

The Key to the Presidency

An E-Mail to Democratic Activists

November 1, 2004

[What is] ... "The Key to the Presidency"? ...

I D E N T I T Y

If voters choose a president as Commander in Chief, they'll probably pick Bush, ahead on "security" issues.

If voters choose a president as Chief Executive, they'll probably pick Kerry, ahead on "bread and butter" issues.

BUT if the voters choose as president as Head of State—which is what I assert they typically do—then they'll pick the candidate with whom the most of them best IDENTIFY.

The guy sitting at home wants to see himself in the representative of the country, our "face to the world": He wants to say to himself, "That's how I'D be if I were president."

And what about the gals at home? And the blacks? And the gays? Well, unfortunately, the very fact that we've had only straight white men as president only serves to reinforce my premise, given that straight white men have held and continue to wield most of the power in this country. In that context, it's not so much that every voter identifies himself or herself with the president but identifies the president, as an

individual, with his or her—our collective— notion of a president.

Significantly, John Kerry got back into this race when he won the first debate, by looking—as everyone said—"presidential."

Washington, Lincoln, FDR, JFK, Reagan, Clinton—each symbolized our nation— personified our people—at a particular point in our history, for better or worse.

The bugaboo, of course, is that at this exact moment in our history, with our nation's presidential preference split right down the middle, our nation has a split personality (It reminds me of the two-headed monster I saw in a Halloween display).

But one way or another, one personality will become dominant. But how?

Simple. We, of course, cannot afford to let up one moment on all the foreign and domestic policy stuff; but in the end, particularly with the race this close, the voters will probably vote the man.

If Senator Kerry wants to become President Kerry, I think all he needs to do is be John Kerry.

The same guy who looked so happy the other day sporting the baseball cap of his hometown team after it had finally won the World Series after all those years. You know, the kind of guy with whom the guy (or gal) at home can and will readily identify (No, I'm not suggesting he put the cap back on; it was a wonderful, spontaneous moment ... as spontaneous as these things can be in a campaign).

Honesty, authenticity, sincerity (in the candidate and in each of [his] supporters). Those are the qualities that should ultimately carry the day, that should ultimately carry Kerry into the White House. As well they should.