

>> Robinson: Welcome to Uncommon Knowledge. I'm Peter Robinson. A Senior Editor of the Weekly Standard magazine, Andrew Ferguson is the author most recently of the splendid book, Land Of Lincoln: Adventures in Abe's America. Television writer and producer, Rob Long, became an executive producer of the hit show, Cheers, while still in his 20's, and has operated at the top levels of the entertainment industry ever since. A contributor to National Review magazine, Rob remarked during the Reagan years that history shows one out of every three conservatives in Hollywood becomes President of the United States. These days, Rob is one of the three. Andrew Ferguson and Rob Long, welcome.

You're allowed to say thank you . . .

>> Long: Thank you for having us, this is fantastic, yeah.

>> Ferguson: Thank you very much.

>> Robinson: You will now help me to understand what has just happened in America. Segment 1: The Rhetoric of Barack Obama and Abe Lincoln. Obama has himself claimed the mantle of Lincoln. Announced his campaign in Springfield, took the oath of office with his hand on the Lincoln Bible, he's done it himself. Andrew Ferguson on Barack Obama as an orator. You listen to this, Quote, "Obama is a theatrical presence. To an unnerving degree, his performance relies on sight and sound rather than sense" close quote. You know something about theatrical presences.

>> Long: Being one myself, yeah. I think Andy's absolutely right. You know there's that moment after the speeches where you think, "Wait, what?" That's kind of effective. I mean, he's different from Lincoln, who was pretty ---

>> Robinson: Well, that's what . . . Lincoln's beard, the stovepipe hat, there was some theater about Lincoln as well, no?

>> Ferguson: Oh yeah. He was very conscious of public images, you know. He always had, by the time he died I think he was far and away the most photographed man in America. He'd consciously go into every photography studio in every town he went to to get his picture taken because he wanted to be a graphic presence as well as a -

>> Robinson: So he was his own Karl Rove . . .

>> Ferguson: Yes, well they didn't have Karl Rove. Those were the days, they didn't have Karl Rove.

>> Robinson: Those were the days. Now let's get to the text here. Lincoln's second inaugural address, universal consent, that's a masterpiece: short, brilliant, every sentence a poem. But the first inaugural address, which I just went back and reread, is more than 3,600 words, a lot of them forgettable, you get the sense that you've got a still youngish lawyer here who doesn't want to leave out a single argument; it's a brief address to the South on why they shouldn't secede. Obama's inaugural address, 2,400 words,

straightforward. If only on the count of discipline and directness and succinctness, Obama wins.

>> Ferguson: Well Lincoln had a little bit more on his plate, you know. What Lincoln wanted to do in that first inaugural address was to lay out what he thought was an airtight case, so that nobody could come back at him and say we're going to secede anyway because you guys are going to run roughshod over us if we don't leave the country, so he wanted to have sort of a touchstone document that he could always refer to. The problem with Obama is, he wasn't making an argument at all; he was putting together a bunch of catch phrases. You know, my favorite was - I couldn't quite believe it when he went into it -

>> Robinson: Obama.

>> Ferguson: Yeah. When he quoted Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and said, "We're going to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off" - I half expected him to -

>> Robinson: and start all over again.

>> Ferguson: Yeah. I think that's the first time that Dorothy Fields and Jerome Kern have ever been cited in an inaugural address.

>> Robinson: Do you want to stick up for Barack Obama's first inaugural address?

>> Long: No, actually I thought it was kind of strange. I mean, I thought, when I was watching it I was kind of hoping for that moment - the soaring moment - I thought he had way too much Act One stuff, you know, Act One in the script is always when the stuff hits the fan, you know, the complication, and then Act Two is the struggle and Act Three is the triumph. And he spent a lot of time talking about how bad everything is; it's really, really bad. And I kept thinking, you know, now would be a good time to talk about all the good stuff, and he actually put it off. I mean, I think the difference between - one of the many differences - between Lincoln's first and Obama's first, is let's be honest,

>> Robinson: It's likely there will be a second.

>> Long: Let's get our popcorn and settle in. Lincoln had a very specific audience he was talking to. He really knew who he was - basically, everyone quiet down, and everybody down there in South Carolina listen up. Obama had sort of a larger audience, and I don't think he really picked who he wanted to talk to, which is why the speech seemed very meandering. Which is, I think, one of the reasons why . . .

>> Robinson: Even though it was only 19 minutes long.

>> Long: Yeah. It felt longer, it really did. It was like his worst performance, and I think it was like the first time he was talking to all of us. And there was something great about -

even though I wasn't going to support him - watching him talk to his troops. That was really kind of moving.

>> Robinson: During the campaign.

>> Long: During the campaign and during the convention, yeah.

>> Robinson: I want to get to the text again in just a moment, but you touched on something that was sort of deep, if I . . .

>> Long: I often do.

>> Robinson: Yes, you do.

>> Ferguson: He just touched on it; he didn't really get into it.

>> Long: That's vulgar.

>> Robinson: You said that you were hoping for him to soar. Everybody was. A million people on the Mall and everybody wanted the speech to be, in some way or another, equal to the moment. Question: why? Why should rhetoric matter to us? Why should we care whether the speech is any good or not?

>> Ferguson: Well, leaders lead not just by actions, they have to lead by words. They have to lay out propositions and then meet them or refute them, whatever the case is. You know the thing is,

>> Robinson: Isn't there something a little 19th century about that? You don't care to argue that

>> Ferguson: Well this sort of gets back to what we said about him being a theatrical presence. What I thought that was interesting about that speech, I think it was the inaugural, it was universally regarded as sort of not quite up to - you know, sort of bland and not up to his usual standard. I think that that's because people paid attention to it in a way that they hadn't to his other speeches. If you really go back and look at the speeches - the stump speech that he repeated over and over again, even the speech on race that was so lauded; they're not that impressive. There's a lot of cliches, a lot of old, you know, 'We will choose today over yesterday', 'We will choose the future over the past', things like that that are sort of these shopworn, off-the-shelf tropes from old, old, old campaigns.

>> Robinson: Then how did he get a reputation as a good orator?

>> Ferguson: It's the theatricality in my opinion. It's the voice, it's those beautiful hands, it's the pauses, it's the stern gaze . . .

>> Robinson: All of that came through on the 60-second sound bites during the campaign. People got the vague impression- strong, but still vague impression- that he was good at it. And then we actually listened to him for 19 minutes and look at each other and say, "Wooooo, maybe not". Is that what you're saying?

>> Long: We've had a string of pretty bad candidates, pretty bad politicians theatrically for a long time. We've been in sort of a bad space, especially for the Republicans, where you always have your heart in your mouth, it's always a high-wire act with us. And I think a high wire act with a lot of these guys. And I think there was finally this person on the stage who seemed not only to be good at it, but he seemed to believe. I mean, the one person who has really 100% confidence in Barack Obama is Barack Obama. You never see behind the . . .there's never a moment when he's like looking off stage for just . . . "what do I say now", "what do I do now?" One of the reasons I think people were so disappointed from the inaugural speech as opposed to the similar kind of "fiery trial, gathering storm clouds, the purple prose" of before is because now he's President. It's like, ok, what are you going to do? And I feel like even in that White House, there's the sense of "What are we really going to do now?"

>> Robinson: Segment Two. Barack Obama and Abraham Lincoln: experience and character. Let me just raise a couple of topics: politics. Before becoming president, Lincoln served just four times in the lower house of the Illinois legislature and one term in the House of Representatives. Barack Obama's elected three times to the Illinois Senate and serves four years or 2/3 of one term in the United States Senate. What do you make of that?

>> Ferguson: Well I hear this a lot, you know, when people raise Obama's lack of experience - "what do you mean, Lincoln, you know . . ." There's actually a serious point in rebuttal to that, which is, Lincoln had a very distinguished career in the House of Representatives; he served a term and then became leader of his party. The first thing he did as leader of the party was push through this incredibly ambitious public works program which, unfortunately, bankrupted the state of Illinois for the next 75 years.

>> Robinson: So in that way he's very similar to Obama.

>> Ferguson: There's a lot these guys have in common. But anyway, then of course he spent the next 18 years as a very impressive lawyer, you know. On a national stage, he argued around the country and made a lot of money and you compare Obama's legal career to that, where you know, Obama never signed a legal brief on his own; every brief that he was associated with was co written with his partners in his law firm, so it's very hard to trace where the guy was tested in the way that even Lincoln had by 1858.

>> Robinson: So, Lincoln just is more experienced and a more impressive figure.

>> Ferguson: Oh yes.

>> Long: That's a little unfair, though. I mean Lincoln was a towering American.

>> Robinson: Hold on. Education: Abraham Lincoln attends school for 18 months. I address this to you, graduate of the Ivy League. Barack Obama's a graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Law School, so Lincoln may have more experience, but Barack Obama has a much deeper, more impressive education. Correct?

>> Long: No. Yes. Ok, culturally, yes.

>> Robinson: The very suggestions causing Andy to laugh.

>> Long: And it should. Culturally yes. I mean as a proud member of the Ivy League, I consider that actually a problem; that's actually a liability. It's almost like being a Senator. People say if your state Senator went to Harvard, I mean, oh my God, he'd be perfect to be President. I can think of nothing worse than that, I mean, I used to say that at 9/11, the flight 93, in which the brave Americans ditched into Pennsylvania, if that plane had been filled with the political science faculty of Harvard, it would've hit the Capitol, I mean, it would've dithered its way into the White House, absolutely.

>> Ferguson: They would've been debating the point.

>> Long: You're right. The truth is that, I think that especially now - you saw it a little bit with the reaction to Sarah Palin, which I don't even want to get into - the idea that somehow going to these fancy schools makes you qualified or smart - it's just ludicrous. They're enormously expensive and if you're remotely clever you can scoot your way through it without an education whatsoever. Believe me, I almost did. Well actually I really did.

>> Ferguson: They say the only thing harder than getting into Harvard is getting out of it. It's very hard to flunk out of Harvard. But this isn't - I agree with you - this isn't quite fair, I mean, Obama really is an impressive man on certain of these scores, I mean the guy is . . .

>> Robinson: Ok, let's go to the next: sense of self. He's been in office, as we shoot this show, not quite two weeks, and it has already become commonplace to comment on his preternatural sense of self confidence. Rob said this, that the one man in America you're sure believes Barack Obama can do the job is Barack Obama.

>> Long: That's why he got from Harvard, by the way.

>> Robinson: Is it? William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner - Andy knows where this is going - quoting Herndon, "His ambition was a little engine that knew no rest." Comment?

>> Ferguson: Yes, I think that the thing they have most in common is this incredible sense of self-possession and you know, Lincoln could walk into a room and know immediately that he was the smartest guy there. And he never doubted it; to him it was just a fact. And then the question for him became, ok, how do I figure out what to do with

these guys, because they're not as smart as I am. I think that Obama has a little bit of that, and, he may be right. I mean Obama is clearly an incredibly smart guy. And clever and crafty in the way that really helps as a politician.

>> Long: Also enormously disciplined.

>> Robinson: Lincoln was disciplined too, right?

>> Ferguson: Yes I think so.

>> Long: He's hugely disciplined, this guy. I mean I don't think we've had a more disciplined candidate for president in years.

>> Robinson: Alright. World view. One line from Lincoln's first inaugural quote - this was striking actually - it was striking after - well, you'll see the contrast. "Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him, who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulty" close quote. The "him" is with a capital "H". One line from Barack Obama's address: "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and non-believers." What's happened between those two speeches, in the century and a half between those two speeches?

>> Ferguson: Well, a lot more Jews, Hindus, Muslims and non-believers moved in.

>> Robinson: So that's a comment, that's purely a comment on the pluralism, the greater pluralism in the country- it's not a comment on the world view - the contrast in the world view between the two men?

>> Ferguson: Well I think that it's a matter of emphasis; what do you want to emphasize? Lincoln was open to immigration, quite a great supporter of immigration, an enemy of the "know-nothings" who targeted Catholics and so on, but that wasn't what he stressed and for a good reason. There was the reason to stress the unity of the country when he was President rather than various groups. For lots of reasons now, the Democratic politicians particularly like to stress each individual constituency.

>> Robinson: Ok, Rob. Bearing in mind that Barack Obama himself invites the comparison, again, he's the one himself who asked to put his hand on the Lincoln Bible

>> Long: Sure.

>> Robinson: when he took the oath of office. Is this comparison between Barack Obama and Lincoln useful? Does it tell us something about Barack Obama? Is it to his detriment? Should we just drop the whole thing?

>> Long: No. I think it's always useful to compare Presidents to each other, even the unlikely ones. I think it tells us more about ourselves and what we're looking for and

what we want. And it probably tells us a little bit more about our inability to grasp what's happening now without looking to the most tumultuous era in American history. You know, you talk to any economist - when the dust settles, we kind of think, well, things are tough economically, but it is not the Great Depression, it is not the Civil War.

And so the idea that history repeats itself, once is tragedy, second time is farce, this isn't farce, but if he's compared to Lincoln, is more like the mini Lincoln, because these are like mini problems - they're not that big. I think he's a very smart guy and very disciplined guy and I think he knows if he kind of holds things together for 4 years, 8 years, they'll put him on the 10 dollar bill. Don't do anything, is really what Barack Obama must be saying to himself; how little can I get away with, whereas Lincoln had to do a lot.

>> Robinson: Typical product of the Ivy League. Alright, segment three. We've done time with Barack Obama, we'll come back to Barack Obama, but for just one segment, let's talk about George W. Bush.

>> Ferguson: Can we go back to Barack Obama?

>> Robinson: Yeah.

>> Long: Help me out, who was George W. Bush again?

>> Robinson: Norman Puthorst's [phonetic] quote: "By the time Reagan became President, we'd been fighting the Cold War for 33 years; by contrast, we started to fight the War on Terror only after Bush entered the White House. In this respect, it was not Reagan to whom Bush should've been compared, but Harry Truman", close quote. Bush a second Truman. That's for sure what we heard from a lot of Bush supporters as his time dwindled down, as the days dwindled down to a precious few, to work in another lyric here. Valid? Truman did something big and important, in recognizing, laying out the basic structure of the Cold War, but it was very unpopular. Decades later, we now think of him as a very good, if not a great President. Do you buy it?

>> Long: I don't know. I'm not sure. I hope that . . .

>> Robinson: Stop there. Why are all three of us pained having to talk about George W. Bush? What the heck is going on?

>> Ferguson: Well, the idea is

>> Robinson: He did a good job in all kinds of ways,

>> Ferguson: The idea is he did a good job in all kinds of ways, regardless of what you think about the competence of his administration or any of the details. He was confident in making big decisions and he made them and he slept that night, which of course is Truman's greatness. I mean you know, he did the atom bomb and he went to sleep that night; it didn't bother him. He made the decisions, recognized Israel and so on and so

forth. I'm not that big of a Truman fan myself, because the records show that in many ways he was a petty, demagogic, small man, and I don't think that - I'm not a big Bush fan either - but I don't think that you can make those kinds of

>> Robinson: Here's the case. I'm sorry, did you want to . . . just cut me off at any moment

>> Long: All I'm saying with Truman is the troops were on the trains in many ways. I mean, he made a big deal out of how he made the decision to drop the bomb, I think; "I made it like that". Well in many ways that was a fait accompli; it had been done and they'd informed him about it and he really was the rubber stamp on that decision. And he had kind of a brain trust around there who had been thinking for at least three years, four years before him, 'what are we going to do when this thing is over and it's us and the Russians?'

>> Robinson: Well, here's the argument.

>> Long: So I would say I think that the reason we're stymied by George W. Bush is that part of us does not want to give the other side any ammo, right? It's like hard, because the truth is, that when we're privately talking amongst ourselves, he's a disappointing President. We wish he were-I wish- I'll say

'I' - I wish he were a bigger man. I wish that they were - I wish it didn't always seem so jury-rigged over there and so house-of-cards and so that weird bunker mentality. I wish that they hadn't made such a big deal about the weapons of mass destruction and when they weren't there suddenly it was radio silence from the White House and they just sort of crouched into a defensive posture and tried to convince us that they found some tubes or some talcum powder and that was it. I mean, but a lot of things about that administration that even though directionally they might've been correct, I wish that they had done it in a different way. And I feel like partly for our side is one the reasons why Barack Obama did so well is because he spoke to people who wanted a President who could articulate and believe and say things and didn't always seem to be looking at the note cards, and didn't seem to always be like a deer in headlights.

>> Robinson: Hold on.

>> Long: So that's my answer.

>> Robinson: Here's the case. Harry Truman arrives at the Potsdam Conference only 83 days after becoming President of the United States. The first World War - excuse me - the second World War has just ended, according to all the intelligence that Harry Truman had received, Joseph Stalin was our ally, the conference at Yalta where FDR sat down with Stalin and sorted things out, Truman goes into this and within a year, he has discovered that the Soviet Union has indeed deeper, darker designs that they have no intention of withdrawing from Eastern Europe, and Harry Truman turns around and in a dogged, tough-mannered way, sets in place the fundamental architecture of the Cold War that every President for the next four decades would follow and that ultimately prevailed.

George Bush goes into office at a moment of sloppy prosperity; the Clinton years accomplished nothing except staying out of the way and letting the economy roll,

>> Long: Still not sloppy prosperity, that's the miracle.

>> Robinson: And then the terrorists and by the time he leaves office, there's not been a second terrorist attack, we have substantially won a war in Iraq; it's a pretty damn impressive record, and three or four decades from now, people will wake up and realize it.

>> Ferguson: Well that's certainly the case that the Bush people would like to pick.

>> Robinson Oh alright. I'm not . . .

>> Ferguson: But I'll say, slightly disagree with what Rob said. I don't think that the long term problem for Bush will be that he couldn't read off, that he had to rely on the note cards and so on. I think that he gets kind of a bad rap with that; he wasn't pretty fluent in certain areas of policy. But he had this terrible weakness for grandiosity which Truman did not. The second inaugural address is one of the most absurd public utterances of a President that I know of.

>> Robinson: Remind us, give us, remind us of it.

>> Ferguson: Well this is that we will essentially eliminate evil in the world, not necessarily in our time, but in the world. And you know, this is the kind of thing, it's so meaningless that you really shouldn't be saying it.

>> Long: Also, even Wilson, even President Wilson would've said, 'Ugh! Hey, five more minutes on that!'

>> Robinson: Yeah. And the disconnect - what I noticed about the text was the disconnect from reality. He didn't even mention the words Iraq or Afghanistan. It was at a level of abstraction nobody could really . . . now wait a minute, are you saying that we're going to win in Iraq or are you really trying to suggest that we're going to take on every nasty regime in the world? Within the text there was no way of arguing one way or the other.

>> Long: I kind of feel like that was the problem. In 30-40 years, you're right, it'll be different. By that time I'll be in my prime. I would say this. Here's my problem, I guess that's my problem, that's sort of [inaudible]. But if you read the Woodward books, all of them and the first one he was, you know, a hero and the second one he was kind of ok and the third one he's a chump, all the way through that there are always people in the White House saying things like, 'well, the American people won't accept this' or 'the American people will accept that' and it's almost as if that White House has internalized the focus group; they're incapable of making policy without first thinking about how it was going to be focused grouped or they even focus grouped it. I mean, give Clinton

credit, he actually paid the 20 grand to run the poll. The Bush administration, though, basically, the people who'd never met a decent American in the past 50 years, saying, well, 'tell me what Americans need' And what they came up with was this kind of nonsense, rather than what we Republicans are really good for, which is flinty, nasty realism, which is 'okay, you know what? You're right; he probably didn't have anything to do with 911. . . we're probably going to get rid of him anyway because he's a bleed in the area. That's that. That kind of thing American people really like from us.

>> Robinson: Let's wrap up this segment. Claire Booth Luce used to say that history would have time to give even the largest figures only one sentence. Lincoln freed the slaves, Reagan won the Cold War. What's the sentence that history will give to George W. Bush?

>> Ferguson: Well I suppose it will be something like he put us on a war footing; the question is whether we should've been on a war footing, whether there was a war.

>> Robinson: Ummm. Rob?

>> Long: I can't do better than that.

>> Robinson: Alright, Segment 4: Obama and Reagan. Barack Obama, in his 2008 book, *The Audacity of Hope*, quote, this is Barack Obama or whoever helped out on that book. You reviewed both books. Do you think they're both the work of the same man? Did he have some ghosting on the second book? What's your feeling?

>> Ferguson: No, I think that it looks like the second book was written more quickly than the first.

>> Robinson: Alright, Ok. Quote, "Reagan

>> Long: Ted Sorenson wrote those.

>> Robinson: Quote, "Reagan spoke to America's longing for order, our need to believe we are not simply subject to blind, impersonal forces, but that we can shape our individual and collective destinies, so long as we rediscover the traditional virtues of hard work, patriotism, personal responsibility, optimism and faith", close quote. Has he got Reagan right?

>> Ferguson: That pretty much covers it. I'd say it's a fair reading.

>> Long: In the text, yeah, he's got it right; in the practice, not really so much.

>> Robinson: Proceed.

>> Long: Reagan said, you already have these tools; this is what makes you great. We're going to remove ourselves from your greatness. Barack Obama, I mean, can you imagine Reagan giving this?

>> Ferguson: That's good. That's very good. How much are you paying him?

>> Long: Not enough. Can you imagine Ronald Reagan giving the first 10 minutes of that inaugural speech? Let me tell you how bad things are. No! He was thinking about how good things are and we apologize as a government for getting in your way. And that's a difference. You know, Reagan didn't think he had to give you anything and Obama thinks, I'm going to help you get to the - I've got to give you a little push.

>> Robinson: Lou Cannon, Reagan biographer, Lou Cannon, has just written an article - as we tape this, the article's a couple of days old - quote, "the Presidential exemplar who may be most useful to President Obama as he seeks to jumpstart the economy is a Republican, whose single-mindedness in the first months in office enabled him to gain the confidence of the American people and the approval of his proposals from Congress", close quote, that Reagan got into office with all kinds of plans, but narrowed his focus, particularly during the first six months - you could argue during the first year - to the economy, the economy, the economy. Barack Obama should do the same.

>> Ferguson: Well I think that that's a little bit overdone. Journalists especially do it; this whole business of the first hundred days, the first six months. You know if you look at Roosevelt, for example. The New Deal was not a creature of the first 100 days or the first year,

>> Robinson: The first three terms, basically.

>> Ferguson: Well, no, it really got going, in an effectual sort of way, in 1935, with WPA and the Social Security Act. The only thing that really lasted from those first hundred days was the FDIC. So I don't think that you can hold people up to this standard; if Obama doesn't have the force of personality in the first hundred days to get everything done, then there's some kind of failure. And, it's also true of Reagan, you know. The defense buildup really didn't gain traction until late of '82, I would say.

>> Robinson: Although he did get that tax cut. What he did was get shot in March, within the first hundred days,

>> Long: Big help, right.

>> Robinson: Yes. It was, politically it was . . . Ok, so here's a - he has yet again touched on a deep question:

>> Long: I just touched on it . . .

>> Robinson: Now I give you the opportunity to man-handle it. Barack Obama and Ronald Reagan, wonderful orators, appealing people, they know how to use, how to appeal to the camera, here's the question: 'Can Barack Obama . . . the question is how closely substance and style are related. If Ronald Reagan- of course, Lou Cannon is over there saying he focused on the economy, but what he was doing, he focused on exactly the opposite of what Barack Obama did. Here we are, less than two weeks into Obama's presidency and he's increasing the federal budget at one swoop by more than 70%. 8 hundred and twenty billion - for Reagan, if he had a chance, he would've decreased the federal budget by 80%. They're going at it in exactly opposite ways. So the question is, is it possible for Barack Obama to be as eloquent as Reagan, when he is attempting to limn the virtues of the Federal government, whereas Ronald Reagan was attempting to limn the traditional and ancient virtues of freedom and individual liberty?

>> Long: Nice use of limn, by the way.

>> Robinson: Yeah. Spelled l-i-m-n.

>> Long: Well, I think Obama's got a thornier problem in a way. Reagan had a - even Reagan's first hundred days, Reagan's first year, they were oppositional, I mean, there was a lot of conflict. They were fighting back and forth between him and Congress. It really helped in a way. We make this big deal about how we're all unified - we're not all unified! It's much better when we're fighting, it's much clearer.

>> Robinson: Mr. A. Ferguson wrote an entire article in the Weekly Standard called, 'The Myth of Unity.'

>> Long: And it was a brilliant article.

>> Ferguson: It was. Now that I think about it, it was.

>> Long: What do they pay you for that? Not enough! So I would say that Obama's big problem is that he's slowly realizing his two biggest enemies are Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi. And see, he's going to have to say, I'm not really going that far; I'm going to pull back. It's really hard to give a soaring speech about how, ok, I'm 70% in their corner. And one of the great things Reagan is he could say, 'You know, I'm totally against everything Tip O'Neill wants. I'm against all of it. And really, that was so clear. It's always better to be clear, even if it means that the Washington folks can say mean things about you. I think that Obama's got some heavy choices.

>> Ferguson: There's also an element here that I think that they do, that both Reagan understood and Obama understands, which is, the essence of political oratory at least that I know of, in the last hundred years, I suppose, is you have to flatter the American people. The American people want to be told, not that we have a brighter future ahead or anything, they want to be told that they're pretty damn good. When you really get down to it, they have differences and as you very well pointed out, you know, Reagan's idea was I'm going to take the government off your back, Obama says he's going to give you

the tools to do whatever you need to - tools is the big phrase that Clinton started. But both of them have to leave the people, the public thinking, wow, we're really, we are really . . . this is what American exceptionalism has always been used for in politics and if you do that, you can go a long way.

>> Long: Yeah, we are the only country that invented the giant, foam number one. They don't have that in France. Search all over Western Europe, you can't find one.

>> Robinson: Final segment: what Obama means. I have here a collection of quotations about the election of Barack Obama. I'm going to read a couple of them and just let you go. Here's the first, Oprah Winfrey, quote, "It feels like hope won. It feels like there's a shift in consciousness. It feels like something really big and bold has happened here, like nothing ever in our lifetimes", close quote. Robert?

>>Long: Well, I feel sorry for Oprah, because he's the chief executive of the administrative branch of government and there's really only a couple of ways this story ends and it ends with a lot of arguments and kind of half measures and a lot of failures, even if they do put his face on the ten dollar bill. And eventually these guys are going to have to - the Obama maniacs - are going to have to come down to earth. It's never nice - it's always difficult and especially for this guy, because, you know, it's America, it's a chaotic place that doesn't really ever get behind anything and we're going to be caviling and nitpicking at this guy for eight years.

>> Ferguson: Yeah, I watch this and I think can any good come from this at all, of these expectations of this man. Which is one of the problems with comparing him to Lincoln,

>> Robinson: Land of Lincoln by Andrew Ferguson, splendid book, buy it immediately.

>> Ferguson: He's not evoking Lincoln for Lincoln's ideas or anything; he's evoking Lincoln in a kind of sentimental way, as this great unifying figure. So he was not a unifying figure, you know, the country kind of split apart when he got elected. So the expectations are not just doomed, they're unrealizable, you are simply never going to rally people in the way he's trying to do it, on that cult of personality.

>> Robinson: Peter Hitchens, brother of our friend, Christopher Hitchens. Longish quotation, but bear with me here. Quote: "I was in Washington, D.C., the night of the election. Among third-world nationalities, there was something like ecstasy; they knew the election meant that America had finally switched sides in a global cultural war. Suspicious of welfare addiction, totally committed to preserving its own sovereignty, unabashedly Christian in a world part secular and part Muslim, the United States was unique. Now the U.S., like Britain before it, has begun the long, slow descent. Where now is our last, best hope of Earth?" close quote. Andrew?

>> Ferguson: Look I'm a conservative, I like doom and gloom as much as the next guy, I can be as pessimistic as you want, but

>> Robinson: In his own way, that's as over the top as Oprah.

>> Ferguson: Absolutely, absolutely. In fact, it's sort of the despair equivalent of it. It's preposterous.

>> Robinson: Do you subscribe to that?

>> Long: Yeah, there's always this kind of overheated stuff. It's the opposite of the Oprah - the Obama porn, there's also despair porn, it's all over. My God, if I keep a collection of all the disaster and gloom and doom scenarios that have been spun in this country since, you know, since Lincoln, so, yeah, the idea that we are sort of an ungovernable giant, incredibly unruly country. Because of our pure chaos, which is what drives all the other countries crazy, at bottom their criticism of us is always, there's no organization here, there's nobody in charge.

>> Robinson: You don't have a government.

>> Long: You don't have a government. And you know, if you're a good . . . a good American says, 'Yeah, right. We don't'.

>> Robinson: Shelby Steele. Last quotation here. Quote, "Barack Obama's victory was an ideological defeat for modern conservatism and a devastating blow to the Republican party. This defeat was on the level of ideas. It points to nothing less than a new and still unfolding Obama progressivism. He clearly wants a more redistributive and socially activist government" close quote.

>> Ferguson: Well I think that's undeniable, what he wants; what he gets is, of course, the open question right now. And whether, if he does get something, whether it's permanent.

>> Robinson: Devastating blow to the Republican Party?

>> Ferguson: Yeah, for the next couple of months. Who knows? It could be, they could come back like gangbusters in two years, depending on what happens. There are no such things as devastating blows.

>> Long: Well let me engage in a little despair porn here. I think it was a devastating blow. But I think that it was only . . . election eve is when we got the results back, but we have been terminal for two years, three years, four years. And when the financial system collapsed, there really was no free market argument, there was no Reagan, there was nobody articulating . . .

>> Robinson: How do you go, in a quarter of a century, within the Republican party, from Ronald Reagan, to George W. Bush, who said on January 9th or 12th - I'm not sure of the date, but I'm sure of the quotation - "I freely admit that I chucked some of my free market principles" close quote. How did that happen?

>> Long: You get sloppy. You get sloppy for 25 years. You get sloppy, you start confusing a vibrant stock market with a vibrant economy. You start confusing a growing, sort of financial sector with a growing country. You just get sloppy. You get sloppy about education; you get sloppy about a lot of things. And we did. Republicans, our only sort of message is, everything's really hard, and it's not very pleasant and you still have to work hard and you're not going to make that much money anyway, so you'd better save and by the way, you're all going to get sick and die.

>> Robinson: And that's when we're at our best.

>> Long: Right, that's when we're at our best. That's what people want from us. Instead we kept saying, 'No, no, no, no. You simply buy a house and then it increases in value 70%. We did that.

>> Robinson: What would you advise Republicans to do now?

>> Ferguson: Well I think that this is right. Bush Republicans have a terrible burden because in a sense Bush actively ran against Reaganism, by embracing governmental activism and saying when people are hurting, government has to move, and so on and federalizing education. So without that kind of Reaganite touchstone, I'm not sure that they can recover nearly as quickly, as if they just sort of leapfrog backwards over Bush and bring Reagan back into the 21st century.

>> Robinson: Let me read you a couple of quotations. This is just open-ended.

>> Ferguson: What has it been so far?

>> Long: a tightly scripted . . .

>> Robinson: It was tightly scripted; you just ignored the script, which I'm delighted you did, by the way. Barack Obama's concluding paragraph of his inaugural address: "Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back, nor did we falter, and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations", close quote. What grade do you give that?

>> Ferguson: I think that's good.

>> Robinson: You do?

>> Ferguson: I think that was a good ending.

>> Robinson: Ok, now here's Abraham Lincoln's: "Now passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad

land, will yet swell the chorus of the union when, again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature" close quote.

>> Long: Well, unfair.

>> Ferguson: Lincoln had a much better speechwriter.

>> Robinson: Andrew Ferguson, author of Land of Lincoln, Robert Long, thank you very much. For Uncommon Knowledge and The Hoover Institution, I'm Peter Robinson, thanks for joining us.