

THE KLAN WAS IN THE AUDIENCE

Reading Pat Lang's discussion of the possibility that McCain's studied contempt for Obama the other night was crypto-racist reminded me of something I read before the debate. The Klan was in the audience for the debate—or at least they announced publicly beforehand they planned to be there:

The Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan plan to be on campus for the face-off between Republican nominee **John McCain** and Democrat **Barack Obama**, the first African-American nominee of a major party, according to a Friday report in the university's student newspaper.

University officials haven't commented. But, since winning the bid as host a year ago, they have used the attention to promote the university's efforts toward racial reconciliation.

The university newspaper, **the Daily Mississippian**, first reported earlier this month that the white supremacist group planned to appear among the throngs expected on the Oxford, Miss., campus. The emperor of the White Knights group, whose identity was withheld as a condition of the interview, said his members would be "invisible ... Our people won't be in regalia or demonstrating. So, I guess you'll just have to guess which of the people present are Klansmen."

Frankly, I don't think McCain's refusal to look at Obama was racism. McCain treats everyone who does not treat him as America's savior with performed contempt. And I agree with the primate scientists weighing in to note that McCain's behavior had the mark of fear and subordination,

not dominance.

Nevertheless, I thought it worthy to recall this detail, as we continue to discuss the dynamics of the debate last Friday.

The conventional wisdom about the debate seems to have solidified around the conclusion that McCain came off as angry while Obama seemed sane and presidential, particularly by contrast. Given how unbalanced McCain is right now, that doesn't so much surprise me—the contrast between the two was bound to elevate Obama by comparison.

But I do think it remarkable that Obama achieved precisely that effect—pending years of racial stereotypes about angry black men—in the presence of those trying to use intimidation to sustain those stereotypes.