

Change You Can't Believe In

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Full disclosure: I'm a Political Science major by training.

I don't think this makes me more entitled to have an opinion on politics than anyone else. However, what I consider to be the likeliness of a certain outcome is pretty at odds with: A) how politics are normally discussed in our culture and B) what I want to see happen. There is a reason why my favorite professor held class in a bar. That is not why he is my favorite professor.

I am incapable too of discussing a potential future under a President Mitt Romney. When I think about it, I have to sit in bed and eat olives until I feel better. I can't afford olives right now, as my cured fruits budget has been blown by my student loan repayments.

So! My less rational, more intuitive point-of-view: never trust a Political Science major who wants to go into politics. That said, I only had two classmates who wanted official political power by the end of my studies. One did not graduate, due in part to the disturbingly racist content of his homework; the other was very capable and pleasant. He had a Kennedy haircut and escaped the kind of entertaining rumors that the rest of us traded about each other. He proposed to his girlfriend senior year, and when asked about politics, he always gave the nation-state answer.

After the end of an international institutions class, some of us liked to sit on the library steps and have a chat. One afternoon I showed off my two back tattoos. Another girl had a small band around her ankle, and a passionate classmate had a little (regrettable) Communist symbol on his wrist. Mr. Kennedy haircut approached and unbuttoned his blue Oxford shirt. He turned around, and a red snake tattoo filled his back, from the top of his khakis to his armpits. He said nothing. No comment about the design, the hours of pain, the expense, the healing. He put on his shirt, sat down, and picked up the conversation. He was going to France that summer. What about the rest of us? The veil parted and closed.

It is worth remembering that Obama is a snake, under the suit and charm.

For all the ferocity and scaliness of his power animal, however, the Obama Administration Part Two could be entitled, "The Leavening." Within the warm kitchen of slow, sustained economic growth, the sweetness of Supreme Court rulings in favor of the expansion of civil rights (Scalia, don't be a dick for once. You too, Alito), and the sustained kneading of activists, something palatable might rise in twenty years. At best, the end result will be the social equivalent of Pillsbury rolls. An Obama victory is the necessary ingredient, the yeast. And without

enduring, semi-selfless public service, our communities become dented, supermarket brand canned biscuits.

All the potential goodness depends on the tireless efforts of the citizens, the capricious generosity of civil servants, and the ability of the benevolent sharks of the left to reorganize the political machinations of local institutions toward more positive results. Sounds daunting (it is) but possible. Thanks to Obama, there is a legislative wall for you to put your back against if you want to advocate for the physical and intellectual infrastructure of the US. But that's all you get.

For the foreseeable future, most areas (especially the Midwest) will be slumping toward parity with the South. Look for minor improvements in social justice issues, health care (I can afford to break my leg in two years!), and an end to the visible engagement of the US military in Afghanistan. Don't count on Obama fixing the increasingly entrenched institutional inequality, nor should you expect anything less than (continued) unnerving foreign policy (Killing Osama bin Laden in Pakistan sent me into a tizzy of research and analysis. Good for the nation-state, terrifying from the perspective of anyone else). An Obama victory would be a critical inspiration for the disempowered who want to change their communities. But holy h*ll are some their best interests opposed to the internal policies of his administration (and Clinton's, Bushes' I and II, Reagan's, and back and back and back).

I voted for him as a symbol of expanded civic engagement. There were no other options.