

The Dude Abides – Why Honolulu Appears To Have Trumped Chicago

Ken Taub

MAYBE IT'S JUST ME, but have you gotten the feeling lately that not too long ago, late one night, the First Wife told her husband in no uncertain terms that she is just not enjoying their great White House adventure all that much, so how do we get out of here by January 2013, and what do you have to do to make that happen?

In short, why does it seem that this President is not only failing to make the argument, but appearing like he's actually trying to lose the 2012 election two years early?

Much ink has been spilled on why this cool, charismatic candidate from 2007-08 has become so stiff and seemingly reluctant in 2009-10 – not only in his own defense but in the defense of his potent legislative record.

Yes, he inherited an unholy mess that needed tending to, but really now, who turned off the switch?

Why does he appear to be surfing his time in office, letting events, no matter how large, set compass to his steps and define his presidency? When exactly did suave and engaged turn to heartbreakingly mellow?

I know, I know, he had to run as Jackie Robinson and not Barry Bonds to get elected in the first place, but now that he's the POTUS for nearly two years he would certainly be excused for exhibiting the power that comes with this office, including the intermittent tendency to kick some hindquarter and stand some ground.

Oh, and perhaps dynamically express his personal convictions now and again.

Well, he's a Democratic, you may say. And we all know that Democrats are inclined to fight by Marquis of Queensbury rules in a street fight, while groin-kicking Republicans remain unflinchingly convinced that they are In The Right even when the past 10 (if not 30) years may have proved otherwise.

It's confounding. There are at least two dozen actual accomplishments that Barack Obama could ribbon up and sell without breaking a sweat (or better yet, by shouting them from the right soapbox with just a hint of actual sweat on his brow, for dramatic effect if nothing else). While, on the other hand, the Republicans serve up their spicy

misinformation and wild accusations with such nonstop gusto that they might as well be a very drunk chef from the Bayou, speaking in an unclear tongue and selling gumbo recipes they know to be bad to unsuspecting suburbanites, country folk, ranch hands, and all who might be willing to consume such a foul, artificial stew.

So you have to, if nothing else, admire the nerve of the Right, while you wonder what happened to that determined, history-making young man who once showed nothing but nerve. I mean, *someone* had to whisper *something* to him late one night, right?

There is still an ample space – some arena of the heart as yet untrammelled by cable news or town hall rowdies – where one has admiration and private high regard for this special individual gifted by calm and thoughtful judgment. Then there is the cold daylight, where reverie has no sway and admiration yields no power. Yes, perhaps he's just too nice to shake (and hell, the secret service is ever present), and he is after all the sitting Prez. Still...

Someone has to smack that Harvard-educated, professorial-sounding fellow; like Cher did to Nick Cage in *Moonstruck*, yelling "Snap out of it!" The Right declares we got an international Socialist cum secret Muslim in the White House. Not even close. What we seem to have is not scary Barack Hussein Obama but Barry from Hawaii, a most mellow, accommodating, sandal wearing, go with the flow Dude. Ergo the slap.

That said, and against much evidence to date, I choose to remain hopeful. I choose to envision this president over the next two months and especially at his State of the Union address stand up tall, elegant and fierce and challenge his opponents – the streetfighters who want to win more than they want to govern – to go ahead, dismantle the healthcare bill that now provides it to 35 million more citizens and prevents you from losing it when you need it most... and go ahead, be my guest, deregulate Wall Street once again and let them run wild... and go ahead, kill the missile treaty with Russia and the pending trade deal with South Korea... and cut the education budget and put us farther behind Europe, India and China in math and science... and to go ahead, I dare you, let the rich keep more and more of the pie while the middle class is clobbered from nearly every direction.

What to do? Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States, could – maybe, perhaps -- actually speak up; standing up to Republicans who distract with mis-

information and denounce with falsehoods, and reclaim what we all loved most about him the most: his dignity. And...

By the way, Michelle, if I got it wrong, and what you actually have been whispering in your husband's ear at night is "Fight, fight, fight," then I quickly apologize. I do.

Besides, we're all adults here and we know that the fault lies not in the stars or in the bedroom advice or in the ship of state, but in the captain. The one we hired to steer this great boat.

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