

“That One” and “That Man”

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Senator John McCain’s finger-pointing, no-look reference to Senator Barack Obama during the October 7, 2008, presidential debate as “That One” was more than odd. It was, as most detected, a manifestation of disrespect. What commentators have not noticed is that Senator McCain’s phrase echoed and probably descended from one of the most notorious epithets in the regrettable history of American presidential hate politics.

Senator McCain’s “That One” is a very slight variation on “That Man,” the phrase that haters of President Franklin D. Roosevelt used, particularly during his first two terms (1933-1940), to express their loathing.¹ Born in 1936, McCain no doubt heard some of this talk during his boyhood and he might have absorbed the lingo.

FDR biographer Geoffrey Ward has explained the origins and context of the phrase: President Roosevelt

made bitter enemies of the wealthy Protestants among whom he had lived most of his life. He had raised their taxes, regulated their business practices, threatened their dominance; he was, they said, a hypocrite, untrustworthy, demagogic, a “traitor to his class,” and many of them, hating his name too much even to utter it, simply called him “That Man in the White House.”²

“That Man” attitudes carried, most regrettably, the whiff of violence. In early 1933, when Roosevelt was president-elect but not yet inaugurated, an assassin shot at him in Florida and barely missed. Six years

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¹ See generally ROBERT H. JACKSON, *THAT MAN: AN INSIDER’S PORTRAIT OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT* (John Q. Barrett, ed., 2003).

² GEOFFREY C. WARD, *BEFORE THE TRUMPET: YOUNG FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, 1882-1905* 5 (1985).

later, a writer shared this description of mainstream, if private, imaginations of violence:

In the cabañas at Miami Beach the sun-tanned winter visitors said their business would be doing pretty well if it weren't for THAT MAN. In the country-club locker room the golfers talked about the slow pace of the stock market as they took off their golf shoes; and when, out of a clear sky, one man said, "Well, let's hope somebody shoots him," the burst of agreement made it clear that everybody knew who was meant.³

The Roosevelt-haters were in the tradition of other representatives of older, exclusionary orders who feared the future and the American people. As historians Henry Steele Commager and Richard Brandon Morris once explained, "[m]any of Roosevelt's contemporaries reacted to 'That Man'—and to the New Deal—the way the Federalists had reacted to [Thomas] Jefferson and the Whigs to [Andrew] Jackson. They saw dictatorship and revolution where the majority of Americans saw leadership and a democratic resurgence."⁴

Of course FDR was not weakened by this venom. He resisted it and, indeed, he famously used it to his advantage in a speech on the eve of the 1936 election. "We have not come this far without a struggle," he told a Madison Square Garden crowd,

and I assure you we cannot go further without a struggle. For twelve years this Nation was afflicted with hear-nothing, see-nothing, do-nothing Government. The Nation looked to Government but the Government looked away. Nine mocking years with the golden calf and three long years of the scourge! Nine crazy years at the ticker and three long years in the breadlines! Nine mad years of mirage and three long years of despair! Powerful influences strive today to restore that kind of government with its doctrine that that Government is best which is most indifferent. ... We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace—business and financial monopoly, speculation,

³ FREDERICK LEWIS ALLEN, *SINCE YESTERDAY: THE NINETEEN-THIRTIES IN AMERICA, SEPTEMBER 3, 1929—SEPTEMBER 3, 1939* 233 (1939).

⁴ Henry Steele Commager & Richard Brandon Morris, *Editors' Introduction*, in WILLIAM E. LEUCHTENBURG, *FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND THE NEW DEAL, 1932-1940* x (1963).

reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering. They had begun to consider the Government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs. We know now that Government by organized money is just as dangerous as Government by organized mob. Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate for me—and I welcome their hatred.⁵

Just three days after that Roosevelt speech, the American people had their say. The strong majority—including, in 1936 as in 1932 and later in 1940 and 1944, enthusiastic FDR supporter Ronald W. Reagan⁶—rejected “That Man” attitudes. “That One” and similar poisons deserve the same disposal.⁷

⁵ President Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Campaign Address at Madison Square Garden, New York City, Oct. 31, 1936*, in 5 THE PUBLIC PAPERS & ADDRESSES OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT 566-73 (Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., 1938). A recording of this speech is available at <http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/text/us/fdr1936.html>.

⁶ See President Ronald W. Reagan, *Remarks at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library 50th Anniversary Luncheon*, National Archives, Washington, DC, Jan. 10, 1989, in 25 WEEKLY COMPILATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS 46-47 (1989) (“I had voted four times for the man we honor today.”), available at www.reagan.utexas.edu/search/speeches/speech_srch.html; see also President Ronald W. Reagan, *Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Conference of State Legislatures*, Atlanta, GA, July 30, 1981, in 17 WEEKLY COMPILATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS 832-37 (1981) (“I, like millions of others, became an enthusiastic New Dealer. We followed FDR because he offered a mix of ideas and movement.”), available at www.reagan.utexas.edu/search/speeches/speech_srch.html.

⁷ Cf. William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Campaign and American History*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 10, 2008 (letter to the editor), available at www.nytimes.com/2008/10/10/opinion/110politics.html?_r=2&scp=3&sq=leuchtenburg&st=cse&oref=slogin&oref=slogin.