

A Word from London

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The Political Trend Line for the Republican Party

The good news for Republicans is that George W. Bush will be president of the United States. The bad news is that if recent cultural and demographic trends continue, Mr. Bush may be the last Republican president for a very long time. Let me offer the evidence.

Bush won a majority of voters who earn between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per year, approximately 25 percent of the electorate. By contrast, he lost overwhelmingly to voters in the “upper class,” approximately 4 percent of the electorate. He won the vote of those who graduated from college and he won the stock-owning portion of the electorate. These are the positive signs.

On the other side of the electoral ledger, Bush lost the unmarried, the homosexual vote, those who believe in gun control, those who want abortion to remain legal, urban voters, voters who are not religious, and the female vote. Gore also dominated in most immigrant sub-groups.

This is the cultural divide. The country is split in many ways, but the primary concern is not the economy, albeit the economy cannot be entirely discounted, it is the culture. Here the signs are not promising for Republicans.

If cultural trends continue—always a dubious proposition—it is likely that new immigrants will line up with the Democrats; Bush did receive 35 percent of the Hispanic vote, more than expected but still a minority. Moreover, almost all the growth in the population will come from the source now designated as Hispanic.

Admittedly there is variation within subgroups. Mexicans vote differently from Cubans. Colombians and Dominicans do not share the same voting patterns. On balance, however, the Democrats benefit from this growth in this portion of the population.

The hard-scrabble working poor maintain a firm loyalty to the Democratic party as does the unshakable black vote which appears to be assured at 93 percent.

A great imponderable for Republicans is the stock-owning public. If this group expands significantly and if the market rebounds during a Republican presidency, the fortunes of the party could be ascendant. Of course, the reverse is also true; a market that tumbles will have political fallout as well.

In the end, if one envisions an America that has an increase in immigration, urban residents, irreligious people and unmarrieds, the Democratic party will dominate into the foreseeable future.

Even with weak candidates, Democrats will gain due to the promise of a woman's vote which is inclined to favor activist government policies which mitigate the effects of the market. For example women more than men tend to favor a government-operated Social Security system, rather than a privatized scheme.

One of the great areas of voting disparity is in rural areas where Republicans are invariably the favored party. The problem is that the population in rural areas is declining precipitously.

It is often said that with the New Deal coalition gone and the Reagan coalition disassembling before our very eyes, everything is up for grabs. This is simply not so.

America has benefitted from the fruits of the free market, but at the same time, there has been a shift in attitude. The self-control once associated with elites has been transformed into social promiscuity.

It is not unusual for the so-called urbane voter to describe himself as a free marketer when it comes to the economy, but a "progressive" on matters social and cultural. That these positions may be mutually contradictory is rarely considered by adherents.

Of course this somewhat lugubrious scenario for Republicans doesn't mean they should throw in the towel. The investor class could surprise if Dow 36,000 is on the not too distant horizon. There is the prospect of some Hispanic conversions, especially those who come from culturally traditional societies. The suburban vote is still to be contested. And Republicans have twenty-nine of the governors, suggesting a modest Republican lead nationwide.

Yet on balance I find it hard to rely on a silver lining. The trend lines are not with Republicans. "Elephants" should hope for the best and work for the best, but I'm not sure I can offer a lot of encouragement.

Italian and French Mistaken Impressions of the American Election

Sitting in a Roman restaurant as the U.S. presidential recount and recriminations continued was revealing in somewhat unexpected ways. Based on the Italian political experience, the American election appears as a comic strip consistent with recent voting patterns in Italy and European stereotypes of the United States.

The French, with their reflexively anti-American sentiment, view the American election as a Woody Allen saga: one choice gives you tragedy; the other, disaster. French spokesmen have seemingly transformed a contested election into a form of national humiliation.

Jacques Attali, one time aide to President Francois Mitterand, called the election "a true internal Vietnam," a vote that indicates "the U.S. has a twenty-first century economy and a nineteenth century democracy."

Dennis Jeambar, editor of *L'Express*, wrote "a drop of Floridian poison would lead one to believe that the whole body of the hyperpower is infected."

A self-described Italian wit said Kofi Annan should call for UN monitors to observe the recount in Florida. He and a number of television talking heads said the U.S. resembles “a banana republic” it often decries.

Not to be outdone Nicole Fontaine, president of the European Parliament, offered to send an observer team from Strasbourg to Palm Beach.

This critique is remarkably hypocritical when one considers the voting irregularities that routinely accompany Italian elections and the French two-round system which invites closed door deals.

While the contentiousness and rancor from the stunningly close election has offered Europeans a rare opportunity to poke fun at the United States, many Italians and French spokesmen miss the point. Rather than tumble into a constitutional crisis, the equanimity of most Americans demonstrates the robustness of American political institutions the founders of the nation passed on to their heirs.

Despite charges of cheating and overheated rhetoric verging on revolutionary cant, it is widely believed that when the dust clears the hunger for vengeance will give way to consensus. Thankfully Americans are not French or Italians.

It is my belief that the unconventional conditions surrounding the election will create an opportunity for bipartisanship rarely seen in recent American politics. But even if I’m wrong and the next Congress is rancorous and little can be accomplished, American institutions are so intrinsically strong that they cannot be imperiled by an inert government. Some analysts might contend the economy will be enhanced by a government unable to act.

It is also the case that passions in Washington ebb and flow. The issue of today is a hazy memory of tomorrow. Americans are notoriously ahistorical. As a people, Americans tend to look to the future rather than back at the past, a state that made it relatively easy for President Clinton to gloss over the Lewinsky scandal and his subsequent impeachment.

As difficult as the next presidency may be, Americans will unquestionably be understanding, especially if the president tacks to the center. Several issues that could easily be embraced by the leaders of both parties include the elimination or modification of the income tax marriage penalty and the estate tax, thereby creating an impression of compromise and reconciliation.

As one Clinton advisor noted,

There is an incredible amount of unfinished business in which everyone has already broken their picks and done all the hard work.

It is possible that the crippled president in January 2001 will be the master conciliator by November 2002.

Fred Greenstein, presidential scholar at Princeton University, noted that critics who anticipate an enfeebled presidency “underestimate the resiliency of American institutions.”

The Italians and the French may be laughing about the United States today, but as history attests the last laugh resides with Americans. It is facile to argue that the infinitesimal difference between Republicans and Democrats displays a funda-

mental weakness in the American political system.

In the case of France and Italy, governments fall in national crises every decade if not sooner; hence the application of local awareness to American conditions. What most Europeans ignore or cannot comprehend is the sturdiness of American political institutions. If there is any question about the strength of these institutions the next few years should prove that Italian and French perceptions about the U.S. are flat out wrong.

Presidents' Day and National Ignorance

Presidents' Day is a good time to take stock of the meaning of the presidency in American history. At the school my youngest daughter attends, Washington and Lincoln's birthdays have been converted into Presidents' Day, and Presidents' Day has been transformed into Winter Recess.

At a recent meeting only two in a class of twenty-one knew which two presidents were associated with the holiday. That, by the way, shouldn't be a surprise.

Several years ago James Madison University eliminated American History as a requirement suggesting implicitly that the graduates from that university do not have to know who James Madison is.

Although it may appear as hyperbole, the nation is in the throes of institutional amnesia with the past regarded as a dream from which we will soon awaken.

This alarming condition is confirmed by a study entitled, "Losing America's Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century." This survey, organized by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), reports the seniors at fifty-five of the so-called most prestigious colleges and universities in the United States, as determined by *US News and World Report*, received a grade of D or F on history questions drawn from high school curriculum.

For example, these seniors could not identify Valley Forge, words from the Gettysburg Address, or even the basic privileges of the U.S. Constitution. ACTA reports that students from every one of the top colleges can graduate without having a single course in American History. In seventy-eight percent of these institutions students are not required to take any history at all.

Should anyone doubt the dumbing down in America, Jay Leno's random questioning of people on the street about rudimentary history and civics facts reveals disturbing responses. What is a bicameral legislature? Where is the White House? What are the three parts of government? These questions yield answers at once hilarious and pathetic.

In response to a Roper Organization survey conducted in 1996 the most common response to the question: "Who said government of the people, by the people, and for the people?" was Thomas Jefferson. And this from a group of students who completed their requirements for college graduation.

That this is an outrage should be apparent to any sensible person. If institutions of higher learning no longer require a rudimentary appreciation of American civilization and its heritage, there is a real danger a common frame of reference will be lost and our free society could be in jeopardy. Already there

are radicals who contest a distinctive American legacy arguing instead that this nation is a geographic entity only, on which anything can be imprinted.

James C. Rees, director of George Washington's Mount Vernon, said:

This report (ACTA) explains why visitors coming to Mount Vernon seem to know next to nothing about the real George Washington, and why they appear to be almost starved for America's history.

History is being shortchanged at every level of education from elementary school to graduate school. I found that even history majors have yawning gaps in their knowledge

In a recent speech to graduate students at a well-known university I said that Wallace had a profound effect on the attitude of leftists in the 1948 presidential election. At that moment, a young lady seeming to speak for her classmates, said "I didn't know that George Wallace ran for president in '48." She had never heard of Henry Wallace, did not know he was vice president or a former Secretary of Agriculture. This from an American History major.

Losing a civic memory is not something that can be accepted lightly. Free institutions depend on people who are willing to defend traditions in which they believe. When those traditions are unknown or disregarded, liberty itself can be challenged.

Abraham Lincoln admonished that "We cannot escape history." Alas, that is precisely what is happening. In the ACTA report:

- * Only 34 percent of the respondents could identify George Washington as the American general at the battle of Yorktown.
- * Only 42 percent could identify George Washington as "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen."
- * Only 23 percent could identify "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people" as a line from the Gettysburg Address.

By contrast 99 percent of the students know Beavis and Butthead and 98 percent could identify Snoop Doggy Dogg.

On this Presidents' Day in 2001, I wonder whether the nation can survive intact if most of our college seniors are so abysmally ignorant of the polity in which they reside. Surely parents and policy makers should be engaged in a clarion call for a restoration of national memory. It is a tragedy of extraordinary proportions to suggest the America's best and brightest do not know anything about the nation that offers them opportunity and liberty unprecedented in recorded history.

Hypocrisy, Good and Bad

La Rochefoucauld, the French philosopher, made the statement that "hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays virtue." This is undoubtedly even more true now than

when the statement was originally uttered in the seventeenth century.

As I see it however, hypocrisy comes in two forms: hypocrisy that is a tribute and serves a social end, and hypocrisy that violates social norms and is ultimately destructive. Let me cite several examples.

The English have developed an informal system for the distribution of pornography that is tastefully hypocritical. One can obtain porn, but the procedure is filled with shame and censure comparable to a person buying *Hustler*, but reading it within the confines of a newspaper.

There is nothing unlawful about the purchase, yet it is designed to make the buyer feel ashamed. He is obliged to recognize that while he will not be stopped from viewing pornographic material, it is a matter society frowns on. This is what I would describe as positive hypocrisy.

On the negative side of the hypocrisy equation examples abound.

There are those who contend that stem cell research from human embryos is desirable since the research could relieve suffering from Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and other afflictions, even if the act is morally questionable.

On the other hand, some of these same people are opposed to the genetic manipulation of organisms, such as fruits and vegetables, for fear that this will have long term baneful effects on consumers. Presumably human genetic manipulation is okay, but genetic manipulation of plants is not.

In the 1980s President Reagan called the former Soviet Union "the evil empire." After the comment was made the foreign policy establishment excoriated him for a lack of diplomacy. Press accounts described his statement as a "foolish gesture," and Reagan was portrayed as a crude and unyielding cold warrior.

In 2000 Vice President Al Gore noted that the election is a contest between good and evil. The implicit presumption is he and the Democratic Party are good and the Republicans are evil. Even though several analysts noted that this kind of language is inappropriate in a political campaign, the major press outlets, who had once criticized Reagan for the use of the "e" word, were conspicuously silent when Gore employed its use.

One might conclude it's okay to call Republicans evil, but it's not okay to call Soviet leaders evil.

The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) invariably opposes religious symbols in public schools, e.g. a cross. In fact, on several occasions ACLU attorneys have fought vigorously in court for a strict separation of church and state on everything from funding to shared use of textbooks.

At the same time, the ACLU fought vigorously for the untrammelled expression of artists. When Jose Serrano put a cross encased in urine and called his "opus" "Piss Christ" ACLU lawyers fought to have it displayed in museums. My guess is that if a print were made the same attorneys would support its display in a public school art class.

Here too hypocrisy reigns; religious symbols are *verboten* unless the symbol is defaced or degraded.

In the 2000 campaign it was often suggested that people cannot be trusted to

invest a portion of their Social Security funds with private sources, such as mutual funds. The argument is that some people might be irresponsible and lose their retirement assets thereby increasing those on the public dole.

On the other hand, some of these same advocates (one thinks of Senator Hillary Clinton) contend we should eliminate the Electoral College (not an easy thing to do since it requires the state's approving such an action) and have the direct election of the president. The argument put forward is that the people's will should be heeded without the intervention of a paternalistic Electoral College.

The people in the first instance cannot be trusted to invest their money wisely, but in the second instance should be trusted to elect directly the president of the United States.

Hypocrisy is obviously on a roll. It has insinuated itself into every crevice of American political life and most of what we observe is hypocrisy of the bad variety.

Another Frenchman, poet Charles Peguy said, "Everything starts in mystery and ends in politics." I would revise his claim to suggest that everything starts in mystery and ends in hypocrisy, especially political hypocrisy of the worst kind.

Family Policy in the West

Demographers are increasingly in agreement that rather than a population explosion the Western world and Japan are more likely to be facing a population implosion. Already the signs are clear that many countries are more worried about the lack, rather than the excess, of babies.

In Italy, for example, which has only 1.2 children per family, current fertility levels could threaten the very existence of the nation. If one were to do a straight-line extrapolation using current trends no one will be left on the boot of Italy in 3000.

With the phenomenon of parents with one child now very much in evidence, e.g. 85 percent of Italians don't have a sibling, intergenerational ties are being dramatically loosened. If an only child marries an only child, the couple will have no aunts, uncles or cousins. A family with relatives sitting around a Christmas table may be a distant memory only Hollywood mythmakers can restore.

The disappearance of extended families is not easily reversed. Even if pro-natalist policies were introduced today, their effect would not be observable for two generations. Moreover, life style choices, namely late marriages and two incomes militate against a policy shift.

How nations can offset the combined pressure of an aging population and a declining birth rate isn't clear. However several steps can be taken even if a desired outcome isn't assured.

For one thing, there should be the clear recognition that families matter. They are the essential foundation of democratic governments and the economic bulwark against financial failure.

Second, there should be the recognition that a fulfilling life is more often than not achieved through marriage and having children, notwithstanding the sacrifices children entail. This sentiment should be manifest in a family tax forgiveness

initiative designed to encourage a higher fertility rate than now exists or a policy that rewards a parent for staying at home with children up to six years old.

Third, a tax penalty levied against married couples must be eliminated so that the economic incentive to stay married exceeds the economic advantage of divorce. Similarly, unilateral no-fault divorce proceedings should be altered in order to change the perception that a marital spat constitutes a marriage breakdown.

Last, hedonistic individualism so prominent in pseudo-sophisticated circles should be challenged by cultural leaders who appreciate the blessings of matrimony. The high stakes in question make it imperative that a cultural response is organized.

It is clear that the assault on the family launched in the late sixties and seventies has borne fruit, but it is a poisoned fruit—one whose deleterious effect on the society is demonstrable.

Despite all of the by now well-rehearsed arguments about the changing family (read: breakdown of the family), marriage and family life—with all their difficulties—remain the best way to nourish democratic government and well-adjusted children.

As Kevin Andrews, a member of the Australian Parliament, recently noted:

A nation without a conscious family policy leaves to chance and mischance an area of social reality of the utmost importance, which in consequence will be exposed to the untrammelled and frequently thoroughly undesirable impact of policies arising in other areas.

At long last scholars are starting to realize the family is the linchpin of social cohesion. Without it, dislocation and anomie result.

Now all we have to do is convince well-educated women in the West that it is in their interest and the interest of their respective nations to have babies. This is truly an uphill struggle. Then again stranger things have happened. Even Madonna has two kids. Ω