

**From:** H  
**Sent:** 8/24/2009 12:27:43 PM +00:00  
**To:** Oscar Flores [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Fw: CLAREMONT INSTITUTE REVIEW : THE AUDACITY OF BARACK OBAMA - CHARLES KESLER  
**Attachments:** Claremont Institute Review.doc

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----- Original Message -----

**From:** Lynn Forester de Rothschild [REDACTED]  
**To:** H  
**Sent:** Mon Aug 24 08:02:39 2009  
**Subject:** FW: CLAREMONT INSTITUTE REVIEW : THE AUDACITY OF BARACK OBAMA - CHARLES KESLER

H,

Here it is again, as an attachment and as text here.

Did this work?

Also, the NYT interview was great because what you are doing is great.

Xoxx

L

Claremont Institute Review

The Audacity of Barack Obama

Any politician who has taken on Bill and Hillary Clinton's national political machine and won should not be underestimated. Yet Republicans as well as many Democrats persist in underrating Barack Obama's electoral talents and, above all, his soaring political ambition.

His writerly mind, professional bearing, and effortless self-control make it difficult to take his measure as a politician. He can seem cool, detached, unusually introspective. As a wag at the Financial Times put it, if John McCain's life story is the stuff of Hollywood movies, Obama's is like an off-Broadway play—it lacks action but is full of internal monologues. Raised in Hawaii and Indonesia, his father a Kenyan, his mother a sweet Midwestern atheist, Obama as a young man thought himself something of an outsider wherever he went. Smart and popular, he seemed to prefer to maintain his emotional distance, partly because he was confused about his own identity (as he explains in *Dreams from My Father*, the autobiography he published at age 33), and partly because he feared being trapped in places that were too small for his talents.

Eager to find himself by finding a community to which he could belong, he was struck, nonetheless, by the flaws or limits of every race, culture, and country he encountered. Unlike other intelligent human beings who have made the same discovery, Obama did not lower his expectations but decided that, just as he could and did choose to refashion his own identity, communities could do the same, with a little help. He spent three years as a community organizer in Chicago, but was disillusioned with the results. Eventually he found in politics, and especially in political oratory, the path he was seeking: the way to redeem the sins of an existing community by leading it to a vision of its future, better self; and to introduce himself, proudly biracial, multicultural, and progressive, as living proof that the divisions and disappointments of the past can be overcome, if never quite left behind.

### A New Majority

Part of the past that Obama wants to transcend is the recent history of the Democratic Party. In *The Audacity of Hope*, his second autobiography (focused on his Senate years, not quite two of them at that point) and the source of his most thoughtful campaign speeches, he treats the party elders respectfully, but not exactly warmly. He mentions Teddy Kennedy three times, calling him one of the Senate's best storytellers; devotes a page to Al Gore's emotions after his "precipitous fall"; and acknowledges "the Kerry people" who invited him to speak at the 2004 Democratic Convention. Obama goes out of his way to emphasize that he is a newcomer to the party who couldn't even get a floor pass to the 2000 Convention. Reflecting on the elections of 2000 and 2004, he confesses that "I sometimes felt as if I were watching the psychodrama of the Baby Boom generation—a tale rooted in old grudges and revenge plots hatched on a handful of college campuses long ago...."

Obama praises Bill Clinton more highly than any other contemporary Democrat, because Clinton recognized the staleness of the old political debate between Left and Right and came close to moving beyond it with his politics of the Third Way, which "tapped into the pragmatic, nonideological attitude of the majority of Americans." But Clinton blew it, and the author gradually lets you know it. First, he regrets Clinton's "clumsy and transparent" gestures to the Reagan Democrats, and his "frighteningly coldhearted" use of other people (e.g., "the execution of a mentally retarded death row inmate" before a crucial primary). Then Obama notes sadly that Clinton's policies—"recognizably progressive if modest in their goals"—had commanded broad public support, but that the president had never been able, "despite a booming economy," to turn that support into a governing coalition. Finally, he gently accuses Clinton of the worst offense of all: strengthening the forces of conservatism. Due to his "personal lapses" and careless triangulations that ceded more and more ground to the Right, Clinton prepared the way for George W. Bush's victory in 2000.

In his campaign speeches, Obama can't afford to be so candid—he needs Hillary and Bill's supporters, after all—but he subtly makes his point. For example, in his Acceptance Speech in Denver, the single biggest speech of the campaign, he laid at Bill Clinton's feet the oldest backhanded compliment in the books, thanking the former president "who last night made the case for change as only he can make it...." That's a disguised double insult: it reminds the discerning ear of Clinton's characteristic bloviation, and then of his political failings (when you see Clinton, you're reminded why the Democrats need Obama).

Granted, Obama holds Clinton to higher standards than he does the other party elders. Jimmy Carter, Gore, Kerry—these gentlemen lacked the political talent that Clinton squandered, in Obama's estimation, and they were innocent of political daring. Their shortcomings are palliated, to some extent, by the fact that the times were not auspicious. Still, Obama is fairly clear that if the party is to move forward it must return to earlier exemplars, and especially to its heroes who brought about major political changes lasting for a generation or more. This was the context of his comparison of Clinton to Ronald Reagan, which raised such a ruckus early in the campaign:

I do think that, for example, the 1980 election was different. I think Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that Richard Nixon did not and in a way that Bill Clinton did not. He put us on a fundamentally different path because the country was ready for it.

The comparison of Clinton to Nixon is delicious in its own right, but Obama's larger point is that Clinton was no Reagan, partly because the times were different but mostly, as he points out in his book, because Clinton was undisciplined and conceded too much to the Right. As tokens of Obama's seriousness about fundamental political change, *The Audacity of Hope* mentions Franklin D. Roosevelt more often than it does any living Democratic politician; and it features a long, interesting discussion of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the political point of which is to reestablish the Democrats' claim to speak for American ideals, the touchstone of every electoral realignment.

Thus the commentators who interpret Obama as a new kind of post-partisan political figure get it exactly wrong. It's true that he wants to stop "arguing about the same ole stuff," as he told Planned Parenthood; he wants to move beyond the decades-long debate between liberalism and conservatism. Bill Clinton wished for the same thing in 1992,

as did George W. Bush in 2000. The 42nd and 43rd presidents had doctrines that they hoped would precipitate this magic synthesis—the third way, and compassionate conservatism, respectively. What's interesting, as political scientist James W. Ceaser noted in these pages ("What a Long, Strange Race It's Been," Spring 2008), is that Obama does not feel the need for such a doctrine. Nor does John McCain. The 2008 race is taking place squarely within the familiar ideological framework of liberalism and conservatism, but with McCain promising some maverick departures from the norm (while still accepting the norm), and Obama talking up hope and the need for change. The change needed, however, is for nothing less than a full-blown electoral earthquake that will permanently shatter the 50-50 America of the past four presidential elections. He thinks liberals can get beyond the old debate by finally winning it.

"Eking out a bare Democratic majority isn't good enough," he writes in *The Audacity of Hope*. "What's needed is a broad majority of Americans—Democrats, Republicans, and independents of good will...." After the New Hampshire primary, he told his supporters "you can be the new majority who can lead this nation out of a long political darkness." A month later, after winning the Wisconsin primary, he explained what he called "my central premise," that "the only way we will bring about real change in America is if we can bring new people into the process, if we can attract young people, if we can attract independents, if we can stop fighting with Republicans and try to bring some over to our side. I want to form a working majority for change." That's easier said than done, of course, and likely would require several elections. Speaking to the AFL-CIO in 2003, he laid out the long march that would be necessary:

I happen to be a proponent of a single-payer universal health care program.... [a] single-payer health care plan, a universal health care plan. And that's what I'd like to see. But as all of you know, we may not get there immediately. Because first we have to take back the White House, we have to take back the Senate, and we have to take back the House.

As a matter of fact, he is not officially a proponent of a single-payer health care plan; his 2008 platform stops far short of that. Nor has he repeated this sweeping, candid endorsement of his ultimate goal, which might be described by that hoary but accurate epithet, socialized medicine. In the meantime, however, the Democrats in 2006 recaptured both the Senate and the House of Representatives. If after 2008 the Democratic party controls all three elective branches, then his "working majority for change" will be in a position to go to work.

#### A New Lincoln

If the leading edge of Obama's audacity is his desire to bring about fundamental political change at a time when every other leading Democrat has given up on it or lacks the gifts to achieve it, his daring shows itself too in his confidence that he is the man for the job, the man of the hour. His self-confidence has been noted, of course, and well parodied. It's even been parodied unconsciously, as by Mark Morford, an online columnist in San Francisco:

Many spiritually advanced people I know (not coweringly religious, mind you, but deeply spiritual) identify Obama as a Lightworker, that rare kind of attuned being who has the ability to lead us not merely to new foreign policies or health care plans...but who can actually help usher in a new way of being on the planet, of relating and connecting and engaging with this bizarre earthly experiment. These kinds of people actually help us evolve. They are philosophers and peacemakers of a very high order, and they speak not just to reason or emotion, but to the soul.

Yet the fact is that the precise character of Obama's ambition has not been well understood. In his own terms, he seeks to bring about enduring political change even as (to mention those he invokes in this connection) Ronald Reagan, John F. Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson did before him. (He didn't concur with Reagan's change, to be sure.)

It's Obama's account of Lincoln that deserves particular attention. Lincolnian language appears and reappears in Obama's speeches. In fact, he compares himself indirectly and sometimes directly to the first Republican president. The speech that initially put Obama on the map, his 2002 denunciation of the pending Iraq War, concludes in a poor paraphrase of the Gettysburg Address: "Nor should we allow those who would march off and pay the ultimate sacrifice, who would prove the full measure of devotion with their blood, to make such an awful sacrifice in vain." He announced his candidacy in Springfield, Illinois, a place central to Lincoln's political career and site of some of his great speeches, including the "House Divided" and his affecting farewell to the city as he left to assume the presidency. In his speech, Obama does his best to appropriate Lincoln's memory:

And that is why, in the shadow of the Old State Capitol, where Lincoln once called on a divided house to stand together...I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for President.... By ourselves, this change will not happen. Divided, we are bound to fail. But the life of a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer tells us that a different future is possible. He tells us that there is power in words...in conviction. That beneath all the differences of race and region, faith and station, we are one people. He tells us that there is power in hope. As Lincoln organized the forces arrayed against slavery, he was heard to say: "Of strange, discordant, and even hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought the battle through." That is our purpose here today. That's why I'm in this race. Not just to hold an office, but to gather with you to transform a nation.... Together, starting today, let us finish the work that needs to be done, and usher in a new birth of freedom on this Earth.

Obama identifies himself (as we say today) with Lincoln: Abe is not the only "tall, gangly, self-made" lawyer primed for greatness that the audience is supposed to recognize. Though it ends with another paraphrase of the Gettysburg Address, the passage—and the whole speech—is meant to recall Lincoln's "House Divided" speech, which kicked off the Illinois senate campaign in 1858 against Stephen Douglas. The quotation about the "four winds" is Lincoln's description of the new Republican Party, forged from fragments of the fading Whig and Free Soil parties, and reaching out to anti-slavery Democrats and centrists.

Thus Obama compares the new majority he seeks to build to the majority party that Lincoln helped to create. He tries to inspire Democrats by appealing to the founder of the generations-long, post-bellum Republican majority. This is partisan ambition of a high order, masquerading as high-toned bipartisanship or post-partisans hip: Obama speaks as though Lincoln were trying to overcome the country's divisions by calling for unity, for cooperation in the spirit of national renewal. In fact, Lincoln's point was that the Union would "become all one thing, or all the other." It would become either all free, or all slave. Lincoln's road to unity ran through division, through forcing the country to choose. Obama's point is similar, despite his soothing language: our divisions will be healed once the country is safely in the hands of a new liberal, Democratic majority.

Obama spoke in 2005 at the opening of the Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield. On that occasion, he talked more of the man himself. Lincoln exhibits "a fundamental element of the American character," he said, "a belief that we can constantly remake ourselves to fit our larger dreams." He hailed Lincoln's "repeated acts of self-creation, the insistence that...we can recast the wilderness of the American landscape and the American heart into something better, something finer...." The wilderness of the American heart—now that's an expression, and a sentiment, that Lincoln never uttered. Is it Obama's own view of the American soul's desolation?

Lincoln's life ends up sounding a lot like Obama's. "Lincoln embodies our deepest myths," Obama averred. "It is a mythology that drives us still." Here is the stark difference between the two men. Lincoln never thought of himself as pursuing or being driven by a myth, even though his life and death acquired, in the eyes of others, mythic significance. At any rate, when Obama later contributed a version of the speech to Time magazine, he altered a line to read:

In Lincoln's rise from poverty, his ultimate mastery of language and law, his capacity to overcome loss and remain determined in the face of repeated defeat—in all this, he reminded me not just of my own struggles. He also reminded me of a larger, fundamental element of human life—the enduring belief that we can constantly remake ourselves to fit our larger dreams.

Peggy Noonan, with her usual keen perception, took him to task in the Wall Street Journal for having explained "that he's a lot like Abraham Lincoln, only sort of better." In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama charmingly relates the story, pooh-poohing the notion that he was seriously "comparing myself to Lincoln." But Noonan had it right.

### Wright and Wrongs

To make possible a new liberal majority, Obama has to rehabilitate liberalism's reputation, to separate it from the extremist cultural politics of the Sixties and the burden of defending Big Government. Bill Clinton began this renewal in the 1990s, proclaiming "the era of big government is over" and preaching the Third Way gospel of opportunity, responsibility, and community. Obama's politics is a continuation and deepening of Clinton's efforts, aided by a much more favorable political environment—further removed from Reagan's shadow; coming after two terms of a deeply unpopular Republican president; in the midst of two wars, one of them tainted by shifting (and frequently extravagant) aims, premature claims of victory, and strategic mistakes; and with the final two months before the election dominated by a market meltdown frequently said to be the most serious since the Great Depression.

Obama's debt to Clinton is real, though usually (especially lately) unacknowledged. Obama far outdistances Clinton, however, in telling the story of America in a way that reinforces a renascent liberalism. The term is perhaps inexact, because Obama (like Hillary Clinton now) prefers to call himself "progressive" rather than liberal. But the difference is tactical and semantic, not substantive. More than any Democratic presidential candidate since JFK and especially FDR, Obama has an interpretation of American history that justifies what he wants to do. Not incidentally, Obama's version also has the advantage of countering Reagan's view of the country's history as the working out of American exceptionalism (including divine favor), popular good sense, limited government, free market economics, and moral traditionalism.

Obama is a good writer whose strength is narrative, and his account of America is a kind of story, mixing social, intellectual, and political history, that begins with the founding—with the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. (Not for him is Reagan's emphasis on the Puritans and their "shining city on a hill." In profound ways, for Obama the black church replaces the Puritans in his understanding of America.) He tries to construct a new consensus view of the country that acknowledges, and contextualizes, traditional views in a way meant to be reassuring. In *The Audacity of Hope* he quotes the Declaration's famous sentence on self-evident truths and then comments: "Those simple words are our starting point as Americans; they describe not only the foundations of our government but the substance of our common creed." Though few Americans could "trace the genesis of the Declaration...to its roots in eighteenth-century liberal and republican thought," every American understands its "essential idea":

that we are born into this world free, all of us, that each of us arrives with a bundle of rights that can't be taken away by any person or any state without just cause; that through our own agency we can, and must, make of our lives what we will....

It sounds Lincolnian, until you notice that the "bundle of rights" is not said to be natural, exactly, nor true exactly, but simply understood by Americans without their quite grasping those rights' origin in 18th-century political thought. Would that old understanding, say, Jefferson's, still be authoritative for us now, or are we permitted (or forced?) to understand them in a way more congenial to our own felt needs and desires? Obama soon makes clear that Jefferson and the other founders were less than faithful to the universal principles they proclaimed. Like a good law professor, he lines up evidence and argument on both sides before concluding that, in fact, the founders probably did not understand those principles as universal but rather as confined to the white race. The "spirit of liberty," he writes, "didn't extend, in the minds of the founders, to the slaves who worked their fields, made their beds, and nursed their children." In the end, then, Obama's interpretation is the opposite of Lincoln's, who devoted some of his finest pages to proving that the founders regarded slavery as a moral and political evil because it violated the rights of man.

The dog that didn't bark is Obama's renowned speech on race, the one devoted to starting a national conversation on the subject and to putting the Rev. Jeremiah Wright's notorious comments in their proper context. The words "all men are created equal" do not appear in it. And so it is a very different appeal, with a very different view of America, than one would find in, say, Martin Luther King's great speech at the Lincoln Memorial. Obama mentions the Constitution briefly, noting its "ideal of equal citizenship" and that it "promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time." But he does not mention the conclusion that he arrives at in his book, namely, that the Constitution's "people" did not refer to or include blacks, and especially not black slaves. Although he regards both the Declaration and the Constitution as racist documents originally, he does not emphasize the point in his speech because it would confirm Rev. Wright's fundamental charge, that the U.S. is a racist country. And the point of Obama's speech in Philadelphia, at the National Constitution Center, was not merely to repeat his condemnation of Wright's remarks "in unequivocal terms" but to put the whole controversy behind him.

In truth, Obama's evaluation of Wright's statements was very equivocal. He calls the reverend's charges "not only wrong but divisive," that is, untimely, because the American people are "hungry" for a "message of unity" right now, as delivered by the junior senator from Illinois. Wright expressed "a profoundly distorted view of this country," Obama says, "a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America...." What that means becomes clearer a little later, when Obama declares that "the profound mistake of Reverend Wright's sermons is...that he spoke as if our society was static; as if no progress has been made." But Obama's own candidacy confirms "that America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope—the audacity to hope—for what we can and must achieve tomorrow." In short, Wright was not wrong that America was a racist nation, with racist principles; he was wrong, however, to speak as though the country is as racist as it used to be. "America can change," not in the sense of living up to its first principles but in the opposite sense of moving away from them. Except, that is, from the deepest principle of all, which expresses "the true genius of this nation"—our belief in change itself.

Wright's eruptions were dangerous to Obama not merely because they raised questions about his judgment in having Wright as his pastor, and because they raised doubts about his ability to be a unifying, post-racial figure. They were dangerous above all because they represented a particularly virulent strain of the spirit of Sixties' radicalism, and shook Obama's claim to have left all that behind him and behind his new movement for change. As he said in his second, more decisive repudiation of Rev. Wright (April 29, 2008), "the reason our campaign has been so successful is because we had moved beyond these old arguments." Because he did not actually disagree with Wright's fundamental charge but could not say so openly, Obama's reasons for denouncing the reverend became oddly personal. "I don't think that he showed much concern for me," Obama told reporters. Indeed, Wright's performance at the National Press Club was "a show of disrespect to me. It's...also, I think, an insult to what we've been trying to do in this campaign."

## A Renewed Liberalism

But Obama disagrees emphatically with Rev. Wright on the question of change. He thinks Wright is trapped in the past, even as McCain and the Republicans are—two very different pasts, doubtless, but equally out of touch with the country and its future. A proper understanding of America's past—centered on change and the country's openness to it—will make sense of the present and liberate us to make a brighter, more unified future, claims Obama. His understanding of the past thus pays lip service to such terms as self-evident truths, original intent, and first principles, but quickly changes the subject to values, visions, dreams, ideals, myths, and narratives. This is a postmodern "move." We can't know or share truth, postmodernists assert, but we can share stories, and thus construct a community of shared meaning.

At times, Obama seems to agree with this. "Implicit...in the very idea of ordered liberty," he writes in *The Audacity of Hope*, is "a rejection of absolute truth, the infallibility of any idea or ideology or theology or 'ism,' any tyrannical consistency that might lock future generations into a single, unalterable course...." Is the idea that human freedom is right, slavery wrong, thus to be rejected lest we embrace an "absolute truth"? After criticizing the founders for allegedly overlooking precisely this universal principle, Obama now warns against all such truths. More remarkable still, he praises the same founders for being "suspicious of abstraction"! "It may be the vision of the Founders that inspires us," he writes, "but it was their realism, their practicality and flexibility and curiosity, that ensured the Union's survival." In other words, the founders' integrity is shown precisely by their not believing too deeply in their own principles. Their deepest principle, so to say, was their sheer flexibility or openness to change.

Yet Obama is by no means a complete postmodernist. As a decent man, he believes in justice. (Accordingly, in yet another twist, he honors Lincoln for pursuing Lincoln's "own absolute truths" with a saving "humility.") And as a self-described progressive, he believes in change, i.e., he believes that change is almost always synonymous with improvement. He is heartened by the fact that political and constitutional change led to the Union becoming all free. He doesn't dwell on the fact that change could have led, instead, as Lincoln had feared, to the Union becoming all slave.

As an African-American, he knows of course that blacks had to wait a long time for change to be their friend. So he is no simple-minded progressive. In fact, what's most interesting about him as a writer is his struggle with these powerful, and conflicting, intellectual currents.

As a politician, however, he trods an easier, more familiar path. He sets up, in *The Audacity of Hope*, a debate between Justice Antonin Scalia's and Justice Stephen Breyer's opinions on how to interpret the Constitution. After much toing-and-froing—"I'm not unsympathetic to Justice Scalia's position.... I understand the strict constructionists' reverence for the Founders..."—Obama comes down, surprise, on Breyer's side. The Constitution "is not a static but rather a living document, and must be read in the context of an ever-changing world." He expressed the same point when he announced his presidential candidacy: "The genius of our founders is that they designed a system of government that can be changed." That sounds, and is, anodyne—in an "ever-changing world," how much genius does it take to design a government that can change?—but it's the only formulation that permits him to show that the founders were the original progressives.

Obama sees the American story as a blend of two themes, individualism (symbolized in the Declaration) and unity (symbolized in the Constitution's commitment to "a more perfect Union"). The latter phrase, plucked from the Preamble, has long been a favorite of liberals, and was used in the same way by, for example, Bill Clinton. Unity means being your brother's, and sister's, keeper; it means coming together "as one American family." Obama explains: "if fate causes us to stumble or fall, our larger American family will be there to lift us up." He doesn't explain who get to be the parents in our new national family. Membership in this community confers or protects our "dignity," in the sense of guaranteeing "a basic standard of living" and effectively sharing "life's risks and rewards for the benefit of each and the good of all." Conservatives prefer to leave us "to face fate by ourselves," he notes, because they believe in "the Social Darwinist idea," which "requires no sacrifice on the part of those...who have won life's lottery...."

Thus unity is for the sake of "dignity and respect," which require both "social justice" and "economic justice." The latter ramifies widely, demanding, for instance, that "if you work in America you should not be poor"; that a college education should be every child's "birthright"; and that every American should have broadband access. Obama does not follow FDR, who turned such socio-economic goods into rights and called for enshrining them in a Second Bill of Rights. Chastened by the right-wing and middle-class backlash against welfare rights, Obama again follows the example of Bill Clinton, who reconceived such benefits as components of "opportunity." As Obama presents it: "opportunity is yours if you're willing to reach for it and work for it. It's the idea that while there are few guarantees in life, you should be able to count on a job that pays the bills; health care for when you get sick; a pension for when you retire; an education for your children that will allow them to fulfill their God-given potential." These are not rights, exactly, because that would imply Big Government to provide them. These are things that government will guarantee or help guarantee, so that you can take advantage of your opportunities and be protected in case your opportunities take advantage of you. Not big but merely "active government" will be needed to provide these "guarantees," Obama promises.

The difficulty is that the logic of these provisions is not very different from that of Rooseveltian socio-economic rights. Obama says, "it matters little if you have the right to sit at the front of the bus if you can't afford the bus fare; it matters little if you have the right to sit at the lunch counter if you can't afford the lunch." Actually, it matters a great deal (for human dignity, in fact), but the larger point is that this argument, that formal rights matter little without accompanying substantive or socio-economic advantages, leads easily to turning those advantages into rights. Doesn't the little old lady have a right to a decent lunch? And if she can't afford it, shouldn't government pay? One doesn't know whether to regard the new formulation of provisions for "opportunity" as a prudent step away from Big Government, or as a covert invitation to it. Jobs at a "living wage," universal health insurance or even a single-payer system, generous (and rising) social security coverage, universal support for college tuition, tax increases to pay for it all—Obama's will be a very active government, indeed.

#### A New Politics for a New Time

The tenets of Obama's progressivism are certainly not original. His is a renewed rather than a new liberalism; the principal change is not the message but the messenger. Nonetheless, he is an extraordinary orator and political strategist who has a real chance to win the new majority he seeks. Accordingly, in the unfolding electoral marathon of 2008 he champions what he calls "the politics of hope."

To begin with, hope confronts "the politics of cynicism." Cynicism wears many hats in Obama's speeches: the "politics of anything goes," the tactics of "spin masters" and "negative ad peddlers" who seek to divide us, the viewpoint of those who think "politics has become a business and not a mission," the "can't-do, won't-do, won't-even-try style of politics," the resort to "stale tactics to scare the voters," the effort to "make a big election about small things." The nefarious cynics deny the nation's problems, then blame them on someone else ("the other party, or gay people, or immigrants"). And when the people look away "in disillusionment and frustration," the "cynics, and the lobbyists, and

the special interests" move in to fill the void, and turn government into a game only they can afford to play.

Cynicism is Obama's all-purpose explanation for the "gridlock and polarization" that characterize our small politics today, that rob Americans of "our sense of common purpose—our sense of higher purpose." To put it differently, cynicism means the politics of self-interest, and it is his equivalent of the deeper and richer institutional analysis that once was American liberalism's stock-in-trade. Liberals used to criticize institutions like the congressional committee system, the separation of powers, and political parties dominated by large donors and local interests, on the theory that they perverted American politics by marrying narrow self-interest to mechanistic checks and balances. The result, supposedly, was the obstruction of progressive reform and "the deadlock of democracy." Obama simplifies this elaborate protest literature into an indictment of the Tom DeLays and Karl Roves of contemporary Washington, who have induced public apathy and a paralyzing loss of faith in the future.

The antidote for this widespread cynicism is hope, which is the quality that a visionary leader can awaken in the public, at long last. "We know the challenges.... We've talked about them for years," Obama argues.

What's stopped us is the failure of leadership, the smallness of our politics—the ease with which we're distracted by the petty and trivial, our chronic avoidance of tough decisions, our preference for scoring cheap political points instead of rolling up our sleeves and building a working consensus to tackle big problems.

There are good ten-point plans aplenty, he observes. They have all been blocked by the pervasive cynicism in Washington, and concerning Washington, over the past three decades or more. "It's time to turn the page," he likes to say, but the problem is that "we haven't had leaders who can inspire the American people to rally behind a common purpose and a higher purpose."

Now, "leadership" as the way to overcome the American government's (purported) chronic gridlock is one of the oldest of old liberal tropes, classically treated by Woodrow Wilson. Obama's prescription for American problems would come as no surprise to JFK and FDR, who in this respect are Wilson's students. Perhaps Obama pays more court to a politically engaged citizenry than did FDR or Wilson. ("Men are as clay in the hands of the consummate leader," wrote Wilson in a confident moment.) Yet all of these figures were eager in some degree to rouse the public from its cynical slumbers. And Obama admits that though the times must be right, it's up to the leader to recognize and exploit the favorable moment, to open the public's eyes to the possibility, indeed the imminence, of a political leap forward.

If "the genius of our founders" is a system of government "that can be changed," it's perforce up to future generations to rally to the task. In every critical moment, Obama affirms, "a new generation has risen up and done what's needed to be done. Today...it is time for our generation to answer that call." Echoing the passing of the torch that JFK celebrated on behalf of his generation—as well as the heroic exertions of the civil rights movement—Obama in announcing his candidacy adjured his followers, "Let's be the generation that ends poverty in America.... Let's be the generation that finally tackles our health care crisis.... Let's be the generation that finally frees America from the tyranny of oil." He continued:

That is why this campaign can't only be about me. It must be about us—it must be about what we can do together. This campaign must be the occasion, the vehicle, of your hopes, and your dreams.

His oft-repeated refrain about "the moment" speaks to this generational awareness. "The moment" is when a generation becomes conscious of itself and ready to act to change America, when it realizes that "yes, we can" change the political system by acting as one. This awakening that makes possible all subsequent political reform is what Obama refers to when he proclaims, "We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." The "moment" is when hope vanquishes cynicism, when the sudden realization of generational unity finally makes hope itself viable. Obama invites new voters, college students, independents, and disaffected Republicans to join in this new, more sober Woodstock.

The clash between hope and cynicism pits the future against the past, "a new politics for a new time" against the same old, same old. Despite Obama's occasional impatience with progressivism's rosy view of human nature, his reliance on the formula of the past versus the future—and on the "living Constitution" to weave them together—confirms his deep debt to Wilsonian-style Progressivism, which has dominated the Democratic Party's consciousness for a hundred years. As they say, the oldest word in American politics is "new."

Obama can be "a proud citizen of the United States and a fellow citizen of the world," as he announced in his Berlin speech, because the generational currents are not confined to individual nations, especially not in the modern wired and globalized community of nations. When discussing international politics, however, Obama adjusts the generational polarity to hope versus fear. The old view of international relations, fervently embraced by the current Bush Administration, is dominated by fear—of other nations, of enemies within and without, of loss of sovereignty. But the 21st century should try to build "a more hopeful world" that will finally realize for all its inhabitants FDR's Four Freedoms—freedom from fear, from want, freedom of speech and expression, freedom to worship.

The return to FDR may signal that Obama desires a more muscular foreign policy than liberals or conservatives realize, as his remarks elsewhere about incursions into Pakistan and hunting down Osama bin Laden suggest. In any event, the war in Afghanistan, which he supports and wants to intensify, may eventually make the Iraq War look like child's play. Obama recognizes that there are many forces in the world, including terrorism, that America must rightly fear. On the whole, though, his proposed tilt from fear to hope in our foreign policy promises a greater role for "strong diplomacy" and for "a world that stands as one." The problem is that uniting the world is much harder than uniting Americans; as the number of "different stories" increases, the power of "common hopes" must, too, in order to unify the diverse narratives. Based on his analysis of such hopes in the Cold War—a major theme in his Berlin speech—Obama needs a dose of reality. He hopes for a better world of international unity in which many walls will fall: "the walls between the countries with the most and those with the least...the walls between races and tribes; natives and immigrants; Christian and Muslim and Jew..." But strong walls often make good neighbors. And he speaks of the fall of the Berlin Wall as if no one pushed it or ever stood guard by it.

### Audacity and Hope

Obama is careful to distinguish hope from blind optimism. Hope is not "the almost willful ignorance that thinks...the health care crisis will solve itself if we just ignore it." "Hope is not ignoring...the challenges that stand between you and your dreams." On the contrary, hope is "imagining, and then fighting for, and then working for, struggling for what did not seem possible before."

You know, there is a moment in the life of every generation when that spirit has to come through, if we are to make our mark on history, when we decide to cast aside the fear and the doubt, when we're not willing to settle for what the cynics tell us we have to accept, but instead we're willing to reach for what we know in our gut is possible...when we determine that we're going to keep the dream alive for those who still hunger for opportunity and still thirst for justice.

That's why he insists on "the audacity of hope," which he calls "God's greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation; a belief in things not seen; a belief that there are better days ahead."

This mixture of divine and secular assertions boils down to a moment of historical clarity: hope is when you recover your faith in progress, when you envision "the better days ahead," but also when you resolve not to wait passively for them but to pursue them courageously: the audacity of hope. To the leader belongs the awesome power to transmit this vision of the future to the people, to allow those who walked in darkness to see a great light, and to organize them for the "march into the future" that he alone can lead. Despite Obama's efforts to offload to or share some of this responsibility with the awakened people, it falls primarily on his head as the prophet of the moment. Though he expresses doubts about his ability and invites the people to correct him when he goes wrong, he knows that he is the one.

Sometimes it helps to take the long view. Audacity is a curious word with two meanings, which reflect a genuine moral ambiguity. It means both boldness, daring, confidence—and reckless daring, rashness, foolhardiness. It can be a good or a bad thing, a virtue or a vice. Hope, by contrast, is a passion; in the language of the medieval schools, hope aims at a future, arduous, and possible good. It doesn't always attain that good, however. There is also hope as a theological virtue, but presumably Obama doesn't mean to offer eternal happiness to his followers. His vision is of earthly happiness, wholeness, and justice. As he explained to Americans in 2004, in his debut at the Democratic National Convention, his name, Barack, means "blessed."

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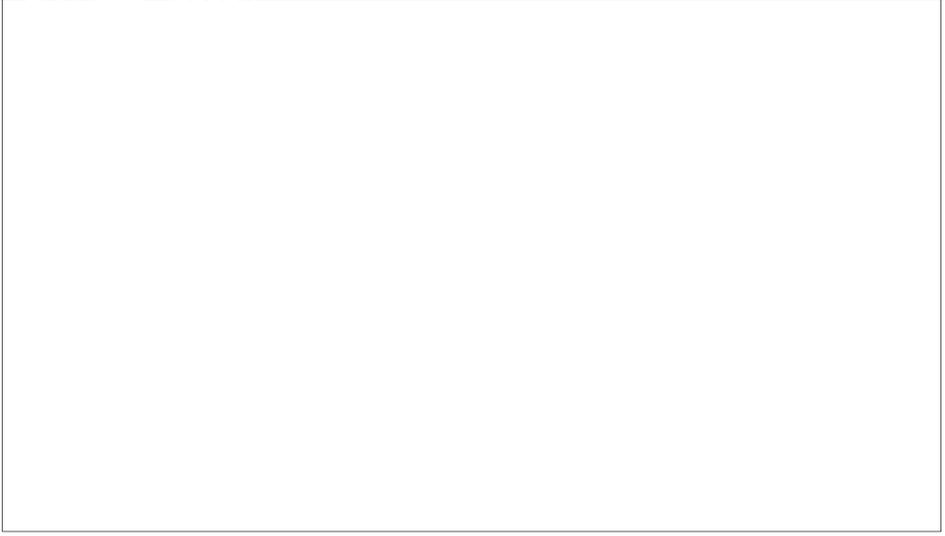


From: H <HDR22@clintonemail.com>

To: Oscar Flores [redacted]

Date: Mon, 24 Aug 2009 08:27:43 -0400

Subject: Fw: CLAREMONT INSTITUTE REVIEW : THE AUDACITY OF  
BARACK OBAMA -  
CHARLES KESLER



**PR\_RIM\_PAGER\_TX\_FLAG:** true

**PR\_RIM\_MSG\_REF\_ID:** 1715782073

**PR\_RIM\_MSG\_FOLDER\_ID:** -3

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