

## Pick Your Battles: Activism, Politics, and Voice in a Changing World

Editor's Note: by Lynda L. Hinkle, Editor in Chief

In his Inaugural Address, the new United States President, Barack Obama, called for a

"...a new era of responsibility-- a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task."

The speech hearkened back to other great speeches in American history that call for people to be accountable, such as the famous "ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country" or the less famous inaugural address of Theodore Roosevelt who said:

"Much has been given us, and much will rightfully be expected from us. We have duties to others and duties to ourselves; and we can shirk neither. We have become a great nation, forced by the fact of its greatness into relations with the other nations of the earth, and we must behave as beseems a people with such responsibilities. Toward all other nations, large and small, our attitude must be one of cordial and sincere friendship. We must show not only in our words, but in our deeds, that we are earnestly desirous of securing their good will by acting toward them in a spirit of just and generous recognition of all their rights. But justice and generosity in a nation, as in an individual, count most when shown not by the weak but by the strong. "

But what about other nations with less power, less voice, less buying power than the United States? What about people all over the world, in first and third world countries, whose voices are raised and whose hands are engaged in the work of change?

Recently in a law class I attended, there was a heated discussion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One student proclaimed "it has no teeth...what good is it to have these lofty goals if you can't enforce them." It is true, the Declaration does not require compliance. It does not demand. It does, however, provide standards for justice that international activists have looked to for decades as evidence that yes, there is a better way. In Article 1 it tells us that " All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood [and we would add...sisterhood!]"

Human rights, it seems, have become a passé cause. We don't talk about them as much as we once did. We have not always reacted with the same shock when human rights violations happen...after all, even the most civilized countries are doing it now aren't they? But that Declaration stands, a reminder of our highest activist ideals.

In this issue of MP Journal, we asked writers to consider what activism means now and what voices they thought needed to be heard. But, perhaps equally importantly, we challenge our readers all over the globe to listen to the voices local to you...who needs your efforts to help them be heard? How is your unique voice silenced and how can it be revealed to a world in need of your best and highest self? What is your battle? Whatever it is, pick it....

Fight it.

Win it.