & healing with our mother planet.

If you do not. If you deal from the bottom with the corporate jackal whores consuming all blindly these many years, if you go soft on defending the defenseless, if you turn to bullets & platitudes as though salvation, we will drive you, sir, from office to a place in Hell that will look far up toward George W. Bush's.

That's what it's like to have raised our hopes, to hold them, to ask we work our days toward that January day & your vow to defend the Constitution. That's what is going on, the spirits raised up & roiling right now.

I will vote for you. I will work for your campaign after my own ways. I will *cheer* when you take office. But I will be with millions watching thereafter, & still ready for whatever comes next.

Sincerely,



Raymond Souland, Jr.
Portland, Oregon



From Soulard's Notebooks

Letter to President-elect Barack Obama

December 13, 2008

3:46 p.m.

CoffeeTime Coffeehouse

Portland, Oregon

Dear President-elect Obama,

I am writing to congratulate you on being elected President of the United States. It was thrilling to be part of your campaign, to witness the hopes your campaign raised translated into a thorough victory on November 4, a clearly enunciated statement by millions repudiating the policies & attitudes ruling the world this past 8 years. George W. Bush's time is over. He will leave office this coming January a disgraced, humiliated man. A spectacular failure. A would-be King now shown a humbled fool. Between the hopes your campaign spoke toward again & again, & the deep, abiding loathing for Bush, your victory became more & more likely, & then happened.

Wow. It *really* happened. Since then you have been readying to take office, selecting your Cabinet & others who will join you in Washington, D.C. I was particularly pleased by your choice of Hillary Clinton for Secretary of State. I think she will be terrific in the role of mending international relations, repairing the tattered American image. She is a brilliant woman & I'm sure will work tirelessly for peace & reconciliation. I also admire your commitment to a bi-partisan Cabinet. Some, frankly, do not. Many are progressives, & already halfway off your bandwagon. Don't want to believe you will keep promises, don't want to get fooled again. Some talk as though you're already in office, breaking promises left & right.

Sir, I don't bear such doubts. I am certain you are intending to keep promises & do good by all. I believe in your intelligence, your heart, & most of all, your empathy toward others. I believe you when you say you wish to be the leader of one nation & will work with any who will work with you, & will listen to all who speak.

I believe there will be both victories & defeats, better & worse days. Bush is soon gone, but his kind—the iniquitous of this world who feed on the suffering of others, their vulnerabilities, sometimes their ignorance—goes on & on. The human soul may pitch toward stars, open-handed to every living being, a mortal thing ringed with countless coronas of musics, even as it may also ignore all sufferings or sensations not its own, take from others while wearing a bland, righteous mask, judge a skin color or a genital kind or a language or a philosophical or a political opinion enough to damn another, burn down his house, annihilate his loved ones, leave him gutted & dying on an empty street.

Thus it can be reasonably said that you continue along others' steps as much as you begin anew. There will be doubters & those who resist your ideas about one American family, much less one human family or one planetary family. People often will fall back on two questions: what's in it for me & mine? What do I have to give up for others, & why? Each of us, to some reasonable or unreasonable degree, will be watching how you govern from this perspective. As hard as getting elected was, & as improbable as that victory, what's to come will utterly overshadow it.

The American economy, & by extension the global economy, has been reduced to a shambles. Two unfinished wars continue in Iraq & Afghanistan. Regional wars threaten in half a dozen parts of the world. The environment's condition is deteriorating even as powerful interests will try to continue American addiction to foreign oil—not to mention its lack of affordable healthcare for millions.

The litany of woes goes on & on. There is always, frankly, a litany of woes. Mortal things suffer. We love & break up, we are lonely, we are sick, we die. Most of us labor all our lives just to survive, to retire for a few elderly years of sitting in the sunshine, feeling worn out & useless. The elite among us, not among the millions of wage slaves, fare better along the way, but still end up in a box or an urn. Just a prettier one.

What I come back to, what I find the moveable space in all this, what I call the imaginal space of possibilities, is what resides, figuratively at last, in the human heart. What got you elected was not policy so much as a persistent tapping at these secret, precious, vulnerable places. A dark-skinned man has never led this race-wounded nation. A still-young man who grew up poor, fatherless, lived some years overseas, worked very hard & gained his entrance into the finest universities in the land. Well-spoken does not describe your speeches. They cry, they ring, they summon, they urge to heal, to unite. After a dark, bloody, shameful decade, infested with lies, with brutality, with ever-increasing disappointments & diminishing prospects, you stood up & said, "Yes, We Can." You talked, in words both plain & golden, of hope, of change. You shifted the cultural dialogue from tomorrow's next calamity to tomorrow's new possibility. Your opponents mocked you & called your words pretty, empty, delusional. Each one mis-read what people wanted. Each promised to be a knight against encroaching darkness, a parent checking under the bed & in the closets for monsters. You didn't. You simply said, "Get up, check the closets with me, now under the bed. The worst monsters live in your hearts. Now you remember. Now you know."

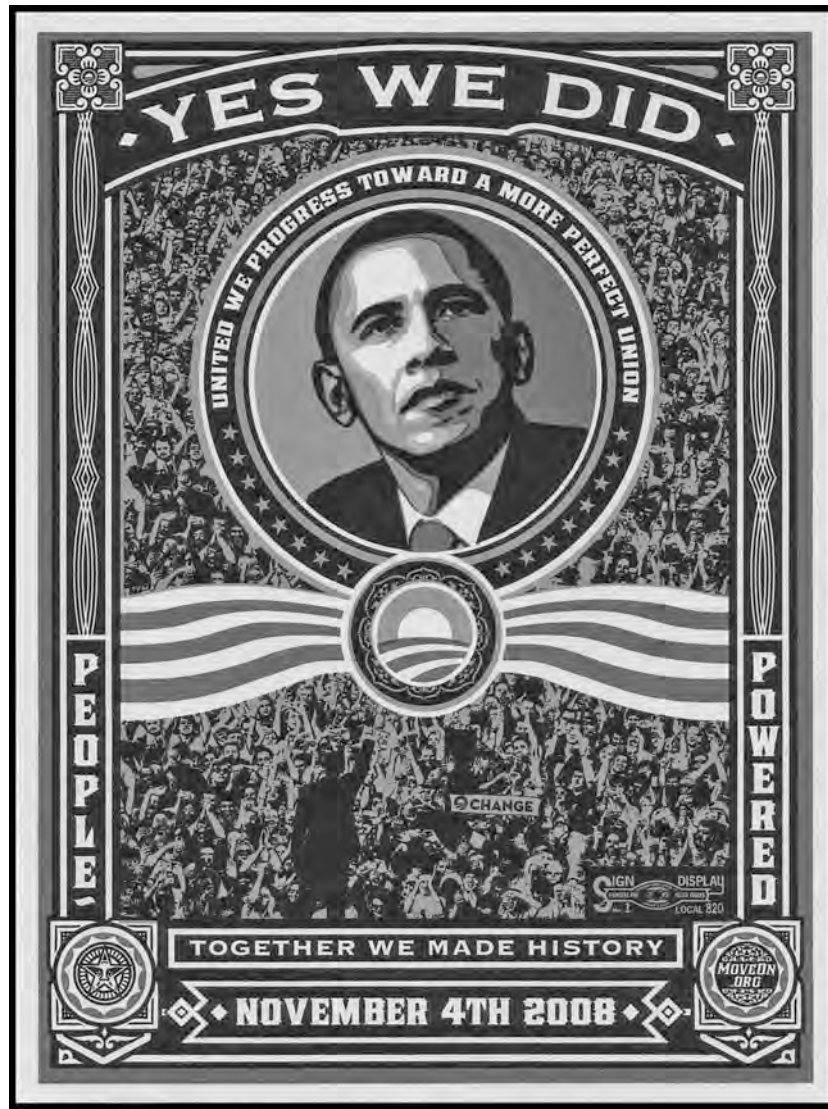
I believe, Mister President-elect, Barack, that you will do well, that you are suited for this great, hard task. You will push this nation & the world as a whole toward smarter, kinder, & eventually more prosperous days. You will lead & inspire. Others will listen, will find a model to emulate in one way or many. As always, what good that happens will not annihilate suffering or selfishness or plain stupidity. Neither fullest moon's beauty nor bloodthirstiest war lasts perpetually. Or perhaps, more accurately, life shifts between them, strangely allows & accommodates both. There will always be beauty. There will always be war.

You know what you have to do, your many tasks, the many expectations, countless possibilities & pitfalls. Mysteries beyond view, unknowable turns of fortune. Tonight, some seven weeks from when you take your oath of office, I am thinking of you with love, with

respect, with a deep sense of fraternity with you, & with every possible good wish that you will succeed more often than fail, move the world into clearer air, deeper awareness of our better impulses & of each other. Tonight, I am with you in heart & spirit, I am hopeful, nothing is impossible. We *can* do this. *Yes, we can.*

Peace & love,

Raymond Lonard, Jr.
December 13, 2008
Portland, Oregon



Letter to President Barack Obama

October 10, 2009

10:10 p.m.

CoffeeTime—my armchair

Portland, Oregon

Dear President Obama,

This is my third letter to you, but first since you've been President of these United States. I wrote to you in June 2008 while you were a U.S. Senator from Illinois, campaigning for president—& again last December when you had won the office but not yet been sworn in. So in both instances, I was anticipating, rather than considering, your work as president. I say this as prelude to this letter which does this considering.

First of all, let me congratulate you on being awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. I would say I was surprised without being shocked. It is becoming clearer to me that the world outside the U.S. treasures you in a way Americans, many, do not. Your being about as far way from George W. Bush as imaginably possible alone is enough to give you great honors. Americans, on the other hand, evaluate you too minutely to step back for the larger view. Some fear you will do too much; more fear you will do not enough.

I find myself drawn to sports team analogies when thinking about your style of governance. You clearly recognize two things: you were not made king, & your time in the office is definably finite. Eight years at most. You know the twined political & corporate & media bureaucracies of Washington, D.C. & the nation as a whole predated your election, & will continue should you govern the nation every day from January 20, 2009 to January 20, 2017. It's how it is. So the clock is ticking, but it's early. Time enough to try some things, start accruing points & momentum. Of course, arriving to a playing field bloody & gouged as George W. Bush left it throws a kind of desperate spin on the game right off. So, to advance the sports metaphor, & maybe begin to leave it too, we're in a playoff series, best-of-seven, once heavily favored, but down three games to one.

Time to panic? No. Not your style. Time to game plan. Call out weaknesses, clarify priorities, figure strategies.

You made promises; now every hand is out. Your opponents are going to crowd the line, play dirty, do whatever. There are always fat cat motherfuckers who are doing nicely, slurping up their share of blood-profits in the soft shadows of quasi-legality. Don't like a diminished amount of slurp.

Call out weaknesses. The country is mostly broke, angry, sick of war, despising Republicans & none too kinning up to Democrats in truth. You're fresh blood, an orator, a visionary. Cool & wicked intelligent.

Clarify priorities. Easy. You call out the broken healthcare system as crippling the nation's economy, & a moral abomination. This focuses the media chatter & is, while a risky issue to tackle first, one whose tricky navigation to success will keep the bar set high, & rack

up the points.

What will come after? No doubts here: civil rights legislation. Gay rights. Drug policy revision. Stem cell research. Environmental policy. All important, all wait, but their successes hinge on healthcare. That first big score.

Overseas, the path is oddly clearer. American presidents do more as they will, & can, on the world stage. So: talks with Iran, North Korea, Russia. Talks with Israel & Palestine. Renewal of commitment to diplomacy & the United Nations. I believe you will do a lot more in time, that you've had to deal with the great wounded beast this nation is foremost, & you are & you will.

Iraq? We'll be out in 2012. Afghanistan? You will be stuck with that one for a while because withdrawal is not so simple. But I would estimate that you have no taste for perpetual war & occupation. Nor will you abandon a nation in suffering, in part by the U.S.'s doing. My guess is the answers will come slowly, like with healthcare domestically.

You've been in office about ten months. Ten out of a possible 96. What I've seen in that time is a man settling into his job while having to perform it at the highest level. You are not a miracle worker yet you have changed a great deal already. Nobody was talking about serious healthcare reform a year ago, as though it would happen any time soon. Diplomatic talks with Iran were inconceivable. A siege mentality had consumed the world, a constant wondering where the lunatic monster head in D.C. would lurchily turn its rabid, blurry red-eyed gaze next. What was left for Bush to fuck up?

He leaves office, you arrive, a society with little patience waits about five minutes before complaining. The heart of what I want to say to you right now is this: you will never bear the power or influence again that you are accumulating now & will have for the next two years or so. Don't save it. Power does not keep. The fire you're raising now, the allies you are making, the strategies for working with Congress, handling the media, & so on, it is a conjuration that will go so far, & eventually spend out. Power & fire are both like that.

For awhile you will have to play with practically breathless perfection, & hope or pray the Universe or some equal potency is mostly on your side. So I say this: play it through. Hesitate less often until not at all. There's a moment in playing the great games—in making the great works of Art—in conceiving the greatest thoughts of science & philosophy & learning—a moment when impediments fall aside & the way opens clear. You are nearing that point, Mister President, Barack, where trust is all, action is all, you will no longer make the moves, the *moves will make you*.

That's what I see now & foresee for you as forthcoming. A lot of work, a lot of wrangling. Just remember, my friend, it's not that your best fire won't spend out, it's how well you wield it while in your hands. Play it artless, play it humble, play it like you can't lose.

Peace,
Raymond Soreland, Jr.
Scriptor Press,
Portland, Oregon

Letter to President Barack Obama

October 24, 2010
Gourmet Express – my table
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This is the fourth in a series of letters I have been writing to you since 2008, when you were running for the Democratic Party's nomination for President, & I'd decided to support you publicly (for me this was in the pages of my independent literary journal, *The Cenacle*).

As I write to you this time, the mid-term Congressional elections are hardly days away. There are widespread predictions that the Democrats will lose control of one or both chambers of Congress—or retain one or both by narrow margins. 'Tis said that progressive voters are disillusioned with your presidency—unwilling to fight for you now as they did in 2008 because of a feeling that you have let us down. Too willing to compromise, too unwilling to lay down a principled stand & swing on through the firestorm of opposition led by Republicans, conservative Democrats, & the many corporate interests in the mainstream media.

I've been trying to cohere where I stand regarding your presidency. Your recent interview in *Rolling Stone* touted gains, counseled patience, urged a renewed commitment to fight on, now more than ever. Your comments implied that the bastards would love progressives to despair & stay home. I suppose this observation struck me more than the many other things you said. You said, in essence: *Look at the bigger picture, the longer view of matters*. That's where I will direct the bulk of my thoughts here.

Whatever happens in early November, I believe the next two years, in terms of meaningful governance from Washington, D.C., is a wash. You will make moves to aid the economy & to improve the U.S.'s relations in the world—your opponents will resist & denounce, & distort, & resist some more. By next year you will be shifting into re-election mode &, while I believe you will be able to defeat Sarah Palin or whatever weird-eyed ghoul the Republicans nominate, I wonder how the federal government can ever undo from the inglorious muck of intractable special interests which has moved it closer & closer to complete paralysis. I wonder this knowing many people of various political stripes would not object to such a scenario.

But . . . the big picture. The longer view. The nearly-impossible position you were put in in 2008 was to recover this country from George W. Bush's catastrophically destructive eight years of financial deregulation combined with hugely inept military adventurism. He left office with everything burning or already burned down. You urged us to look to the sky & stars, or at least the horizon, when we collectively stood deep in a hole.

Honestly, I think your administration made one crucial mistake early on: you assumed that the millions of people who voted to send you to the White House, whose lives & livelihoods were being devastated in 2008, had anything in common with most of the people (politicians, lobbyists, media, etc.) who run the government. You vowed to work with them on our behalf & while you managed to stave off a full financial collapse, it was not because these D.C. interests cooperated—it was because you had enough momentum early on to push through them.

This same early momentum allowed you to win a modest healthcare reform victory, an end to combat operation in Iraq (admittedly not an actual victory in Congress), & a shifting in policy toward alternative energy & financial reform. But what was evident was that each victory cost too much, took too long, yielded too moderate fruit—& slowed & drained that momentum more & more. So even as you can list gains on both hands & more, we stand just days from your party's mild-to-disastrous reprimand at the hands of the nation's voters. Not because the conservatives have discovered their missing brilliance, their absent empathy for the vast majority of the population—quite contrary, because their thrill for political bloodsport has blotted your simple desire to do good & help people.

Big picture? Long view? *Take the gloves off*, sir. Democracy as it plays out these days is two men in a ring, each sporting to knock down the other, claim the belt. Yours is not to make the laws—that's Congress—, or to interpret their Constitutionality—that's the Supreme Court. Your job is to steer the ship of state—personify its mind, its heart, its sense of history & intention both. Your job is not, in truth, to be a Democrat or Republican. Your job is to stand apart in D.C. on behalf of your millions of fellow citizens across the land. When we suffer needlessly—as so many of us are right now—or do not benefit from competent, if not visionary governance, you are failing us. Not Congress, not the media, not the lobbyists, not the vampires in suits & smiles around you—your job is to protect *us*. Those you move among there can fall in line behind your leadership on this truth, or you are morally & legally obliged to push them aside.

Big picture, long view? This country has been in trouble a long time, even as day by day it functions for now. Many hold the two-party system to much account, & I tend to agree with this, to a point. But here is where I see your greatest potential to lie: as first citizen of the nation.

First Citizen is not a king but a simple, powerful individual whose prime obligation is to act & speak on behalf of his fellow citizens. Make decisions mindful of those most vulnerable, least vested with coffers & influence & options.

I doubt not you agree with this in principle, & selected practice, but what I urge upon you, sir, is a greater sense of its absolute necessity when the pressure to conciliate to the bastards is greatest upon you. Some victories will taste sweet; others will simply cost too much.

If I could urge one thing upon you, it would be this: gain back the higher ground you have been ceding. Fight your way back. This country must see again the better angels of your—& its own—nature. Be willing to lose a few battles in the name of winning the War. The faith lost in the possibility of the government acting rightly & decently is a greater threat than any single piece of legislation. I urge you, in sum, to govern more fearlessly, & to lead again with the hope you once shined upon millions of faces.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Raymond Souland Jr." with a stylized, flowing script. The signature is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Raymond Souland, Jr.
Scriptor Press New England

Letter to President Barack Obama

October 23, 2011
Gourmet Express – my table
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This is the fifth in a series of letters I began writing to you back in 2008, when you were still running for your party's nomination for the presidency. This is my third annual letter to you since you took office as the President. Each of these letters is both mailed to you & published in the pages of my literary journal, *The Cenacle*.

Tonight, I took myself down to Dewey Square in Boston, near the Financial District, where Occupy Boston is encamped. I witnessed a General Assembly in action, donated some of my press's volumes to the nice library there, & talked at length with some visitors from Occupy Wall Street.

What I saw was a brave tent city of people, many young, some not, experimenting with a kind of ad hoc communal living, surrounded by great edifices where a very few keep accounts stockpiling a great deal of wealth.

There were two things evident at Occupy Boston: the anger at the federal government for failing the many on behalf of the few, & the widespread hope that the Occupy Movement has returned to people's lives.

Many of these people last felt that hope during the 2008 campaign when you won the presidency. Those too were exciting times, rife with the feeling that we were kicking a criminal administration to the curb & ushering in a new one, & hopeful about the many more good things you would do on our behalf.

Three years after your election, your 2008 voters are angry, many jobless, & they are camped in Dewey Square, on Wall Street, & in dozens of cities around the country. A movement you gave energy & impetus has long tired of waiting for you, & passed on ahead to try and do for the 99% what you have all but failed to do.

That you perhaps staved off a depression in 2009, signed into law modest healthcare reform, drew down troops in Iraq & Afghanistan, ended Don't-Ask-Don't-Tell in the military, & a few other acts—these sit as small islands of accomplishment in your great black sea of concessions & failures. Even now, there is fresh news that your administration is benefitting big banks while millions inherit the bill.

Yet I have also noticed in recent months your more obvious frustration with & disdain for the partisan kneecapping of congressional business in Washington, D.C. Even with your somewhat bold American Jobs Act, you cannot get a simple floor vote in Congress because of partisan maneuvering.

Maybe you have finally figured out that your best intentions are up against deeply entrenched bastards who will cede you the least social gains for the greatest cost, & are now already counting down the days to your second term's finish. Your opponent next year will be a suited clown, & the election important only in how strong a Congress you are given back & what you will lose by redistricting.



"I DONT WANT TO Rule or Conquer anyone, I should
Like to help everyone if possible. Jew, Gentile, Blackman, or white.
We all want to help one another. Humans are like that. WE
all want to live by each others happiness, not by each others Misery.
We dont want to hate and despise one another. **IN THIS WORLD**
THERE IS ROOM FOR EVERYONE, the earth is rich and can pro-
vide for everyone. The way of life can be free and Beautiful.
BUT WE HAVE LOST THE WAY
Greed has poisoned men's souls: Has barricaded the world
with hate, has goose stepped us into misery and bloodshed.
We have developed speed, but we shut ourselves in. Machinery
that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has
made us cynical, our cleverness hard and Unkind. **WE**
ARE TOO LITTLE

If we re-elect you, it will only be to avoid a Republican gaining the office & resuming George W. Bush's destruction of the social safety net. It will not be like in 2008 when so many of us believed in you & what good you would do in office. No, it will be a return to the "lesser of two evils" voting strategy. Do you realize you're devolving from the candidate of hope & change, the "Yes We Can!" candidate, to the lesser of two evils? Some in Dewey Square would not even cede that you are so much lesser.

One way to understand the message the Occupy Movement is sending you is by considering the word "occupy." A benign word, at least in some of its several definitions, it can imply simple space taking, passive dwelling. Not necessarily a word of fight or even resistance. More a word of right. Simple right. Each being on this planet, of any kind, even as it passes from one form to another, has a *right to occupy*—

& in so saying, the purpose of Occupy is to realize fully that each of us here already does this, not at the discretion of a mortgage or a rental agreement, but as a *truth*. Each of us occupies this world. *We belong to it, & it to each & every one of us*. To all created entities. Those that would tend against this truth oppose their world itself. I can't deduce it any more simply.

If you indeed have renewed stomach for the fight ahead, knowing now better than you did in 2008, your task hereon is to wrack in word & deed against those who would deny some their right to occupy. Your early missteps, your slow realization of the scale & scope & seriousness of those who oppose you, might be forgotten by at least some who come to feel that you are maturing & seeing what the rest of us see: that these entrenched bastards will simply wait you out unless you ally yourself, like King & Kennedy before you, with as many millions of every kind & place as you can. You did this in 2008. It's why you are in the White House.

What faces you are the following questions: in a nation of laws, not a nation of men, whose laws shall we abide by? Those in the interest of some, most, or everyone? Laws are simply sentences with public authority backed by a combination of agreement & guns.

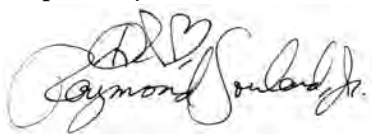
Yet by laws—which exist, which do not, & how enforced, & on whom, & not on whom—, is nakedly revealed what a society (& especially its power-bearers) thinks of itself. They offer a moral temperature, & codify it for a time, till the temperature shifts, as it always does.

The final question for you, to look to answer in your later years, is whether or not you settled for a small peace, a somewhat prosperity, or if you met the challenge to include all, as hard & dirty & stupid as this will seem to do at times, include all in gaining & asserting anew each's right to occupy?

I cannot but hope that you will try with all of your might, act like people not elections matter, & still realize, this far along, the potential we all felt you possessed three years ago. We can & will Occupy despite the bastards in D.C. & elsewhere. We would much rather you yourself found a collaborative place in our ranks.

The time is now, my friend. There's so much work to do.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Raymond Souland, Jr." with a stylized, cursive script.

Raymond Souland, Jr.
Scriptor Press New England



Letter to President Barack Obama

October 20, 2012
Christian Science Plaza
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This begins my sixth letter to you, fourth since you've been the sitting American President. I write to you annually in October, & publish the letter in my literary journal, *The Cenacle*, as well as mailing to you. One of millions you receive, I'm sure, but as much intended to inspire those around me to think for themselves, speak their minds, even put their thoughts to paper. Because it matters. I'm sure you'd agree with this sentiment.

Tonight I am sitting in a very pretty place, Christian Science Plaza in the Back Bay section of Boston. Lovely old buildings, long reflecting pool. I lived near here some years ago as a graduate student in English literature. Boston is one of the most beautiful metropolises in the country, & I'd guess your fondness for it is nearly great as my own, given your years at Harvard, save I think you're probably most partial to Chicago.

Four years ago, sir, you talked of hope & change as you campaigned for President. It was a really ugly time in this country's history, & your bright words rained welcomed down on our drought. We elected you to office, & you've spent four years discovering that most people in Washington, D.C. don't give a fuck for the population as a whole. They are greedy, cynical, & worse, immovable. Lobbyists stick around forever. Congress has no term limits, or quality controls, & perpetual re-election is common.

In short, you've had to bend, stoop, & claw for every gain. It's all been slow, & little has been pretty. The country has limped partway back from the eight year raping it took from Bush & his known & shadowy backers.

I'm not sure why you'd want four more years as President. I know many, myself included, who want you to continue in office as a way to keep Mitt Romney out, & his stygian overlords from returning to power. A Romney presidency would be marked by the slow husking of the social safety net & ever-diminishing efficacy of the Constitution to protect anyone from anything.

You've spent four years trying to find the country jobs. It's simple as that. You've been partly successful, & so the election seems to be a judgment on if enough people think you've been successful enough so far to keep on going. You'll lose some of the impatient vote. Many of the jobless will just stay home.

But I think enough of us will vote for you in the handful of states that matter to keep you in. *Yes, we can?* Yah, I hope.

I'm sure tonight you are traveling somewhere in the country, dog tired, sick of saying the same words over & over for fear of . . . whatever. Probably wishing, a little



bit, that you & Michelle & your daughters were back in Chicago, watching movies & getting take-out. (Their food rivals Boston's.)

But you're nonetheless out there, hustling for every last vote in the last great election of your still-young life. Trying to convince an electorate—too lazy most of the time to see the wasteland for good that DC has become—that *this election matters*. Future Supreme Court nominations are at stake. Laws to help everyone or just a few are at stake. It matters.

My hope, Barack, is that a country you've genuinely tried to help will keep you in office. Will see Romney for the shallow corporate drone he is, suit-&-tied 1-percenter, & unapologetic about it.

My hope is that you are re-elected & do what good you can before DC looks past you to the next guy promising hope & change, & an end to business as usual.

My hope is that you are re-elected & you surprise me a little bit with what time in office you've got left. I'd welcome it.

Good luck. You have my vote again.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Raymond Souland, Jr.', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Raymond Souland, Jr.
Scriptor Press New England
Scriptorpress.com

* * * * *

But when all is said and done—when you pick up that ballot to vote—you will face the clearest choice of any time in a generation. Over the next few years, big decisions will be made in Washington, on jobs and the economy; taxes and deficits; energy and education; war and peace—decisions that will have a huge impact on our lives and our children's lives for decades to come.

On every issue, the choice you face won't be just between two candidates or two parties. It will be a choice between two different paths for America.

I won't pretend the path I'm offering is quick or easy. I never have. You didn't elect me to tell you what you wanted to hear. You elected me to tell you the truth. And the truth is, it will take more than a few years for us to solve challenges that have built up over decades. It will require common effort, shared responsibility, and the kind of bold, persistent experimentation that Franklin Roosevelt pursued during the only crisis worse than this one.

We, the People, recognize that we have responsibilities as well as rights; that our destinies are bound together; that a freedom which only asks what's in it for me, a freedom without a commitment to others, a freedom without love or charity or duty or patriotism, is unworthy of our founding ideals, and those who died in their defense.

As citizens, we understand that America is not about what can be done for us. It's about what can be done by us, together, through the hard and frustrating but necessary work of self-government.

So you see, the election four years ago wasn't about me. It was about you. My fellow citizens—you were the change.

Only you can make sure that doesn't happen. Only you have the power to move us forward.

I recognize that times have changed since I first spoke to this convention. The times have changed—and so have I.

But as I stand here tonight, I have never been more hopeful about America. Not because I think I have all the answers. Not because I'm naïve about the magnitude of our challenges. I'm hopeful because of you.

And if you share that faith with me—if you share that hope with me—I ask you tonight for your vote.

If you reject the notion that this nation's promise is reserved for the few, your voice must be heard in this election.

If you reject the notion that our government is forever beholden to the highest bidder, you need to stand up in this election.

—President Barack Obama,
Democratic National Convention,
September 6, 2012

Letter to President Barack Obama

October 19, 2013
Christian Science Park
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This begins my seventh letter to you, fifth since you've been the sitting American president. I write to you annually, & also publish the letter in my literary journal, *The Cenacle*.

I am writing this letter about eleven months after the American electorate fairly soundly chose to keep you in office for a second term. Since the Second World War, & the imposition of two-term limits on your office, it has proven fairly difficult to unseat a sitting president in his re-election bid. There is what I'd call a very working class sentiment that a man in office usually deserves to finish the job, or try to. And, in the case of your opponent Mitt Romney, the clown makeup was too glaring to miss.

So here you are, sir, with a second & final term as American president. No more elections of your own to run or to be beholden to. Now it's not the need for money or votes but a clear focus upon the time remaining in office & what should be done with it.

There's recently ended yet another battle in Washington over whether or not the government is a valid thing. Whether it can do good in people's lives, protect & even improve their chances to get the basic needs of life met—food, housing, good health, meaningful work—and possibly think & feel & experience further into each's brilliant, blessed mortal time on earth as men & women.

Yes, it can. Of course, *yes it can*. But that was never really the point of the question, was it? It was simply to sow dissension, stir prejudice, harden despair. Those who led the recent government shutdown want the American populace to give up, little by little, on the ideals of American governance—of, by, & for the people—even as these self-serving & pernicious motherfuckers invoke the Constitution.

Their battle line drawn? Your modest healthcare reforms, already passed into law, already vetted by the Supreme Court. Done deal. *Done & done & done*.

And they lost. Oh, but wait. Several months of your presidency was spent fighting this battle again. Time ticked off the clock, won't come again. No refunds.

So, what now? Immigration reform. Talks with Iran. Those lead my mind, but many others closely follow.

I believe by now you are hardened to the job. You know the bloody money mechanisms of DC well enough to work them. You know the powers of your office exquisitely & I don't doubt you have your plans ready for executing. Some will succeed, some fail, many won't finish by when you shake your successor's hand in January 2017.

What I wish to say to you, in practical terms, is this: *stay angry. Stay hopeful*. But this too: *get more creative*. This country is more than guns & money & resources & numbers. It is over *300 million minds* to be summoned better, to be inspired to think new, & to push for & then past the impossible.

Sir, my question for you is this: how can you finally bypass all of the rusted mechanisms of American politics *to collaborate directly with your fellow citizens*? How?



I don't know the answers to this question, or how it jibes with your existing plans, or what real world situations will affect the remaining years of your presidency.

I don't know & yet I appeal to you, sir, Mister President, Barack, to realize finally that your hopes of doing good for the millions of common men & women you preside over lies in appealing to them directly. Angriely, hopefully, creatively, collaboratively. Every day, above & below & through the impediments you face.

And I'll say more. We are one race, one human race, segmented artificially by countries & languages & religions & ideologies, but we still each & all die in the end. We each & all still dream every night. My beat & breath & brain are each's & all's. We each & all belong to this world.

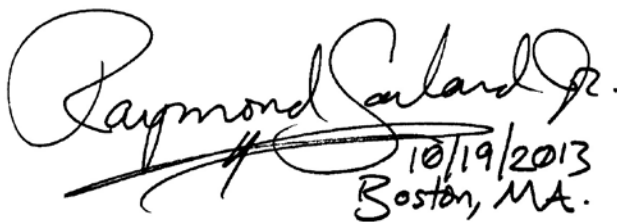
As you move beyond the day's latest manufactured crisis, my friend, know that you are in a sense not just working with & for Americans. The hope you preached of back in 2008 is still yearned around the globe by millions in worse circumstance than the most suffering Americans.

I urge you think in these terms hereon. Globally. What can you do with your remaining time for all men & women, for *all life on earth*?

That may sound crazy or too much by far. And yet, think of it: think of the few men & women we revere from the ages. They did not speak for a portion of the populace. They spoke to all of it. *All of us*. That's why their words still inspire, still matter.

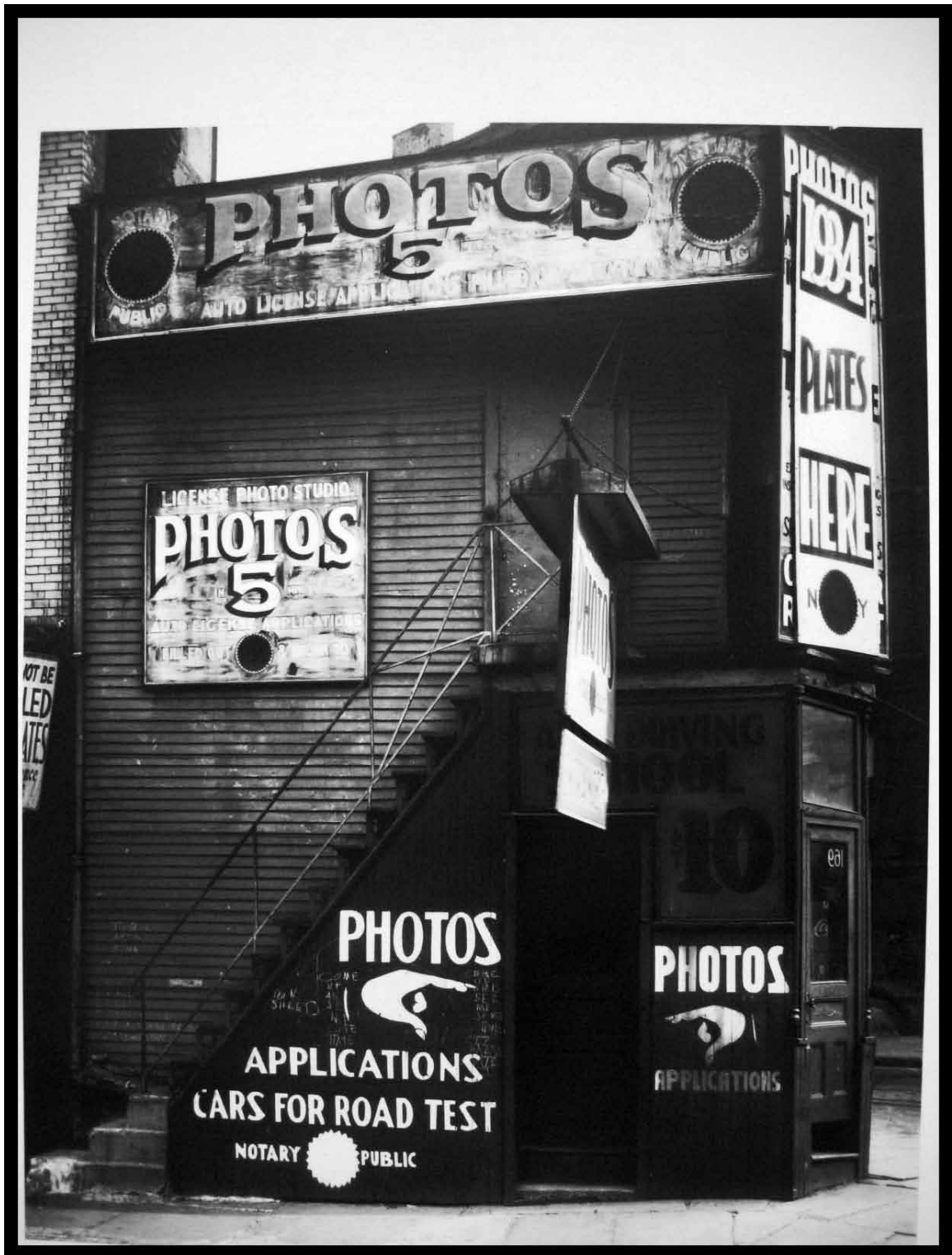
Think globally, Barack, in the days, weeks, & months ahead. Beyond the petty bullshit of your opponents, think globally. And angrily. And hopefully. And creatively. And collaboratively. Peace to you, my friend.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raymond S. S.". Below the signature, there is a date "10/19/2013" and the location "Boston, MA." written in a similar cursive style.

Scriptor Press New England

scriptorpress.com



From Soulard's Notebooks

October 25, 2014
Christian Science Park—
near Reflecting Pool
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This begins my eighth letter to you, sixth since you've been the sitting American President. I've written to you annually since 2008, & also publish each letter in my independent literary journal, *The Cenacle*.

As I write to you this time, the mid-term Congressional elections are just over a week away. The Democrats may barely keep the Senate, or may not.

The country is in the mostly-media-driven frenzy of the Ebola virus crisis. Happily, it does not appear we'll all, at least for now, go the way predicted in *28 Days Later* or *The Walking Dead*.

The economy seems vaguely recovered from its 2008 depths. Unemployment is down to 5.9%.

And yet. And yet. The U.S. has been revealed to be even more of a Big Brother spy at home, & ever less of a legitimate peacemaker abroad.

And yet. And yet. The FCC's drive to gut Net Neutrality has been, best said for now, slowed. You've publicly spoken out, on the right side of history in this matter. How would you have become President without a free & open Internet?

Healthcare reform roots ever deeper into the nation's bureaucratic structure. Republicans have all but given up on their politically-driven efforts to repeal it. They essentially have no argument (or alternative) to convince millions of people that being uninsured again is a good idea. This legislation, along with withdrawing troops from Iraq & Afghanistan, will likely stand as your administration's greatest achievements. Not perfect, but pretty damned good. These, & being the first non-Caucasian American president.

And yet. And yet. Why is your party not winning back the House of Representatives & easily keeping the Senate? Why does *Harper's Magazine* fear Democrats will support your ideologically like-minded colleague, Hillary Clinton? Why do Democrats campaigning this election season tout your healthcare reforms but steer clear of you?

Why. I think there's no plain answer. You were elected with an emotional mandate in 2008, & an expedient one in 2012. The first to crush the Bush cabal & hurry them out of D.C. (they never really left but it was good enough for then). The second because you had done some good things (war draw-down, healthcare), deserved more time & because, honestly, Mitt Romney was such a corporate tool that listening to him talk made too many people ill to allow him any chance of winning.

But here you are, now, your election victories behind you, your lame duck status fairly assured no matter what happens this Election Day. Washington will get nothing done, or even less.

I wonder what the Barack Obama of 2014 would tell the 2008 Obama, if he could. Perhaps that the hallucinatory fervor of that November cannot last. Perhaps that being President can be both the most powerful & paralyzing position in the world. Perhaps that your

years in office will disappoint progressive ideologists but the families of soldiers & sick people will not fail to praise you.

I'm trying to remember what I felt toward you in 2008. I've re-read all the letters I've written to you. I've seen their downward trajectory from hope & praise to worry to pleading to . . . resignation tonight. I realize that what I wanted then was a philosopher-statesman, a visionary, a poet. I saw these qualities in you as a candidate. Many did.

What you became was a semi-successful administrator. To use a sports metaphor, you took over a last place (feeling) team, coached it back to the playoffs, won a couple of memorable games there. But your opponents figured out that you had no new secret strategies for winning. You gave a good pre-game speech, your players were reasonably well-coached, but you *weren't that unbeatable*.

Maybe the hard lesson to learn is that we're never going to get a philosopher-statesman in this country. Maybe it's for the best. Politics is an ugly business of money & special interests, & lying with a pretty smile. Politics is whoring for power over others. Politics is for the kind of arrogant solipsistic personality nobody wants to have in their family or workplace (though most of us have them).

My hope is that progressives stop with the idea of a high road vs. low road approach to governance. That we stop trusting your kind to stay true to any virtuous path. That we elect you to accomplish good & should have little to no patience for your continual compromises & endless pleas for patience.

My hope is that we understand for good hereon that a man or woman sells his soul to win political office, to be thrust by effort into the unnatural position of deciding the fates of others unknown, never to be met.

Your kind's willingness to engage this activity should be treated with pity, & expediency. You're not the heroes of society, if any of you ever were. (We have plenty of those—every society does—artists, teachers, scientists, doctors, philosophers, athletes, clergy—some famous & many known only to a few.) You are its prime functionaries, enjoined to keep this unsustainable, earth-destroying, poverty enslaving market capitalism, built on endemic structural inequalities, from collapsing sooner than it will. You keep your aggregate thumb in the dyke. Until the time comes, desperately soon, when we collectively enact a better idea than dykes.

You've done some good. You've more than that prevented others from doing much harm. But you've shown this nation & the world at large that believing that a man-hero will come along to rescue us from our societal failures is a simplistic & pathetic idea.

I hope your failure both to govern inspirationally & well will help more & more of us to stop waiting for this to ever occur again.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Raymond Scharf, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Scriptor Press New England

scriptorpress.com

October 25, 2015
Home—green couch
Melrose, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This begins my ninth letter to you, seventh since you've been the sitting American President. I've written to you annually since 2008, & also publish each letter in my independent literary journal, *The Cenacle*.

My support for your administration reached a nadir last year, as I finally came to grips with my romantic illusions of your 2008 campaign versus the raw truths of you in office.

The feelings of bitterness & distrust I still feel have directly affected my view of those running to be elected your successor in 2016.

The Republicans seem to be engaging in their quadrennial clown contest, again mistakenly thinking that racy quips on TV news talk shows do any of the work of convincing tens of millions of people to consider seriously casting their votes for any of them. They put the *stu-* in stupid. The *-pid* too.

But neither do the Democrats engage me much. Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, whoever else, will talk a good game now; one of them will likely even talk right on through to Election Day victory. But once the Inauguration Day speech is given, what then? A special-interest-entrenched Congress, accomplishing less & less each passing session. *What then?*

Strangely, I've still kept my attention, when it drifts to politics, on what you are doing now. You've been taking more action outside of Congress in your second term than you ever considered before.

In particular, & crucially, & honestly this issue alone is making me reconsider your presidency, you've been pushing harder & harder to get action on the growing climate disaster slowly overtaking the world. You've used executive actions to circumvent a paralyzed Congress to cut America's carbon pollution; brokered a similar deal with China; & now look seriously all in with regards to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris this December.

Regarding this meeting of nearly 200 countries, you recently told *Rolling Stone* that what's needed is a "joint international commitment that is well-defined and can be measured."¹ To assure that everybody is "locked in," in terms of taking this global catastrophe seriously, & committing the time, manpower, & money it will take.

In that interview, you don't indicate that the Paris Climate Summit will be enough, or that anything you are doing by executive order now is sufficient. But you do say the following: "I don't want to get paralyzed by the magnitude of this thing. I'm a big believer that the imagination can solve problems."

The reason why your approach on this appeals to me, Mister President, is because it rings in my ears of the "Yes We Can!" idealism by which you won the presidency. With important differences.

First of all, maybe most importantly, is the "we." The "we" now is the whole human race. "We" caused this crisis, albeit some more than others, & "we" must solve it. Too slowly, too messily, but at it & at it & at it. Your belief is that as the climate disaster strikes more & more of the world, the bogus counter-arguments will dissolve away. It's proving true.

The "we" is all of us, our failed stewardship of the planet, our insane assumption that we *are* its stewards, that we do not simply *belong to this world*, as does all creation within its atmosphere.

The "we" comprises the hundreds of nations & cultures & thousands of languages. Simple truth is that every one of us has to breathe, has to eat, & cannot live for more than a short while outside

1. Jeff Goodell, "Obama Takes on Climate Change," *Rolling Stone*, Issue 1245, 08.October.2015.

of this wonderful, powerful, fragile, human-damaged eco-system.

Second of all, because I think your years in office have matured & tempered you, some. You've been humbled to the corporate-media-political power structure that you seemed to think would bend more than a little to your will, to your sense of right action. You've had to learn how to govern when those around you would rather see millions go jobless, millions live with second-class citizenship, millions suffer poor & die, than agree with you or work with you. A lot of those men & women in Congress are heartless motherfuckers no reason or compromise will move.

I see your work on the climate catastrophe as a natural extension of what you've done with issues such as healthcare, drug policy reform, & gay rights. You at least nudged those in progressive directions.

This issue, though, is something *even more* substantive than those, & it's not hard to foresee your advocacy extending beyond your time in office. I think it will consume a good part of your time hereon. For this, we all should be grateful. We need every powerful voice we can get.

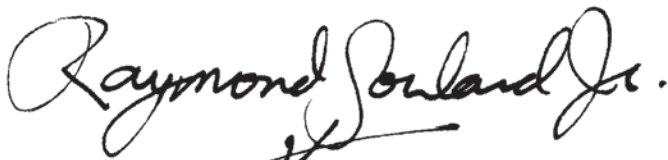
So even as I will eventually take a better look at next year's candidates, I will very likely be measuring them against how you have fared in office since 2008. Your failures, your victories, how you've changed, where you've matured. I'll keep asking myself, more or less, "would he or she fare better or worse on this than Obama?"

But I'll continue watching you as you begin your last full year in office. Will you arrive to 2016 high on the hopes raised at the Paris Climate Summit? Will you push on with it, staking your presidential capital on this most crucial of matters? Will you press the Democratic Party & its chosen candidate to commit to the fight at their 2016 convention?

Will you bring a fully revived & wonderfully matured vision of "Yes We Can!" to the question: "Can we save this beautiful place, our home?"?

Are you done with the bullshit that bogged you down so long? Are you ready again to say "Yes We Can!"?

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raymond Souland Jr." with a stylized flourish underneath.

Scriptor Press New England
scriptorpress.com

October 22, 2016
Caffé Bene—Back Bay
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This begins my tenth letter to you, eighth since you've been the sitting American President. I've written to you annually since 2008, & also publish each letter in my independent literary journal, *The Cenacle*.

I want to thank you for the response to my letter to you from last year. It confirmed to me how seriously you take the global environmental crisis, & my belief that leaving office will not slow your call for serious & immediate action. Again, thank you.

Eighth & final letter to you while you are President, since you transition out of office in just a few months. This election season you are out on the campaign trail on Hillary Clinton's behalf. Funny, in a way, given that in 2008 your victorious path to the White House involved stymieing her own. But then you made her your Secretary of State, & I believe this has helped her to hone her knowledge of both foreign & domestic policy even more. She's a successor-in-waiting to your two terms in office, even as she carries with her also her experiences in the U.S. Senate, & of course those from the 1990s as First Lady.

I think as much as the presidential election is most in the public eye right now, it's your time in office, the very fact of your election in 2008, that is most massively shaping this election. For the Democrats, while Senator Bernie Sanders represented a proposed sea changing outsider campaign, somewhat similar to your own in 2008, it was the familiarity factor with Clinton that won out. His was the *repudiation* candidacy (to put it simplistically), while hers has been the *continuance* campaign.

Why? Because the Republicans have become the party not just of No, but of *No Fucking Way*. For eight long years, they have slowed your efforts on economic recovery, financial reform, healthcare legislation, jobs creation, etc., etc. Their goal of total D.C. gridlock, from before you even took office in 2009, has been frequently successful.

So as much as Sen. Sanders talked a good game, more people didn't want another "outsider" (in this case an Independent who caucuses with the Democrats) running head-first & futilely into gridlock for four or eight more years. More chose the ultimate insider, a woman whose personal life has been flayed wide open for *decades*. She can't be shook. Her progressive principles (and she's letting these show *because* of being in your administration, as well as contesting Sanders) are steel to the core. My guess is she'll be as progressive domestically as you tried to be, maybe more if the Democrats take back Congress, & probably no less willing than you have been to try diplomacy on the world stage. Pacifists, either of you? No. Neither of you have ever promised anything like that. More inclined to avoid "dumb wars" & to protect "American interests" (*money, money, money*).

And your presidency inadvertently *invented* Donald Trump. This birther-spouting, wall-erecting, Muslim-hating, small-fingered, girl-groping, tax-evading, Russian-loving, flaming monstrosity of a humanoid emerged from the deepest, vilest swamps of American racism, misogyny, exceptionalism, & pseudo-capitalist bullshit. He's like the Frankenstein monster of everything this country has ever done wrong to itself & to the world. And he'll still get 45% of the vote in the election &, of the 300 million people in this country, *come in just second to succeed you*. Whatever Clinton becomes as President, & I hope she far exceeds the low expectations most have for her, it was the fact of *your* presidency, its successes & failures, & what the Republican Party has turned into as a result of it, which will have gotten her elected.

When you came into office in 2009, you were seen as the ultimate repudiation for eight long *LONG* years of George W. Bush. The country was in two wars. The economy was in shambles. We millions expected miracles from you. What we've gotten from you has been eight years of hard,

relentless effort to clean up W's tall tall shit-pile, & to try to turn the nation's focus toward helping its most vulnerable citizens—as well as re-joining the globe of nations in repudiating the more blatant dreams for American Empire in the 21st century.

I've re-read all of my letters to you from the past 8½ years. I've concluded tonight that we were all naïve about how much you could do as President. Between the valid Constitutional separation of powers, & the pernicious corporate & other special interests that mostly own the federal government, one man with eight years can only do so much.

And yet, that said, you did a whole lot. The country is better off than it was eight years ago. More prosperous, more peaceful. Better for everyone, in all important cases? No. Drones still kill innocent people around the globe. Wires still tap into people's private lives. Donald Trump is still *too close* to the presidency.


But I believe you did a lot of good. You drew down wars. Many now have healthcare who didn't. The jobless rate is far lower. We are talking again with countries like Iran & Cuba. The global environmental crisis is being taken *much* more seriously.

You restored civility & intelligence & order to your office. You made it good again to be a President who can grapple with the complexities of the nation & the world. You raised the expectations we have for your successors, & what good he or she vows to do for the most vulnerable among us.

I will miss you as President. Miss writing to you, like this, even if I were to choose to write to you again. You are a good man, Barack, & I feel very fortunate to have been a witness to your time of leadership. I suspect it will go on in other ways next year & beyond.

You have my respect, my affection, & my best wishes, as before, so hereon.

Peace,



Scriptor Press New England

scriptorpress.com

