

# Sugar Land

**THE WORLD IS A LONELIER PLACE THAN IT WAS THIS TIME LAST week.** The robo calls have stopped, mass e-mails no longer clog the inbox, direct mailers are now outnumbered by holiday catalogues. The election is over. And while you may be depressed or elated by the outcome, there's little choice now but to move on.

Of course, that's not as easy as pulling the signs out of your lawn or scraping the bumper sticker from your rear window. Like the Halloween candy consumed last weekend, the residue of the past year will remain with us for some time — our own political avoiddupois.

Shedding that burden will take effort, but it's worth it. Americans have created many great things in this 232-year-old democracy, but we have not yet developed a language to discuss our politics. Whether yours draw from right wing radio or left-leaning chat rooms, the angry argot is the same. Every statement is a salvo, every retort wrapped in withering prose. There are plenty of smart, thinking people who voted for John McCain. There are plenty of Barack Obama fans who aren't Stalinist pinkos. But you wouldn't know it from the death stares and middle fingers that surfaced on suburban roads, or the rampant theft and vandalism of political signs on private property.

It's nice that citizens care who runs their government, but it would be nicer if they cared about their neighbors. Or, more generally, if they cared about everyone's right to speak freely, endorse openly and campaign actively. We love democracy until it runs up against our entrenched beliefs. Then it's goodbye marketplace of ideas, hello secret police.

Such attitudes have clearly been exacerbated by the Religious Right, which has attempted to conflate politics and morality through issues like abortion and gay marriage. The left isn't without blame, however, having turned the issue of global warming

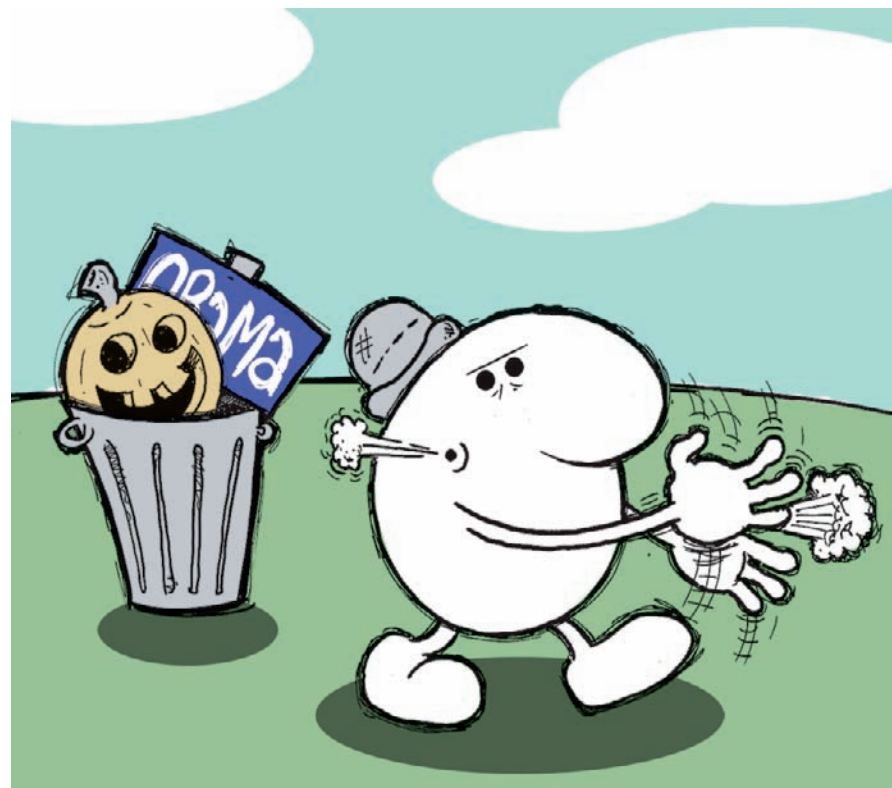
into a battle between those who care about the fate of the Earth and irrational despoilers gunning for the End of Days.

Viewed through the prism of partisanship, the opposing sides couldn't be more different. But the confluence of two recent calendar dates — Election Day and Halloween — points up just how absurd such perceptions are. The first, steeped in divisive politics, involves converging at a central community building and peacefully filling out paperwork. The other, born of a desire for candy, involves dressing as zombies and ax murderers, and threatening neighbors for handouts. Martians would be hard-pressed to understand why one causes our blood pressure to rise, and the other only our blood sugar.

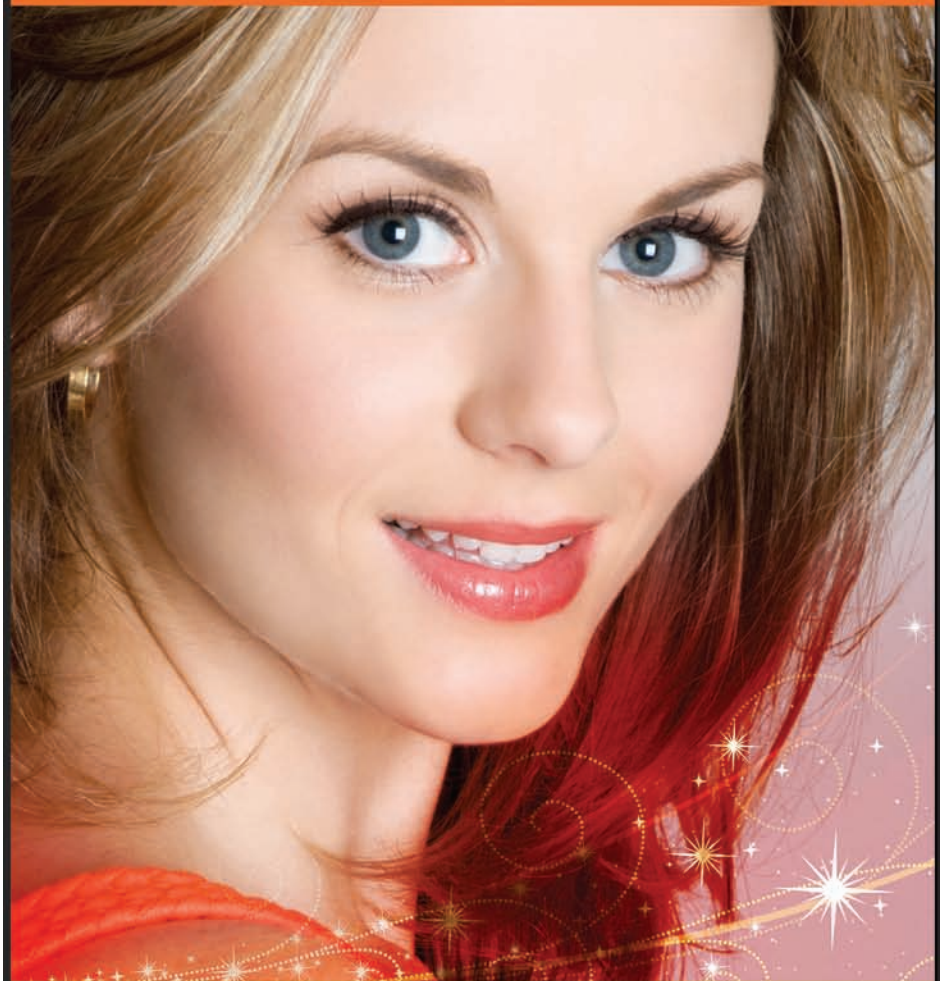
I should probably point out here that, as of this writing, Election Day has not yet dawned, much less ended, and there is no certainty how the vote will roll out. But it isn't too soon to begin focusing on the things that unite us as a community, as a nation, as a species. Almost to a person, we want our children to grow up cared for and well educated. We want to have good jobs and safe homes, clean air and drinkable water. We want to enjoy our brief time on this planet with a minimum of suffering and a maximum of joy.

With that much in common, policy differences seem positively niggling. So beat your swords back into ploughshares, replace the sign divots on your front lawn, and remember that whatever's ahead, it has to be better than the past eight years.

As for that that lingering partisanship? Try feeding it something sweet. ☺



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