



Obama: 'This Is the Moment'

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Given the size of the audience in Berlin Thursday, the enthusiastic response, and the standard lines about how we-were-, -are-, and -will-be-friends boilerplate, one wonders whether all it took to win the Euro-hearts and minds was to have a charismatic, multiracial American spice up a standard George W. Bush speech about helping the world, addressing AIDs, more troops in Afghanistan, etc.?

So supposedly sophisticated Europeans, who constantly dissect American politics and culture, seem suddenly to like us now, because a younger, more mellifluous figure repackaged the standard American trans-Atlantic rah-rah speech, dressed up with a little Obama mesianic sermonizing: "People of Berlin — people of the world — this is our moment. This is our time!"

along with some throwaway lines about global warming and Darfur?

That's all it took?

A few minutes of Obama's Elvis-like hope and change? And now the Europeans will pour troops into Afghanistan, match our AIDs-relief dollars, stand up to Iran, be balanced in the Middle East, get off our backs about Iraq, and stiffen their spines with the Russians, because the days of Bushitler are by fiat over with?

Besides the usual rock-star stuff that he excels at, Obama still does not do history well. He started, as is now usual, almost immediately by mentioning his race ("I know that I don't look like the Americans who've previously spoken in this great city.") But that simply was not true,

given the fact that for the last seven years both American Secretaries of State – who have been the faces of American foreign policy in Europe – were African-American.

His reference to why Berlin did not starve in 1948 (“But in the darkest hours, the people of Berlin kept the flame of hope burning. The people of Berlin refused to give up. And on one fall day, hundreds of thousands of Berliners came here, to the Tiergarten, and heard the city’s mayor implore the world not to give up on freedom.”) seems somewhat misleading: the city was kept alive not by “the world” or even the courage of the hungry Berliners, but by skill and courage of the U.S. Air Force.

Three conclusions:

One, the public spectacle was of enormous political value to Obama,

given the vast press coverage and the enthusiastic crowds.

Two, pundits will probably praise – and then forget – the speech in the same manner they did his embarrassing “I can no more disown Rev. Wright . . .” race sermon which they once compared to the Gettysburg Address – before quietly deleting it.

Three, I doubt aping the European line about torture, global warming, Darfur, etc. will result in any more NATO troops to Afghanistan, or anything else forthcoming from Europe. As it is, they want less, not more, military spending; their extra-constitutional anti-terror laws, spy-cameras, and preventive detentions make the Patriot Act look like Cub Scout bylaws; and their new anti-immigration protocols would earn calls of “fascism” if enacted here at home.

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