



A Sneer, a Tear, a Comeback

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Was it the tears in the [New Hampshire](#) coffee shop? Whenever there is a political upset, everyone looks for the unscripted incident, the I-paid-for-this-microphone moment that can account for it. [Hillary Clinton](#)'s improbable victory in New Hampshire is being widely attributed to her rare display of emotion when asked how she was holding up. This "Hillary cried, Obama died" story line is satisfying, but it overlooks an earlier moment played to a national television audience of 9 million that was even more revealing.

It showed a side of [Barack Obama](#) not seen before or since. And it wasn't pretty. Asked in the Saturday Democratic debate about her dearth of "likability," Clinton offered an answer both artful and sweet -- first demurely saying her feelings were

hurt and mock-heroically adding that she would try to carry on regardless, then generously conceding that Obama is very likable and "I don't think I'm that bad."

At which point, Obama, yielding to some inexplicable impulse, gave the other memorable unscripted moment of the New Hampshire campaign -- the gratuitous self-indicting aside: "You're likable enough, Hillary." He said it looking down and with not a smile but a smirk.

Rising rock star puts down struggling diva -- an unkind cut, deeply ungracious, almost cruel, from a candidate who had the country in a swoon over his campaign of grace and uplift. The media gave that moment little play, but millions saw it live, and I could surely not have

been the only one who found it jarring.

It is fitting that New Hampshire should have turned on a tear or an aside. The Democratic primary campaign has been breathtakingly empty. What passes for substance is an absurd contest of hopeful change (Obama) vs. experienced change (Clinton) vs. angry change ([John Edwards](#) playing Hugo Chávez in English).

One does not have to be sympathetic to the Clintons to understand their bewilderment at Obama's pre-New [Hampshire](#) canonization. The man comes from nowhere with a track record as thin as Chauncey Gardiner's. Yet, as [Bill Clinton](#) correctly, if clumsily, complained, Obama gets a free pass from the press.

It's not just that [NBC](#) admitted that "it's hard to stay objective covering this guy." Or that [Newsweek](#) had a cover article so adoring that one wonders what is left for coverage of the Second Coming. Or that Obama's media acolytes wax poetic that his soaring rhetoric and personal biography will abolish the ideological divide of the 1960s -- as if the division between left and right, between welfare statism and free markets, between internationalism and unilateralism, between social libertarianism and moral traditionalism are residues of Sgt. Pepper and the March on Washington. The baby boomers in their endless solipsism now think they invented left and right -- the post-Enlightenment contest of ideologies that dates back to

the seating arrangements of the Estates-General in 1789.

The freest of all passes to Obama is the general neglect of the obvious central contradiction of his candidacy: The bipartisan uniter who would bring us together by transcending ideology is at every turn on every policy an unwavering, down-the-line, unreconstructed, uninteresting, liberal Democrat.

He doesn't offer even a modest deviation from orthodoxy. When the Gang of 14, seven Republican and seven Democratic senators, agreed to restore order and a modicum of bipartisanship to the judicial selection process, Obama refused to join lest he anger the liberal base.

Special interests? Obama is a champion of the Davis-Bacon Act, an egregious gift to Big Labor that makes every federal public-works project more costly. He not only vows to defend it but proposes extending it to artificially raise wages for any guest worker program.

On [Iraq](#), of course he denigrates the surge. That's required of Democratic candidates. But he further claims that the Sunnis turned against [al-Qaeda](#) and joined us -- get this -- because of the Democratic victory in the 2006 midterm elections.

Obama has yet to have it pointed out to him by a mainstream interviewer that the [Anbar Salvation Council](#) was founded by Sheik Abdul Sattar Abu Risha two months earlier. Obama has yet to be asked why any Sunni would choose to join

up with the American invaders at precisely the time when Democrats would have them leaving -- and be left like the pro-American Vietnamese or the pro-French Algerians to be hunted and killed when their patrons were gone. That's suicide.

Even if you believe that a Clinton restoration would be a disaster, you

should still be grateful for New Hampshire. National swoons, like national hysterias, obliterate thought. The New Hampshire surprise has at least temporarily broken the spell. Maybe now someone will lift the curtain and subject our newest man from hope to the scrutiny that every candidate deserves.

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