

THE PALIN-OBAMA CONVERGENCE

By Michael Ventura

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Barack Obama and Sarah Palin are actually the same person.

No, really, they are.

Apparent opposites, they parallel each other uncannily.

Palin and Obama each came out of nowhere. Almost instantly, each commanded the brightest of national spotlights.

Each – again, instantly! – forged a direct, forceful connection with a select but loud audience. Palin's core crowds were passionately idealistic middle-aged rednecks, and Obama's were passionately idealistic young liberals.

Palin and Obama knew exactly what their respective audiences wanted to hear and knew exactly how to say it.

Then their appeal expanded quickly to the mainstream of their parties.

Palin and Obama lacked realistic experience for high national office but possessed star quality that – abracadabra! – made their inexperience a virtue to enthusiasts who believed that Palin and Obama were originals who'd forge stunning new solutions to our seemingly intractable dilemmas. Each had a unique way of making unrealistic generalities sound like plausible proposals – if one didn't look too closely, and continue to look.

Palin and Obama inspired precisely what their enthusiasts wanted to feel. For both, analysis was anathema and emotion was everything. Remember Obama exhorting crowds with shouts of "This is what is possible if you believe!" The crowds shouted back, "We believe!" Obama continued: "There are a lot of people who tell you not to believe! There are a lot of naysayers. A lot of doubting Thomases." "We believe!" roared the crowds, "we believe!" (as described in *The New York Times*, Feb. 5, 2008, p.A16).

Palin and Obama each claimed divine guidance. Footage of Palin's church services were all over the Internet, and Obama testified: "I felt I heard God's spirit beckoning me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth and carrying out His works" (*The Atlantic*, Dec. 2007, p.49).

Palin is an attractive woman in her 40s, and Obama is an attractive man in his 40s, "attractive" being a polite media word for "sexy," though during the campaign it was politically incorrect to observe that these were the sexiest national candidates in history, and it was more than incorrect to notice that the electorate was, in the funky sense, turned on.

Palin's audience had no respect for Obama's, and Obama's had no respect for Palin's. Neither Palin nor Obama attempted to mute this corrosive disrespect. Cleverly, Palin, with her trademark sauciness, and Obama, with his trademark air of superiority, encouraged any class bigotry they found useful for their ambitions.

Palin's spotty, pettily corrupt record as mayor and governor in a politically inconsequential state was ignored by her enthusiasts. Obama's spotty and occasionally quite corrupt record as a state legislator and novice senator was thought inconsequential by his enthusiasts. On Feb. 3, 2008, on the front page of its Sunday edition, two days before Super Tuesday, *The New York Times* ran a detailed article on Obama's dealings with the Illinois nuclear industry, citing broken promises, lies, and sellouts that resulted in hefty contributions to Obama's campaign coffers. The story passed as though it never existed, though it was Obama's one significant act as a United States senator (aside from running for president).

Again and again, intelligent people I know looked hard at Obama's record and – intellectually, if you will – they sort of blinked. Looked away. Watched his next campaign speech. Decided, almost nonverbally, that his record didn't matter.

This particular mojo – unconcern for flagrant betrayals – has continued for Palin and Obama after the election.

As governor of Alaska, Palin swore an oath to "faithfully discharge my duties" (www.vlex.com/vid/oath-of-office-300664). She betrayed that oath when she quit the governorship before her term ended, but that made not a dent in her popularity and influence among people who vociferously stand for what they call "traditional American values." In two columns ("Conditions on the Ground," Dec. 18, 2009, and "Critical to the Success," Jan. 15), I documented Obama's lies and inconsistencies as he justified his escalation of the war in Afghanistan. Liberals made not a peep. Most have behaved as though the war isn't taking place and Obama isn't lying about it, though liberals behaved very differently toward the same actions by George W. Bush. And liberals seem not to have noticed that Bush's secretary of defense, Robert Gates, is also Obama's secretary of defense, nor that Gates has become "perhaps the most influential member of the Obama cabinet" (*The New York Times*, Nov. 8, p.A15).

With the recent Democratic midterm debacle, liberals have rightfully decried the Supreme Court decision that freed up anonymous money pumped into races countrywide. What they seem to have forgotten is that, early in the campaign for the presidential nomination, Barack Obama and John McCain signed a promise to use only public money. The pledge was Obama's idea (*The New York Times*, Feb. 15, 2008, p.A18). He put in writing that this was something he'd "aggressively pursue." Liberals were happy when he broke that promise and took money from wherever he could get it, outspending McCain two-to-one (*The Week*, Nov. 12). Obama's enthusiasts were again like Palin's: Victory mattered more than – well, more than anything.

Obama swept into the nomination on the enthusiasms of people too young to know better and people who should have known better but were entranced by a sense of possibility substantiated by little but image and gab.

It's worth noting that in the recent midterm election "corporate political action committees gave 53 percent of their donations to Democrats, compared with 35 percent in the last midterm election" (*The Week*, Nov. 12, p.22). If you follow the money, the rhetoric that corporations are dissatisfied with Obama holds little water. They're doing fine with Obama. "The Standard & Poor's 500-stock index [had] its best September since 1938" (*The Week*, Oct. 15, p.44). "From January 2009, when President Obama took office, through June 2010, corporate profits increased 62 percent, the strongest 18-month rise since the 1920s" (*The Week*, Nov. 12, p.48). Meanwhile, 20 million Americans are out of work or underemployed.

It's hard to imagine corporations doing better in a Republican administration, though workers would undoubtedly be doing much worse.

Palin has been clever enough to stick with campaigning, reveling in the power of influence, so much easier to wield than executive power, while Obama and his enthusiasts have become the playthings of circumstance.

Now it's the Republicans' turn to become circumstance's puppets. Obama had good intentions and pathetic strategies. Republicans have no ideas and one strategy: Make Obama a one-term president. The odds favor them.

Obama looks bewildered and whipped. Maybe he'll rally. Maybe not. As for Palin, she still looks sexy. Sexy is its own reward.

They no longer mirror each other. Obama probably wishes they still did.

What happened to his eloquence? Historians will debate that endlessly. During the campaign, Obama's eloquence was classical – a white-wine eloquence. Palin's is a gum-chewing, Coors-in-a-can patter. Only churlishness would deny her credit for managing her image better than he's managed his. As for eloquence, she said it for everyone with the best political one-liner of Obama's term so far:

"How's that hopey-changey thing workin' out for ya?"

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