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Obama Everyman: How Much Is Too Much?

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As I watch President Obama filling out his NCAA bracket and his wife Michelle digging in the White House dirt to plant vegetables, I think of a photo op from another time.

There were Hillary and Bill Clinton, embracing after a swim under the trees beside the beach -- as if the photographer ambled into an unguarded moment between two of the most heavily guarded people on earth. The Lewinsky scandal, oddly enough, broke shortly thereafter.

As Robin Williams said: "Reality - what a concept!"

When it comes to real, I don't know at what point, politically speaking, the Obamas "jump the shark." But I have to think we are dangerously close to takeoff. Once airborne, a nation that never has needed to trust motions and motives -- the real intentions -- of political leaders will be in bigger trouble than it is right now.

Just as we were asked to pretend that the beach photographer breached the Clinton's Secret Service perimeter of heavy weapons and helicopters, there is a fiction afoot that we have been invited into the life of just plain folks.

The *Daily News* and *US Magazine* have already afforded the first family the full-on "just like us" treatment.

We've: Obama filling out his NCAA bracket; sipping beer at the ball game; riding a roller coaster with the kids; showing off the new swing set (note to staff: maybe we should have had shots of him actually putting it together); body surfing; downing cheese steaks in Philly; waiting in the snow for the kids outside school; going out for a Valentine's date and, of course, yucking it up with Jay Leno just like Dennis Miller does.

The most refreshingly natural family to grace the White House in decades may be on the verge of becoming something unnatural -- over-packaged and over-exposed.

But ...

Let's say I get it. The Obamas are good people, with adorable kids, determined to lead normal lives. Especially after eight years of egregious lunacy, a little normalcy sells. But what are my instructions? Am I supposed to call my anti-stimulus, anti-bailouts congressman and say "don't be mean to my buddy?"

Of course, there might be something else entirely going on.

The midterms are already looming. Two years in, a new president always loses some seats. With houses taken, savings decimated and jobs evaporated, an angry and impatient electorate expects things to be a lot better by then. If they're not -- and they might not be - - the only thing standing between populist rage and a Democratic rout may be Obama's personal popularity.

I truly believe that the Obamas are fine people with a deep love of family. The kids are the best thing to hit the White House since John-John peeked out from under the desk.

I don't want Obama to succeed. I want him to succeed spectacularly. I want him to fix the economy. I want him to heal the Middle East. I want him to catch Bin Laden. I want to find where Madoff hid the money. I want him to go down as one of the great presidents of our time.

But the everyman photo ops are fast approaching the end of their useful shelf life. And still to come are the dog and the "Obamas First White House Christmas."

Mr. President, you are not like us. You run the free world, and that guy following you around with a briefcase has the codes to blow up humanity.

There is a Latin phrase that might have a place in the White House communications office: "Ars est celare artem -- the art is to hide the art."

Right now, the brush strokes are a bit obvious.