

# Opinion

## Politics, under Obama, even more partisan

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If you open the current issue of The New York Times Magazine, you are greeted with the headline, “Who is Barack Obama?” You would think perhaps a happy, fluffy human-interest piece about our president’s past will follow.

You would be wrong. The subheader gives a much more accurate description of the article’s point: “And why do people say such loopy, ugly things about him? The enduring rot in American politics.”

That “enduring rot,” of course, is referring to the growing majority of Americans who do not approve of the job our dear president is doing. This is a wide umbrella, and covers everyone from Glenn Beck to those of the “Birther” movement (who claim Obama is not a naturalized citizen), to the tea party participants, to the peaceful protesters in Washington, D.C.

It’s currently very fashionable to decry the “nasty tone” in American politics, and pundits are quick to jump at explanations. Former President Jimmy Carter even chimed in claiming the animosity is rooted in racism toward our black president. At least the Obama administration had the good sense to distance itself from that claim.

Liberals are only shocked and outraged by the protests because they’re not used to seeing it from the other side.

Joe Wilson stepped over a line by yelling, “You lie!” at Obama during a speech. But during the Bush years, how many protesters carried signs proclaiming “Bush Lied, People Died”? How many signs put our then-president’s face on wanted posters? What kind of person would have the gall to hold up a sheet of cardboard proclaiming

“George Bush: World’s #1 Terrorist”?

Surely saying that “Osama bin Bush is in the White House” is worse than calling Obama a liar. In fact, if you replace Bush’s head with Obama’s and substitute flag waving instead of flag burning, today’s protests are exactly the same as those during our previous president’s term.

These protests and supposed animosity are simply the symptoms of a struggling political party during difficult times. Yes, it seems that media outlets like Glenn Beck are orchestrating and fanning the flames of many protests. But the same was true of a few liberal bloggers during the Bush years. And besides, the organizers of a protest aren’t really

important — they don’t create the dissent; they just channel it.

Sure, it seems that some of the people

protesting today have only the feeblest grasp on their protest methods. Putting a Hitler mustache on Obama’s face doesn’t really match up with the point they are trying to make. But the same ploy made just as little sense on Bush’s face a few months earlier. And the Birther movement might be crazy, but so was the “Truther” movement, which claims that Bush and Co. were complicit in the 9/11 attacks.

I suppose the real fear is that all of this anger will incite someone to take violent action against the president. This is always a concern, of course, but Bush made it through five odd years of liberal protests, so why should right-wing protests be more risky?

Protests and marching that only espouse a narrow political ideology rarely have the intended results anyway. Bush didn’t suddenly wake up one day and say, “You know, I did lie!” and I doubt Obama will either. Reasoned debate is still a much more powerful political tool. This ruckus merely serves as a vent for frustration and a galvanizing force for the party base.

Dissent, it is said, is the highest form of patriotism. It’s important that we recognize this as true from both ends of the political spectrum.



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