

This is a Presidential race like no other. On the Democratic side, we have the choice of exceptional candidates: intelligent public servants who are passionate in their commitments to a strong and inclusive America.

But we have neither the luxury nor constraint of making our choice this time based purely on policy differences, because the Democratic candidates have laid out detailed plans and prescriptions that are largely similar. So instead, in this election, other qualities – especially a candidate's character and ability to unite Americans of all persuasions around common policy goals – play a larger role than usual.

Indeed, we are offered, for the first time in many decades, the choice of a candidate of extraordinary character, leadership, judgment, integrity, and inspiration – a combination and range of qualities that is rare to find in someone operating at the highest political levels. And so we can make our choice in this election based on a rare convergence of *both* our minds and our hearts.

Barack Obama is the right man for the Presidency, and his time is now. He has been a phenomenon for more than 20 years, when I first encountered him at Harvard Law School. But he is not the kind of flash-in-the-pan phenomenon that some of his rivals had been hoping for and expecting. He is the real thing.

I worked in the Clinton White House and Administration, and was very proud to do so. But I left Washington for New York after the first term in 1996 because I came to feel that it would be easy within our nation's capital to become a "moon" – one who basks in the reflected light of others and feels important because one is in an important position, around important people, or dealing with important issues.

I felt that it was hard (and rare), hanging around the Beltway, to become a "sun" who had discovered and cultivated the inner light within oneself, and who came to Washington having something truly unique and creative to offer and wanting to extend that light outward to others.

Now, twelve years later, I can truly say that we have the option of electing a sun, and he is Barack Obama.

Much has been said about Senator Obama's extraordinary gifts of oratory and inspiration. But less has been said about the inner strengths and qualities that are manifested in his outer sheen. Unlike his rival, who "found [her] own voice" just a few weeks ago in the snows of New Hampshire, Barack has lived his life of service from the inside out. He knows who he is. He pursues politics not as an end or as an art form in itself, but as a necessary means to achieve higher ends. His is a moral compass that will guide him and our nation well.

And so this campaign is not – as he frequently says in his public appearances – about him; it is about us. It is not a vehicle for him to find *his* voice; it is a catalyst for inspiring Americans to express *our* collective voice. He talks not about what "I will do for you," but about what "we will achieve together." He will help all of us, together, usher in a whole new era of politics, one in which we can truly be inspired to reclaim our sense of active, empowered citizenship.

In a world that has experienced too often the failures and dangers of top-down political structures, the prospect of revitalizing American democracy through active, common-sense citizen involvement from the bottom up is the change we need to see in the world.

We hear much about candidates' relative experience and inexperience in terms only of their years in Washington or in politics. But we hear little of candidates' life experiences outside of politics, or the grit and stamina and grace they may have displayed in getting to where they are from where they came.

More than any other major figure on the American political scene, Senator Obama's political outlook is shaped by truly having been a citizen of the world. He was born to a black Kenyan father and a white mother from Kansas. A self-made man, he was raised by his single mother and maternal grandparents in an environment without many material advantages. His paternal African grandmother still lives in a Kenyan hut without running water and electricity. Raised in the multicultural environments of Hawaii and Indonesia, Senator Obama can passionately engage with, actively listen to and respectfully speak with people of all backgrounds and faiths.

Senator Obama is a man of faith, but an inclusive sense of faith – a faith that tempers his great intellect with humility, not a faith that aims to cover up a lack of intellect with false certitude. His office displays a portrait of Gandhi, and he is moved by theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr, who coincidentally expressed my favorite sentiment ever: "Power without love is brutality, but love without power is mere sentimentality."

As someone who travels the world as a US diplomat,

'Obama has the character, intellect, judgment, experience, integrity, and leadership to lead our nation well'



■ Senator Barack Obama shakes hands with a supporter

J.D. POOLEY/GETTY IMAGES

including to many predominantly Muslim countries, I can attest just how critical Senator Obama's unique life experience is, in formulating and projecting a forceful but intelligent American foreign policy that above all protects America but also commands the respect of the world. As one noted commentator wrote recently, even apart from his articulated policies for enhancing America's standing in the world, his mere election to the Presidency would lead to an immediate "rebranding" of America, and increase immeasurably our "soft power" in the world.

The Senator's unique life experience, combined with his correct and consistent judgment about the Iraq war from the beginning, harken back to another great leader who was challenged as having a "thin" resume because he had served in the Illinois state legislature, practiced law, and returned to politics to serve only one term as a representative in Congress before deciding to run for President. That leader, of course, was Abraham Lincoln. But after making a name in the presidential campaign by exhibiting the courage to speak out against the deeply accepted practice of slavery, Lincoln was able, as president, to take the side of the nation's better angels and to change the course of American history.

In contrast to many of his opponents, who have built their lives and ambitions in Beltway politics, Senator Obama is not someone who approaches politics as an end. He is a true public servant who, despite dazzling intellectual achievements – including being President of the *Harvard Law Review* and at the very top of his class at Harvard Law School – gave up every lucrative and prestigious opportunity to go back to Chicago, where he had earlier been a community organizer for many years.

Yet while rooted in the experience of organizing working class communities in Chicago – and while personally and deeply aware of conditions of global poverty – he has the intelligence and judgment to speak comfortably with leaders in London, Mumbai, Brussels or Wall Street about economic theory and foreign policy.

Senator Obama – through the multitude of his life experiences and the calm, respectful style of his leadership – is someone who naturally and instinctively bridges so many divides. He connects and brings together the global background of his youth with the local communities he organ-

ized as an adult; the ordinary experiences of working class people in America and globally, with the perspectives of highly educated academics, policymakers and professionals; the blue states of Democrats with the red states from which his mother and grandparents came.

Because governing and tackling the major challenges facing our nation these days require more than a bare majority of support, it is essential that we elect someone who in style and substance is able and willing to reach out beyond the traditional Democratic "base", and who can inspire large numbers of American citizens to transcend the often-bitter attempts in our politics to divide us.

Let me add, finally, that there is sometimes an attempt to perceive or create divisions between immigrants and African Americans. But we are all beneficiaries of the struggles to overcome this nation's racial injustices. The very reason for our presence in this country is the 1965 Immigration Act, which eliminated the last remaining formal color line in the US laws – the exclusion of Asians that appeared in the immigration laws since the late 19th century. Those legal hurdles came down following the successes of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act.

So as we try to work to clean up America's image and policy toward the world and its policies at home, I can think of no better leader than Senator Obama, who – in part because of who he is and where he came from, but also because of what he believes and what he has accomplished – would give America a whole new fresh chance.

He truly believes in Gandhi's approach that we must lead by the example of our ideals and our actions – including by fostering economic opportunity for each individual, and by respecting pluralism and restoring the rule of law at home and abroad. His light has a transformative potential at this critical juncture in our nation's and our world's affairs. He has the character, intellect, judgment, experience, integrity, and leadership to lead our nation well.

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