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## Obama captures historic White House win

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By John Whitesides, Political Correspondent

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Democrat Barack Obama captured the White House on Tuesday after an extraordinary two-year campaign, defeating Republican John McCain to make history as the first black to be elected U.S. president.

Obama will be sworn in as the 44th U.S. president on January 20, 2009, television networks said. He will face a crush of immediate challenges, from tackling an economic crisis to ending the war in Iraq and striking a compromise on overhauling the health care system.

McCain saw his hopes for victory evaporate with losses in a string of key battleground states led by Ohio, the state that narrowly clinched President George W. Bush's re-election in 2004, and Virginia, a state that had not backed a Democrat since 1964.

Obama led a Democratic electoral landslide that also expanded the party's majorities in both chambers of Congress and firmly repudiated eight years of Republican President George W. Bush's leadership.

The win by Obama, son of a black father from Kenya and white mother from Kansas, marked a milestone in U.S. history. It came 45 years after the height of the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King.

In a campaign dominated at the end by a flood of bad news on the economy, Obama's leadership and proposals on how to handle the crisis tipped the race in his favour. Exit polls showed six of every 10 voters listed the economy as the top issue.

Tens of thousands of Obama supporters gathered in Chicago's Grant Park for an election night rally that had the air of a celebratory concert, cheering results that showed his victories in key states.

McCain, a 72-year-old Arizona senator and former Vietnam War prisoner, had hoped to become the oldest president to begin a first term in the White House and see his running mate Sarah Palin become the first female U.S. vice president.

(Editing by Kieran Murray)

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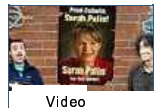
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