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## **Obama's historic opportunity**

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Can Barack Obama push America's "re-start" button? This question not only involves the U.S. economy and the world's perception of America, but something much deeper.

This president-elect has an unprecedented opening to re-start the American Revolution. However, to do so requires that the people of the United States be a central part of the equation. Government can no longer be something done to us, or for us, but something that we participate in actively. This would return us to those moments in history when our people and our government were on a common path.

The common path, which started with Gen. Washington's rag-tag Army, came to an abrupt end on Sept. 11, 2001. In the aftermath of those horrible acts, we did not re-invent ourselves or take on leadership in the newly globalized world. Instead, we embraced even harder the brand-driven, stock-market-as-reality cynicism that had come to characterize the country.

We got fat on junk food, easy credit and anti-intellectualism. In the process, our unique imagination for tackling problems and celebrating life disappeared. Now that the financial bubble has burst, who are we to become? Think about the American Revolution, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, and the civil rights movement. Each of these called Americans to action as individuals and as a government.

The Obama revolution will be meaningful only if it ignites civic involvement and intellectual commitment. Skepticism and cynicism, including the political excesses of conservative talk radio and its naysaying, rose to a high-water mark in the Bush years. Instead of leadership, we huddled in, protected ourselves and became tough, jingoistic and brazen outwardly. Duct tape, going to the mall, and troop deployments became the order of the day. Hardly the stuff of Washington, Jefferson and Adams.

For Obama to heal a nation and to bring lasting greatness to its people will require going to the bedrock of the country, beyond the current financial crises, physical infrastructure rebuilds, and even health care reform. An investment in the capacity

and imagination of the American people for economic, social and global returns is the only sustainable, historically significant solution. This requires fundamentally revamping education as civic involvement on an unprecedented scale, re-thinking it in ways that will seem unimaginable.

The human mind is one of the only truly renewable resources on the planet. Unlike any other nation in the world, America has used education as a strategic weapon for most of its 232 years as a republic. But our current education models have failed to produce a population that continues to re-invent itself. They are based on the passive attendance of young people and their teachers, not on civic involvement and personal growth.

To build a lasting base for the United States to regain leadership and stability, we need to invest in our human capital. Certainly the country that has given the world the information technology revolution, and a campaign that made it into an art form, can reinvent our nation by inspiring learning, innovation and problem-solving at a new level. Google, Yahoo, Amazon, Microsoft, eBay and Expedia are recent examples.

To grow an economy and a society that will allow any of us to retire on our savings will require young people smart enough to manage an economy, stimulate new forms of growth and maintain a just society. To make history in these first 100 days, the president-elect has an intriguing challenge in front of him: to stimulate a re-ignition of American imagination.

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