

The substance of that hopey-changeey thing

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We are coming down the homestretch in Barack Obama's presidency. In less than six months, he will hand power over to the newly elected executive-in-chief and move to a new neighborhood in the District of Columbia.

Famously, Obama's term was originally premised on hope. Just as famously, his own faith has been mocked and doubted. I wonder how much of each he has left?

On the first count--hope--he doesn't need much, to tell you the truth. Love him or hate him, Obama has been an astonishingly effective president, especially in the face of determined opposition. The Affordable Care Act, the economic recovery, the Iran deal, same-sex marriage--the list goes on and on. He doesn't need a lot of hope because he's almost at the better country already.

Now, there are also plenty of ways in which the hope Obama offered in 2008 has failed. American overreliance on military force is almost as wretched as it ever was, particularly in its use of drones and the targeting of American citizens deemed terrorists. His administration has done little, if anything, to resolve systematic abuses in home foreclosure proceedings. Obama couldn't get gun control legislation through Congress--and politically, America is more divided than ever.

The promised land still seems a long way off, in other words.

No president could ever make his (or her) citizens less strangers and sojourners on the earth, of course. Like most presidents, Obama completed many of the hopes he

brought to office with him and left many others undone. Some hopes are fulfilled, and others remain unseen. So it goes.

But I wonder again: what faith does the president have left? Obama will be just 55 when he leaves office. Will he continue to set out for an inheritance, not knowing where he is going? Will he look to the heavenly city? Will he trust and believe that his policies will continue to have descendants "as many as the stars of heaven"? Or will he be content to write his memoirs and wait for Sasha and Malia to deliver grandchildren?

No one could blame him if he did, but it seems unlike him. Obama is the most talented natural politician in a generation or more. He won't be content to sit on the sidelines for long. Sooner or later, he'll take up a cause to work on.

Perhaps it will be the one he could never address too directly while in office: race. We will soon enter into a new land indeed, one in which white Americans make up a minority. Obama obviously believes that black and brown children are heirs of the same promise of freedom and justice given by our nation and its ideology. I hope that he has enough faith left to trust that the promise can be fulfilled.

I hope we all do. It would be nice to get to the heavenly country and find that God is not ashamed to be called our God.