

**Barack Obama: The Unadjusted Man**  
**Why Barack Obama is a True Conservative**

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*The true rule, in determining to embrace, or reject any thing, is not whether it have any evil in it; but whether it have more of evil, than of good. There are few things wholly evil, or wholly good. Almost every thing, especially of governmental policy, is an inseparable compound of the two; so that our best judgment of the preponderance between them is continually demanded.*

-Abraham Lincoln, Speech in the House of Representatives (20 June 1848)

Abraham Lincoln, the preserver of the United States, saw an evil in slavery. He saw that the government of the United States, with its Constitution, was good, albeit not perfect. It was because of the evil he saw in slavery, and the good he saw in the United States, that he determined that the Union must be preserved at all costs. In the greatest crisis in American history, the reasons for going to war came down to a determination of what is good and what is evil. What is important about this determination is not the end product, but the means to which the end was reached.

So was Lincoln a moderate, or was he a tyrant? This is a debatable point. In viewing secession and slavery as evils to be exterminated at all costs, he prosecuted a war in which 600,000 Americans lost their lives. Many may view this as a highly ideological position to take, but in the context of the time, it was not. Lincoln did not have much choice in trying to preserve the Union. Yet, at the end of the war, Lincoln turned toward mercy and compassion toward the South. One interpretation of this move is that he was not an ideologue and only pursued war in such a ruthless manner because of necessity. When the end came, he realized that the time called for the country to move past the horrors of war and embrace their fellow countrymen once again. Nevertheless, his

assassination ended any hope of a merciful reconciliation. Despite his death, his example sets forth the notion that one can still remain reasonable even under the most dire circumstances.

As Lincoln states, nothing is perfectly good or perfectly evil. You have to carefully weigh the good and evil in a thing before determining its value. This careful evaluation of ideas is an implicit rejection of ideology. Ideologies thrive on making broad accusations of the evilness of a thing, and will do whatever it can to eliminate it. Jacobinism, Nazism, and Marxism all fall into this category.

In recent political discourse, there is a perception that conservatism falls into this category. Bloggers, columnists, and talking heads all seem to subscribe to this line of thinking, whether on the right or the left. For them, conservatism is an ideology, bent on reversing the Sixties, eliminating entitlement programs, limiting government and spending, reducing taxes, promoting family values, etc. However, while political positions on issues may accurately reflect a certain ideology, these positions do not describe what it means to be a true conservative. Conservatism, as widely understood in modern politics, is a reactionary mode of thought; reactionary against what some perceive to be a change in the traditional foundations of American society. True conservatism is not reactionary because it is not bound to any ideology. It is rather a mode of thought that can be applied to issues, through a careful weighing of means and ends, with respect for tradition, and a healthy respect for gradual, evolutionary change.

The banner of conservatism in American politics has been usurped by those with a reactionary ideology, with little or no respect for gradual change. These false conservatives, whether of the neoconservative factions or the religious fundamentalist

factions, do not believe in gradual change. They either believe that change can be forced upon others, or that change is in itself evil. The true conservative, like Edmund Burke, believes that change should build upon the foundations of society in order to preserve it. Sometimes, these changes may be radical, like in the case of abolishing slavery. Lincoln did his part because he believed that slavery was evil. Other leaders in American history, such as Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, understood that certain situations required drastic measures to preserve the foundations of society, whether it be busting trusts or enacting forms to end the Great Depression. And unlike the liberal, the true conservative does not believe in change based on abstract ideas that have no basis in reality or historical experience. Change must be rooted in reality.

This is in part why Senator Barack Obama is a true conservative. While it may seem counterintuitive to believe that Obama is a conservative, he does not believe in change based on abstract principles. Many of the issues he identifies with, such as health care, race relations, and the economy, are also identified with liberal ideology; he does not take the liberal approach to these issues. He views them within the context of preserving American society, a society he views that is in danger of losing its competitive edge, and of leaving those in the lower rungs of society by the wayside. Much like other great American leaders, such as Lincoln, the two Roosevelts, and Adlai Stevenson, he is a true conservative.

True conservatism is a way of thinking, and it is also a way of living. It is a demeanor, a temperament, and a humble and moderate way of living. It requires a certain type of non-conformist to pull off this delicate balancing act; non-conformist in the sense of conforming to the great examples of leadership in the past, rather than conforming to

the often vulgar way of doing things in the present. It is above all leadership, and a leadership by more than just policy positions, but a moral leadership, and the ability to inspire others to live up to one's example.

Barack Obama encompasses all these qualities, and it will be proven over the course of the paper. It will identify what it means to be a true and false conservative, what it means to be an Unadjusted Man, and what it means to live by the inner check. In the end, it will be demonstrated that leadership takes more than just living to the moment: it means taking the best parts of the past, preserving and reforming them, and allowing to build for a better future. The Honorable Senator from Illinois best exemplifies these principles in the current era of American politics.

### **The True Conservative**

*"A person should not believe in an ism, he should believe in himself."*

-Ferris Bueller

While the above quote occurs in an American teen comedy set in the 1980s, it does not diminish the truth of its meaning. True conservatism is not beholden to any particular ideology or doctrine. It is a way of thinking; a guide for living life. For the conservative, the ends do not always justify the means.

It was the father of modern conservatism, Edmund Burke, who believed that ideologies were destructive. In analyzing the French Revolution, Burke saw that its ideology, Jacobinism, held a utopian view of the world and an unrealistic view of human nature. The French Revolution not only sought to sweep away the monarchy, but also sought to change the order of being. Any ideology that seeks to upend the order of being,

due to its unrealistic view of human nature, is dangerous and must be opposed. This is a fundamental point in Burkean conservatism.

Burke did not oppose all revolutions; he was a supporter of the American Revolution. He was against tyranny in all forms, right wing or left, in addition to unrealistic ideologies. What he was for was gradual, organic, and evolutionary change. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke stated “A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation.”<sup>1</sup> Change, with respect to what Burke called the “wisdom of the ages,” was not only good, but necessary for a state to survive. The wisdom of the ages, according to Burke, is the entirety of human experience. It is the practices and traditions of humanity that lead the individual through his or her daily life. Without it, humanity is lost, and unable to reach the ancient ideal of happiness, the *agathon*. In using the wisdom of the ages, the conservative is able to decipher what change is necessary in order to preserve the order of being, and to preserve the state.

Peter Viereck also believed that ideologies are to be opposed, and states that conservatism, as well as liberalism, are “less doctrinaire than the novelty-intoxicated radical on the left, the stand-pat Old Guard reactionary on the right.”<sup>2</sup> Where the liberal and conservatives differ, is that the liberal “plans change from abstract *a priori* generalizations” and the conservative “sees change as disruptive to the traditional framework unless, instead, it grows organically out of historical context.”<sup>3</sup> The true conservative will see the best that liberalism has to offer, and then root it in reality in order to maintain continuity with tradition.

How then does a true conservative figure out what is best? Perhaps it is best to consider that ideas exist upon a spectrum. At both ends of the spectrum are the extremes, the radical leftists and rightists. Neither end of these ends is desirable. The best choice is then the middle. This is what Aristotle characterized as the Golden Mean. In his *Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the best way to achieve virtue. One must consider between two extremes, excess and defect, when taking moral action. The best choice is to take neither extreme, but the mean. Virtue then becomes “a state apt to exercise deliberate choice, being in the relative mean, determined by reason, and as the man of practical wisdom would determine.”<sup>4</sup> Moderation is a virtue, and for the true conservative, it is the best way to preserve the wisdom of the ages in the face of change.

Since humans use the wisdom of the ages in everyday life, many who would protest against conservatism are in reality living conservative lives. Viereck states in *Conservatism Revisited* that conservatism is “a way of living, of balancing and harmonizing; it is not science but art.”<sup>5</sup> He states that it is “misleading that ‘conservatism’ contains the suffix ‘ism.’”<sup>6</sup> The great conservative minds of history, including John Adams, Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville,<sup>1</sup> and Metternich<sup>2</sup> all were against abstractions and ideologies. Viereck believes that when conservatism is viewed in such a way, as “the history-rooted balancing and transcending of isms,” that prime example of such thought is in two time presidential candidate and UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson.<sup>3</sup> He states:

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<sup>1</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville is best known for writing *Democracy in America* in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. A French intellectual and historian. Please see Wikipedia for more information.

<sup>2</sup>Prince Metternich was a German-Austrian statesman and diplomat, responsible for leading the Congress of Vienna after the Napoleonic Wars. Please see Wikipedia for more information.

<sup>3</sup>Adlai Stevenson, two-time Democratic candidate for President in 1952 and 1956. During this period, was admired, as well as derided, for his intellectualism. Please see Wikipedia for more information.

No figure in our time has better expressed the good-humored, pluralist harmonizing of isms and interests that compose the American reality. During the decade 1952-62, the creative role of Adlai Stevenson has been the perfect object-lesson of how to attain liberal and conservative synthesis: Mill plus Burke; Jefferson plus a noblesse-obligated, traditional and very American spirit of aristocracy, a Periclean-democratic aristocracy.<sup>7</sup>

To further illustrate this point, August Heckscher reiterates that conservatism “is not an ideology” but a way of thinking, and that it “not only recognizes different classes, orders, and interests in the social order but actually values these differences and is not afraid to cultivate them.”<sup>8</sup> To him, Adlai Stevenson best represented this view and “had a feeling for the way separate groups could be brought into the service of the whole.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the true conservative, by practicing moderation, is best equipped to live up to America’s motto, *e pluribus unum*.

One last principle to consider of true conservatism concerns justice. True conservatives will argue that it is the duty, or *noblesse oblige*, of the elite in a society to be stewards; it is their duty to guide their fellow citizens (lower, middle, and upper class) toward prosperity. They must work toward the common good. It is also imperative that they are earning their share of the prosperity. When the elite fail to earn their fair share (either too much or too little), or fail to do what is necessary for the common good, then that society will fall into class warfare. If the elites fail in this endeavor, it then becomes the responsibility of the government to take the lead in providing for the common good.

This failure on the part of the nobility is what Irving Babbitt would consider a failure of leadership. It also violates the Burkean and Aristotelian idea of justice: a just society is one in which an individual receives his share of the “wealth” in proportion to

his service to society. A society ceases to be just when the elite fail to maintain its stewardship role, or when the gap between rich and poor reaches such an unfair proportion to cause social upheaval.

### **The False Conservative**

When people think of the contemporary Republican Party, it is equated with neo-conservatism, religious fundamentalism, and a certain mean-spiritedness. Different scholars have different names for them, such as Old Guard reactionaries or radical conservatives. For the purposes of this paper, the banner of false conservative will encompass all these ideologies.

The problem with false conservatives is that they profess to be conservative, yet they oppose much of what true conservatives stand for. They embrace isms. They let doctrines and dogmas make their choices for them. They do not practice moderation. In many ways, the things they profess to believe in give lie how they live their lives. For example, the Reverend Ted Haggard was a staunch opponent of homosexuals and their lifestyle, yet it was discovered that he engaged in intercourse with a male prostitute. This kind of hypocrisy seems to be common place with false conservatives. The reason for disconnect between the beliefs of false conservatives and their actions is that their ideologies do not represent reality. These ideologies reject Platonic dualism and the *metaxy*. In a sense, these ideologies are liberal, if one uses the previously mentioned Viereck definition, which is that liberals believe in abstract, *a priori* change.

In addition to the differences between true conservatives and liberals on change, there is a difference between how the two modes of thought understand human nature. Liberals believe that humans are capable of being perfected. Since humans are obviously

not living the utopian lifestyle, the problem cannot be in man, but outside of man. Evil then must lie in the things preventing man from being good. These things include tradition, society, and government. Therefore, this evil must be purged or changed in order to bring humanity to perfection.

True conservatives do not believe in the perfectibility of man. The conflict between good and evil lies in the soul, not in society. Man will always be in the *metaxy* (in between beast and God), and heaven cannot be brought to earth. False conservatives, it appears, do believe that humanity can be perfected. At the very least, humanity can be restored to some idealistic past, which is a thesis of Robert Reich's book *Reason: Why Liberals Will Win the Battle for America*.

The former Secretary of Labor, Reich argues that radical conservatives ("radcons") believe that evil is manifested in particular groups in American society. These groups include, but are not limited to, homosexuals, hippies, feminists, etc. Many of these groups achieved mainstream recognition in society during the 1960s, and radcons consider these groups to be a representation of the "moral deviance" that exists in American society. Reich paraphrases how radcons seek to eliminate this evil:

There's no compromising with such evil. It has to be countered with everything we have. Religious faith and discipline are the means of redemption. Punishment and coercion are the only real deterrents. Fear is the essential motivator.<sup>10</sup>

Reich may be overstating his point here, but it is nevertheless a valid one. Unlike Lincoln, radcons are not fighting a civil war, and their methods underscore an irrational fear, rather than a reasoned approach. These radcons are false conservatives, in that they blame groups of people for causing evil in society and attempt to fight this evil through fear, persecution, and in some cases, legislation, all in some quixotic attempt to reverse

the excesses of the 1960s. This is not a true conservative view. True conservatives are not counterrevolutionaries. While these radcons may have a point that there is a moral decline in America, they are entirely wrong about the means in which to correct it.

False conservatives are also manifested in the neoconservatives of the Bush Administration. It is their belief that spreading democracy throughout the world will bring peace, and that the only way that this can be done is through American military might.<sup>11</sup> The Iraq War is an extension of this philosophy. Neoconservatives believed that democracy is a universal ideal, and all that is required to spread democracy is to eliminate tyranny, and freedom and democracy will spread like wildfire. Rousseau believed that the government can force people to be free, but taken at face value, the idea seems ludicrous. Currently, an example of a government forcing people to be free is occurring in Iraq. Despite over five years of fighting, little has been accomplished toward establishing a viable democracy. In addition to intuitive knowledge, the real world experience of forcing Iraqis to be free shows how ridiculous the Rousseauistic notion that people can be forced into freedom.

### **The Unadjusted Man**

Not only does a true conservative engage in this mode of thinking about politics, but to all walks of life. It is not just a stance on issues, but a whole demeanor. Also, conservatism should not just be used for its own sake. A true conservative does not choose when to be conservative or not because it is convenient, but does so because it is the right thing to do.

This type of person is what Viereck calls the Unadjusted Man. Since the true conservative holds the wisdom of the ages close to his heart, he is unlikely to engage in

trends just to “fit in.” “Fitting in” is what Viereck considers the great problem in American society of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. People are guilty, he argues, of conforming for the sake of conforming, and in the process, becoming depersonalized. Conforming, however, must be viewed in context. The Unadjusted Man is discerning, and will make an “adjustment to the ages” and a “non-adjustment to the age.”<sup>12</sup> Viereck elaborates:

The Unadjusted Man rejects superficial norms not for rejection’s sake but to serve valid ones; his attempt to distinguish between such rival value claims is a dilemma of tragic soul-searching, not of easy conditioned answers. Unadjusted, in the highest sense of tragic freedom, were the dying words of Thomas More on the scaffold: “I die the king’s good servant but God’s first.”<sup>13</sup>

Unadjustedness is then characterized by loyalty to long lasting values and ideas that have withstood the test of time, and not the ever shifting cultural and political trends that dominate an era. For example, Franklin Roosevelt was an Unadjusted Man because he took the steps necessary to prevent a revolution in the U.S. during the Great Depression. People on both the right and left criticized him for either going too far or not going far enough in his reforms. Yet, FDR understood that change was necessary in order to preserve the Republic, and instead of succumbing to radical change or doing nothing, he took the middle way.

By contrast, Senator Joe McCarthy is the antithesis to the Unadjusted Man. So infamous is the man that his witch-hunt like tactics are now called “McCarthyism.” Viereck would consider him to be the bad example of a non-conformist. He was a demagogue, and took advantage of early Cold War fears of communist infiltration and fanned them to the point of absurdity. Instead of using a reasoned approach to fighting communists, he waged a publicity campaign, designed more to suit his own vanity than for the public good. While he was correct in identifying the threat communism posed to

the United States, his methods, those that the Unadjusted Man would never use, were abhorrent.

Context is important in defining someone as unadjusted. In FDR's case, he was in the midst of one of the worst economic crises in American history. While his reforms would look radical in another era, in the context of his era they are reasonable and necessary. In a way, it could be said that FDR was actually a true conservative. He is definitely the Unadjusted Man. The trends of that era were to either do nothing, like some *laissez-faire* thinkers wished, or to embrace socialism. FDR did neither.

### **The Inner Check**

One last metric to determine whether an individual is a true conservative is by assessing what kind of will is driving that individual. The will to power? The will to greed? The measure of a true conservative is neither, but rather what Babbitt calls the "will to refrain" or the "inner check."

Babbitt argues that the will to refrain is "specifically human" and is "ultimately divine."<sup>14</sup> This will to refrain is "the idea of humility," that man should submit himself to a higher or divine will, in order to refrain from allowing lower impulses from ruling one's life. This type of will is found throughout the world in different regions and cultures but is ultimately the same. It is also not limited to any religion. Babbitt states that "the higher will and the power of veto it exercises over man's expansive desires is humanistic rather than religious."<sup>15</sup> This will to refrain, while not beholden to any religion, is a spiritual will, primarily in that it focuses on the inner life. Instead of being ruled solely by passion or intellect, one is ruled by either looking upon the example of the divine, such as Jesus Christ, or to the example of a moral leader, such as George Washington.

The humanistic example does not even require a historical figure; the moral leader could be one's parents. The inner check works by looking to either the divine or humanistic example to guide their life, and this is an internal spiritual conflict, not an external materialistic conflict.

The inner check functions as a true conservative principle by its submission to the higher or divine will, and also to the wisdom of the Golden Mean. For Babbitt, the “essence of humanism is moderation” and a “man's moderation is measured by his success in mediating between some sound general principle and the infinitely various and shifting circumstances of actual life.”<sup>16</sup> These sound principles are the wisdom of the ages, which Babbitt says that this wisdom is found in not just religious belief, like Christianity or Buddhism, but also in the humanistic philosophies of Aristotle and Confucius.<sup>17</sup> The type of individual that lives by these principles is truly Babbittian, in addition to being a true example of leadership.

## **Barack Obama**

*When it comes to foreign policy, Obama's habit of spouting internationalist bromides suggests little affinity for serious realism. His views are those of a conventional liberal. Nor has Obama expressed any interest in shrinking the presidency to its pre-imperial proportions. He does not cite Calvin Coolidge among his role models. And however inspiring, Obama's speeches are unlikely to make much of a dent in the culture. The next generation will continue to take its cues from Hollywood rather than from the Oval Office.*

-Andrew J. Bacevich

*I mean, there's nothing uniquely Democratic about a respect for civil liberties. There's nothing uniquely Democratic about believing in a foreign policy of restraint. You know, a lot of the virtues I talk about are virtues that are deeply embedded in the Republican Party... The Democrats don't have the monopoly on wisdom, but we have to make some sharp breaks from the failed administration policies of the past.*

-Barack Obama

The first quote, from Andrew J. Bacevich, comes from an article in which the author actually makes the case that conservatives should vote for Barack Obama come November. Bacevich argues that because of Obama's opposition to the Iraq War, he is

the only chance for the “modest prospect of a conservative revival.”<sup>18</sup> Despite this support, Bacevich does not believe that Obama is a conservative. It is not surprising that the author thinks this. The common perception of Obama in America is that he is a liberal. However, based on the criteria set forth previously, Barack Obama fits, albeit not perfectly, into the role of a true conservative. As a true conservative, it follows that Obama also fits the role of the Unadjusted Man, and abides by the inner check. And as for the next generation taking cues from Hollywood, maybe he can explain why there is an abundance of art featuring Obama, 812,671 members in the Facebook Obama page (as of May 7, 2008), and is energizing young Americans to vote in higher numbers than in years past?<sup>19, 20, 21</sup>

### **Obama as the True Conservative**

What makes Obama a true conservative is his avoidance of isms. In the beginning of his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama writes a chapter on Republicans and Democrats, in which he discusses how ideologues captured politics since the 1960s. He laments this fact, as the back and forth has produced a deadlock in politics, evidenced by nearly fifty-fifty split in the past two presidential elections. Obama is conservative in this sense because he understands that polarizing politics prevents people from seeing “their own self-interest as inextricably linked to the interests of others.”<sup>22</sup> Going further, Obama says:

Whenever we dumb down the political debate, we lose. For it’s precisely the pursuit of ideological purity, the rigid orthodoxy and the sheer predictability of our current political debate that keeps us from finding new ways to meet the challenges we face as a country.<sup>23</sup>

Obama understands the Burkean notion that doctrines and dogmas are dangerous. In America, it is dangerous because it has led to purely political, short term, and unrealistic solutions, and these solutions are often reversed or road blocked by the other side. He feels that there is a “trivialization” of politics at play, and the only way to reverse this is through the difficult task of uniting “a broad majority of Americans-Democrats, Republicans, and independents” in order to focus on and fix the many problems America faces.<sup>24</sup>

Many people label Obama as a liberal due to his position on health care. The criticism comes from those who think that Obama plans for something similar to “socialized medicine.” The fear is that people will receive lower quality health care due to higher costs, longer waiting times, and other issues. Indeed, a plan that would eliminate private health insurance in favor of a universal healthcare program run by the government is indeed socialistic. However, his plan is not “socialized medicine” nor is it universal health care. In short, his plan calls for a national health insurance program that would help insure the 47 millions Americans without health insurance. Universal health coverage, under Obama’s plan, would take generations to achieve, and is the kind of gradual change that a true conservative can support.

It is important to refer back to FDR’s example of true conservatism. By instituting his reforms during the Great Depression, he preserved the institutions and traditions of the United States. Therefore, as these institutions age over time, they are reformed and become a part of the institutions that need preserving. In short, it is conservative to preserve and reform social security, and counter-revolutionary to oppose or wish to eliminate it. Over time, additional reforms that were necessary, such as

Medicare, Medicaid, and welfare have become a part of American society. They provided support for those in need, much like social security. Although time has shown their flaws and tempered their excesses, they are an example of the gradual change that has taken place in America toward providing for those unable to provide for themselves.

It is unnecessary to go into the specific details of his plan, but the broad themes are reforms that “provide strong incentives for improved quality, prevention, and more efficient delivery of care.”<sup>25</sup> He believes that these focal points can lower costs, and the money saved can be used to provide subsidies to low-income families who can’t afford private insurance.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps most striking in Obama’s position on health care is that he believes that there are no easy fixes to reforming health care, but if people are committed to it, then “there are ways to accomplish it without breaking the federal treasury or resorting to rationing.”<sup>27</sup> Lastly, an important feature of his plan is the mandate that all children without insurance obtain coverage. It is this last point that signals Obama’s preference for gradual change. Instead of mandating coverage for all Americans, he focuses on children. This policy would therefore take generations before all Americans would benefit. This long term thinking is important to Obama’s conservatism.

In his discussion on health care, there are no doctrinaire positions that Obama takes. He states upfront that Medicare and Medicaid are broken, but he doesn’t aim to either increase its reach or completely dismantle it; he wants to reform these programs. He feels the same way about welfare, that while it “provided relief for many impoverished Americans, it did create some perverse incentives when it came to work ethic and family stability.”<sup>28</sup> While Obama focuses on reducing costs, he understands that reforms will still be expensive. Obama argues that the Bush Administration, in favoring

the rich and corporations with tax cuts, has contributed to income gap between rich and poor. If the U.S. were to end these tax policies that favor the rich and corporations, it would be possible to pay for health care reform (and of course, ending the Iraq War would help ease costs).

The income wealth gap between rich and poor in America is of course a cause for concern. It is on this point that moderation is best pursued. To side with radical liberals, an egalitarian society would eliminate the wealth gap, but egalitarianism makes the mistake that justice is about material equality. To side with *laissez-faire* capitalists, and with the current policies of the Bush administration, the income wealth gap will be greater, with the rich achieving a disproportionate share of the wealth, and the poor and middle class barely gaining or staying the same. Both sides are unhealthy for the United States.

Obama recognizes this possibility. In order to conserve American society, he feels that the wealth distribution that unfairly favors the rich (in his view, the major violators are corporations) must end, the social safety net must be strengthened, and greater investment in education in order to make Americans more competitive in the global economy. Warren Buffett says, in a discussion with Obama on unfair distribution of wealth, that his ability to earn his money was a result of his dependence on society. He makes the further point that it is up to the wealthy to reinvest that money in order to pay back society, but states that his rich peers feel that they “deserve to keep every penny” of their money.<sup>29</sup> And most conservative of all, Obama says, in response to Buffett, that in order to make this investment happen, it is not a simple matter of identifying the right policies, but “it will also have to do with a change in spirit, a willingness to put our

common interests and the interests of future generations ahead of short term expediency.”<sup>30</sup>

Shifting the focus from domestic politics to foreign policy, Obama firmly displays his true conservatism. As is well known, he is an opponent of the Iraq War, dating back to 2002 before the invasion, saying in a speech that he could not support “a dumb war, a rash war, a war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics.”<sup>31</sup> He is against the Iraq War for the same reasons that true conservatives are against the Iraq War: that the war is based on a belief that evil can be eliminated by spreading democracy. He does not believe that we can “impose democracy with the barrel of a gun” and that when such action is attempted “we aren’t just setting ourselves up for failure. We are helping oppressive regimes paint democratic activists as tools of foreign powers and retarding the possibility that genuine, homegrown democracy will ever emerge.”<sup>32</sup>

Obama believes that multilateral action should be preferred over unilateral action. He believes that the best way for Americans to restore their credibility in the world is to be cooperative and to stop acting selfishly. He certainly does not believe that international politics is a zero-sum game. He argues that:

When the world’s sole superpower willingly restrains its power and abides by internationally agreed upon standards of conduct, it sends a message that these are rules worth following, and robs terrorists and dictators of the argument that these rules are simply tools of American imperialism.<sup>33</sup>

This statement is truly conservative, in that it places emphasis on example, and not action. Babbitt argues in *Democracy and Leadership* that a true leader is one that abides by the inner check and provides an example for others to live by. It is a conservative notion that you should mind your own business, and settle your own affairs before you

can even comment on someone else's affairs. Obama even states this fact himself, by saying that "at least one area where we can act unilaterally and improve our standing in the world [is] by perfecting our own democracy and leading by example."<sup>34</sup> He goes further, by stating that the success of any foreign policy is ultimately derived by how the U.S. manages its most precious resource: "the American people, and the system of self-government we inherited from our Founders."<sup>35</sup>

It is exceptional for an American presidential candidate to state that the best way to lead in international relations is through example. This line of thinking can be explained by his unique experience growing up of mixed-race and living in Hawaii and Indonesia. He has the ability to see the perspective of the average American, and the perspective of a citizen from another country. This of course is not limited to international relations, and much like Adlai Stevenson, he is uniquely capable of seeing different perspectives, valuing them, and bringing them together to serve the cause of the whole.

### **Obama as the Unadjusted Man**

*A government that truly represents these Americans-that truly serves these Americans-will require a different kind of politics. That politics will need to reflect our lives as they are actually lived. It won't be prepackaged, ready to pull off the shelf. It will have to be constructed from the best of our traditions and will have to account for the darker aspects of our past.*

-Barack Obama

The above quote is about the average American, who may or may not be struggling through unemployment, debt, and an uncertain future. To solve the problems of the average American, there must be reasonable, sensible people coming up with realistic solutions. This requires a new kind of politics, without the polarization, without the mean-spirited personal attacks, without the doctrines and dogmas that lead to

deadlock instead of cooperation. Obama represents this new kind of politics, which in its essence, is the old kind of politics. It is the unadjusted, gentlemanly way of doing politics, which has fallen by the wayside over the past decades. By not conforming to the politics of division, animosity, and sometimes downright hatred, Obama is the Unadjusted Man.

In the beginning of *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama recounts some older senators reminiscing about the post-World War II period, where politics was less ideological. Obama tells this story for a reason; he wants this old politics back. This is the longstanding politics of civil disagreement and criticism, not the “tricky Dick” politics of Nixon. This is why Obama refuses to air negative advertisements. Instead of pointing out the follies of his opponent’s, he rather attacks their attacks. In one particular ad, he accuses Clinton of engaging “in the same old negative politics” about a proposed gas tax holiday.<sup>36</sup> He refuses to conform to the current political climate of attacking your opponent’s shortcomings or furthering falsehoods. He criticizes their ideas about policy instead. In one particularly funny appearance, in a speech in North Carolina after the April 16, 2008 Philadelphia debate, Obama responded to questions that attacked his character and patriotism by saying “you just gotta, kinda, let it...” and then he proceeded to calmly brush some imaginary dirt of his shoulder.<sup>37</sup>

The pattern seen when reading Obama’s book is how calmly he looks at every issue. He doesn’t insult or condemn, even those who may deserve it. He doesn’t attack people. His moderation and demeanor is identical to what the Unadjusted Man is. As previously noted, the Unadjusted Man will agonize over an issue before coming to a decision. An example of Obama agonizing occurs during his Senate campaign in 2004.

His opponent, Republican Alan Keyes, declared that “Christ would not vote for Obama because Barack Obama has voted to behave in a way that it is inconceivable for Christ to have behaved.”<sup>38</sup> Instead of dismissing his comments offhand, as some advisors told him to, Obama “could not help but take Mr. Keyes seriously.”<sup>39</sup> Instead of running away from his comment, it spurred Obama to write about how faith cannot be ignored in politics, and that “both religious and secular people” share the values that bring our society together.<sup>40</sup>

As the child of a white mother from Kansas, and a black father from Kenya, Obama is aware of both perspectives in black-white relations in America. It is because of his uncommon heritage, coupled with his true conservative mode of thought, which allows him to transcend the polarization of race relations in America. Unlike other African-American leaders in America, such as Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, or Louis Farrakhan, Obama doesn’t engage in demagoguery. As someone who sees both sides, he is able to make decisions that are designed to help both sides, which he refers to a “rising tide” that will not only lift up minorities, but all Americans.<sup>41</sup> Obama doesn’t like to refer to himself as a “black candidate;” he is an American candidate.

This does not make Obama unrealistic about race relations in America. He understands that America still faces problems with regards to race, even if things are better than they once were. He also recognizes that the government can only partially help minorities gain equal status (equal in terms of economics, education, and other issues where discrimination may play a factor); he states that “minorities, individually and collectively, have responsibilities as well.”<sup>42</sup> He strongly believes that personal

responsibility comes first when confronting one's problems. The government can only reach so far.

These are true conservative notions. They are also qualities of the Unadjusted Man. He wants to help all Americans, not just minorities. And he does not believe that government programs that specifically target minorities can “serve as the basis for the kinds of sustained, broad-based political coalitions needed to transform America.”<sup>43</sup> This language seems to imply that affirmative action is not a long term solution to ending discrimination. Obama understands that affirmative action is limited, and says as much. It is brave for an African-American, much less a presidential candidate (even a “liberal” one at that) to question the viability of affirmative action. This is not the quality of the conformist; it is the quality of the Unadjusted Man.

### **Obama and the Inner Check**

The inner check, or the will to refrain, as defined by Babbitt, is the submission to the divine will or the higher will in order to prevent the lower passions from dominating the soul. This inner check is not limited to religion, and is found in different humanistic philosophies. All the candidates in the ongoing primaries are Christians, so what difference does it make if they all believe in Jesus Christ? The difference, I believe, is the emphasis that Barack Obama places on his faith, and it is shown that Obama is a true example of Babbitt's inner check.

In his chapter on Faith in *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama discusses his upbringing. He was raised to experience all religions, and never was forced into one as a child. For most of his young life, he grappled with questions concerning his spirituality. He has a

typical Kierkegaardian view on faith: he has many doubts and questions concerning his religion, but has faith that it is true and will work toward grace. In his own words:

It came about as a choice and not an epiphany; the questions I had did not magically disappear. But kneeling beneath that cross on the South Side of Chicago, I felt God's spirit beckoning me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth.<sup>44</sup>

In submitting himself to the divine will, Obama lives by the inner check. In doing so, his example is quite Babbittean. Not only because he lives by the inner check, but his leadership is so inspiring. He leads by example. He is not a tricky politician. He is, and perhaps this is comically paradoxical, an honest politician.

## **Conclusion**

The audacity of hope. That was the best of the American spirit, I thought-having the audacity to believe despite all evidence to the contrary that we could restore a sense of community to a nation torn by conflict; the gall to believe that despite personal setbacks, the loss of a job or an illness in the family or a childhood mired in poverty, we had some control-and therefore responsibility-over our own fate.  
-Barack Obama

Many of Senator Obama's speeches invoke the themes of hope and change. In his speech on race, he stated that children should have the hope "that they can write their own destiny."<sup>45</sup> Some people may feel that this is naïve. The idea that an individual can transcend his or her circumstances and create something new is certainly unrealistic, and Obama is rightly guilty of fomenting this idea. However, when reading more deeply into his thoughts, it becomes clear that he is realistic about people's chances to write their own destiny. He doesn't believe, in the Rousseauistic sense, that someone can eliminate their past. On the issue of race, he says that America must "acknowledge the sins of our past and the challenges of the present without becoming trapped in cynicism or despair."<sup>46</sup> He is a believer in the American Dream, and that anyone, given the will and the means, can reach it.

Obama is not the perfect example of a true conservative. For instance, the issue of abortion is where he can be uncompromising. He believes that a ban on abortion would force women to perform risky, underground abortions, and would violate a woman's right to choose. Despite his unwillingness to change his position, he recognizes the frustrations on both sides of the abortion issue. When he discusses how moral problems are to be solved, there is a choice to be made on "whether we need the coercive arm of the state to enforce our values, or whether the subject is one best left to individual conscience and evolving norms."<sup>47</sup> Yet, he recognizes that these principles won't always work, especially on an issue as polarizing as abortion. Even though he feels that persuasion is the best way to solve the issue, he feels that those in power should refocus "on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies through education...or any other strategies that have broad support and have been proven to work."<sup>48</sup> He even relates a story where he met a small group of anti-abortion protesters outside a rally, and instead of avoiding them, went up to them, introduced himself, and explained his position. Despite his unwillingness to change on this issue, he still shows himself as the Unadjusted Man with regards to his demeanor in talking with those he opposes.

As a follower of the inner check, Obama believes that in the end, responsibility for one's life rests on the individual. While the government can and should play a helping hand, it is not responsible for someone's personal failure. Obama understands this. Through his example, he can inspire people to do more than fume about their circumstances. He can inspire them to create something with their lives, for the benefit of themselves, their families, and their communities. This is a truly conservative belief, rooted in the philosophy of Aristotle, Burke, and Babbitt.

In many ways, Obama's positions and rhetoric appeal to common sense, and perhaps this is why his candidacy is so appealing to Americans. The principles of the true conservative, the Unadjusted Man, and the inner check are driven by this appeal to common sense. It is ruled by the sense of moderation, best explained by Aristotle and his Golden Mean. When reading *The Audacity of Hope*, it is striking to see how evenhanded and reasonable Obama is. Moderation rules Obama, much like the inner check rules him. While he is certainly not perfect embodiment of these true conservative principles (no man is perfect), he is nevertheless a unique figure relative to modern politics, because so few politicians today follow these principles. It is unlikely that a politician with his qualities exists in contemporary American politics. It is exactly for this reason that his leadership is needed in America. Leaders of his type are so rare, and if it is indeed that the last Unadjusted Man to be president was Franklin Roosevelt, then America cannot squander its chances to elect the next great American president.

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