

At Least He Doesn't Snore...

I'm one of those people having a difficult time finding something positive to say about Barack Obama. Don't get me wrong, I'm old enough to have known a lot of people in my lifetime, and they've included conservatives and liberals, Christians and Jews, atheists and agnostics, straights and gays, men and women, peaceniks and war-mongers, and capitalists and Marxists. I like to think I'm pretty tolerant of other people, and would not stand in the way of their believing whatever the hell they want to believe, provided they allow me the same courtesy.

But my tolerance level is rapidly reached when I encounter elitism, lies, and hypocrisy, and that tends to happen most when I encounter a politician. I experience an outrage of anger when preached to by someone who follows his own alternate set of rules. If you're going to deliver a speech arguing that mankind is destroying the planet by burning fossil fuels, you should at least not have your limousines idling with their air conditioners on for an hour so you don't have to sweat after the dimwits stop applauding you. If you're going to hold the high moral ground, you should be spending time with your seriously ill wife and not hiding from reporters in the bathroom of a hotel where you were caught with a "female acquaintance." And if you're going to defend massive federal spending with the Bible verse where Jesus said, "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers, you do for me," then you'd better be prepared to open up your scrapbook and show the voters page after page of an incredibly pure and noble life.

Maybe I should be a little more tolerant of politicians. A politician is, after all, someone who will always be there when he needs you. I recall my encounter with Rahm Emanuel in 2002. It took place at a pancake breakfast in a Northwest Chicago church. I was there with a friend, believing it was only a church fundraiser. Emanuel was running for Congress in the 5th District in Illinois and, despite the fact that he had been an advisor in the Clinton Administration, he was pretty much an unknown. Of course, being a Democrat in Illinois gives you a pretty good shot at being elected, but like any good politician Emanuel wasn't taking it for granted. So, there he was in the church basement, eagerly pressing the flesh and drumming up votes.

Emanuel approached me, introduced himself, started to extend his hand, and asked if I would support him. I recognized both him and his name, and as I stood up I explained that I couldn't vote for him because I lived in another district. The moment he heard those words, he immediately withdrew his hand. It couldn't have been pulled back any faster had I told him I had leprosy. Now, I wouldn't have voted for him anyway, but I was raised to be polite and would never have said aloud that his having worked for Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, Illinois Senator Paul Simon, and President Bill Clinton was more than enough for me to suspect he was just another candidate with grandiose plans on how to spend my money after he was sworn in. He abruptly turned away as soon as he knew he'd be getting no vote from me, and went looking for other gullible, uh, that is, prospective, voters. Frankly, I'm glad Emanuel withdrew his hand, as I had no way of knowing whose pockets it may previously have been in.

At any rate, the topic is my outrage at elitism, lies, and hypocrisy, which takes us to the current gold-medal champion, Barack “Barry” Hussein Obama-Soetoro-Obama... or whatever his real name is. The name itself gives me cause for suspicion, not because it isn’t your everyday American name of Western-European origin, but because he changed it more than once. Hey, what’s wrong with the name you were born with? I’m a little loose on my rule, I must admit, as I certainly think it was acceptable for Francis Albert Sinatra to call himself Frank. But my rule falls somewhere this side of Cher, Madonna, and Carrot-Top.

I don’t care if you change your religion. After all, you have no control over where your parents take you as a child, and I’ll bet little Barry Soetoro wasn’t all that excited about studying “Mangaji” in school in Indonesia. I’m sure that from time to time his mind wandered away from reciting the Quran and he instead stared out the window, entertaining thoughts of defeating President Suharto after besting him in a live debate hosted by Larry King – who, even back then, was asking penetrating questions like “What’s your favorite ice cream flavor?”

Somewhere along the line Barry Soetoro decided Barack Obama might be a better moniker for a community organizer/rabble-rouser on Chicago’s South Side, and inasmuch as Cassius Clay had turned into Muhammad Ali without losing too many fans, why not disown the step-father who was kind and generous enough to adopt him and revert back to the name of his adoring biological father (the alcoholic womanizer who deserted him and his mother when he was two years old).

Urban legend has it that Barack Obama joined Chicago’s Trinity United Church of Christ at the urging of his future wife Michelle. That’s not unreasonable, as many a man has converted to please the woman in his life. Luckily for Obama, being a Christian would boost his chances of holding a higher political office. You could get by on the South Side of Chicago with a Muslim background (it could even help you), but to venture beyond the realm of community organizer you’d better start acting like the average voter, even if you don’t look like him.

Thousands of American churches have nice, decent pastors who probably give a good, uplifting sermon and have personalities that match Howard Sprague’s (of Mayberry, North Carolina fame). Obama managed instead to saddle himself with Reverend Jeremiah Wright, who is about as close to Howard Sprague as Madonna’s British accent is authentic. As the Obama campaign for President started to gather steam, the media did a little (but not much) digging and learned something about Reverend Wright. His sermons were frequently racially and politically charged. Some would no doubt dispute that, but the phrase, “God Damn America” is likely not often heard during Sunday sermons across the heartland of this nation. One overly-cautious media report said that Wright’s remarks “were interpreted by some as being unpatriotic and deeply offensive.” That’s like saying, “There are reports that some witnesses to the Hindenburg disaster were allegedly unnerved by the sight of flaming bodies being hurled 200 feet to the ground.”

The esteemed Reverend Wright has charged that the 9/11 terrorist attacks were retribution for America's terrorism of other nations. That, in itself, is not a criticism unique to Wright, but it certainly is not a good campaign statement for someone running for President of the United States. ("Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie, and we had it coming!") Wright has also defended the controversial Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, as one of the most important voices of both (yes, both!) the 20th and 21st centuries. Farrakhan, a man who once said "Hitler was a very great man," and "Judaism is a gutter religion," and "white people are potential humans, they (just) haven't evolved yet," was given a "lifetime achievement award" from Wright's (i.e., Obama's) church. And the paranoid yet creative Wright has stated on more than one occasion that the United States government created the AIDS virus as a form of genocide on African-Americans - which, I must admit, even outdoes his comparison of American troops to the Roman soldiers who killed Jesus.

For 20 years Barack Obama attended Wright's church and sat in a pew while Wright delivered his tempestuous sermons. The name of Obama's book, "The Audacity of Hope," was reportedly inspired by the very first Wright sermon he had heard, a sermon which attacked a nation where "white folks' greed runs a world in need, apartheid in one hemisphere, apathy in another." Obama certainly knew Wright was controversial, and the night before the official announcement that he was going to run for President, he asked Wright not to give the public, pre-announcement prayer as had been originally planned. Obama instead allegedly prayed with Wright in the basement of the Illinois State Capitol before going out to speak. ("Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.")

Wright had also been appointed to Obama's African American Religious Leadership Committee, a group of black religious pastors and leaders that supported the candidacy. But by March of 2008 Wright was no longer a member. (So far I've not been able to find any evidence of John McCain booting a controversial preacher from a White American Religious Leadership Committee, but I promise to keep looking.)

By late April of 2008, Obama was further distancing himself from the avuncular Wright, saying his many remarks were "a bunch of rants that aren't grounded in truth," and accusing him of exploiting racism. He described some of his pastor's comments as "outrageous" and "destructive." In denouncing some of Wright's remarks, Obama said "Based on his comments yesterday, well, I may not know him as well as I thought." (To me that sounds a lot like Rich Little saying, "That isn't the Jack Benny I've impersonated all my life." I'm using parentheses here out of respect for the Generation X readers who've never heard of Rich Little or Jack Benny.)

Finally, by late May of 2008, Obama had been pelted with so much criticism because of Wright that he resigned his membership in the Trinity United Church of Christ. But this was a case of closing the barn door after the horse had already fled because, by that time, Wright had already retired as pastor and sat down to write a book. (Allegedly that book will be released a few weeks short of Election Day. One might expect it will get some attention.) Obama's resignation was politically necessary but largely irrelevant because,

of course, if he is elected he'll be in Washington and not attending that church anyway. (Resigning from his church after the fact takes as much courage as deciding to never again wear a toupee... after it fell off and everyone laughed at your bald head.)

What many Americans logically find troubling about the Wright-Obama connection is that Obama was a member of Wright's church for 20 years. Few believe that Wright suddenly developed his anti-white and anti-American attitudes and arguments only as Obama was deciding to run for President. No, Wright has used such inflammatory rhetoric for at least two decades. No one is disputing his right to do so. He has the right to blame white Americans for all of the problems in the black community. He has the right to honor people who hate Jews, like Louis Farrakhan. He has the right to condemn America all he wants. He has the right to wear a lacy pink dress while giving his sermons if that's his thing. But he's not running for President.

Obama says the glove doesn't fit and the bloody footprints do not belong to his Bruno Magli loafers. He denies being in the church when Reverend Wright made any inflammatory comments. He's known the man for 20 years, was married by him, was baptized by him, and had his children baptized by him – and yet never knew the opinions Wright had on issues he and his parishioners found critically important. Had Obama also never heard of Louis Farrakhan? Had Obama not read any church literature announcing that the well-known anti-Semitic Farrakhan was being given a “lifetime achievement award?” Had Obama never had conversations with other church members about their pastor's controversial statements? Did no one ever approach Obama (who, being a politician, is certainly no quiet wallflower prone to slink in and out of church unnoticed) and ask, “So, how did you like the Reverend's remarks this morning? Do you agree that white folks are to blame for all our suffering?”

Obama reluctantly said, “The statements that Reverend Wright made that are the cause of this controversy were not statements I personally heard him preach while I sat in the pews of Trinity or heard him utter in private conversation. When these statements first came to my attention, it was at the beginning of my presidential campaign. I made it clear at the time that I strongly condemned his comments. But because Reverend Wright was on the verge of retirement, and because of my strong links to the Trinity faith community, where I married my wife and where my daughters were baptized, I did not think it appropriate to leave the church.”

The voter is supposed to believe that Obama sat in a church for 20 years and never heard his pastor say any of the things which the media had absolutely no trouble uncovering? One can only imagine what the media might have uncovered if they weren't in Obama's corner. The voter is supposed to elect as President a man who was totally unaware that his spiritual advisor for 20 years was a rabid anti-American racist? That's as preposterous as electing to the United States Senate someone who had been the local leader of the Ku Klux Klan. (Oh, wait, West Virginia did that repeatedly? Never mind.)

After evaluating all of these events, one must accept one of only two conclusions. Either Barack Obama is a deceitful, lying politician, who knew full well what Jeremiah Wright

was preaching from his pulpit for 20 years, who disowned him only after it became politically necessary, and who probably agrees with most of his pastor's views... or Barack Obama has slept through 1,040 sermons.

Inasmuch as there is nothing in his policies that I like about Obama, I'll give him the benefit of the doubt and admit that his one good trait may be that he doesn't snore.

Don Fredrick
August, 2008