

Change in 2012

FOR CONSERVATIVES fretful over the future of the party to which they have given allegiance, *How Barack Obama Won: A State by State Guide to the Historic 2008 Election* reads like something out of Edgar Allan Poe. Co-authored by NBC's Chuck Todd, it is a grim tale of what happened to the GOP in 2008 and what the future may hold.

Yet on second and third reads, one discerns, as did General Wolfe's scouts 250 years ago, a narrow path leading up the cliff to the Plains of Abraham—and perhaps victory in 2012.

First, the bad news. Obama raised the national share of the black vote to 13 percent, then swept it 95 percent to 4 percent. The GOP share of the Hispanic vote, now 9 percent of the electorate, fell from George W. Bush's 40 percent against John Kerry to 32 percent. Young voters ages 18 to 29 went for Obama 66 percent to 31 percent. And Obama ran stronger among white voters with a college education than did either Al Gore or Kerry.

Put starkly, the voting groups growing in numbers—Hispanics, Asians, African-Americans, folks with college degrees, the young—are all trending Democratic, while the voters most loyal to the GOP—white folks and religious conservatives—are declining as a share of the U.S. electorate. And demography is destiny.

Other grim news: 18 states and Washington, D.C., with 247 electoral votes—all New England save New Hampshire; New York and New Jersey; the mid-Atlantic states, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland; Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota; the three Pacific Coast states plus Hawaii—have gone Democratic in all of the last five presidential elections. And John McCain lost every one of them by double digits. In this Slough of Despond, where is the hope?

Despite all of the above, John McCain, two weeks after the GOP convention, thanks to the surge in energy and enthusiasm Sarah Palin brought to the ticket, was running ahead of Obama.

It was the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the crash and the panic that ensued, which McCain mishandled, that lost him all the ground he never made up. Had the crash not occurred, the election might have been much closer than seven points, which in itself is no blowout.

Second, an astonishing 75 percent of voters thought the country was headed in the wrong direction. Obama won these voters 62 percent to 36 percent. But if the country is seen as heading in the wrong direction in 2012, it will be Obama's albatross.

Third, only 27 percent of voters approved of Bush's performance as of Election Day; 71 percent disapproved. Only Harry Truman had a lower rating, 22 percent, and Democrats were also wiped out in Washington in 1952.

Here is Todd's dramatic point: "With the single exception of Missouri, which barely went for McCain, Obama won every state where Bush's approval rating was below 35 percent in the exit polls, and he lost every state where Bush's approval was above 35 percent."

Obama rode Bush's coattails to victory. Had Bush been at 35 percent or 40 percent, McCain might have won. But in 2012, Obama will not have Bush to kick around anymore.

On candidates' qualities, the situation looks even rosier for the GOP. In 2008, no less than 34 percent of the electorate said that the most important consideration in a candidate was that he be for "change."

Obama was the change candidate. He patented the brand, and he carried this third of the nation 89 percent to 9 percent.

But in 2012, Obama cannot be the candidate of change. That title will belong to his challenger, the Republican nominee. Obama will be the incumbent, the candidate of continuity.

The second most critical consideration of voters in choosing a president was "values." No less than 30 percent of the electorate said this was their primary consideration in voting for McCain or Obama.

Among values voters, fully 30 percent of the electorate, McCain won 65 percent to 32 percent, or by two to one.

What these numbers demonstrate is that liberals and neocons instructing the GOP to dump the social, moral, and cultural issues are counseling Republicide. When African-Americans, who gave McCain 4 percent of their votes in California, gave Proposition 8, prohibiting gay marriage, 70 percent of their votes, why would the GOP give up one of its trump cards—not only in Middle America but among minorities?

A conservative who could have sharpened the social, moral, and cultural differences might, from the exit polls, have done far better.

McCain's diffidence on life, affirmative action, and gay rights, his embrace of amnesty and NAFTA, all help explain the enthusiasm gap. Twice as many voters were excited about the prospects of an Obama presidency as were about a McCain presidency.

Lastly, on Election Day, only 7 percent thought the U.S. economy was doing well, while 93 percent rated it as not so good or poor. The GOP will not have to wear those concrete boots in 2012.

The tide is still running strong against the GOP. But there may be one or two more White Houses in the Grand Old Party yet. ■

Saving Israel From Itself

The two-state solution is the only way to guarantee the Jewish state's long-term security—and our own.

By **John J. Mearsheimer**

THE UNITED STATES and Israel fundamentally disagree about the need to establish a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel. President Obama is committed to a two-state solution, while Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu is opposed and has been for many years. To avoid a direct confrontation with Washington, Netanyahu will probably change his rhetoric and talk favorably about two states. But that will not affect Israel's actions. The never-ending peace process will go on, Israel will continue building settlements, and the Palestinians will remain locked up in a handful of impoverished enclaves in the West Bank and Gaza. Anticipating this outcome, Obama has told Congress to expect a clash with Israel.

This is not a fight Obama is likely to win, even though the United States is more powerful than Israel and most Americans favor creating a Palestinian state and bringing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a close.

Look at the historical record. Since 1967, every American president has opposed settlement-building in the Occupied Territories. Yet no president has been able to put meaningful pressure on Israel to stop building settlements, much less dismantle them. Perhaps the best evidence of American impotence is what happened during the Oslo peace process in the 1990s. Israel confiscated 40,000 acres of Palestinian land, constructed 250 miles of connector and bypass roads, doubled the

number of settlers, and built 30 new settlements. President Clinton did hardly anything to halt this expansion.

The main reason no president has been able to stop Israel from colonizing the Occupied Territories is the Israel lobby. It is an especially powerful interest group that has pushed the American government to establish a "special relationship" with Israel, which is, as Yitzhak Rabin once said, "beyond compare in modern history."

The special relationship means Washington gives Israel consistent, almost unconditional diplomatic backing and more foreign aid than any other country. In other words, Israel gets this aid even when it does things that the United States opposes, like building settlements. Furthermore, Israel is rarely criticized by American officials and certainly not by anyone who aspires to high office. Recall what happened earlier this year to Charles Freeman, who was forced to withdraw as head of the National Intelligence Council because he had criticized certain Israeli policies and questioned the merits of the special relationship.

Many hope that Obama will be different from his predecessors and stand up to the lobby. The indications thus far are not encouraging. During the 2008 presidential campaign, Obama responded to charges that he was "soft" on Israel by pandering to the lobby and publicly praising the special relationship. He was silent during the recent Gaza War—

when Israel was being criticized around the world for its brutal assault on that densely populated enclave—and he said nothing when Freeman was forced to quit his administration. Like his predecessors, Obama appears to be no match for the lobby.

Israel's supporters in the United States often claim that the special relationship is not due to the lobby's influence. The American people, they argue, identify closely with Israel and put significant pressure on their leaders to support it generously and unconditionally. But there is abundant evidence showing that this is not true. Recent polls indicate that over 70 percent of Americans think that the U.S. should not take sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and only 47 percent of Americans think that Israel's influence in the world is "mainly positive." Moreover, 60 percent of Americans have said that the United States should withhold aid to Israel if it resists pressure to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

In short, a clear majority of Americans do not favor the special relationship and would back Obama if he leaned on Israel to accept a Palestinian state. The lobby, however, would surely side with Israel and pressure the White House to back off. Given the lobby's track record—as well as Obama's—it is difficult to imagine him not caving.

Israel's supporters defend the special relationship because they believe it is an unalloyed good for both countries. In