



Now it's 'Obama the irrelevant'

By: Gene Healy

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If our fashion-conscious president still finds the time to read the lad-mags, December's GQ had to hurt. Obama made the magazine's list of "The 25 Least Influential People Alive," along with Tiger Woods's ex-caddie, the prosecutor who couldn't convict Casey Anthony, and MTV tart Tila Tequila.

Obama "should be the most transformational figure of the century," GQ carped, "Instead, he wields all the power of a substitute teacher at night school."

Sure, the piece was somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but there's real venom behind the smirk. Now is the hour of liberal discontent with the Obama presidency.

The "thrill up my leg" is gone for MSNBC's Chris Matthews. Obama has "the worst kind of a notion of the presidency," the Hardball host railed recently: "Why are we in this fight with him? Just tell us, commander, give us our orders and tell us where we're going, give us the mission."

Sigh. Where to begin? It's absurd to complain that Obama - who can launch wars without congressional approval and assassinate American citizens via drone strike, a man who sits atop an executive branch of 2.1 million civilian employees claiming authority over everything from how much salt we ingest to what sort of light bulbs we're permitted to use - is powerless.

And it's utterly perverse for anyone - let alone a journalist - to address a politician as "commander" and beg him for marching orders.

Obama's current difficulties were entirely predictable, however. It isn't just that he's been a terrible president, it's that no earthly figure could deliver the miracles he promised: among other things, "a complete transformation of the economy, "care for the sick and good jobs to the jobless," to "end the age of oil in our time," begin to heal the very planet and, perhaps most unrealistically, "fundamentally change the way Washington works."

Like they say, though, it couldn't happen to a nicer guy. Since Obama has stoked irrational public expectations for presidential salvation in virtually every public policy area, it's hard to feel sorry for him.

Yet some folks manage the feat. That's apparent from an article called, "The Carterization of Barack Obama" in the new issue of Esquire. (Some guys peruse the lad-mags for the racy pictures; I read them for the articles).

In it, Charles P. Pierce argues that: "The problem with redemptive presidents is that, invariably, they call upon the country to be as good and decent a place as they described when they were running. They ask for sacrifice, for putting " aside party for the national good."

Alas, "They then discover that the country isn't as good or decent as they had been saying it was The redemptive president is caught then," Pierce said.

Obama's problems are all our fault, you see. If only we were good enough to deserve him!

Actually, the problem with "redemptive presidents" is that when they fail to deliver national redemption, they invariably demand more power for the task. Thus, it's not surprising that Obama is now invoking Teddy Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" as part of his re-election strategy.

Roosevelt had nothing but contempt for limits on presidential power, and issued more executive orders than any president before or since.

The Framers' envisioned a modest constitutional "chief magistrate," who would secure the rule of law, not overturn it. But decades of longing for a national redeemer have turned the presidency into a constitutional abomination: an office that promises everything and guarantees nothing, save public frustration and the steady growth of federal power.

The quest for "transformational figures" and "redemptive presidents" reflects a dangerous, adolescent view of the presidency. If only it were limited to the lad- mags.