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BEST OF THE WEB TODAY | AUGUST 16, 2011

## Tony & Tacky

*Jimmy Carter, Barack Obama and the decline of the liberal elite.*

By JAMES TARANTO

The Cato Institute's [David Boaz](#) calls our attention to a columnist's harsh assessment of the president's re-election effort: "Has there ever been a campaign as vacuous, as negative, as whiny? Probably so--somewhere back in the mists of the American Presidency."

"Back in the mists"? What about Jimmy Carter? That, reader, is the gag: The column Boaz quoted was about Carter, not Barack Obama. What's surprising is that it wasn't written by William F. Buckley or James J. Kilpatrick but by the leading liberal columnist of the day, [Anthony Lewis](#) of the New York Times.

Lewis's column, published 2½ weeks before Carter's landslide de-election, is a fascinating time capsule. Lewis, who was as liberal as they came, managed to get Ronald Reagan totally wrong. He not only described the soon-to-be president as holding "extreme and ignorant views" but wrote that "Reagan, with all his personal amiability, takes an essentially gloomy view of the American situation":

We are weak, he says; we are declining economically; the Russians are trampling over our interests; the world mocks us.

What fun a Franklin Roosevelt would have with that Reagan picture of a pitiful America. He would tell the voters that the men in the Kremlin have much more reason for nervousness--in Poland, in Afghanistan, in their own economic muddle. We have problems, he would say, but we have the will and the ingenuity to solve them. He would give people dreams. He would inspire.

Lewis also argued that the only reason Carter (seemingly) had any chance of winning was that he was up against such a right-winger, instead of Gerald Ford or "a lesser-known figure with at least a facade of moderation, such as Howard Baker."

*Plus ça change:* Just yesterday [E.J. "Baghdad Bob" Dionne](#) moaned that "no sane human being . . . can pretend anymore that today's Republicans remain the party of Bob Dole or Howard Baker." The only thing that's changed in 30-plus years is that the late President Ford has given way to his erstwhile hatchet-man running mate as the symbol of bygone GOP moderation.



But Lewis had Jimmy Carter nailed. Carter complained about the media, "but it was Jimmy Carter, not the press, who said a victory for his opponent could divide this country between black and white, Christian and Jew. It was a remark almost, if not quite, worthy of Richard Nixon." (That *is* a change: Today when liberals compare Obama to Richard Nixon, they mean it as either a compliment

Tony Cenicola

Anthony Lewis, a liberal from a better time.

or a backhanded criticism of his supposed moderation.)

"There is no fun in Jimmy Carter," Lewis observed, "and very little of the self-confidence that [Franklin D.] Roosevelt communicated. Carter has acted as if his job were a pious duty. He has talked to us about malaise. He has uplifted practically no one. He has sent conflicting signals, to his own people as to the world."

The same words could be written today about Obama, who was a 19-year-old college student back then. But by and large, that's not what you read when you pick up the Times or other major liberal opinion organs. To be sure, Obama is unfavorably likened to FDR--but for being insufficiently demagogic, not cheerless and self-pitying.

Whereas Lewis criticized Carter for *being* demagogic, today's Timesmen don't notice Obama's demagoguery because it is mild by comparison with their own. Several Times columnists likened Obama's detractors to Islamic terrorists, and only one, Joseph Nocera, apologized. He had written that "the Tea Party Republicans have waged jihad on the American people."

Arthur Brisbane, the Times ombudsman (a position that didn't exist in 1980), praised Nocera over the weekend, writing that his apology "reflected well on him and, I believe, on The Times, too." But Brisbane also wrote that when asked if Nocera had gone too far, "Andrew Rosenthal, the editorial page editor, didn't think so."

Why is the Times so vulgar and ill-tempered today compared with Anthony Lewis's era? Part of the answer is that the liberal media have become more partisan as competition has eroded their authority and market share. "The Times is a struggling new media company now, and in new media the readers, viewers and dollars go to those who tell committed partisans and ideologues what they want to hear," observes blogger Mickey Kaus (analyzing a slanted news piece, not an editorial or column).

If the Times of today is not as confident and civil as Anthony Lewis was in 1980, it may be because the liberal media elite are in a position analogous to that of Democratic politicians then: bereft of new ideas, still disoriented a few years after a sudden loss of dominance and authority.

They also, we suspect, are personally invested in Obama in a way they never were in Carter. Obama, with his exotic upbringing and Ivy League background, is very much a creature of the liberal elite. Carter, a Naval Academy grad from rural Georgia, was not. Obama's race plays into this inasmuch as it reinforces the liberal elite's dissonant beliefs about themselves: that they are intellectually superior (and thus fit to govern others) and devoted to equality.

Obama's ascension to the presidency redeemed the worldview of the liberal elite. His failure in office is shattering it. That explains the primal reactions from the faculty lounges and the liberal editorial boards.

### Desperate Housewives

President Obama is nothing if not persistent. Having been rebuffed by Congress when he demanded "massive, job-killing tax increases," Obama is still pressing his case. Here he is at a "town hall" in Minnesota yesterday:

If we're willing to do something in a balanced way--making some tough choices in terms of spending cuts, but also raising some revenue from folks who've done very well, even in a tough economy--then we can get control of our debt and deficit and we can start still investing in things like education and basic research and infrastructure that are going to make sure that our future is bright. It's not that complicated, but it does require everybody being willing to make some compromises.

I was in Holland, Michigan, the other day and I said, "I don't know about how things work in your house, but in my house if I said, 'You know, Michelle, honey, we got to cut back, so we're going to have you stop shopping completely--you can't buy shoes, you can't buy dresses--but I'm keeping my golf clubs'--you know, that wouldn't go over so well."

What do Barack Obama and Michele Bachmann have in common? Both are submissive to their spouses!

Seriously, this is deeply weird. In Obama's analogy, he (in his role as president) is the spendthrift wife, and Congress is the husband she (the metaphorical wife) is trying to henpeck.

#### Related Video



Opinion Journal columnist James Taranto on President Obama's Midwest bus tour.

But Obama doesn't quite have it right. What he is demanding from Congress isn't analogous to a husband's giving up "golf clubs" --i.e., spending less money on himself. It's more like the wife demanding that the husband bring in more money: "You march right into your boss's office and demand a raise!" The poor husband knows he'd risk being fired for such impertinence. He's getting it from both sides.

In this case, though, the wife (Obama) works for the same boss (the American people) as the husband (Congress) does. And she is pleading with the boss to urge her husband to demand that the boss give him a raise. In the real world, the boss would fire the wife, and maybe the husband, too.

The bad news is that can't happen until 2012. The good news is the couple has a prenup (the U.S. Constitution), so while the divorce is sure to be acrimonious, at least the settlement may not be ruinous.

#### The Tea Party Meets the Pity Party

President Obama "went head-to-head with a prominent conservative Tea Party activist" in Iowa yesterday, Agence France-Press reports:

Ryan Rhodes, a leader of the group in Iowa, took on Obama during an open-air town hall meeting, which marked a moment of new intensity in the president's campaign for a second term.

Rhodes shouted out that the president's calls for more civility in politics had little chance of coming to pass after "your vice president is calling people like me, a Tea Party member, a 'terrorist.' "

As we noted [Aug. 2](#), Biden has denied he used the word "terrorist," though he seems to have at least assented when other Democrats did. At any rate, Obama wanted less tea and more sympathy;

"I absolutely agree that everybody needs to try to tone down the rhetoric," he said, before going on to detail some of the more explosive charges that conservatives have laid against him.

"In fairness, since I have been called a socialist who wasn't born in this country, who is destroying America and taking away its freedoms because I passed a health care bill, I am all for lowering the rhetoric."

As the [Washington Examiner](#) reports, Obama also likened himself to one of his greatest predecessors, but in an absurdly diminishing way: "Lincoln--they used to talk about him almost as bad as they talk about me."

[National Journal](#) has a video "mashup" that likens Obama to another much-maligned predecessor:

Obama's speeches on Monday at town-halls in Minnesota and Iowa sounded a lot like Rose-Garden remarks that [George W.] Bush made during a press conference in April 2008. Like Obama, Bush's job approval had just hit an all-time low. And like Obama, he was having trouble getting economic initiatives passed by a divided government--both the House and the Senate were controlled by Democrats. So how did Bush and Obama deal with these obstacles? By blaming Congress.

Obama, like Bush in the latter half of his second term, is in a weakened position, having suffered a huge setback in the midterm election. But unlike Bush, the weakness of Obama's position is compounded by his smallness as a person.

### **The Big Bus**

"The country's automakers should ditch their focus on SUVs and trucks in favor of smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicles, President Obama said Monday," the Hill reports:

"You can't just make money on SUVs and trucks," Obama said during a town hall forum in Cannon Falls, Minn. "There is a place for SUVs and trucks, but as gas prices keep on going up, you have got to understand the market. People are going to try to save money."

Good thing we have a president who understands business so well, or America might be struggling economically. Oh wait . . .

The president did not arrive in Cannon Falls in a Prius or one of those dinky Smart Cars. Officially, he came by "bus," but not just any bus. The [BBC](#) calls it a "battle bus": "Big, blocky, black, with painted-out windows, it looks more like a police mortuary van than a symbol of hope arriving on your street."

[TalkingPointsMemo.com](#) fills us in on the options:

With President Barack Obama embarking on his mid-August tour of the midwest on Monday, the public got its first look at one of two \$1.1 million armored buses that, as TPM first reported back in April, were recently purchased by the Secret Service and will be used on the campaign trail.

The bus is "an impenetrable-looking conveyance the size of a cross-country Greyhound, painted all in black, with dark tinted windows and flashing red and blue lights," according to a [Associated Press](#) description.

TPM notes that the eventual Republican nominee will get one of these things too. You can't just make money on SUVs and trucks, as the president notes. There's a booming market for bus-shaped armored personnel carriers too.

### **What a Wonderful Debacle**

"Vice President Biden will tout the debt ceiling deal during a trip to China and Japan," the Hill reports:

The vice president "will be in a good position to talk about the very strong deficit package that we concluded here recently," Undersecretary of the Treasury Lael Brainard told reporters Monday in comments previewing the vice president's visit.

That would be the same package that President Obama, in his Minnesota town hall, called a "debacle." Isn't the tradition for the president to be a statesman and the vice president the attack dog?

### **Riot, Please**

From an op-ed in the [Boston Globe](#):

Without influence in government and media, the only voice left to the poor is either large-scale violent or nonviolent protest, but the latter is much harder to organize and demands committed leadership that does not just emerge overnight. One hopes that aggression gives way to a more Gandhian approach, but, as the more straightforward of two alternatives, violence was foreseeable.

As predictable as the violence is the response. When the poor lash out, the comfortable condemn their moral decay and decry their criminality. The problem is not located in the

economic structures that make violence all but inevitable, but in the violent people themselves. The better off use the power of the state--whose violence, unlike that of the poor, is deemed justifiable--to force them back into alignment with the status quo ante in which they submit silently.

Conditions in the United States today are not so different from those in Britain.

Not that long ago, the Globe's sister paper, the New York Times, was blaming the Tea Party for political violence that had not actually occurred. Now the Globe is publishing justification for riots that have not happened.

### Ask a Former Enron Adviser

- "The real lesson from Europe is actually the opposite of what conservatives claim: Europe is an economic success, and that success shows that social democracy works."--[Paul Krugman](#), New York Times, Jan. 10, 2010
- "A 13-year-old boy has walked free from court after admitting smashing up a shop with a stolen golf club as his mother said the riots are because the government does 'f\*\*\* all' for children."--[Daily Telegraph](#) (London), Aug. 15

### View of the World From 8th Avenue

"The president's itinerary is giving him a homespun backdrop for his hard-edged message, taking him past family farms and through fly-speck towns like Peosta, Iowa, (population 1,377) and Alpha, Ill. (pop. 671)."--New York Times, Aug. 16

### Out on a Limb

- "Upcoming Reports Could Calm--or Validate--Recession Fears"--headline, [Los Angeles Times](#), Aug. 16
- "GOP Front-Runners' Hostility to Government Motivates Fiscal, Social Conservatives in Iowa"--headline, [TheNation.com](#), Aug. 15
- "Barack Obama Is Not Harry Truman"--headline, [Commentary](#) website, Aug. 15
- "Safety Questions Loom Over Indiana Stage Collapse"--headline, [Associated Press](#), Aug. 15
- "Krauthammer: 'Ron Paul Is Not Going to Be President of the United States' "--headline, [DailyCaller.com](#), Aug. 16
- "Christine O'Donnell: Witch Ad Was a Mistake"--headline, [CNN.com](#), Aug. 16

### World Ends, Etc.

- "Obama's Approval Hits All-Time Lows With Women, Blacks and Democrats, Says Gallup"--headline, [CNSNews.com](#), Aug. 15
- "Obama Souvenir Sales in Tailspin"--headline, [Washington Times](#), Aug. 16

### Generalissimo Francisco Franco Is Still Dead

"Paul Krugman Is Still Wrong About Texas"--headline, National Review Online, Aug. 15

### How's That Hopey Changey Stuff Workin' Out for Ya?

"30 Taken Into Custody at Yes We Can Social Club"--headline, KSDK-TV website (St. Louis), Aug. 15

### Holy Death Sect, Batman!

"Holy Death Sect Draws Followers in Violent Mexican Border City"--headline, FoxNews.com, Aug. 15

### She Gets the Kids, He Gets the Cell

"Ruth Madoff Reportedly Plans to Divorce Bernie"--headline, FoxNews.com, Aug. 15

### Questions Nobody Is Asking

- "Is Rick Perry as Christian as He Thinks He Is?"--headline, [TheAtlantic.com](#), Aug. 15
- "Who Do I Support With Pawlenty Gone?"--headline, [FrumForum.com](#), Aug. 15

### Answers to Questions Nobody Is Asking

- "How Gloria Steinem Forced Me Out of the Closet"--headline, [Puffington Host](#), Aug. 15
- "Does President Obama Love America? Rick Perry: 'You Need to Ask Him' "--headline, [ABCNews.com](#), Aug. 16
- "Obama on Tour: 'I Make No Apologies for Being Reasonable' "--headline, [Chicago Sun-Times](#), Aug. 16

### Look Out Below!

"Free Meals for All Detroit's Schoolchildren in Fall"--headline, [Detroit News](#), Aug. 16

### It's Always in the Last Place You Look

"The Olympics? You'll Find Me at the Seaside"--headline, [Daily Telegraph \(London\)](#), Aug. 15

### Too Much Information

"15 Things You Didn't Know About Members of Congress"--headline, [NationalJournal.com](#), Aug. 15

### Someone Set Up Us the Bomb

"Ron Paul Remains Media Poison"--headline, [Politico.com](#), Aug. 15

### Bottom Stories of the Day

- "Minnesota Delegation Not Rushing to Back Bachmann"--headline, [RollCall.com](#), Aug. 16
- "ACLU Sides With Sex Offenders"--headline, [Fox News Radio website](#), Aug. 16
- "On Mortgage Rates, Obama Wants Proposal for How Government Can Keep Big Role"--headline, [Washington Post](#), Aug. 15
- "Huntsman Campaign Picks Up Former T-Paw Staffer"--headline, [DailyCaller.com](#), Aug. 15
- "President Obama: I Will Introduce Specific Plan in September to Boost Economy--and If Congress Doesn't Act, We'll Run Against Them"--headline, [ABCNews.com](#), Aug. 15

### From Fantasy to Sci-Fi

"At a town hall meeting on the first stop of his Midwest bus tour, President Obama brushed off criticism of his health care overhaul, which many Republicans commonly deride as 'Obamacare,' " ABC's Jake Tapper reports:

Today the president was referring to The Affordable [sic] Care Act, which he pointed out is "also known as Obamacare."

"By the way, I have no problem with folks saying Obama cares. I do care," Obama said. "If the other side wants to be the folks that don't care, that's fine with me."

At first we thought the president was making an incredibly lame attempt at humor in the hope that voters would conclude that he should keep his day job. But then we realized he actually thinks he's [Luke Skywalker](#):

**Princess Leia:** It's not over yet.

**Han Solo:** It is for *me*, sister. Look, I ain't in this for your revolution, and I'm not in it for you, Princess. I expect to be well paid. *I'm* in it for the money.

**Leia:** You needn't worry about your reward. If money is all that you love, then that's what you'll receive.

[to Luke] Your friend is quite the mercenary. I wonder if he really cares about anything. Or anybody.

[She stalks out]

**Luke** [calling after her]: I care.

Having promised to heal the planet and make the oceans recede, Obama has switched idiom, from fantasy to



science fiction. Another example:

**Obama in Iowa yesterday:** "We had reversed the recession, avoided a depression, got the economy moving again, created 2 million private sector jobs over the last 17 months. But over the last six months, we've had a run of bad luck."

**Robert Heinlein**, in "Time Enough for Love," 1973: "Throughout history, poverty is the normal condition of man. Advances which permit this norm to be exceeded--here and there, now and then--are the work of an extremely small minority, frequently despised, often condemned, and almost always opposed by all right-thinking people. Whenever this tiny minority is kept from creating, or (as sometimes happens) is driven out of a society, the people then slip back into abject poverty. This is known as 'bad luck.' "

The other day, as [NewsBusters.com](#) notes, former Enron adviser Paul Krugman argued that if the government undertook "a massive buildup to counter the space alien threat . . . this slump would be over in 18 months." Some people thought he was joking.

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