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The Libertarian Case for Obama

Seven potential upsides to a hope-monger presidency

[Terry Michael](#) | September 19, 2008

For those who recognize that "libertarian Democrat" is no more oxymoronic than "libertarian Republican," a solid case can be made for Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) as a Leader of the Free World who won't take that American Exceptionalism conceit as seriously as "Country First" Sen. [John McCain](#) (R-Ariz.).

Sure, we'll have to endure four or even eight years of warbling by Barbra Streisand at White House dinners. And I am under no illusions: Obama has more Populist-Progressive than Madisonian inclinations. But, guys and gals, Ms. Wasilla is no less stomach-churning than Babs. And the actual Republican presidential candidate is even more authoritarian than his Progressive hero, Teddy Roosevelt. John McCain is no friend of Friedman.

Thus, seven reasons libertarians can hope for the best from Obama.

1. Sen. Obama has met at least one war he doesn't love. His early pronouncements against the criminal enterprise in Iraq are enough reason, in themselves, to vote his way on November 4. Anyone paying the least attention must conclude that Lt. McCain's "cause greater than self" always involves the Army, the Navy, and the United States Marines (not necessarily in that order.)
2. The election of an African-American will end liberal racism as we know it. If an overwhelmingly white nation chooses a black leader, the Jesse Jacksons and other Mau Mauers for identity-based group preferences will be put out of business, [as I explained here](#).
3. One word: Osmosis. You couldn't live in Hyde Park or teach at the University of Chicago with the intellectual curiosity of a Barack Obama without gaining at least some understanding of libertarian economics. That can't be said for most of the reactionary left-liberal wing of the Democratic Party dominating Capitol Hill. But I believe Obama is educable on free markets and I'm convinced that Democrats are ripe for a return in the next decade to the liberalism of our party's founder, Thomas Jefferson (I made this case two years ago in [my libertarian Democrat manifesto](#).)
4. Obama is the best hope for keeping government out of your bedroom and away from your body. As would any Democratic standard-bearer, the senator from Illinois represents the pro-choice, pro-gay rights side of the cultural divide. And he has at least made interesting soundings about reducing America's status as the world's number one jailer, much of which is tied to drug offenses and other crimes without victims. No libertarian can feel comfortable with a Republican candidate who doesn't echo the personal choices demanded by his supposed hero, Barry Goldwater.

5. The hidden hand did well this month punishing stupidity. But libertarians committed to free markets, not corporate oligarchs, must pause to consider the need for field-leveling regulation. More precisely, we should ask whether there was sufficient enforcement of reasonable restraints already in place. We need Republicans to stand against excessive tinkering in markets, of course. But my modest retirement fund may be safer with Democratic regulators in charge than rogue elephants.

6. R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Yes, we need to restore America's reputation around the world. Anybody who's traveled beyond the Atlantic and Pacific in the past eight years knows America needs a makeover. Whatever you think of Barack Obama—unless, like the mindless U!S!A! crowd, you don't care what the world thinks—he will restore much of the goodwill we have lost when he raises his hand on January 20, 2009. That's significant for libertarians who believe in the importance of the nation most committed to free markets and free minds—ours—leading by example. More-of-the-McSame in foreign policy is something we can't afford.

7. Finally, Barack Obama is smart enough to follow the aspirations of the Gen Y, Millenials, and Echo Boomers next up on the American political stage. They want choices in both their bank accounts and their bedrooms. I don't have much empirical evidence for that, though the college students I teach suggest that such libertarian leanings are on the rise. After all, a generation growing up with an explosion of mega-data-informed choices literally at its keyboard fingertips will resemble the self-sufficient, liberty-loving founders of the Agrarian Age more than they'll resemble the social welfare liberals of the Industrial Era who gave us one-size-fits-all central authority mandates.

The oldest candidate in American history won't inspire such potentially libertarian change—but the senator from Illinois can. It's change in which you and I can believe, whether or not we believe in any candidate, including Barack Obama.

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