

Oh, The Pain of The Believer: Barack's Betrayals Offer Lessons We Can't Deny

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Region: [USA](#)

Global Research, August 29, 2011

29 August 2011

Journalists are not supposed to have political opinions, and yet we all do. Our “biases” are usually disguised, not blatant or overtly partisan, and can be divined in what stories we cover and how we cover them,

Even ‘just the fact’s maam,’ journos for big Media have to decide which facts to include and which to ignore.

Our outlooks are always shaped by our worldviews, values and experience, not too mention the outlets we work for.

Which brings me to the challenge of seeking truth and recognizing it when you see it.

I have to admit that I was seduced by the idea of Barack Obama.

The idea of a black President, the idea of a young President, the idea of an articulate President, and the idea of a man married to such a stand up women from a working class family was hard to resist.

Here’s a guy who seemed really smart, not just because he went to Harvard but because professors there I liked were impressed with him. (I taught at Harvard, and know very well how not so smart many students there can be!)

In the end, it doesn’t mean much, but in that period he lived about a block away from the House I once shared on Dartmouth Street in Somerville.

Was that a degree of separation?

He had also been a community organizer, starting in politics at the grass roots in Chicago. I also worked at Saul Alinsky-style organizing and even knew the iconic organizer personally.

Was that another degree?

He’s invoked the spirit of the civil rights movement but was not part of it. He treated Dr. King as a monument before the new memorial was conceived, embracing him as a symbol of the past, not a guide to the future.

He took an anti-war stance on pragmatic grounds only, preferring Afghanistan to Iraq. He hasn’t extricated us from either battlefield.

His strategy borrowed heavily from the Bush Doctrine. What’s the difference, really, as US

troops now intervene worldwide and Guantanamo remains open for business?

There was a lot I didn't know. I didn't know the backgrounds of those that groomed him and funded him. His relationship with the centrist DLC was murky as were the details on the services he performed for a shadowy firm, Business International, said to have CIA links.

There were those who warned, but I guess, I didn't want to listen.

Why? I didn't want to reinforce my own skepticism and sense of despair. I feigned at being hopeful even as I took quite a few critical whacks at his positions in my blog. His deviations from a liberal agenda and his paens to the "free market" were considered necessary for his "electability."

I was also influenced by the euphoria for him overseas that had become infectious but has since soured.

To be honest, I was so disgusted with eight years of George Bush for all the right reasons that I wanted him gone full stop, as did millions of Americans.

Hillary didn't appeal to me, not because she's a woman but because of her slavish affinity for the Israel lobby and middle of the road Democrats. (Yes, Obama, did his mea-culpa to AIPAC too!)

I was denounced as a super sexist by a few for not buying into her centrist Clintonista crusade.

She had gone from a student advocate to part of a ruling family; he went from bottom-up activism to top-down elitism.

When she joined his "team," you knew they were always in the same league.

When the right bashed him for associating with radical Bill Ayers, who I knew, it made me suspect he might even be cooler than I thought, even as he raced to distance himself. His membership in Reverend Wright's church hinted at a deeper consciousness until he buckled in the media heat and threw the man that married him under the bus.

And yet, I wanted to believe because I needed to believe, needed to believe it was possible to change the American behemoth, to believe that, as he kept saying, "it could be different this time."

As the late writer David Foster Wallace put it, "In the day-to-day trenches of adult life...there is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship... else (what) you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things - if they are where you tap real meaning in life - then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough."

So, in a sense, I became a worshipper like so many, not of the man or the dance he was doing in an infected political environment, but because I convinced myself that I worshipped possibility, that there are times when the unexpected, even the unbelievable occurs. I had seen Mandela go from prison to the presidency of South Africa.

After all, how does a progressive blast a candidate who has Bruce Springsteen and Pete Seeger singing the uncensored version of “This Land Is Your Land” at his inaugural?”

Yet, there was always a nagging question: was he with us or just co-opting us?

Yes We Can?

Slowly, despite the glow and the aura, deeper truths surfaced, realities I had winked away. Its not surprising that his mantra has gone, as the Washington Post reports, from the “fierce urgency of now,” to “ Be patient, democracy is big and tough and messy.”

Yes, I knew, I may have been rationalizing a false god, who was only another, if more attractive, politician who says one thing and does another in a political system where power, not personalities prevail.

Like many of his predecessors he would be “captured” by the power structures, by the military men and contractors at the Pentagon and the money men on Wall Street.

He was in office but never really in charge. Clearly, he didn’t have the votes to enact a real change agenda. But that was because his own party was long ago bought and paid for.

He never had a chance, even if as I wanted to believe, he wanted one. He said he wanted to be transformational figure but the system transformed him—and quickly.

Everyone runs “against Washington,” even a Senator, who was part of it.

And so I held my nose and voted, hoping against my wiser instincts. I even made a positive film about the campaign that showed how he used social media and texting to mobilize new voters. When I tried to get a copy to the White House, through an insider there, I found they couldn’t be less interested.

By then, he had gone from playing the “outside game” to opting into the “inside game” built around compromise in the name of “pragmatism, or ‘getting it done,” in his words. In the end he was a rookie who may have outsmarted himself or just served the interests who put him there.

He couldn’t dump his most passionate and issue-oriented followers fast enough.

While his backers were still hot to trot, he became cooler toward them, and, in effect, repudiated them with few progressive appointments. He put on his flag pin and relished the symbolism of the “office.” He became the master of the uplifting speech disguising a quite different policy agenda.

He spoke for the people but served the power. His wanted the other side to love him too, even as his stabs at “bi-partisanship” proved non-starters.

When you lie down with those “lambs,” (or is it snakes?) you betray not only supporters, but their hopes. FDR was soon spinning in his grave.

I am not surprised that knowledgeable critics of his economic policies not only consider him bull-headed and wrong, but, actually corrupt, aligned and complicit, with the banksters who are still ripping us off. No wonder he’s “bundled” more donations from the greedsters and

financiers this year than in 2008! No wonder, he turned his back on consumer advocate Elizabeth Warren and is trying to kill prosecutions of bank fraud in high places.

Christopher Whalen who writes for Reuters say there will be a cost for his doing nothing, "The path of least resistance politically has been to temporize and talk. But by following the advice of Rubin and Summers, and avoiding tough decisions about banks and solvency, President Obama has only made the crisis more serious and steadily eroded public confidence. In political terms, Obama is morphing into Herbert Hoover."

Yet, at the same time, many of us who now know how we have been used, will vote for him again, because, as he rightly calculates, there is no one else, and the alternative is even worse. Watch and weep as today's rebels become next year's rationalizers.

It reminds me of when activists were asked to vote for Lyndon Johnson in 1964 with the slogan "Part of the Way with LBJ." That way ended with an endless escalation of war in Vietnam, and guns trumping butter. Sound familiar?

The search for truth and reality has hit a wall but has to continue. The lessons need to be learned. We have to say we were wrong, when we were, not in our beliefs, but in pinning our hopes on a shrewd, ambitious, and double-faced political performance artist.

While people who still back him dismiss the accusation that's he's a hidden socialist, Kenyan, or space alien, all too many suspect he may be a secret Republican. He is who he is, aloof, cautious, and a man in the middle. He's staying there.

Let's give David Foster the last word.

"The really important kind of freedom involves attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day. That is real freedom. The alternative is unconsciousness,...

... It is about simple awareness - awareness of what is so real and essential, so hidden in plain sight all around us, that we have to keep reminding ourselves, over and over..."

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