

COMMENTARY

Character Witnessing



This thing is really heating up, this three-candidate, two-party hoe down.

At stake for only a few of us (suggesting the ridiculously low level of commitment we have): the lives of our children. Will they, too, have to go fight very foreign wars, their names someday to be inscribed then forgotten on a wall in Washington, D.C.?

Most of us don't have to worry about it, though. Instead, we have to worry about this: How much longer will those damn wars shackle us with debt? And how much money are we saving through this recession for our old age, or our children's? And how much more will the price of gasoline go up (and why are we still dependent on those bigots and bullies, the Saudis)? And how much farther will the health insurance dilemma drag us down, or property devaluation, or declining jobs?

The three candidates probably answer most of those questions differently, especially if they're from opposing parties. But not always in public debate, or clearly.

So I figure many will choose the next president by their estimation of his or her character. Maybe that's not the best way to choose, but it strikes me as the inevitable way, more often than not.

And nobody has yet pinned down exactly how to judge the character of these candidates.

But I have an idea.

A couple of them, Clinton and Obama, have lived their entire adult lives in relative privilege. Admirably, they've demonstrated the discipline to take advantage of their big-horsepower tal-

ents and egos to try to do some good, as they define it.

McCain, on the other hand, started out his adult life that way, scion of the family's pride and privilege, at the U.S. Naval Academy. But then he suffered things that few of us could endure with the courage and capacity for resurrection he did, as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. So we know one thing about his character: he's tough as nails, and he won't give up.

Is that in itself — endurance and fortitude — the only reason to pick him? No, clearly not.

So how do we judge whether he also has the smarts, the capacity for understanding the experiences of other Americans, the sheer ability to lead under difficult circumstances — and whether his opponents do, too, along with a measure of McCain's steel?

Very simple. We put them all to the test, rather than to a mere debate about tests or character.

Could McCain put up with what Hillary and Obama have faced in their lives? There's a way to find out.

Could they endure what McCain has endured? We can discover that, too, more or less.

I got this idea while talking to my mother, in Colorado. She heard a late-night caller on a talk show insist not only that McCain wouldn't even be running for office if he hadn't been a POW, but questioning the truth of his experiences in Vietnam, in particular the difficulties he faced at the hands of his captors.

My mother was not pleased, a position which has nothing to do with her politics. She believes Americans should honor the man for his service, his courage and his suffering in our name. She was equally outraged when people impugned — falsely, as it turned out — John Kerry's credibility and valor in Vietnam.

So instead of calling in to express her dis-

“Put on your high-heeled sneakers, womp that wig down on your head/ ..Put on your red dress, baby, ‘cause we’re going’ out to-night/... Hoo hoo! I’m pretty sure you’re gonna knock’em dead.”

— Jerry Lee Lewis

pleasure (my mother does not believe her voice should be heard floating nakedly on the airwaves over the western United States under cover of darkness), she called me.

And that gave me this idea.

Beginning sometime in June, the candidates should agree to set aside two weeks for election-year character tests — this should be a federal mandate for any who seek the White House.

Then each will receive his or her orders.

Week 1, Hanoi Hilton (Everglades Annex):

Beginning at dawn on a Monday in the rainy season, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama will be dropped by parachute into the Everglades. Each will then be forced to walk mostly naked for 12 hours, then placed in exposed bamboo cages and given bad water and maggot-infested food. They will be shouted at, spit on and slapped around. Since this won't be entirely authentic, no broken bones or life-threatening torture will be tolerated, just the occasional blow to the kidneys from behind, or hanging upside down for a while, or standing in the rain holding out weighted buckets of their own waste. Both will be forced to answer in detail each major question facing the average American (see above), four times a day. Forget sleeping.

Also, very mean people will throw things through the cage at them — unspeakable, smelly things — throughout the week, both day and night.

Duration: 7 Days and Nights.

Week 1, Dress Ball:

Beginning at dawn on a Monday morning, John McCain will continue his grueling 16-hour-per-day campaign schedule. But first he will be required to shave his legs, apply perfect make-up to his eyes, cheeks, forehead and lips, then don panty hose and a bra under a red power

dress, high-heel shoes, a string of pearls, and big dangly earrings attached to each ear. He will be required to paint both his fingernails and toenails (he may choose red or pink), and to carry a purse. He will also be required to sit with his legs together at all times.

Then McCain — womanly and wig-adorned with the kind that requires him to do his hair every single day — will actually be forced to talk about women's issues, both to men and women. He will also be forced to answer in detail each major question facing the average American (see above), four times a day.

McCain will sit whenever he visits a toilet. Rolling his panty hose back up over his underwear and pulling the dress down before he rushes back out to press the flesh again. He will be required to walk through factories of steel workers in his pretty dress, and to address (pun intended) the blue-blood denizens of WASP country clubs. Finally, he will also be required to kiss both men and women — on the cheek if he wants to.

He should not be required to swing his hips when he walks, unless he so chooses, or enjoys the sensation.

Duration: 7 Days and 7 Nights

Week 2, “Black Like Me.”

This week, both Clinton and McCain must become “Black Like Me,” to name an old book about how it's done by honkies. You can pretty much guess the rest, but each will be required to spend some quality time prostrate before both the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, and any white racist in good standing for that credential.

Week 2, Dress Ball (Obama).

As Jerry Lee said, “Put on your red dress, baby...” ■



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