



I had chosen to be a coward, to pretend that the issue was about my election, not the broader racism that infused her comment.

Similarly, I suspect that you know that the whisperers are using the cover of your middle name and your Indonesian childhood to make a statement about the role that Muslims should play in America. It is a statement made repeatedly by mainstream figures in the American media, like CNN commentator Glenn Beck. Beck welcomed Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to Congress, on his show with the following challenge: "Sir, prove to me you are not working with our enemies."

Senator Obama, you have been courageous and direct on a range of issues—the Iraq war, race, foreign policy. Why not do the same with the whisper campaign? Why not dismiss the question about your faith in one line and then make a statement on the real issue: that this is a thinly-veiled attempt to disparage and disenfranchise an entire group of people based on their religion. It is un-American bigotry. Period.

One of the most attractive parts of your candidacy is your eloquence about identity. "I was engaged in a fitful, interior struggle," you write in *Dreams from My Father*. "I was trying to raise myself as a black man in America, and beyond the given of my appearance, no one around me seemed to know exactly what that meant."

There is a generation of young Muslims coming of age in America who experience a similar struggle. They hear from too many Americans that Muslims can never be true citizens, their loyalties will always be elsewhere. They hear from some twisted voices in the Muslim world that living in America makes them less Muslim. They are at the crossroads of an identity crisis, trying to look both ways at once.

The reason so many people see themselves in you is because of your eloquent story of reconciling your own multiple identities: black and white, Kenya and Kansas, community organizer and corporate lawyer. That process is not just the struggle of individuals, it is at the heart of the American journey as well. Our challenge has always been to make the multiple identities of this nation mutually enriching instead of mutually exclusive.

I cannot pretend to know anything about the challenges of presidential campaigns. My experiment with electoral politics ended pretty much with my defeat for class representative in 7th grade.

But I do know this. "Hussein" is not the only part of your name that has Muslim roots. "Barack" is a derivation of a commonly used word in Islamic Arabic: *baraka*. It is also associated with the Hebrew term, *barukh*. In both languages, it means "blessing." And that is the only way to describe how millions of people feel about you, Senator Obama—that you are a blessing unto them, our nation, and our world.

And those Muslim kids? They are hoping that you, who have so eloquently added a new chapter to the American narrative, will write them into the story as well. You are running to be their President too. I hope you live up to the promise of your name with them.

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