

# EX:CHANGE

January, 2012

*Change* is a word Americans fell in love with in the months leading up to the 2008 Presidential election. By the time we got to the polls, regardless of which candidate we were supporting, all of us were using that word. Then, on November 4, the word became a sentence, “A change has come to America.”

A change had come. Some of us were elated, others were lukewarm or disappointed or even furious. But no one could deny the change. Barack Obama, the first American man of African heritage, would be our 44<sup>th</sup> President.

As I watched all of this, I found my social psychologist self taken by the enormous importance given to the word and idea of *change*. Or maybe it was ideas. Words like *change* and *hope* and *values* are big words. Even as they carry emotional punch, they can be amorphous and imprecise, varying by the meaning of the person using them. We say words like that to each other and assume we mean the same thing. That’s not always so.

We also can have great good feelings associated with a word like *change*. But if we never stop to say clearly what we mean and what we’ll recognize as signs of change, we can easily feel betrayed if the feeling isn’t delivered, if the change doesn’t come.

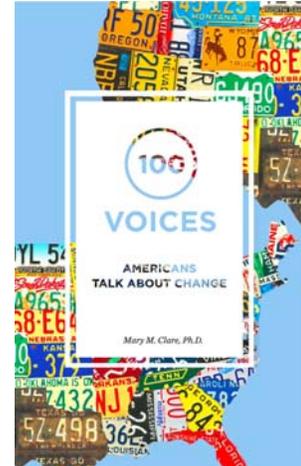
The EX:Change project was an idea that formed itself from my musings in the days surrounding the election. What if I took the first 100 days of the new Administration to interview Americans – to drive around the country asking about change? I came up with three questions:

- When you say the word *change* what do you mean?
- Alongside change, what is important to have remain the same?
- What would be concrete signs that positive change was occurring?

Then the day after the Presidential Inauguration, I began to ask and to listen. My goal was 100 voices in 100 days. In the hours of taping and driving I experienced what will certainly be one of the greatest privileges of my lifetime – listening to everyday Americans from all walks of life as they shared their hopes, ideas and stories in answer to those three simple questions.

The wisdom of the people is consistent and profound. So is the generosity and kindness of spirit. Two baristas in a Starbucks in York Nebraska said, "We're not as divided as the media tell us we are. Good luck. We need this -- to know what Americans are really thinking."

Now we're moving into a new presidential election cycle. It's time to revive the spirit and the practical understandings of change. It's time for us to hear one another's voices and to engage in active national dialogue in ways that bolster again our belief in ourselves. It's time to give voice to democracy in ways our leadership must heed.



Thanks to the 100 voices of EX:Change we now have a resource – ***100 VOICES – AMERICANS TALK ABOUT CHANGE***. With the ongoing support of volunteers around the country, I'm on the road again beginning January 21, 2012 – the third anniversary of this project's beginning. Following the same route my goal is to return the ***100 Voices*** to the American people as we stand together to engage the challenge of keeping our democracy vibrant and alive.

Keep up with me on facebook, twitter and the ***100 Voices*** blog ([www.exchange2pt0.wordpress.com](http://www.exchange2pt0.wordpress.com)).

The time is now for joining in the radical act of listening.

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