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# WHAT OBAMA ISN'T: BLACK LIKE ME ON RACE

By STANLEY CROUCH

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FEEDBACK

If Barack Obama makes it all the way to becoming the Democratic nominee for President in 2008, a feat he says he may attempt, a much more complex understanding of the difference between color and ethnic identity will be upon us for the very first time. Back in 2004, Alan Keyes made this point quite often. Keyes was the black Republican carpetbagger chosen by the elephants to run against Obama for the U.

S. Senate seat from Illinois. The choice of Keyes was either a Republican version of affirmative action or an example of just how dumb the party believes black voters to be, since it was obvious that Keyes came from the Southeast, not the Midwest. That race was never much of a contest, but one fascinating subplot was how Keyes was unable to draw a meaningful distinction between himself as a black American and Obama as an African-American. After all, Obama's mother is of white U.

S. stock. His father is a black Kenyan. Other than color, Obama did not - does not - share a heritage with the majority of black Americans, who are descendants of

plantation slaves. Of course, the idea that one would be a better or a worse representative of black Americans depending upon his or her culture or ethnic group is clearly absurd. Even slavery itself initially came under fire from white Christians - the first of whom to separate themselves from the institution were Quakers. The majority of the Union troops were white, and so were those who have brought about the most important civil rights legislation. Why then do we still have such a simple-minded conception of black and white - and how does it color the way we see Obama? The naive ideas coming out of Pan-Africanism are at the root of the confusion. When Pan-African ideas began to take shape in the 19th century, all black people, regardless of where in the world they lived, suffered and shared a common body of injustices. Europe, after all, had colonized much of the black world, and the United States had enslaved people of African descent for nearly 250 years. Suffice it to say: This is no longer the case. So when black Americans refer to Obama as "one of us," I do not know what they are talking about. In his new book, "The Audacity of Hope," Obama makes it clear that, while he has experienced some light versions of typical racial stereotypes, he cannot claim those problems as his own - nor has he lived the life of a black American. Will this matter in the end? Probably not. Obama is being greeted with the same kind of public affection that Colin Powell had when he seemed ready to knock Bill Clinton out of the Oval Office. For many reasons, most of them personal, Powell did not become the first black American to be a serious presidential contender. I doubt Obama will share Powell's fate, but if he throws his hat in the ring, he will have to run as the son of a white woman and an African immigrant. If we then end up with him as our first black President, he will have come into the White House through a side door - which might, at this point, be the only one that's open. [scrouch@nydailynews.com](mailto:scrouch@nydailynews.com)

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