

A Stranger in Our Midst

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As the Obama administration enters its second year, I -- and undoubtedly millions of others -- have struggled to develop a shorthand term that captures our emotional unease. Defining this discomfort is tricky. I reject nearly the entire Obama agenda, but the term "being opposed" lacks an emotional punch. Nor do terms like "worried" or "anxious" apply. I was more worried about America's future during the Johnson or Carter years, so it's not that dictionary, either. Nor, for that matter, is this about backroom odious deal-making and pork, which are endemic in American politics.

After auditioning countless political terms, I finally realized that the Obama administration and its congressional collaborators almost resemble a foreign occupying force, a coterie of politically and culturally non-indigenous leaders whose rule contravenes local values rooted in our national tradition. It is as if the United States has been occupied by a foreign power, and this transcends policy objections. It is not about Obama's birthplace. It is not about race, either; millions of white Americans have had black mayors and black governors, and this unease about out-of-synch values never surfaced.

The term I settled on is "[alien rule](#)" -- based on outsider values, regardless of policy benefits -- that generates agitation. This is what bloody anti-colonial strife was all about. No doubt, millions of Indians and Africans probably grasped that expelling the British guaranteed economic ruin and even worse governance, but at least the mess would be their mess. Just travel to Afghanistan and witness American military commanders' efforts to enlist tribal elders with promises of roads, clean water, dental clinics, and all else that America can freely provide. Many of these elders probably privately prefer abject poverty to foreign occupation since it would be their poverty, run by their people, according to their sensibilities.

This disquiet was a slow realization. Awareness began with Obama's odd pre-presidency associations, decades of being oblivious to Rev. Wright's anti-American ranting, his enduring friendship with the terrorist guy-in-the-neighborhood Bill Ayers, and the Saul Alinsky-flavored anti-

capitalist community activism. Further add a hazy personal background -- an Indonesian childhood, shifting official names, and a paperless-trail climb through elite educational institutions.

None of this disqualified Obama from the presidency; rather, this background just doesn't fit with the conventional political résumé. It is just the "outsider" quality that alarms. For all the yammering about George W. Bush's privileged background, his made-in-the-USA persona was absolutely indisputable. John McCain might be embarrassed about his Naval Academy class rank and iffy combat performance, but there was never any doubt of his authenticity. Countless conservatives despised Bill Clinton, but nobody ever, ever doubted his good-old-boy American bonafides.

The suspicion that Obama is an outsider, a figure who really doesn't "get" America, grew clearer from his initial appointments. What "native" would appoint Kevin Jennings, a militant gay activist, to oversee school safety? Or permit a Marxist rabble-rouser to be a "green jobs czar"? How about an Attorney General who began by accusing Americans of cowardice when it comes to discussing race? And who can forget Obama's weird defense of his pal Louis Henry Gates from "racist" Cambridge, Massachusetts cops? If the American Revolution had never occurred and the Queen had appointed Obama Royal Governor (after his distinguished service in Kenya), a trusted locally attuned aide would have first whispered in his ear, "Mr. Governor General, here in America, we do not automatically assume that the police were at fault," and the day would have been saved.

And then there's the "we are sorry, we'll never be arrogant again" rhetoric seemingly designed for a future President of the World election campaign. What made Obama's Cairo utterances so distressing was how they grated on American cultural sensibilities. And he just doesn't notice, perhaps akin to never hearing Rev. Wright anti-American diatribes. An American president does not pander to third-world audiences by lying about the Muslim contribution to America. Imagine Ronald Reagan, or any past American president, trying to win friends by apologizing. This appeal contravenes our national character and far exceeds a momentary embarrassment about garbled syntax or poor delivery. Then there's Obama's bizarre, totally unnecessary deep bowing to foreign potentates. Americans look foreign leaders squarely in the eye and firmly shake hands; we don't bow.

But far worse is Obama's tone-deafness about American government. How can any ordinary American, even a traditional liberal, believe that jamming through unpopular, debt-expanding legislation that consumes one-sixth of our GDP, sometimes with sly side-payments and with a thin majority, will eventually be judged legitimate? This is third-world, maximum-leader-style politics. That the legislation was barely understood even by its defenders and vehemently championed by a representative of that typical American city, San Francisco, only exacerbates the strangeness. And now President Obama sides with illegal aliens over the State of Arizona, which seeks to enforce the federal immigration law to protect American citizens from marauding drug gangs and other miscreants streaming in across the Mexican border.

Reciprocal public disengagement from President Obama is strongly suggested by recent poll data on public trust in government. According to a recent Pew report, only 22% of those asked trust the government always or most of the time, among the lowest figures in half a century. And while pro-government support has been slipping for decades, the Obama presidency has sharply exacerbated this drop. To be sure, many factors (in particular the economic downturn) contribute to this decline, but remember that Obama was recently elected by an often wildly enthusiastic popular majority. The collapse of trust undoubtedly transcends policy quibbles or a sluggish economy -- it is far more consistent with a deeper alienation.

Perhaps the clearest evidence for this "foreigner in our midst" mentality is the name given our resistance -- tea parties, an image that instantly invokes the American struggle against George III, a clueless foreign ruler from central casting. This history-laden label was hardly predetermined, but it instantly stuck (as did the election of Sen. Scott Brown as "the shot heard around the world" and tea parties dressing up in colonial-era costumes). Perhaps subconsciously, Obama does remind Americans of when the U.S. was really occupied by a foreign power. A Declaration of Independence passage may still resonate: "HE [George III] has erected a Multitude of new Offices [Czars], and sent hither Swarms of Officers [recently hired IRS agents] to harass our People, and eat out the Substance."

What's next?

