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# People of Earth! I Am Here To Help

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The Democrats are having their flop-sweat moment. Barack Obama should be way out in front. The Republicans are in terrible shape. There hasn't been a more battered brand name since Bart Simpson swallowed a jagged metal "O" from his box of Krusty-O's cereal. The GOP has nominated an old white-haired dude, in Paris Hilton's words, who makes Dick Cheney look like a lambada champion. He'll be the kind of president who will yell from the Oval Office window, "You kids get off my lawn!" The economy isn't roadkill quite yet; it's sort of like wounded roadkill, flopping around, unable to get going but unwilling to lay down and die.

And yet, John McCain is pulling ahead of Obama. The latest Reuters poll has Grandpa Munster up five percentage points over our secular messiah. The Real Clear Politics average of polls has Obama and McCain in a virtual tie. And, according to RCP, if the race were held today and McCain took the toss-up states where he's currently ahead, he'd be the next president.

Yes, it's early. McCain has had a good couple weeks. But these were McCain's first good couple weeks since he secured the nomination. Meanwhile, with the exception of the Jeremiah Wright unpleasantness, Obama has had a good couple years.

The winds at the Democrats' backs are hurricane-force gales, and yet there's Obama holding steady, like a young Dan Rather in his schoolgirl rain slicker, immobile and unmovable.

Ask the typical Obama supporter why this should be so and you'll get a range of answers. Some just stare at the poll numbers the way my late basset hound would look at me when I tried to feed him a grape: with pure unblinking incomprehension. Others act like the guy who sits alone with his shopping bags at the public library, muttering about Fox News conspiracies and how Karl Rove-like aliens are doing terrible things with probes of proctological exactitude. Still others just shake their heads at the racism of anyone who could possibly have a problem with a very left-wing politician with almost no experience, who often sounds like his campaign slogan is: "People of Earth! Stop Your Bickering. I Am From Harvard, And I'm Here To Help."

Perhaps therein lies the answer to this supposed mystery. Indeed, perhaps there's no mystery at all, and Obama's problems are the same problems Democrats always have at the presidential level: He's an elitist.

Oh, I know. Upon reading that, some liberal spluttered herbal chai tea from her nose at the injustice of this whole elitist canard, and the earnest Ivy League interns at some liberal magazine have burst into laughter, offering the appropriate *bons mots* from Balzac at the preposterousness of such a suggestion, saying: "Don't you conservatives understand? Democrats care about the little guy. They're on the side of the proletariat — I mean workers — and as Obama has so eloquently put it, if the workers would only stop clinging to their silly sky god and guns, they'd understand that."

Liberalism is often a problem at the presidential level. Cultural liberalism is a burden. Haughty cultural liberalism is a disaster in the making. For good or ill, the presidency is a cultural institution as much as it is a political institution. And it's fundamentally a culturally conservative one. Fair or not, many perceive Obama as a cultural outsider. This week, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley said of Obama's friendship with

former left-wing domestic terrorist Bill Ayers: "They're friends. So what?"

Psephologist and columnist Michael Barone noticed during the primaries that, with the exception of the black vote, Obama's support within the Democratic Party is comprised almost entirely of cultural liberals. He dubbed this intra-Democratic split a divide between "academics and Jacksonians." The Jacksonians are working-class, culturally conservative whites. The academics are the same people who formed the base for Howard Dean, Bill Bradley, Michael Dukakis, Gary Hart, George McGovern and other successful presidents in the anti-matter universe where Spock has a goatee.

In this universe, however, you need Jacksonians more than you need academics to win a general election, which is one reason why no non-Southern Democrat has won the presidency in nearly a half-century. It's not that voters love Southerners, either. Rather, Southern Democrats simply seem more Jacksonian (even so, only Jimmy Carter won with a majority of the popular vote).

Obama may still win, of course, proving that America is not only ready for a black president, but a cultural liberal as well. If he loses, though, you can be sure Democrats will claim he lost not because he is a black and more charming Michael Dukakis, but simply because he is black. Because liberals are never wrong.

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