

Q: Hi, Glen. How are you doing?

A: I'm pretty good. This is about a perfect day, a perfect summer day here in Providence, Rhode Island. Unseasonably warm and sunny, and I'm in very good shape. How about yourself?

Q: Well, down here in the New York area it is pretty humid and steamy, but luckily I'm where I prefer to be, which is indoors, and so that's how the weather is here. So, Glen, how do you feel about various things that we've been talking about on Blogging Heads today?

A: OK, again, I'm sorry about the audio, but I think you're asking me how I feel about all these different political developments that have been going on.

Q: That's right, Palinitis, for example.

A: The Palin derangement syndrome, that's what some people on the right are calling it.

Q: That's right, and the now fashionable idea that maybe Hillary Clinton should have gotten the nomination after all, because things don't look as good for our Great Black Hope as they used to.

A: Our Great Black Hope. Well, (inaudible). There's so many thing. So Clinton should have been the nominee, Palin, what is McCain up to, and our Great Black Hope isn't doing as well as we would hope --

Q: At least my Great Black Hope.

A: Yeah, your Great Black Hope. So there's something -- so Palin. A game changer, everybody has said. That proves to be the case. Looks to me like an effort to redefine the race around cultural issues rather than around the kind of economic and sort of straightforward -- you know, what the election is supposed to really be about. I hear people commenting, you know, what with the economy in the shape that it's in, you know, whatever, let's deal with the real issues. Let's not deal with all these lipstick on a pig issues, and I find that argument amusing, to be honest with you, because as if elections were ever simply about real issues, as if elections haven't always, in every way, been about whatever moves voters and whatever framing and sort of image projection techniques can be utilized to try to get advantage over one's opponent.

Q: Sure, and given how sad things were looking for the Republicans before their convention, it's not at all surprising that they decided that they needed to bring out some flash. You might want to call it smoke and mirrors, particularly in the case of some of Sarah Palin's obfuscations, but naturally this is what one does, because most human beings, and therefore most Americans, did not

vote on the basis of having perused the New Republic, and the Weekly Standard, and The Nation. For the most part, it tends to be about the gut, and Sarah Palin is certainly delightfully charismatic in itself. I loved watching the speech. I love watching someone give a good speech, and we must admit that she had delivery skills that were, in their way, equal to Barack Obama's. Different, but the same. And that means, though, that it's scary in terms of what the outcome of this election might be.

A: Yeah, well, the performances are very interesting, and I suppose if I were like you, a student of this kind of thing, I'd be studying it, you know? I'd be saying, wow, what's the subtext here, and what's making it work? I think a couple of things, you know, deserve exploration. Qualifications. So the argument John McCain has basically shown his lack of judgment, and the fact that he doesn't put the country first because he chose somebody who -- heartbeat away and who's not ready, and therefore places us -- should he be elect at all, at a certain kind of risk, in order to facilitate his political program, his electoral prospects. So I think that's an argument that needs to be examined. The other thing is race. I mean, I think Frank Rich (sp?) was very explicit in his column in the Sunday Times this weekend, but I've also seen other people call attention to how white the Republican Convention was, what low percentage of the delegates were African Americans, how kind of quasi-racist or at least there's some racially problematic subtext to some of the appeals and arguments that were made during the convention -- the ridiculing of Barack Obama's being a community organizer, for example.

Q: I like this new idea that community organizer is somehow a racial slur. We can talk about that, but I find that oversensitive.

A: Yeah, I'm just listing. I'm not taking any positions on anything right now, but also the fact that part of the electorate to which Palin is apparently designed to appeal, the class, geographic, sort of cultural niche that she's designed -- that small town, middle America, hunter, frontierswoman, "pro-life feminist," whatever that means, I mean it's got the feminists going really ballistic. I find this all very interesting, but in any case, it seems like it's a white play, some people would say. So then there's the question about race. And then finally, my own take is that from the electoral sort of tactic strategy point of view, it seems very clear to me -- maybe I've already said this -- that the effort is to sort of change the subject. Call it a distraction if you want to, but it's to get the

debate onto a different ground, a ground where the McCain campaign feels that it might be better able to stand. That is, a cultural ground, an us-versus-them kind of character or at least characterological, you know, who are these people that we're sending to the White House, and would we rather send people like us, who are McCain/Palins, so this argument would go, then people like them who are Obama/Biden. So I don't know, those are the issues that I see.

Q: Yeah, and I see some others. For example, it's interesting that really, if you talk about experience, no matter whether you like Sarah Palin's delivery and the way she sticks her tongue up in front of her teeth and gives that smile, that's irrelevant. The question is whether or not Obama and Palin are about evenly matched in terms of experience --

A: Whether or not Obama what, I'm sorry?

Q: Are evenly matched in terms of experience. And the fact of the matter is that they really are. I mean, as interesting as Obama's background is, as sterling as it is, as admirable as it is, in terms of whether or not he's run everything, let's face it. I mean, they are the same, and another thing is that in terms of lack of preparation, it is painfully obvious that Sarah Palin today would be a disastrous choice as president, if she wound up in that position. But people study, people learn, and there are plenty examples of people who seemed awfully green, who were elevated to the Presidency from the Vice Presidency, who ended up doing just fine. Harry Truman is an example. And so she could be the same thing. I think that's less the issue than what sort of politics she espouses. And I think that it was a uniquely cynical strategy for Republicans to suppose that there is a critical mass of women --

A: Uniquely cynical.

Q: -- women out there, who would be angry about Hillary Clinton having not gotten the nomination, and would be moved to go to the McCain ticket, simply because Sarah Palin has breasts. You know, the idea that her being a woman is just a wedge issue, and that her stance on abortion would be unimportant. Although it must be said, and I know I'm going a little bit tapeworm here, that there is a survey -- I forget which one -- that said that women voters are likely to take abortion as a wedge issue, only at the rate of about 14%. So that's not everything, but in general, she's a card carrying, right-wing, not to mention rather aggressively unreflective Republican person. How

many women are there who are angry about Hillary Clinton who would vote for her instead? How many people? I am assuming that that is not going to be a critical mass of people, but then again, you never know what's going to happen, particularly in this election, where all the cards are always on the table. But one other thing -- this is one other thing --

A: Yeah, and you're putting a lot on the table, but go ahead. I'll try to keep track of it.

Q: All right. One more thing on the table, which is that even though vice presidential candidates do not win elections, this one could be different because we have the unusual circumstance of having had a woman get as far as Hillary Clinton did, and it being a close contest, leaving these resentments, plus a woman being chosen as a Republican vice presidential candidate, who is as charismatic as Sarah Palin is, in the era of YouTube. So the speech doesn't run once; people can pass it around, and so it has more power. So there is quite a bit going on, and I'm a little bit uneasy.

A: John, I'm overwhelmed. There's too much to deal with.

Q: Sorry about that.

A: Let me just try to touch on a few of the things that you said. I think it is an amazing admission for an Obama enthusiast such as yourself to say that you find them equally, more or less, matched on the experience dimension, and in view of the fact that neither of them have very long -- because you're comparing, of course, the presidential candidate to the vice presidential candidate, and it -- as I've said here on Blogging Heads in another conversation -- it just seems to me that that's got to be a loser for Obama, no matter what the objective assessment of the relative merits, because you're comparing the guy that the Democrats nominated to lead the country through two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and through all of the complex problems of governance that confront the country -- you're comparing him to this woman who was mayor of a small town and only a couple of years governor of a relatively sparsely populated state. It just seems to me that that framing, that the need to make the argument, the need to even engage the argument, [redounds?] to the detriment of the presidential candidate. So there's that. Aggressively unreflective, and what I want to say here is, you know, that's a really arrogant statement. I mean --

Q: Nevertheless, true. I can't help it if I happen to be reflective. She is aggressively unreflective.

A: Well, you know, and I've seen these columns. I can't remember what they all say now, but you know, making the country dumb, Sarah Palin is indicative of a kind of anti-intellectual -- whatever, whatever. And what I think is amongst my [prophesariat?] --

Q: Colleagues.

A: -- comrades in arms here, sure. You know, sure. We didn't manage to get ourselves elected to anything. We're not leading or inspiring pretty much anybody, except maybe our students, if we're lucky. But it's like it's an IQ test. It's like it's a certain kind of meritocracy. I mean, I find this very interesting, the how we construct this notion of qualification and what it rests upon. So Barack Obama is smarter than Sarah Palin. This seems to be the consensus. She didn't know what the Bush Doctrine was, as if it was a multiple choice on some kind of SAT test.

Q: I don't say unreflective because of that, but go ahead.

A: Yeah, OK. I don't know. I mean, I think --

Q: The reason that I mention the unreflective part, I mean, there is room for unreflective presidents. I mean, reflection, being able to see both sides, that's something that can get you in as much trouble as it can help you, as we've seen with our possible philosopher, King Obama, running and trying to run on reflectiveness, and running into problems sometimes. But I'm saying it because of the past eight years. It seems that we've had enough of another aggressively unreflective person in office, who offered a certain amount of promise in the beginning, and that lack of reflectiveness has put us in a great deal of trouble, in a great many places, and here we are in this mess. Of course, I refer partly to Iraq, but also to a mishandled No Child Left Behind act, Faith-Based Initiatives Act that wasn't defended enough, and all sorts of things that aren't reflective. I am galvanized by the fact that Obama offers the chance of somebody --

A: Well, this is what I'm saying may be a mistake. This is what I don't see, because the correlation between performed smartness -- I'm talking about someone who uses the English language like it was a razor to cut through their concepts, somebody who's able to hold forth freeform on just about any question that might come up and offer a disquisition on it that seems intelligent and interesting and comforts us that the person has a grasp of all those issues, a person who has demonstrated through their career excellence at the kind of competitive intellectualism that is associated with rising to the top of Harvard Law School or an MIT Economics Department or something like that, and has the degrees to

back it up. That kind of thing. The correlation between that, on the one hand, and effective leadership of the country on the other, is real low as far as I'm concerned. Ronald Reagan was called a buffoon, and I'm not a Reaganite. I used to be, but I'm not anymore, so this is not about some lionizing around Reagan. I simply want to observe he was pretty effective as a president.

Q: I agree with you there, yeah. I agree with you there.

A: You know what I'm saying? And it didn't have to do with his ability to offer a spot lecture on any particular subject. Was he reflective? I mean, I'm just asking the question. Was Ronald Reagan reflective?

Q: No, he was not a reflective man, but we could use one now. I would say that what was going on in 1981, the sorts of issues that the nation faced, were ones where and unreflective president who thought in broad strokes and was very much a delegator, were probably more needed than now, when we've got some really complicated stuff going on. We have an alternative energy crisis that really needs to be thought through and made to happen with a kind of force, and with a kind of thought. This is a special time for that, don't you think?

A: But what I'm saying is the president doesn't -- I mean, if you were to try to draw up a model of how such problems get attacked, worked on and solved, it's not going to be a top-down model where the smartest person in the world is in a room, with a blackboard, figuring it out. It's going to be a much more amorphous process, where lots of different kinds of players have to be brought to the table, and where cognitive issues, the issues of how well do we understand something, may really take a second place to other kind of issues -- you know, political and psychological and sort of leadership issues. None of this is meant to extol Sarah Palin as such.

Q: Oh, I know, I know. You know, another thing is, and I think this is an objection that anybody watching this might have at this point, we're not even talking about the candidate for president. But the reason that I consider it so important is because, let's face it, there's an age issue here. This isn't to say, oh goodness, he's old, he's old, he's old, but after you're 70, the chances of you ceasing to exist for one reason or another get higher and higher, and McCain is only an approximately healthy man in some ways, and so when we look at a Sarah Palin, we really are looking at someone who would have a reasonable chance of running the country at some point, in which case everything you're saying about how it's not going to be

some very intelligent intellectual running the country -- that has never happened in itself.

A: But John, on this qualifications issue, look how history repeats itself, because these arguments are a heartbeat away from the Presidency, with the thinness of background and a lack of experience and demonstrated competency that makes that a risky thing to do. They're not unlike the arguments that were made about the candidate Barack Obama during the Democratic primaries vis-à-vis Hillary Clinton, whom he was running against, and of course, that argument lost, right? I mean, the experience versus "judgment" -- judgment demonstrated by -- you know, and I don't even have to go through it again. It will make people mad just to state the fact of the matter that judgment rested upon very flimsy ground indeed. So the genius that I see, and this -- you say "uniquely cynical" -- and I wonder about that. I wonder about uniquely cynical, because everybody's trying to win here. The decision not to meet John McCain in regular town hall meetings of an unstructured discussion [con?], which might have done wonders --

Q: Was a mistake.

A: -- for boosting the quality of discourse in presidential campaigns, which is a public good that we would all be enjoying for election cycles to come, where the decision to opt out of public financing as strategic action, because looking at the fundamentals, it would appear that one would have been benefited electorally by opting out of public financing, that was also a decision that will have repercussions long after this election is over, and will affect the character of American politics for election cycles to come. Those weren't uniquely cynical?

Q: Well, wait, I misunderstood your reasoning there.

A: My reasoning is everyone is trying to win. Everybody's doing what they can to win. I don't see anything uniquely cynical about anybody's actions.

Q: Well, let's refine the word. Talking about using words to cut through things. It was strikingly cynical to me, because it seemed to come, except for a few insiders, out of nowhere, and it was a gamble because of the lack of experience, and all the other things that have been said about the McCain campaign and how he's thrown away his former integrity, and also it was ingenious in a way, because there is this crucial number of what are called alienated women voters. And if you were going to decide who to make your vice presidential candidate, for it to be someone with that combination of traits -- not being a man, and making a good speech -- then I applaud them, in a way.

It was one of the freshest things that has happened with the Republicans since McCain's unexpected ascendancy. It's interesting.

A: I agree with that. I mean, it was audacious and bold. It was perhaps reckless. Certainly it was taking a big risk. It was a roll of the dice, as Bill Clinton would have said in a different context.

Q: You know, I'm waiting for the debates though, because in terms of how the rest of this is going to go, I think the smart money is beginning to be that McCain is going to get good coaching and that Obama is just going to stand there "waffling," and I think that as always, people are misunderestimating Barack Obama and I think it's because of this -- I don't know, it's partly because he's skinny, I think it's partly because he's black, I think it's partly because people see a certain delicacy about him, and again and again, he rises to the occasion, but people seem to think that he won't be doing some training and getting past his old mistakes, too. But he could wipe up the floor going mano-a-mano with McCain, that that would sweep away all this --

A: I don't think that's going to happen, John, but we'll find out soon enough.

Q: Why?

A: I mean, you saw the Saddleback Forum just like I did. He didn't wipe the floor with him there.

Q: And he'll learn from that mistake, I would think.

A: Sure he will, and hopefully his performance would be better, because if it's not, he's toast.

Q: Oh yeah, he could not do that again, and I think that given all of the feedback that there's been, and how painfully obvious it was -- you know, it's not like that was a draw, and some people thought one thing, and some people thought another. It was one of the lowest points in his campaign.

A: But again, I want to come back to what the nature of the competition is, and what counts for aptitude at it. So giving a good speech, and being articulate and quick. Those certainly count for something. They're not pluses, they're minuses. But there are many other things as well, and the ability to render in vivid and immediate language -- and again, you know, a linguist, I know you know all of this. I mean, you would be telling me about this. You know, the ability to be succinct, the ability to get one's worldview across in relatively simple terms, the ability to be direct and decisive, not to weigh on one hand or on the other, to be able to answer questions like either in the world or when does life begin in ways that don't have the

talking heads mulling over your answers for days and days after. This is not the same thing as a high IQ, or the ability to get As in your calculus or your constitutional law course. This is a different kind of thing. And I don't know that Barack Obama has shown us that he has it. I mean, that he has it to the degree that would give you the confidence to say that he's bound to prevail. I mean, the lesson that I've been drawing from the last month of campaigning is that Obama may not be as strong a candidate as everyone has thought that he was, that he may be flawed in some ways that are being exploited by the Republicans.

Q: You know, everything you said, I actually agree completely, and I want to refine something I've been saying. I like that Obama can see both sides of things, that he seems to actually have a problem-solving mindset. But I guess what I've really been thinking is that I want him to use that as a stealth weapon, and so maybe he'll get off some good sallies in debates. But I kind of like the idea of him withholding that at this point, until he gets/got to the Oval Office. Because you're absolutely right. At this point, he needs punchiness. I mean, he needs something that is as viscerally arousing as thing like it's morning in America. I would like -- and I've written about this -- I would like him to take three major points that he has and come up with some kind of catchy way of putting it, and this would have to be a little bit cynical. He needs some slogans, and he needs to put them to audiences in certain ways. Hopefully they would lend themselves to chantability and/or rhyme, and/or have alliteration, and I think that that would help him get past this Adelle Stevenson coolness, which I think is limiting him, because it's at the point where the people who like that kind of person, i.e. college town blue America -- he's got them, but in terms of getting beyond, he needs a different kind of message, and I have a little more hope than you do, because it's not as if John McCain is very good at that either, and he doesn't have the oratorical skill to put it across. But I'd like to see the campaign change in that way. Audacity of hope is not good enough. He needs something more specific. So yeah, if he can't do that, that will be his failure and not -- to do a transition here -- as people like Randall Kennedy today in the Washington Post seemed to think -- a matter of bigotry against black people. People don't seem to want to admit that Obama could fail for reasons that have nothing to do with a white person not liking black people.

A: Yeah, I agree with that. I'd like to discuss Randall Kennedy's piece, but before we do that, if I may, I'd like to direct our attention to the question of whether he ought to have chosen Hillary Clinton as a running mate.

Q: No.

A: Seems to me that he ought to have done --

Q: Oh, no, no.

A: -- of recent weeks kind of demonstrated, almost beyond question, that he ought to have done --

Q: Sort of.

A: And then the question becomes why didn't he, and what does it say about him, if anything interesting, that he didn't do? I mean, the candidacy is premised on the idea that we're going to bring people together across what divides us -- not red states, not blue states. We're the United States. Not black America, not white America, we're the United States of America. We were going to unite people across previous ideological divides. We were going to transcend the tired old '60s originating culture war conflicts that have gotten us nowhere, OK. Then when the opportunity to actually unite, to then a concrete and explicit circumstance take actions that would have the effect of doing this thing, within the Democratic party, not across the entire spectrum of American opinion, but within a relatively consolidated ideological formation, which is the Democratic party. When the opportunity came to actually unite, reach across, build bridges, transcend conflict, he doesn't do it. I mean, literally he doesn't take the action. He doesn't have -- I don't know, the gumption? The vision? The courage? The humility? I mean, pick your word. Doesn't it reflect negatively on the candidate that he didn't take the action that would have most significantly secured his political position, and that would have been a step toward the very unification across difference that he claims to be resting his candidacy on?

Q: Oh, no.

A: You think I'm all wrong about that.

Q: Oh no, I hear you. But now, all right, it's subtle, because on the one hand, if he had chosen Hillary Clinton as his running mate, then there would be a complete immunity to the possibility of women defecting to a Sarah Palin. But I think we can reasonably say that no one would have expected that there would be a significant chance of there being a Sarah Palin when Obama made his choice, and so that's just a historical argument. And you know, once again, we run up into this fundamental difference we have in terms of what an Obama presidency would mean, and I want

to be careful here, but if Hillary Clinton were his running mate, and let's say that that made him more likely to win, then once they're in office, the vice president is Hillary Clinton, and the vice president's spouse is a former president, and one with a type A personality, and so I don't think it's rhetoric to say in a way, there would be three, or two and a half presidents, and this is what the problem with that would be, and this is where I suppose I can't help being an individual as opposed to always thinking strictly of what might be good from a more distant calculus, is that it wouldn't be as much of an Obama presidency. And as I've said many times in this and other forums before, I want it to be his presidency, because I really do think that that would change the way we think about a lot of things. If it were him, and kind of Mama Hillary and her husband always pitching in, with all the criticism that the Clintons would attract -- you know, every time one of them said something that was a little bit wrong, everybody would be talking about it for a week and a half, that would taint the luster and the peculiarity.

A: We do disagree about this. I think this is completely wrong, what you're saying, John. I think there would have been three presidents only if the president let there be three presidents.

Q: Oh, how could he stop it?

A: OK, I think there's only one president. I think, you know, managing it would have been a problem. I'm not saying there was nothing to manage. There would have been issues, to be sure, but not issues that could not have been handled. Let me put the thing the other way around. If you were to put Bill Clinton in the position of having to deal with an older and more seasoned politician, whom he had beaten out in the primaries but needed in order to consolidate his position and win the election as vice president, who happened to be carrying in train a lot of baggage, whatever it was, make up your own story about it, something tells me he would have known how to handle it. I mean, I just got the feeling that he would have known how to handle it. So I don't buy it. I mean, I don't buy that -- I'm not saying there were no issues, but I don't buy that those issues would override the compelling sort of strategic calculation as to how am I going to win this election? What's the other side going to do to me that could hurt me? How can I inoculate myself against that attack? What's my path to victory? Plus, may I just add, the Clintons would be an enormous asset in this knife fight that Barack Obama -- he's in an ugly, nasty, alley fight.

It was predicted that he was going to get into an alley fight, that this election was going to get down to some real gut bucket politics. Now that's something they know something about, you know. That's something that experience and not "judgment" but real experience in the trenches would be extremely valuable. So now you've got this candidate. He's elegant, he's articulate, he's intelligent, but he's not self-confident enough, maybe, or he's overly confident -- pick your argument -- to take this move, and I just --

Q: Well good, be specific.

A: I mean, I do think it reflects negatively on him that he didn't do this thing that would have left him much less exposed to the attack that he's now enduring.

Q: Well, I want you to specify your terms, in terms of what the Clintons would have known to help in the fight, because it wasn't so long ago that the conventional wisdom was that Obama could not get where he is because you just don't know what the Clintons will do to you. Everybody got a kick out of saying that, but look what happened. The Clintons didn't really seem to know as much as we thought, and now you're saying that they would somehow know how to carry a [shiv?] and stick it in people's guts. Is what you're really saying that they -- wait, wait, wait. Are you saying that they know people who would dig up dirt properly? What else is it that they would know how to do? Really, that's a genuine question.

A: OK, I mean, I'm going to answer you. I'm no expert in the mechanics of how campaigns are run and how communication strategies are implemented --

Q: Me either.

A: -- so my opinion is probably not worth much here. But I think two things. I think Bill Clinton's speech at the convention, in which he framed what the election was about, was exactly the kind of rhetoric that ought to have been informing the Obama campaign from the start, in which he framed what the election was about, and we can go over the speech. It's been discussed. But this issue of defining and keeping the definition of the debate about the things that you want it to be about, and not letting it get pushed over onto other stuff. And the other thing is the Palin thing, how to handle it. I mean, I'm not just saying having a woman on the ticket would have helped. I'm also saying that, OK, they found this person and they put them out there. Now how do we handle it amidst all of the storm, and all of the things that are going on? How do we respond to this move by McCain? And you know, again, this

is not entirely original to me, but I think the answer is that you ignore Palin, you keep the focus on McCain, you come out and you say instead of trying to, you know, this net route and this kind of anti-Palin hysteria, I think, is the right word for it actually. You know, instead of trying to pick her, thinking that you're going to like refute her a priori by finding it somehow some kind of scandal or some kind of dirt, I mean, a very dangerous thing, it seems to me, for Obama people to be doing. You know, the lid on all of his stuff has been kept on by a kind of tacit agreement amongst media and others that those are illegitimate issues to discuss, but in any case, that's a side point. Instead of doing that, you acknowledge what a wonderful thing it is that a woman has been put on the ticket. You credit her in passing, and then you move on to keep the focus on McCain. But I'm sorry I can't answer more precisely than that. I just have the feeling that those people know how to -- that is, Bill and Hillary Clinton -- know how to fight this kind of fight, and have had experience at it that would be valuable to the candidate now.

Q: Glen, you know, I get you, but I think that I have all reason to think that Obama will be able to take care of that without the help of kind of those white, type A godparents. As much as I liked Clinton in office -- I'm not an anti-Clintonite in any way. And you know, I think in terms of -- you and I doing Blogging Heads together has I think unintentionally -- I don't think we were planning this when we started this a year ago, but unintentionally, it's been kind of a chronicle of what we happen to think about the Obama phenomenon. If they were gathered together, if some very bored person happened to watch all of them in a row --

A: All these conversations.

Q: -- in a year from now, I think this would be the one that would end up coming off as -- I'm going to take a guess, and I'm willing to be wrong in the future. This is going to come off as the one where one of us was a little bit too worried about Obama at a time when he just didn't happen to be the flavor of the week. I mean, if he wins, this one is going to look like you and I are both caught up in what's been happening over the past 20 days or so. I think he can handle it. He's always surprising us.

A: OK, I agree with you. If he wins, then all these worries and all of this carping and criticism and whatnot will seem small and off-base, and we'll just have to see what happens. But he ain't winning now.

Q: Yeah, but it's the post-convention bounce, and since it was already close, that means that the bounce is going to put him a little bit ahead of Obama. And it's really all about the swing states anyway. You know, these national polls make for good news, but really it's all about a few states, and a youth vote who are under-counted because a lot of them don't have land lines. So I'm not as worried about these dueling upper 40% polls that we start to see every day, unless it got any worse than that.

A: OK, how about if we talk about the race issue then for a minute. You had mentioned Randall Kennedy's piece in the Washington Post. I was really struck by the piece. I don't know what you thought. I was struck at a number of levels. I mean, Randall Kennedy, Randy's a friend of mind, a longtime acquaintance, a law professor at Harvard and a prolific author on legal and cultural issues and racial issues. He confesses to having shed tears on the night that Obama won the South Carolina primary and was heading towards the nomination, and having shed tears yet again on the night when Obama was nominated, when he accepted the nomination at the Democratic Party and spoke before those tens of thousands in Vesco Field on the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther King's great speech. He recalls having been present on the Mall there in front of Lincoln Memorial when Martin Luther King gave that speech in 1963. He would have been very young kid at the time, and all of that, and then he begins to talk about how many Africans Americans have so much invested in the -- including himself, quite evidently -- in the success of Obama's candidacy and what the disappointment of his defeat would mean, or how his defeat would confirm a sort of pessimistic and cynical view of American politics in the minds of some, how it would dash the hopes of others and all of that. He quotes finally, I'll just say, from an essay written by one of this students in a course that he's teaching on the Obama campaign at the Harvard Law School now -- I assume it's at the Law School. He quotes from one of the student essays to the effect that the student says, well, this is the finest African American -- you know, if this guy isn't fit to be president, if he's not able to succeed and break through this glass ceiling of exclusion of African Americans from the Oval Office, then none can. And on like that. And I guess I was moved. I was touched. You know, Randall Kennedy in tears at the site of a political event, I mean, that's really very moving and it gives one something to think about, but I was also a little discomfited by the essay, made unhappy by it, in that --

well, I can say more about it, but I've been talking for a long time, so I should give you a chance to say your piece.

Q: Oh, well yeah. I know what you mean, and the piece where Obama is viewed simply as here's a black man who could be president, and if he doesn't become president then that's sad because a black man couldn't become president, there's something that makes me a little uncomfortable in it too, and I know Randall Kennedy as well. We actually did a Blogging Heads once. He's been very nice. So yeah, I've read all of his books except the first one, and so yeah, I have great respect for him. But his article this morning brought me in mind of something that happened to me last week. You will be interested in this. I got a very genteel tongue lashing last week from Shelby Steele on NPR Tell Me More. Very genteel.

A: I'm sorry, you got what from Shelby Steele?

Q: A very genteel tongue lashing.

A: A tongue lashing -- genteel tongue lashing, OK.

Q: And no tension. He and I will always be friends, but he really does not like the idea of especially a black person looking at Obama as a symbol, espousing Obama for being black and therefore being a symbol of some kind of victory. And he didn't put it in so many words, but he was disappointed in me and anybody who feels like me for supporting him against our "conservative principles," and as we've been over before, my principles are not really meaningfully conservative. But I found it interesting. The idea should not be -- and this is what I would say to Randy as well -- I don't know if it should be just as a symbol. For me, it's not just he's black, isn't that great. It's he's black, and if he were in, wouldn't it be great how that would change the thinking of a lot of people, including black ones? Which for me, is more pragmatic. But if the idea is just a negro is in, and that means racism is over, to me it's a little oversimplified, and I would say that politically, I would think that we would be a little bit more specific in what we're looking for.

A: Yeah, OK. The symbol thing, and I agree. I mean, there are different kinds of symbols. I want to give an analogy, maybe it'll be useful. I use this when I'm teaching about discrimination to my students. You know, I say, suppose you had a military unit -- I don't know, Top Gun, you know, Cracker Jack Aces flying these fighter planes. And women had never done it before. Never had there been a woman flying, landing one of these planes on an aircraft carrier, leading bombing raids, whatever, OK. But the barriers

fall, the cracks in the glass ceiling happen, and women begin to come to the Air Force Academy, and come to flight training school, and pilots begin to emerge and to come through. And then the decision comes to the military of they've got to have an inaugural woman who's going to do this for the first time. Now, what kind of candidate would be ideal for this breakthrough task? And then you could start listing the qualifications about her. And I think it's plausible to argue that one would want to be very conservative in this choice. One would want to have someone who was beyond reproach along every dimension. Indeed, the standards for the first woman to fly and land the plane on the aircraft carrier perhaps ought to be set higher than the ordinary standard that you would use. You would want someone to be an exemplar. In other words, it's the Jackie Robinson effect. You know, not just good enough to get into the major leagues. The first player has got to be a superstar, OK. Now you might argue that Barack Obama doesn't fit that bill, despite his sterling credentials. I mean, I don't, again, want to seem to be doing a Rudy Giuliani and badmouthing the guy. I don't think there's any doubt that the guy's enormously talented, that he's extraordinary, that he is a superstar. I don't think there's any doubt about that. But we saw in the Democratic primary campaign that he leapt to the nomination. We saw that there were a lot of negatives, as well as a lot of positives, and it's now -- we are in a knife fight and we may win or we may not. But it's not as if -- I mean, who would be an appropriate analogy? Maybe a Colin Powell or somebody like that, very different kind of candidacy. I'm not trying to measure these men digit for digit. I'm just trying to say there would have been many different paths to this symbolic achievement of an African American breaking through. Many different ways of trying to go about it, and the failure of this particular way, which I could try to characterize, but I think you know what I'm talking about. Again, I'm taking up a lot of time. The failure of this particular way hardly pronounces the definitive judgment on what might be possible. I mean, in other words, you might have predicted from fundamentals that it would be a Republican, not a Democrat, who would be the first African American elected president.

Q: I would have said that two years ago.

A: You know, for all the reasons that we could trot out about the kind of dynamics of the micro-politics of the two parties, the cultural and so forth of the country, an African American coming from the right of center may have

had a better chance of succumbing all of these obstacles and finally getting through and making a breakthrough and so forth.

Q: America's darling, right.

A: I'm not recommending anything here. It's not as if I'm saying we should have done something. I'm just saying the meaning of his win or loss ought to be viewed in this broader context. It hardly pronounces -- whether you like symbols or not, here's the bottom line of what I'm saying. You're saying -- or Shelby Steele is saying anyway, all this symbolic stuff, a [pox?] on that, we shouldn't be using a candidate's race as a symbol of anything. And I'm saying whatever one's view about the symbolism of it, there's also this kind of strategic consideration about, you know, what's the best way to manage a transition from one state to another, and it's not at all clear that the success or failure of this candidacy tells us everything we need to know about whether or not African Americans can succeed at this level of competition.

Q: That is certainly the case, and my phone is saying battery low, and so we might have to wrap up. And also I was going to have to do that, because I have to go teach Aristotle at Columbia. But on that note --

A: Aristotle, that's cool.

Q: Yeah, Aristotle today, Plato last week. As a matter of fact, the whole issue of finding the mean is interesting in terms of this election. But I think that this is a situation where certainly you are correct, and I just wonder, often you're the idealist among us. In a way, you've got Platonic forms that you're dealing with, and I know what you mean about this Super Negro that would have been the ideal candidate. I wouldn't say it was Colin Powell, because to too many people he doesn't seem black at all, although maybe that would be part of the equation. But I think that it is much better that we have this person now, because I'm not quite sure how long we would have had to wait for that perfect person to come along, and can you imagine, given Obama's imperfections, if he wins, what an exciting thing even that will be, because it will mean that even a visibly less than perfect black person can take it. The fact that he got the nomination is already evidence of that.

A: Yeah, let me say one thing, and we get ready to go. I was going to let you have the last word, but --

Q: That's OK.

A: You can have it if you want to. But what I want to say is instead of lamenting what an Obama defeat would do to the

hopes of African Americans around the country, as Randall Kennedy does in that piece, I think the responsible and wise thing to be doing now is to be saying if he loses the election, it's not all over. It does not mean anything fundamental and definitive, and we must not allow it to suppress our enthusiasm about the prospects for the future for this country. You know, in other words, during the campaign, the primary campaign, people were telling Hillary Clinton supporters, rightly, that if this thing ends and your candidate loses, I understand your fervor, but be prepared for that, and be prepared to sort of move beyond it. And I really think, although it will be hard for partisans to see right now, that that's the right message to be sending. Rather than sort of blackmailing the country with this prospect of -- implicitly blackmailing, softly blackmailing -- the country with this prospect of despair, disillusion, and you know, I don't know what, disorder? The campaign is going to get uglier than it is already, and it's quite ugly, indeed. Instead of fanning those flames, why not damp them? Why not say, look, we want our guy to win, let's go fight for him right to the end. But if he loses, would it be Obama-esque to view the prospect of an Obama defeat as a glass half-full and not half-empty?

Q: I completely agree and I wish that my telephone would let me say more. But I think that we have to close.

A: OK, John, I'm happy to close on that point of agreement.

Q: Glen, I look forward to our next one.

A: Me, too.

Q: And have a good rest of the day.

A: Bye.

Q: Bye.

END