



I (he/she) am Legend

In December, as I watched the opening two sequences of the film *I am Legend*, I had an interesting epiphany about the Democratic primary race. The film opens with a newscaster interviewing scientist Dr. Kripper, played by Emma Thompson. Kripper has genetically altered the measles virus so that it just attacks cancer cells and her virus has been 100% effective. As the newscaster exclaims, "So you've found the cure for cancer!" Kripper agrees, with modest pride, that, yes, she has. The film then cuts to three years later. New York City is a deserted wasteland, overrun with trees, wild animals, and humans turned into bloodthirsty zombies by the virus. The only hope for human survival is Dr. Robert Neville, played by Will Smith. As I watched these two sequences, it suddenly struck me that Barack Obama would win the democratic nomination. Perhaps Thompson's coif resembled that of Hillary Clinton or perhaps it was the parallel the film was constructing between these two outstanding, if science



fictional, scientists, one a white woman and the other a black man (Dr. Kripper disappears from the film completely after this opening scene, perhaps killed by her own virus). I certainly posit no prognostic intention on the part of the filmmakers, only an accidental allegory produced by these two casting choices, Thompson's

notably incidental and Smith's substantial. Smith carries the film—he is the film, for most of it the only living human character. As a matter of fact, *Time* magazine recently published a list of the "25 Most Important Films on Race," the 25th being *I am Legend*. Consider their assessment of Smith (and his resemblance to Obama):

Smith may be the only guarantor of robust box office grosses—the last real movie star. ... He is both black (obviously) and beyond blackness. That makes Smith's pre-eminence as cheering as Barack Obama's Presidential plausibility. Moviegoers aren't color-blind any more than voters are, but they can envision an America where an African American could run the country, and the Fresh Prince rules the movies.

And what do we envision for women, black or white?

– KATHLEEN MCHUGH