

Obama: lessons for Labour (and Conservatives) from the Great UK Campaigner

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[Philip Gould](#), the political communications guru was teaching at LSE just hours after Obama had delivered his inauguration speech. This is a man who, along with many other eager Modernisers, went to Clinton's America back in the mid-90s to find out how to reinvent left-wing politics and get back into power.

So it was interesting to hear Gould deconstruct the Obama magic. He was impressed but unexcited by the speech which he felt lacked that killer phrase, that soundbite to summarise an historic moment.

Commentators ascribe that to a desire on Obama's part to appear austere and dignified, but Gould felt it indicated a possible lack of true communications genius. However, he was full of praise for Obama's election, which he thought embodied all the virtues of the perfect political campaign:

"It was the greatest campaign of modern political history – all the parts worked perfectly together"

In Gould's opinion it was Bush that made Obama possible. And it was the flawed campaigns of both Gore and Kerry that allowed Bush to win twice. Campaigning can't win for a bad politician or party, says Gould, but it can and was crucial in the last three US elections:

"Obama's team understood that a campaign is about flow, strategy and the fundamentals. It was a brilliantly disciplined and organised campaign, while the [Hillary] Clinton campaign was full of bitterness and division"

Gould said that of all the 2008 candidates only Obama really had a strategy based on fundamentals:

"Obama's campaign had the fundamentals, that deep feeling, that sense of historic moment – not a set of techniques – he was the only one with a strategy which was about Change and a new model of politics".

In contrast, both Labour and the Conservatives have not come up with a narrative based on fundamentals or a proper strategy, which is why both have struggled to get any momentum in the last year or so.

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