



Obama's Change Agents: *Our Dark Night Promises to Endure*

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So much for President-elect Obama's promises of change.

In an opening sequence in *The Dark Knight*, Christopher Nolan's sequel to his 2005 hit, *Batman Begins*, the film's criminals furtively meet to discuss their criminal deeds, as one villain admits to another, "I said my drugs would take you places; I never said they would be places you wanted to be." It was the deceptive betrayal in the content of that admission I was reminded of with Obama's latest administrative appointment, Maria Shapiro, to replace Christopher Cox as chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Ms. Shapiro, formerly the head of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority which is responsible for regulating brokerages (among which would have been Bernard Madoff's firm), has a sum total of zero historical achievements in tough regulatory oversight. On the newly created Economic Recover Advisory Board is the role of Chief Economist, announced to be filled with Austan Goolsbee who, among his otherwise distinctive qualifications, wrote a sterling defense of subprime mortgages in a March 2007 *New York Times* article (and to unnecessarily remind, subprime mortgages rank at the top of the list of triggers setting off our current global financial crisis).

"I promised you change," one could hear the President-elect say. "I never said it was the constructive, reform-minded change our country desperately needs." And so it goes with the vast majority of his administration appointments to date—a *Who's Who* of Been-There-Done-That.

Of the fifteen cabinet positions in the Presidential line of succession (excluding the Vice President, Speaker of the House and President pro tempore of the Senate), Obama's selections break down as follows:

- 40% are former President Bill Clinton appointees
- 73% are Democrats
- 20% are women
- 27% are minority (non-Caucasian)



Comparing to President Bush's current cabinet:

- 13% are former President George Bush (41) appointees
- 87% are Republican
- 27% are women
- 20% are minority (non-Caucasian)

The only significant change they collectively represent is that none of them are of Bush's cabinet (save for Secretary Gates, but we'll revisit that in 12 months when he joins the ranks of an aspiring 10% unemployment rate). In an age where Hollywood churns out remakes (pitiable ones at that) of other's past work, pop artists remake classic tunes in poor taste for a generation ignorant to the original artists, and fashion designers are torn between offering us styles that live only on a runway or were first and last in fashion decades earlier, why should we count on politics to provide us with much needed originality?

Obama's cabinet tells no different a story than Bush's in its penchant for change, reform, or acknowledging the gravity of our times. It is what we have come to expect from any politician achieving the highest office in our land—Democrat or Republican.

However, the quantity of former Clinton staff is a little more than eyebrow-raising. The President-elect's reasoning seems to be that the 1990's were a much better decade than the first of the new millennium: no protracted military conflict, no financial crisis, no deterioration of civil liberties, greater international respect for the United States and in turn, a greater US respect for the international community. Is anyone willing to acknowledge that the policies of the 1990's may have contributed to the policies of this first millennial decade? Or that the suffering of this decade may have been born in the last? Or that had Clinton been a more effective president, Bush may have had a less arduous administration? While not seeking to absolve the Bush administration of arguable short comings, or to place undue blame for Bush policy on Clinton's administration, to structure the Obama administration as a repeat of the Clinton administration and assume better times is to both ignore the lessons learned in the last eight years and to mistakenly praise as righteous the eight years before that.

But the last thing we at Our Founding Sons wish to do is portray ourselves as naïve: a President McCain offered us nothing in his campaign to suggest he'd be any different in his cabinet post selections. More alarming was McCain's extreme erraticism in the final months of the



campaign which could lead one to surmise a cabinet post for a Senator Obama could very well have been in the President-elect McCain deck of cards. Politics-as-usual is not a strategy unique to a particular political party. And Obama’s selections offer us little hope for his promised change, with one exception. Arne Duncan is both a politically prudent and hopeful selection for Secretary of Education. While we of course wish success for each of the cabinet appointees (assuming Senate confirmation) we intend to pay special attention to Mr. Duncan. We believe there is no greater issue requiring the full force of our government than education, particularly education reform. Let’s hope Mr. Duncan is adept enough to do what no Education Secretary has been able to do in decades—prepare our young citizens today for the world that awaits them.

Cabinet Level Position (in the line of Presidential Succession)	Candidate
Secretary of State	Hillary Clinton
Secretary of the Treasury	Timothy Geithner
Secretary of Defense	Robert Gates
Attorney General	Eric Holder
Secretary of the Interior	Ken Salazar
Secretary of Agricultural	Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Commerce	Bill Richardson
Secretary of Labor	Hilda Solis
Secretary of Health & Human Services	Tom Daschle
Secretary of Housing & Urban Development	Shaun Donovan
Secretary of Transportation	Ray LaHood
Secretary of Energy	Steven Chu
Secretary of Education	Arne Duncan
Secretary of Veterans Affairs	Eric Shnseki
Secretary of Homeland Security	Janet Napolitano

Obama doesn’t score much better, however, on his appointees to his other cabinet and sub-cabinet level positions. In fact, in the area of gender diversity, Obama falls far short of the inroads made by his predecessor. Of the fifteen positions highlighted below, President Bush filled 54% of them with women, compared to President-elect Obama’s 15%. And on the



question of a Clinton III Administration, Obama has filled these fifteen positions with 38% of former Clinton White House staff, compared to 15% of former Bush (41) staff appointed by President Bush (43). However, in the area of political bipartisanship (both Obama and Bush filled 100% of the below positions with their own party) and racial diversity (Obama filled 8% to Bush’s 3% of the below positions with minority candidates), politics-as-usual continues to prevail.

Position	Candidate
US Ambassador to United Nations	Susan Rice
Administrator of EPA	Lisa Jackson
Asst to President for Energy & Climate Change	Carol Browner
Chair of Council on Environmental Quality	Nancy Sutley
Chairman, Coucil of Economic Advisors	Christina Romer
Chairman, Economic Recovery Advisory Board	Paul Volcker
Chairperson, Securities & Exchange Commission	Mary Shapiro
Director, Domestic Policy Council	Melody Barnes
Director, National Economic Council	Lawrence Summers
<i>Director, National Intelligence</i>	<i>not yet named</i>
Director, Office of Management & Budget	Peter Orszag
<i>Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy</i>	<i>not yet named</i>
National Security Advisor	James L Jones
Press Secretary	Robert Gibbs
US Trade Representative	Ron Kirk

On August 28th of this year, at a DNC speech, President-elect Obama declared that, “change doesn’t come *from* Washington, change comes *to* Washington.”

With 30 top cabinet and sub cabinet positions announced, with the complete Presidential line of succession appointed, with the departments that are to oversee our financial, educational, and military industries already provided with the leadership that has been promised to change our country, reform our country—better our lives and the lives of our children—we find ourselves scratching our heads and wondering in what cities across the country are our change agents with tickets *to* Washington waiting for their rides? We’ll go pick them up ourselves and drive them to the White House.

All we need is an address, Mr. President-elect.