

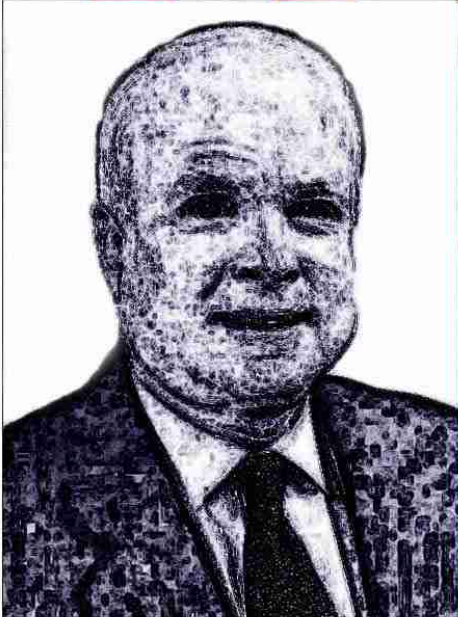

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IMPACT TIMES

Volume 1: Issue 3:
Fall 2008

A News Magazine

THE RACE IS ON



? — MR. PRESIDENT — ?

IMPACT TIMES

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IMPERFECT UNION—For every imperfect union, a leader is needed who understands its imperfections. America is no exception. It has not been that long ago since we stripped the Native Americans of their sacred land, a land admired by many, explored by many more, and marred by conquests, acquisitions and intolerance. In 1497, John Cabot sailed under the English flag to explore the coast of North America in search of a water route to Asia. He ended up claiming the land for England. In 1524, Giovanni da Verrazano went on a different journey for France. In 1540, Francisco Coronado led an expedition in search of the legendary “Seven Cities of Gold” and he stumbled into the Grand Canyon. It was not until 1619 that the first blacks arrived in America as indentured servants. Within a few years the slave trade began.

This nation has changed, adapted, and evolved since its early days. From the Colonial period to the time of the Civil War, from the boom and bust of the early 1900s to modern America, this country’s rich but imperfect history has been shaped by a group of men who we call presidents. Among them were George Washington, a revolutionary military leader, John Adams, a Massachusetts-born lawyer, and Ronald Reagan, an actor. These men have chiseled, shaped and molded our nation into the country it is today. Despite the differences in their professions prior to their White House days, they all shared one common root — they were all Anglo-Saxon males.

Two hundred years have passed since George Washington took office and a new dawn has arrived. With population on the rise, global competition for limited foods and natural resources high, and political hegemony and interdependency inevitable, a new phase of evolution is taking place. Evolution of a nation like ours requires diversification of technological know-how, social agendas, economic and political policies, and leadership compositions. A field of corn with an identical genetic blueprint will risk eradication should danger strike. The same applies to a nation. That is why America needs a major facelift to meet today’s challenges and to take on tomorrow’s dangers. We have come a long way since the day the Pilgrims set foot at Plymouth Rock. The foot-worn path they took paved a road for us but there are still much works to be done. We, as a nation, are defined not by our size, our intellect, or our technologies but by our complexity. As a whole, we are smart people, intelligent enough to know that the seat of the U.S. presidency holds great power and tremendous responsibilities. That is why it is time to put aside our bias, bigotry, fanaticism, and religious zeal, and vote with a clear state of mind.

America is still a young nation but we are crawling at light speed. Given our current state, a new breed of president is needed to guide us safely through our next evolutionary phase, a leader who not only knows the heartbeat of America and the pulse of the world, but also possesses the compassion, intellect, experience, diversity and vision to make this country greater than it is. Whether Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Mormon, as long as he or she has the qualifications to serve with the highest level of competency, he or she should be provided a fair opportunity to be seated in the highest office of the land. Let’s be honest with ourselves for a moment. No black man can truly believe that he knows what it is like to be white, and no white man can honestly claim that he knows what it is truly like to be black. Nor does an Asian know what it is like to be Hispanic and vice versa. However different we are from each other, we are also alike. We share the same piece of land called America. We reap our crops from it, bury our loved ones in it, and give birth to our children on it. We walk, run, and breathe from the air that covers the same piece of land that our forefathers once occupied. We are a nation of Taco Bells, Kentucky Fried Chickens, and Mr. Chow’s Lucky Restaurants. How we view our complexity, treat our neighbors, or pick our presidents, whether they are white, black, brown, yellow, male or female, can make or break us as a nation. Will we still be a vibrant nation two or three hundred years from now, a place that is tolerant of different political, social, cultural, and religious views? Or will we be another storybook tale about a land of many nations that was splintered by the very threads that hold us together today?

The fate of America does not begin with an act from a president but with the action of the people who put him or her in office. No one but us can tell us how to think or for whom to vote. That is why we need to thrust aside our anger, fear, and partiality, and pick the right man or woman for the job. We need to look deep within ourselves and ask the most basic question of all, “Am I electing this person because he or she is black or white, or am I electing him or her because this nation needs his or her experience, compassion, judgment, and vision?” As an imperfect union that strives for perfection, we have a duty to elect not just anyone who is willing to serve but only the one who can truly serve.

Richard Quan
Managing Editor, Impact Times

INTEGRITY & POLITICS—Has integrity ever been the dance partner of American politics? Sure, we long for the warmth of Harry Truman’s fireside chats, but Harry made the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima — an act of terrorism that, because of our might, made us right — and later fed the Baltic States one by one to Russia to appease Stalin. We affectionately refer to Lincoln as Honest Abe, but his White House tenure is marked as the four bloodiest years in this country’s history, and surely, during his terms as president, he was much maligned by anyone south of the Mason-Dixon Line. We praise George Washington for owning up to cutting down that cherry tree — but that was when he was but a boy, long before he entered the world of politics. Perhaps our fixation on the past, our desire to see the good old days only through rose-colored glasses, prevents us from seeing the cold hard truth that in politics everyone lies.

When I was younger I more readily held onto ideals such as integrity and honesty. But as Dr. Gregory House says, “Everyone lies.” I turn 52 next month and I wonder if it is wisdom — which often comes at the expense of innocence — that causes me to doubt the words of any candidate running for political office or merely cynicism in the wake of thirty-four years of voting for the public official who was best at telling lies.

In 1976 I recall watching a woman exit a voting booth to announce to the world that she’d voted for Jimmy Carter because her husband liked peanuts. No doubt many young women voted for Kennedy because he was young, handsome and dynamic (only later did we learn that he used our tax dollars to hire staff to procure women for him), and we turned a blind eye to Bill Clinton’s extramarital affairs because of a balanced budget, low unemployment and a healthy economy. Did we vote twice for Reagan because, like any good actor, he slipped into the role so convincingly? How did we vote twice for our current president, who has left us with an anything but efficient government?

The truth is, to win votes, all candidates tell an assembly of people what they think they want to hear — and that is likely to change with the target audience, whether speaking to a group of Catholic pro-lifers or a group of pro-choicers. But perhaps the greater truth this election year, or any election year, is whose lies we will believe the most. Both candidates are running on a platform of change, so what it comes down to is a leap of faith: do we trust Barack Obama as the second coming of Camelot (minus the Marilyn Monroe proclivity), that he is capable of bringing to Washington the change for which he rightfully identified we voters wish; or do we trust that John McCain’s experience will bring about the change he also promises or merely four more years of the same? Will Joe Biden counter Obama’s lack of experience? Or will Sarah Palin’s record of balancing the budget and combating corruption in Alaska, along with her energy, appeal to enough voters (including those who doubt McCain’s health) to risk four more years of a Republican in the Oval Office (as well as four more years in Iraq)? Perhaps the greater tragedy is that once the election is over the campaign lies or rhetoric will cease, only to be replaced by the truth that we will be fed a whole new diet of other rhetoric designed to pave the road toward 2012.

J. Conrad Guest
Contributing Editor, Impact Times

IMAGINE A DEN FULL OF HUNGRY DRAGONS stirred awake from their comatose state. For all you doubters out there, I have one word of warning — beware. It is happening. The dragons have awakened and they are on the prowl. If the sounds of those thunderous drums in the 2008 Summer Olympics opening ceremony struck a nerve, you have heard nothing yet. Those were only pulses emanating from the dragons' hearts.

It has been years since I first set foot on the streets of Beijing. I remember the day when everything shut down and stores emptied out when the light began to fade. Yes, I was sitting in a simple hotel room with a small bed, a cushioned chair, and a body-length mirror, looking out the window and staring in awe at a dust-filled boulevard. It was only six o'clock and the last of the cyclists had already cleared the street. The only sign of life was an unfamiliar Mandarin voice streaming from a TV set a few feet away. It was a steady voice that spilled into the vacuum of the room, a voice filled with coded propaganda that echoed into the back of my mind. Things have changed since that day. In less than two decades, over two-thirds of those 600-year-old one-storied buildings that I had curiously ventured by have been razed. In their places are new skyscrapers and glass buildings that reflect a nation on the rise again at rocket speed, a nation whose ambition stretches as far as the moon and beyond.

All nations rise and fall, but only great nations will last more than a thousand years. China, despite her flaws and humiliations, has withstood the test of time. She has stood around long enough to rediscover her youth. From a time of kings and concubines to an era of steel buildings and larger than life dams, China has truly transformed herself. She exploded from the Fountain of Youth a new woman, a metamorphosis quicker than the world has anticipated. Her wrinkled skin softened and smoothed out. Her long gray hairs turned silky black like the shadow of the thousand-mile long Great Wall that stretches across the vast belly of her landscape. Her curly nails trimmed and polished, and the womb that once lay barren is now filled with life. The shriveled vessels inside her once more engorged with blood, fed by a greater voracity than ever before. But China must take great caution. For in youth, there are lessons to be learned.

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**RUSSIAN INVASION OF GEORGIA:
A NEW AMERICA** by J. Conrad Guest

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America's calling, Harry Truman;
Harry, you'd know what to do.
The world is turnin' round
and losin' lots of ground,
Oh, Harry is there something we can do to save the land we love?

—Robert Lamm

WHEN I FIRST HEARD THAT RUSSIA had invaded Georgia, I thought, So what? I've been to forty or so of the fifty states in the union, and although Ty Cobb, the greatest Detroit Tiger and perhaps the greatest ballplayer ever □ one of baseball's nine immortals □ was affectionately known as the Georgia Peach because he hailed from Narrows, Georgia, the state itself does not rank as one of my favorites.

But then a colleague of mine reminded me of what happened in the aftermath of World War II — how Harry Truman sat across from Joseph Stalin and pushed the Baltic states, one after another, across the chessboard of Eastern Europe to appease the dictator and form the new world order for the latter half of the 20th century, until the curtain fell on Christmas Day in 1991.

Later that night, as I sat alone in the dark sipping a glass of scotch — Glenfiddich (the good stuff) — and smoking a Graycliff (the good leaf), I wondered if this perhaps was the beginning of the end for life as we know it in these United States. First, Georgia falls, then Alabama, North Carolina, Florida, Tennessee . . . where will it end?

College football starts in a couple weeks, and I've always enjoyed the image of crushed Buckeye nuts while watching the annual Michigan-Ohio State football game in November — I recall once telling my grandmother (now dearly departed) that I wouldn't be visiting that weekend because of this intense rivalry and she, disappointed and with all the naïve sincerity of an adolescent, asked me, "Didn't they play last year?" (this from a woman who once delighted me by telling me of a cousin of hers from Alpena who once played minor league baseball, and when I asked what position he played, she told me, "I think he played batter") — so I wouldn't much mind if Ohio became a part of the new Soviet Union. I rarely travel to Ohio, only occasionally through it to get to more pleasant destinations, and with my Michigan plates I always use caution because Ohio employs the death penalty for speeding violations, at least for Michigan drivers. But it frightens me, too, should Ohio fall — the Michigan/Ohio state border is, after all, fewer than a hundred clicks from my home near Ann Arbor. But then, with our high unemployment and sagging economy, a state near bankruptcy, why would the Russians bother? Maybe they'd stop their northward push at the border.

All this just a few months before the presidential election. How will it affect the outcome? I wonder. Until now I'd pretty much conceded the White House occupancy to Obama, the voters seeking change for the sake of change. How would Barack, in his new Camelot, his Jackie wannabe wife in her pill box hats, deal with this crisis? Would he merely ignore it, creating some other crisis elsewhere to draw attention away from it, as his predecessor did with Iraq, a weapons cache that never existed, the threat of the Evil Axis, never quite lying to us that Iraq was responsible for the events on 9/11, merely refraining from correcting the misconception? Or will the voters now give their nod of approval to McCain, a seasoned Viet Nam veteran, to lead the country back to its former fifty-star grandeur, to stand up to the Russkies, finger poised above the button of mass destruction to back up his rhetoric that the United States doesn't negotiate with terrorists, or Russian occupiers of Georgia or any other state of the union?

America needs you, Harry Truman — Harry, is there something we can do to save the land we love?

CONRAD GUEST's fiction and essays appear in Cezanne's Carrot, Saucy Vox, River Walk Journal, 63 Channels, The Writers Post Journal, Redbridge Review, and Blood and Thunder: Musings on the Art of Medicine. He is also cofounder of and the cigar editor for The Smoking Poet. CONTACT: www.myspace.com/jconradguest

by J. Conrad Guest

Bad politicians are sent to Washington by good people who don't vote.

—William E. Simon, 63rd U.S. Secretary of Treasury

MR. SIMON'S STATEMENT is certainly red, white and blue, until one reflects upon the quality of politicians that run for office. Consider that Bill Clinton (praised as one of our best presidents) had low morals; while Jimmy Carter, because he was a poor politician and delegator, achieved very little while in office but had high morals; we forgave the former his transgressions because he cleaned up the budget, the economy was healthy and unemployment down; the latter we wished to throw out of office for admitting he'd lusted for women in his heart because of hostages in Iran, gas prices escalating to nearly \$1 a gallon, and a sagging economy. Sometimes the best politicians are the most corrupt, as was LBJ, which leaves open for debate their ability lead.

All of which brings to mind a discussion I recently had with a colleague regarding the upcoming presidential election. She was of the mind that he who doesn't participate in the election process forfeits the right to complain; while I'm of the belief that a vote for the lesser of two evils is not only an endorsement of one candidate over the other, but also an endorsement of our election process. That got me to thinking of the power of the "no" vote, or a dissatisfaction with all candidates.

Consider that George Bush won the 2004 election with 62,040,610 popular votes to John Kerry's 59,028,444 votes, which translates to Bush winning 50.7 percent of the votes cast. Not an impressive figure but it was a majority.

Of the 197 million eligible citizens, 72 percent claimed to have been registered voters, and of those 89 percent claimed to have voted, or approximately 62 percent of the population.

But what of the 38 percent that didn't vote? At the risk of proving the adage that figures never lie and liars always figure, if we throw that 38 percent into the equation as "no" votes, we end up with the following election results:

Candidate	Popular vote	
	Count	Percent
Bush	62,040,610	31%
Kerry	59,028,444	30%
Others	1,175,648	1%
No votes	74,755,298	38%
Total	197,000,000	100%

Becoming the leader of the globe's super power with 31% of the popular vote hardly seems impressive, and it shouldn't. Granted, we can't assume that all 38 percent of those who didn't vote translate into "no" votes, but it gives one pause to consider adding to the ballot a "No vote" option, perhaps with the provision that in order to win the presidency a candidate must amass greater than 50 percent of the total votes. Would that result in better candidates running for office? Who can say? But until then, the good people who vote, as well as those who don't, will continue to send bad politicians to Washington.

CONRAD GUEST's fiction and essays appear in Cezanne's Carrot, Saucy Vox, River Walk Journal, 63 Channels, The Writers Post Journal, Redbridge Review, and Blood and Thunder: Musings on the Art of Medicine. He is also cofounder of and the cigar editor for The Smoking Poet. CONTACT: www.myspace.com/jconradguest

IMPACTTIMES

by Kathy T. Camp

I'VE BEEN ASKED MANY TIMES about my views on the election. I'm thrilled to talk to anyone who will listen to me regarding this year's election. Finally, I have an outlet for my opinion. Dull. Why? It's about my own candidate. He reminds me of a character from the movie "Weekend at Bernie's." The setting is a typical beach at spring break. The main character is a dead man, Bernie. A collection of very drunk college-ages kids in places like boats, beach houses, and bathrooms props him up. No matter where they go, they take Bernie, Dead Bernie, with them. They put various hats and sunglasses on him, even change his clothes, so that no one will know that he's dead. We, the viewers, know he's dead, but the other folks in the movie become friends with Bernie. They have great conversations with him; he's a great listener. That's my candidate.

I watched the Republican convention with no expectations. Curious. That's what I was. The woman named Palin, a beauty queen, somehow managed to breathe life into McBernie, the semi-alive senator. I missed the first two or three minutes of her speech. The first thing I heard her say was, "Our nominee for president is a true profile of courage." I noticed myself leaning a little closer to the TV and thinking, "Wow, she's beautiful!" I'm a typical woman checking out the clothes, the hair and make-up. I was glad to see her wearing glasses. They look like mine!

The more I heard, the more I wanted to hear. The more I looked, the more I wanted to see. When I listened to her, I felt comforted and reassured. It seemed that my life would be important to her, that my needs as a single mother would not be over-looked, that my income would not be pillaged to pay for programs that I morally oppose. She spoke strongly, smiled, and colored in a black-outline image of a man. The color photograph she showed me was incredible. It had depth, dark and light areas, and a background something like you see in an Italian fresco. The portrait she painted was filled with vivid colors, rich reds, deep ambers, almost a halo appeared around the war wounds. The dark areas were the time when McCain suffered for his country, his people. She completed the painting. What was a black and white Picasso became a Michelangelo.

I was a college Young Democrat. I campaigned about 15 hours a week for Bill Clinton during his first run at the Presidency. That was before I had children. When real-life hit, my values shifted. I work in education and when I saw how my tax dollars were spent on meaningless programs, I slowly shifted into a more conservative frame of mind. I want to keep more of my own money. I want to feel safe from outside threats. I want to know that unborn children will have a voice. Sara Palin sparked something in me. Hope and a little enthusiasm for something better, something different. She's got five kids and is still married. Her teenager is pregnant and she didn't kick her out of the house, she didn't encourage and pay for an abortion. She, herself, gave birth to a down-syndrome baby. She stood by her values-- twice.

Where am I now? I work 50 hours a week, take my kids to four different after-school activities, go to church on Sunday and ask God to show me that I do have enough time to meet all my responsibilities. Nevertheless, I'm ready to call the local McCain headquarters and ask how I can help the Republican Party. Bernie wasn't dead. He was just asleep. The Palin Princess woke him up.

KATHY T. CAMP is a high school Spanish teacher. She was born and raised in Atlanta and is a current resident of a small western Georgia town called Bowdon. Her passion is in writing. Kathy discovered that tragedies make the best story and therefore incorporated dark chapters of her life into her collection of short stories. Kathy enjoys playing the guitar, reading, writing and painting. CONTACT: kathyiamnotgod@hotmail.com

by Aurelio O'Brien

TOP TEN QUALITIES needed to be a President of the United States and why I'm backing Obama.

- **You must be easy to caricature.** Let's face it; it's all about your face. A good president need not be good-looking, just easy to draw. Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Jimmy Carter and Richard Nixon were huge successes. Kennedy and George Bush, Sr., not so much. Both of our current candidates show promise here, but Obama's ears give him an advantage.
- **You must have troubled relationships with food.** Clinton had his Big Mac attacks and Krispy Kreme addictions. Bush, Sr. hated broccoli, and Japanese food made him barf. The current president had a run-in with an angry pretzel, and JFK looked at Germans and saw jam donuts. The jury is out on this one, but Cindy's cookie recipe flap gives McCain the early advantage.
- **You must possess odd or embarrassing relatives with even odder names.** FDR's nephew, Tadd, married a Hungarian prostitute, but LBJ had this requirement down in spades with his family full of "Birds." Carter's brother, Billy, had his beer, and Ron, Jr. gave the Reagan's a moment of pause when he took up ballet. Clinton had brother Roger, and the current president has brother Neil, and his own wild twins. Barack Obama's own name is about as wacky as they come, although I'm not sure how to gauge who has the real advantage here with the addition of Palin and her family on the Republican ticket. We'll call it a draw.
- **You must look good in hats.** This one is a deal-breaker. Dukakis learned the hard way that you have to own your hat or you can't be president. Lincoln and his stovepipe will be forever joined in our collective memory, and who could resist the Gipper in a cowboy hat. Both of the current candidates have avoided hats, and although Obama looked good in that African head wrap, it may have been a fashion faux pas. No clear winner here.
- **You must be able to throw a baseball.** This one is not a deal-breaker but every president since Taft has thrown an opening pitch. You don't have to be Roger Clemens, but if you only throw underhand or your toss is too wimpy to make it to the plate, don't expect a second term. McCain has a definite disadvantage here due to his war injuries, but seeing Bema bowl gives him only a slight advantage at best.
- **You must have a book agent.** Whether you write the book yourself or use a ghost, you've got to have an agent. With all the books pouring out of the last few presidents and first families, no wonder each of them needs their own library. McCain has two book credits. Obama has four. Advantage: Obama.
- **You must have imaginary enemies.** When we were kids we had imaginary friends but as president, you need imaginary enemies. Whether they are nazis, commies, hippies, or terrorists, you need something that keeps you from turning out the lights when you go to sleep. Nixon had so many he kept a list. McCain calls everyone "my friends," and Obama is known for reaching across the aisle. Fighting with each other doesn't count, so this one looks like a draw.
- **You must have kooky kids.** Well or ill-behaved, doesn't matter, as long as they're kooky. Some ex-presidents have gotten by with kooky pets, but America especially loves to watch the kooky ones grow up and blossom, like an episode of "The Swan." Tricia Nixon, Amy Carter, Chelsea Clinton all did their bit. McCain's kids are all too old to be kooky. Obama's girls delivered a major dose of kooky at the convention, and were met with ovations. Definite advantage to Obama.
- **Your GPA must be a C average or lower.** This requirement is George W. Bush's legacy. We Americans are far more comfortable knowing our president isn't going to out-smart even the dumbest of us. A quick web search revealed no definitive figures on either of the current candidates, but McCain admitted to being at the bottom of his class in the Naval Academy, so we'll give the advantage to McCain.
- **You must have super-rich friends or relatives.** This one is extremely tough to gauge. McCain drinks beer and Obama prefers wine, but the more beer McCain drinks the more money Cindy makes. However, Obama's BFF, Oprah, is one of the richest women in the world. But then, McCain, thanks to Cindy, can't even remember how many mansions they own. They both qualify, with perhaps a slight advantage to McCain for having more direct access to funds.

There you have it: My Top Ten. It looks like 4 to 3, advantage: Obama, but there's still time. If McCain comes up with some solid imaginary enemies (Iranians, anyone?), dons a dapper derby, or adopts Urkel, the race could change. Stranger things have happened in the name of politics.

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AH, THE CURRENT MADNESS of what we call the 2008 Presidential election. Shameless mud-slinging exists, along with accusations of past decisions in order to persecute the character of what could be the leader of our country in the new year. Each campaign will stop at nothing to twist seemingly innocuous words of another candidate into a controversial commentary of a certain issue. While I've heard lots of complaints about how voters wish the candidates would focus on what they will do as opposed to what they won't do, there's a general consensus that people have made a decision early on about who they will vote for. This is obviously a landmark year. Our future president could very well be the first African-American in office, the oldest to begin his first term as president, or the first to have a female vice president on the ticket. While we anticipate a bright future of historic proportions, there is no denying the fact that with these novel characteristics come potentially divisive camps on each side of the campaign.

Let's step away from the immediate election for a moment to examine some of these hot button issues that affect the image as well as perception of these leaders. In my opinion, it's not an accident that race, gender, age, socioeconomic and even party background all play a role in specific stereotypes that taint us from having accurate views of each candidate. These have polarized our American society for quite some time and they will not go away anytime soon. Senator Barack Obama, has an articulate delivery and thoughtful stances on the issues but there are still skeptics based on his lack of experience and age. There are also voters out there who fear they will be labeled racist if they don't vote for him. The other side of this is because of his extensive education, blue-collar workers fear that he will not be able to relate despite his history of proposals and desire to help the working class. As for Senator John McCain, I've heard opinions voiced that he is too old for office, or that because he's Republican and sided with current President Bush on a lot of issues that he will allow our country to remain stuck in the same pattern with the country's problems. Recent media appearances have drawn fire for his lifestyle and numerous properties that paint him as a wealthy politician who could care less about the concerns of those who are not as well off. It just goes to show there's not much people can do to take aim at Senator Biden other than to ask about hair plugs (therein lies the age issue again). Lastly, ever since Governor Sarah Palin was appointed on the Republican vice presidential candidate, the media has gleefully poked fun at her by devising any caricature they can of this woman. It's a bit odd that the more attractive a woman is, the more the media feels the need to take aim with sexist remarks. Or the more controversial decision she's made in leadership, the more they jump on her with catty behavior or scrutiny.

The differences between the Democratic and Republican parties (not to mention independent representatives) are so stark in contrast that there are bound to be citizens who are unhappy no matter who is elected. Chances are, at this point in the campaign you have already made your decision. I know I have, despite a particular bias, but I did make an informed decision after perusing the stances of each candidate and listening to the recent debates. The danger in listening to commentaries, editorials and media representation is that instead of deciding on each candidate's stances, voting can become an emotional decision. Therefore, I urge you to examine the views that mirror your own and make an informed decision based on that. Don't go blindly to the polls!

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GIVEN THE CURRENT STATE of our economy and our relationship with the world, we need a President with not only one or two but with as many of the following six attributes as possible: vision, judgment, experience, charisma, intellect, and good health.

I recently turned on my TV and the first thing I heard was a young American had hung himself with a tie strapped around his neck. A few hours after I heard the news I went to McDonalds to grab a burger. While I stood in line a man in front of me, a blue-collar American twice the young man's age, complained to a stranger to his left that the wage he will earn for that day will go directly to pay for the gas that will take him to work the next day. "I can't do this anymore," he said repeatedly. "I might as well sit home and collect an unemployment check." Not only has the price of gas skyrocketed while factories and businesses are shutting down and corporations filing for bankruptcy, there isn't enough gas to go around.

For nearly a week, almost all gas stations in town were empty. Those with supply had lines that stretched as far as the eyes could see. In a heated afternoon when patience was low, tempers flared. From my car window, I witnessed people shouting at each other as my car crawled at snail's pace toward the gas pump while a station employee stood by the edge of the road flagging another car to stop. The police arrived shortly thereafter. This is the state of our economy. In less than a decade we have gone from a nation with surplus to a nation with over a trillion-dollar deficit, including the Wall Street bailout plan. The state of our economy and our relationship with the world requires a political candidate with very specific characteristics to be the leader of this new but not so free world, a world with new alliances formed and new stresses imposed.

First, a candidate must have a clear vision. He or she must have the ability to look forward and backward, and reach a decision that a common man would not have reached. Great leaders have great vision and extraordinary men have extraordinary vision. Who has the greater vision, McCain or Obama? We will see.

Second, the candidate must have exceptional judgment. Wisdom and judgment are Siamese twins. Those who are wise often make good judgments and those who make bad judgments are often unwise. Wisdom may come with age but an elderly man can also be a fool. Naiveté and youth are not too far apart, but a young man can be quite wise. Has McCain's initial support for the Iraq war overshadowed his support for the surge, or has Obama's reluctance to support the surge overshadowed his initial instinct of not going to war? The damage has already been done and the answer is clear. All of the king's men cannot put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Third, the candidate must have experience. A chess grandmaster can destroy his opponent in one move and a seasoned politician can outmaneuver his opponent with a single whisper. But to get to that one move or unique whisper he or she must already have experienced a thousand moves or heard a thousand whispers. McCain's political experience may help him navigate through a tank of sharks, but he faces an equally impressive opposing force, Obama's colorful life experience. Obama's multicultural upbringing enables him to see beyond the horizon that most Americans are accustomed to seeing. Certainly, one cannot dwell in a cave and know what the world holds.

Fourth, the candidate must have charisma. The German sociologist Max Weber noted that charismatic leaders arise in times of psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, or political distress. Hitler and Churchill, two individuals with opposing political ambitions, were examples. Is 2008 the time for Obama, undoubtedly a charismatic individual who has inspired thousands in America and thousands more across the world? If chosen, can he inspire the leaders of this nation and the leaders of the world to push for better change?

Fifth, the candidate must have extraordinary intellect. The brain is what distinguishes man from ape. A man can retain information, process it, analyze it, and make innovative use of it. Whether from standardized test scores or which school a person attends, our society has created workable templates to measure human intelligence.

Finally, the candidate must have good health. An old man may be able to change the world with his wisdom, but a young man can carry the weight of the world on his shoulder with his strength. We all grow old and will one day die. With age come problems. Our reflexes slow down, our vision blurs, our heartbeat slows, our body weakens, and our mind deteriorates. Given the flurries of activities bombarding a President's life while he or she is in office, having good health, a sharp mind, and quick reflexes are critical factors that will enable him or her to do his or her job at maximum capacity.

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ONE YEAR AFTER PRESIDENT CLINTON declared “never again” on the occasion of the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, the killing started in Rwanda. Politicians like to say “never again”. It’s short and punchy, filled with resolve. But many Americans believe the US should not be the world’s 911. They needn’t worry. In the last one hundred years there hasn’t been one ethnic, religious or tribal group sufficiently slaughtered to warrant our intervention. Our country has not yet produced leaders equal to the challenges of genocide. The United Nations hasn’t devised an effective system to deter or end genocide either. Its efforts in Darfur are a force — provided by the African Union — in place only after most of the killing has occurred and barely able to defend itself. The country with the resources to act is the US, but the US record speaks for itself.

I have been struck while reading about the murdering of Armenians, Jews, Kurds, Cambodians, Bosnians, Rwandans and Darfuris by how often the perpetrators of genocide were sensitive to the presence of outsiders. The commander of the UN Peacekeeping detachment in Rwanda has written that the mere presence of even two peacekeepers was sufficient to temporarily stop the killing. Fifteen foreign journalists spent the 100 days of genocide in Kigali and were not harmed. The killers respected their power to witness and inform.

There is no governmental solution to genocide. Experience shows that domestic political considerations will trump other considerations in the nations best able to help. Fear of casualties, costs and failure and bureaucratic inertia contribute to an atmosphere of hesitation. In the case of Rwanda the US even refused to describe genocide as genocide, imparting as it would have an obligation to act. The US could have helped to reinforce the detachment of 503 peacekeepers but didn’t want to spend the estimated 30 million dollars it would have cost. We later spent more than 230 million dollars to assist the survivors and perpetrators.

Another, non-violent, solution is possible. We know enough about genocide to recognize its precursors. The use of sophisticated telecommunications technology to move public opinion could be a powerful tool in a country where those precursors are present. What if there was an international, citizens’ organization which could take preemptive action in that country? Motivated and organized citizens who view the globe as a community could converge at problem areas voluntarily in sufficient numbers to serve as witnesses. This non-governmental, non-military approach could succeed.

The genocides of the past that had the best conditions for non-governmental solutions were those in which the genocide was part of a civil conflict and not an external war. When the threat of genocide is high enough the volunteers could converge and disburse throughout the threatened population in distinct groups. Each group would have the capability to transmit live audio and video. Witnesses transmitting to millions around the world would be a powerful deterrent to violence. Their presence would continue until political tensions calmed or governments mobilized their collective resolve. In fact, the volunteers, through the risk to themselves, might shame governments into action.

This organization would have a sophisticated media outreach to harness the power of public opinion. For example, it could send press releases to the news outlets of each country that has volunteers in place, explaining who they are, why they are there, what they are doing and what they up to achieve. Photos and contact info would be provided so those media outlets could interview their fellow citizens directly. The volunteers would blog about their experiences and the threatened population with whom they have immersed. This access would get each country interested and vested in and following the progress of their citizens in an area at risk. Public opinion is the best leverage for success, and all available means will be brought to bear on the country at risk and the powers which could support a solution.

Few in the world would volunteer, of course, because of the considerable personal risk, but I believe enough would to make a difference. Volunteers in this effort could affect a real solution to a problem that has been too big even for governments to solve. The volunteers could rightfully claim to have helped prevent or stop genocide. Who could say no to that? There is an untapped resource of the world’s citizens who are frustrated with intractable problems and global emergencies and would take the initiative if they saw a way. The issue of access to troubled areas would, I believe, be a solvable challenge. When presented with a real plan to stop genocide, committed global citizens will be there.

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by M. Sandi Aigoro

AS REPRESENTATIVES of the U.S. Common Bond, we are responsible to not only consider the right to vote, but also the right vote. We have to consider how, over the last eight years, America was unable to put a president into office that held values or core beliefs, particularly the right to privacy and freedom, shared by the majority of the American people. For this reason, our new leader must be the antithesis – a master at reasoning, sensing, communicating, and negotiating, all of which can help to reestablish the country's credibility, both domestically and globally.

The President must demonstrate clear values toward enforcing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights by reestablishing the rights of the American people. He must work with the government to be cautious in doing so by not integrating too excessively (with the American people) or allowing persecution by the media or outside countries, for that matter. It is also important for the President to be an honorable individual, one who respects agreements with our global partners (i.e. the Geneva Convention, which does not support the torture of prisoners). The United States of America has suffered greatly by setting a precedent that is difficult for other countries to ignore. For example, we launched a preemptive and unsupported (by the United Nations) war against Iraq in 2003. Now, Russia, a large, powerful country has taken a preemptive attack upon Georgia, a smaller independent state trying to establish its own power and rights to govern itself.

It is critical that Americans select a leader who is more sensitive to diversity and understand the need to be inclusive rather than exclusive. He must have knowledge of culture and international affairs to lead the world in tolerance and liberty, as well as seize opportunities to become more open to our neighbors to the South. At the same time, he should be communicative and forthright in recognizing the subtle nuances necessary to negotiate required conciliations. Perspective is a must have. Our leader's ability to manage media frenzy and political spin with clear objectives and decisions will bode well when communicating with the world. Americans were inundated with political marketing and persuasion usually afforded to rich men with persuasive objectives.

Our nation's leader must be comfortable dealing with accusations, insults and questions from the press. It would best to be far removed from jokes and anecdotes that could quickly be interpreted as insulting and, therefore, setbacks to global and cultural diplomacy. By ensuring his/her own house is in order, the president and vice president must demonstrate high family and community values. We want a leaders who have not been accused, found involved or in the appearance of actions that will put at risk respect for American values. Making sure that family is first and not last – assuring our core belief that children should always be protected, in marriage, divorce, war and by their government (i.e. enforcement of child labor laws, healthcare and recognizing the results of neglect, which is drug and sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy, prostitution and lewd, and lawless behavior).

Can America afford to have repeated the “We'll smoke em out of there!” judgment that ended up in America's unsupported invasion of Iraq? No, we cannot, as this was conducted under a poorly developed strategy that cost thousands of American and Iraqis lives as well as unmentionable costs to our own credibility and economic soundness. It is the American voter's responsibility to stay true to our common bond to articulate the right questions when assessing the candidates and, subsequently, deciding on the next President of the United States. What do you think?

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UNTIL RECENTLY, SENIORS 62 YEARS OF AGE and older have not had the best choices when it came to getting cash from their homes. Traditional home loans only offered the option of either selling one's house or borrowing against its equity. With reverse mortgages coming on the scene, seniors now have some additional cash-flow alternatives. This type of loan allows mature borrowers to convert their home equity into **tax-free income** without leaving their current home or making mortgage payments - and they do not need an existing income to qualify. Reverse mortgages are probably best understood when compared side-by-side with traditional home mortgages, otherwise known as "forward" mortgages. The following table shows the differences between forward mortgages and reverse mortgages:

FORWARD MORTGAGE	REVERSE MORTGAGE
Uses income to pay debt	Uses home equity to get cash or credit
Monthly mortgage payments	No payments; debt is due when the borrower(s) pass away or relocate.
Falling debt, rising equity	Rising debt, falling equity

Both loans incur debt against your home, and both affect equity, but they do so in different ways. Traditional home mortgages require making monthly payments to a lender. With a Reverse Mortgage, payments are made to you. The following are some important points to know when considering a reverse mortgage. To qualify for a reverse mortgage, you must be at least 62 years of age. All owners who are on the title deed must meet this age requirement. You must also have paid off all, or most, of your home mortgage. Lastly, the home you reside in must remain your principal place of residence. In order to ensure that homeowners are fully aware of the financial ramifications of obtaining a reverse mortgage, you must undergo counseling with an unbiased third party before completing a loan. HUD and AARP oversee a network of counselors who can provide this service, and it should be offered for either a nominal fee or at no charge. One of the advantages of a reverse mortgage is that the money you receive will not be taxed. The amount you'll obtain depends on several factors including the plan you select, the type of cash advances you choose, your age, and the value of your home. Typically, the older you are the larger the loan, as you will have more equity in the house. The cost of a reverse mortgage varies considerably from one type to the next. However, you can typically use the money you receive to offset the loan fees. The costs will be added to the loan balance and must be repaid with interest once the loan terminates. Reverse mortgages do not require any payment as long as the borrower(s) remain in the home. Should the borrower(s) pass away, sell the home, or permanently relocate, then the loan would be due in full, along with interest and additional costs. If two borrowers are on the loan and one dies, the loan would not be due since one of them still occupies the home.

The most common type of reverse mortgage is the Home Equity Conversion Mortgage, otherwise known as a HECM mortgage. This is the only reverse mortgage program that's federally insured and backed by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This type of reverse mortgage is popular for a few reasons. First, you can choose your own interest rate. You can select one that changes annually or one that changes every month. Second, you have several payment options. You may receive monthly loan advances for a fixed term or for as long as you live in the home. You may also choose to receive a line of credit or combine monthly loan advances with a line of credit. Third, the loan can be used for any purpose. With a HECM, you don't have to designate the loan to a specific use; you can apply the funds to anything you choose. Finally, reverse mortgage is one of the most attractive features of a HECM. This plan protects you by guaranteeing continued loan advances even if your lender defaults. The main reason people choose a reverse mortgage is to gain financial independence and maintain an adequate standard of living without leaving their current home. The best way to decide if a reverse mortgage is right for you is to compare it to the other option of selling your house. To do this, ask yourself these three questions: (1) How much cash can I get by selling my home? (2) How much will it cost to buy or rent a new place? (3) Is it worth my moving now, or do I prefer to do some thing else with the money? Perhaps you'll confirm what you knew all along, where you now live is the best place to be.

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BUSINESS OWNERS, DON'T JUST SURVIVE IN TODAY'S ECONOMY, THRIVE! by Bernadette Boas

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OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, especially few weeks, everyone from politicians, bankers, the Fed, and your neighbor are spewing advice regarding the state of the economy, your stock portfolios, and your own wallets. Sell, stick it out, pull it out, stuff your mattress, and more. I often feel compelled to do the same, the difference however is, it comes with a bit of tough love.

No one can or will deny that the evaporating stock market, rising costs and consumers' tight wallets are impacting you negatively, disastrously. But take note, there are many businesses, small and large, that are not only surviving this so called "great depression", they are thriving in it. Meeting with business owners every day, nine out of ten are crying doom and gloom, repeating verbatim, the drama of the media. The one out of ten that are not falling prey to it, are keeping themselves informed just enough to understand what the impacts are; they are tuning out the drama, and they are focused on what they can do to keep the consumer and wallets coming to their business. And, they are succeeding. They are finding ways to minimize costs, reduce expenses, evaluate new products or services, change their marketing or sales approach, optimize their workforce, and taking stock of what is working or not working. Some are even taking advantage of reduced costs to buy new or additional businesses. They are leveraging this down turn to recreate themselves and they are thriving in this depressing economy.

So, your call to action business owners; stop wallowing, stop allowing the media to pull you down, and/or stop waiting for the consumer to come to you! Instead:

- Get as informed as you need in order to get control of the things that you can control and forget all of the things you cannot. Every second you spend focused on those things someone is taking your customer and your money.
- Step back and look at your entire business; expenses, processes, people, technology and systems:
 1. Identify what is working, and continue doing it. Determine if it can be used elsewhere.
 2. Identify what is not working, and either fix it or stop doing it.
 3. Identify what is missing, and despite the need to spend money, if it generates business, buy and implement it. Now!
 4. Sales and marketing your business is king in times like this. If it has slacked or even eliminated, ramp it up!
 5. Lastly, commit to yourself (and your business) today, that you will be positive, motivated, and energized regarding what you and your business has the potential to accomplish. Do not go down with the depression – you do not have to. Attitude is everything!

Prove all of those naysayers wrong . . . take control of your business and success, and as Nike says, "Just Do It". If you believe that you can thrive, you will!

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THERE SEEMS TO BE SOMETHING in the human psyche that is naturally drawn to the unexplainable. Although I have accomplished much in my twenty plus years in the corporate world, what snares most people's fascination is my ability to remote view. While the term "remote viewing" has become a catchall phrase for numerous parapsychology activities, the remote viewing I practice is a structured process developed by the U.S. military to obtain information on places, people, and things that are distant in time/space. After the government admitted to having a unit of psychic spies and declassified the information related to this program, some of the participants chose to share their experiences and training. While there are other types of psychics, the term remote viewing traditionally refers to the original members of this unit or a skilled student of one of these former military viewers. Anyone calling him- or herself a remote viewer who did not participate in the military unit or is not a student of someone who did is simply hijacking the term. In my case, I study with Lyn Buchanan whose program, Controlled Remote Viewing (CRV), is based directly on the military's proven methods.

When people think of psychic readings they often conjure up images of Madam WuWoo adorned with gypsy bangles staring into a crystal ball. While some of the misconceptions surrounding psychic phenomena have been overcome as a result of popular TV programs that portray natural psychics working with law enforcement, psychic ability is still considered more of a curiosity than a credible skill by most people. There are natural psychics among us who can access information distant in time and space without the structure of remote viewing. There are also charlatans posturing themselves as gifted psychics to make a quick dollar. In CRV we use a specific protocol to describe a "target." During our training sessions we work with a variety of "targets." The information we gather during a viewing session is written down, summarized, and analyzed. Pictures or actual site visits verify whether or not we "hit the target." CRV is structured in such a way that there is no room to "fudge" based on the questions someone is asking, the background information provided, body language, facial expressions or anything of the sort because in most cases we are never exposed to the actual person seeking information. We are given nothing more than a set of random numbers called "coordinates" which launches the session. Then, we either hit the target, or we don't. If our target was a small village in Siberia during a winter festival that took place a number of years ago, we either accurately described that scene or we did not.

Some people believe that if we are truly psychic we should be able to pick the correct lottery tickets or work our stock market investments to the ultimate advantage. The truth is, we can do all that. The problem is, no one is ever 100 percent correct. And there is another issue: Our subconscious mind, the part of us that accesses this information, has its own set of rules and ideas of how life should be. Lyn shares the story of how a group of students were gambling at the casino near his home. One was placing bets based on Lyn's suggestions. The student was racking up significant winnings. Elated with his success, he handed Lyn \$500.00. Lyn missed every call from that point on. While he consciously had no reservations about betting, his subconscious mind, developed in a very traditional environment, had different ideas.

My initial motivation for learning CRV was a desire to help find lost children. It is tough, gut-wrenching work. I know I can remote view, but I don't know if I can do that work. Regardless of the capacity in which I use my CRV skills, I have learned that it is important to use them. Sheldrake's theory of a morphogenic field appears to have validity in the world of remote viewing. Each time a viewer opens the door to the collective conscious, all of mankind benefits from the opportunity to expand its perceptions of life. Some will embrace it. Some will not. During one "break" in class, we learned how to bend spoons using our minds. Almost everyone in the class succeeded. It is true: A mind stretched never returns to its original limitations. Once we have accomplished something that far beyond the traditional perception of reality, everything we ever thought is irreversibly transformed and we never see anything in the world the same way again. Our mind holds tremendous power that remains virtually untapped. It is time to start taking full advantage of the possibilities. Those who are curious and courageous enough to step outside traditional norms will find they truly can accomplish things they did not even know were possible.

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I FINALLY GOT TO WEAR sparkly eye-shadow to work. This week I began a new job. I'm teaching high school. We had a lot of meetings two days before the herds of students arrived. One meeting stressed the importance of looking professional. The trend of dressing down makes it hard to tell the teachers from the students,

"Please make sure to set yourself apart, especially during the first week."

My alarm went off at 6 am. Ugh. I drag myself to the bathroom and got in the shower. Cold shower. It's summertime. Cold feels good. I got my face ready for transforming myself into a woman who looks half alive, which requires complete cover up of some areas and re-drawing things like eyes and lips. Then I noticed that my make-up bag was empty—except for a broken eyeliner pencil, a smashed tube of lipstick and a four-year old container of something black. It was so old that the words had faded away. I dug under my bathroom counter, past towels, lotions and pink sponge rollers. My "emergency" make-up bag was not where I left it.

I recalled my daughter gathering up all the make-up in our house for the "ten-years-younger" look she was trying to give her nine year old sister. The next day, she went to her grandmother's house. Her shiny, pink purse looked fairly fat. But I didn't send her through customs to check the contents. Mistake.

I dashed to "the children's bathroom" and scrambled through six drawers containing toiletry essentials like hair-clips, long ribbons and Spiderman on his motorcycle. Underneath the counter, behind squashed toilet paper, obviously sat on during yesterday's hide-in-seek game, I found what looked like a broken CD case. I flipped it over and found the answer to my problem—an array of eye-shadows: pale pink, light blue, and deep purple. I think this had been a birthday present at my daughter's sixth birthday party—that was five years ago. The colors still looked pretty.

I drug my pinky across the light pink powder and smudged it around on my eyelids. "Hmm, not bad," I thought. I added a little purple to bring out my tired looking eyes. As I leaned in close, I saw a sparkle on my right lid. When I finished, I looked younger and fresher than I have looked in about ten years.

"You have pretty eyes," the young teenager said as I stood behind my desk getting things arranged for the stressful first day of school.

I looked at her and smiled. Not too big a smile. I needed to look professional. Before I could say thanks, she continued her compliment.

"Nice glitter."

"Thank you."

My make-up was returned last night. I'm going to pretend I don't know where it is. It's nice to sparkle.

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