

# Progressives Are Still Begging Obama to Save Them

At *Esquire*, Charles P. Pierce has a simple message for Barack Obama: *Save us!*

The article, which bears the headline "[A Plea for a President](#)," is an odd medley of hope, grievance, anger, and despair. But Pierce is clear on one point: Barack Obama needs to stop giving (pricey) speeches and join "the resistance."

*It's time, Mr. President.*

*Suit up.*

I've read Pierce for years, ever since he began writing at *Grantland* (remember them?) six or seven years ago. He's smart, chippy, a good writer, and a dyed-in-the-wool progressive. But I don't recall ever reading a column in which he was so angry or sounded so full of despair.

Pierce appears to be upset about a lot of things: possible war with North Korea; climate change; Jemele Hill's suspension by ESPN; and the fact that Donald Trump is a better golfer than Obama.

But what clearly upsets Pierce most is that "the American people elected, yes, a f\*cking moron." Pierce believes this "f\*cking moron" is destroying America and he's not sure the nation's fabric can take much more.

*"Those institutions are not capable of withstanding these assaults much longer without cracking. The people in the country know this, or, at the very least, except for the 35 percent who are the real cargo-cultists out there, they sense it deeply in their bones. They feel the deepening acceleration of the spiral. The Democratic Party doesn't have*

*the power to lead and the Republican Party doesn't have the will and, even at its best, the media is overmatched by the sheer magnitude of bullshit this administration shovels out as a matter of course every hour of every day. This is absolutely no time for the most eloquent voices in society to be on the bench.*

*So why, sir? Why in the hell are you out there giving speeches to mother\*cking bankers in mother\*cking Brazil?"*

Chippy stuff, as I said. But what I sense most from Pierce is a dark despondency, and the author does not shy from impugning the former president for going AWOL while people—and his party—are suffering.

*"Where were you when the women marched? Where were you when scientists marched? Where have you been on Pruitt, on DeVos, on Sessions, or on the endless assaults on your achievements?"*

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*Where were you during the election about the Russian ratfcking and where have you been since? Hillary Rodham Clinton is out there getting whacked around from hell until breakfast talking about it. Do you have her back? She called the reaction of your administration to this assault on American democracy "mushy," and she was right. And she was the one who got pilloried for saying it. Where's the courage in that? People have been pushing back against this monstrosity daily, at great personal risk. Why haven't you been one of them? Why haven't you been out front?"*

Now, anyone with half a brain could foretell exactly what Obama would be doing with his time once his terms were up: golfing (poorly), going on luxurious trips, banking fat checks for giving canned speeches, and publishing a ghost-written book. But that's beside the point. What's stunning is to see an accomplished, intelligent, grown man pining to be saved.

But it makes a bit more sense when one considers the way in which many progressives received Barack Obama.

“We thought that he was going to be – I shouldn’t say this at Christmastime – but the next messiah,” Barbara Walters admitted to Piers Moran in 2013.

It was a role the former president seemed to relish, to the consternation of some progressives. Jonathan Stein, for example, explained his uneasiness with “Obama’s messiah complex” in a *Mother Jones* [article](#) back in 2008.

*“I am profoundly troubled that any candidate would chart the course of American history as follows (and I’m rearranging Obama’s history here to make it more chronological):*

*American Revolutionaries -> Manifest Destiny -> Slaves/Abolitionists -> Suffragettes -> the Labor Movement -> the Greatest Generation -> the Civil Rights Movement -> Himself.*

*Does this post play unhelpfully into the pernicious and growing Obamaism-as-cult meme that we’ll likely see repeated over and over by the right wing if Obama gets the nomination?*

*It does. Sorry. But Obama's rhetoric makes an undeniable suggestion: that his election, not an eight-year administration that successfully implements his vision for America, would represent a moment in America of the grandest, most transformative kind. And that's a bit much."*

Stein was right to be concerned. But what's most stunning is that progressives are *still* begging Obama to come back and save them. Obama seems to have come to grips with the fact that he was not, after all, a secular messiah. But some progressives, evidenced by Pierce's plea, have not.

This seems somewhat at odds with the progressive paradigm. We tend to think of conservatives as those more likely to pine for heroes of the past—the Reagans, Churchills and Lincolns—as they despair that everything is going to hell. Progressives are supposed to be thinking *forward*. But this yearning for the past makes a bit more sense when one considers the religious-like fervor and symbolism voters and the press heaped on the Obama presidency. He was '[The Second Coming.](#)'

This messiah-like embrace of the former president reminded me of something Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote in [The Brothers Karamazov](#): "So long as man remains free he strives for nothing so incessantly and so painfully as to find some one to worship."

This idea, that man cannot help but worship if given the opportunity, was one the philosopher Alexander Schmemmann explored in his fine essay "[Worship in a Secular Age.](#)"

Schmemmann stated that "worship is a truly essential act, and man an essentially worshipping being." However, he argued that secularism was antithetical to the very nature of worship (in fact, he calls secularism "negation of worship").

One wonders, after reading Pierce, if Schmemmann was slightly off on his thesis. Perhaps secularism is not the negation of

worship at all; perhaps secular worship just looks grossly different.