

# Beating The Bushes

All Politics, All The Time

January 02, 2009

## Where Children Sleep

As I finally begin writing, the sun is going down on this, the first day of 2009. It is now close to the end of the third quarter at the Rose Bowl, and the Trojans are destroying Penn State 31-7. I would love to devote my full attention to the game, but cannot, because I have some writing to do. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, this wouldn't present a problem. After all, writing is what I do; for me, it's a heck of a lot easier than carpentry or repair work.

This week however, writing is just about as difficult as carpentry; it is that hundredth time. I'm trying to get through a piece about Israel's military actions against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and all that it portends. It is a terribly difficult situation; one fraught with hard and conflicting emotions. Part of me responds to the current engagement with the clear-eyed certainty of a 110% Zionist:

*"Israel, you are totally justified in going after Hamas. Whatever befalls them and the people they so poorly lead is their own damn fault. After all, they are the ones who have been firing rockets into Ashkelon, Ashdod and Beersheba. They are the ones who time and again have made it abundantly clear that their priority is not to feed, clothe, house or educate the people of Gaza, but to wipe the Jewish State off the map."*

Another side or part of me -- although grudgingly understanding -- wants Israel to cease and desist; to quit the bombing and to forget about launching a ground offensive. This part of me -- indeed, this part of so many of us -- shudders at the thought of Israel becoming ever more isolated, ever more criticized and reviled by the so-called "family of nations."

*"Israel: to the rest of the world it doesn't matter whether you have right on your side. Nobody cares whether your cities are being rocketed or you have implacable, well-armed, blood-thirsty enemies living on your western border. No one cares that you -- a civilized, democratic state -- are in the constant crosshairs of a terrorist group that thinks nothing of sending its sons and daughters off to a grisly, explosive martyr's death. The rest of the world only*

*knows -- or thinks they know -- one thing: that you have both displaced and dispossessed several millions of indigenous people. Stop what you are doing before it is too late . . ."*

According to official Israeli sources, the Gaza bombings have been specifically targeting Hamas' weapons caches, supply tunnels through which they amass those arms, and -- for the first time in recent memory -- the homes and hideouts of Hamas terrorist leaders. Indeed, it has just been reported that the Israeli Air Force bombed the house of Nizar Rayan, a senior Hamas leader, killing him along with his four wives and nine of his children, four of them younger than 18. It should be noted that Rayan sent his own son on a suicide mission against Jewish settlers in Gaza in 2001, and has been advocating renewed suicide missions against Israel in the past several days. The way things go, it is likely that all people will know or remember is that 4 of Rayan's young children died in the Israeli Air Force strike. Few will care to recall that the Israeli Air Force has, for the most part, been confining its strikes to military and terrorist targets. Few will care to hear that Hamas and other militant groups have been launching rockets against specifically civilian targets in Israel. Few will ever know that during the height of the bombing, the Israeli Supreme Court actually ordered the government to allow foreign journalists limited access to Gaza.

Why would the court do such a thing? Because Israel is a Democracy, regardless of what her enemies say.

Believe me, I too feel terrible about those children dying in the beds in which they were sleeping. Like all but the most heartless, zealous or mindless, I too wish that all children could be safe in the places where they sleep. I also wish that Iran, Syria, Lebanon and other Muslim nations would stop using the Palestinians for their own political purposes. Oh they bemoan their fate and hurl blood-curdling invective against the Jewish State. They even provide arms and terrorist training to the terrorists of Hamas and Hezbollah. But what have they truly done for their brothers and sisters?

Predictably, most Western governments have issued calls for an immediate cease fire. Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni has rejected French President Nicolas Sarkozy's proposal because it lacked any plausible guarantee that Hamas rocket fire would stop. Both President Bush and Secretary of State Rice have put the blame for the Israeli bombardment squarely on the shoulders of Hamas. This should come as no surprise.

What is surprising are a couple of responses from within the Arab world:

- In a speech delivered on Wednesday, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas stated that Hamas was responsible for the Israeli invasion, "because it ended the cease-fire between it and Israel 12 days

ago." [In the same breath, Abbas, not wishing to sound like a "traitor to the cause," also called what Israel is doing, "the bloodiest massacre and systematic destruction of all forms of life."]

- Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister, Prince Faud al-Faisal, actually criticized the Palestinians for their inability to remain behind President Abbas of Fatah -- an implicit condemnation of Hamas: "This terrible massacre would not have happened if the Palestinian people were united behind one leadership, speaking in one voice. We are telling our Palestinian brothers that your Arab nation cannot extend a real helping hand if you don't extend your own hands to each other with love."

There is no simple answer to the Gaza engagement. Indeed, there are no simple answers -- only simple-minded questions -- when it comes to anything involving the Middle East. But a love for Israel and a hatred of bigotry, racism and murder can make seeming simpletons out of the seemingly smart. I do know that whatever Israel does -- or does not -- do will result in criticism, disparagement and revulsion in many quarters. That's just the way the world goes. But as Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "Do what you feel in your heart to be right -- for you'll be criticized anyway. You'll be damned if you do and damned if you don't."

Many who are anxiously awaiting the beginning of the Obama Administration wonder what role he will play in the painful conundrum that is the Middle East. So far, adhering to his "only one president at a time" philosophy, he has given little hint on his policy on the Middle East conflict, though he has said finding a peace plan will be an early priority of his administration. This is a positive change from what we've had; both Clinton and Bush '43 waited until near the end of their second term to begin seriously considering the situation. During the 2008 campaign, Obama did state, "If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I'm going to do everything in my power to stop that. I would expect the Israelis to do the same thing."

For as many question marks as may exist about what the Middle East will look like after Obama takes office and Israel elects its next government, one thing is clear: where children sleep should be safe, secure and inviolate.

Anna and Nurit join me in wishing you and all those you love a New Year of health and happiness, of peace and prosperity.

*Kurt F. Stone*

[By the way, Southern Cal wound up defeating Penn State 38-24. Thanks J.L. for your critique; you can see I took it to heart!]

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# Beating The Bushes

All Politics, All The Time

January 09, 2009

## *Warren G. Harding 's Downstairs Neighbor*

Although certainly not as volatile as the present-day New York Stock Exchange or NASDAQ, presidential rankings do possess a significant degree of elasticity and movement. Not surprisingly, there is wide consensus on which presidents rank as either truly great or spectacularly bad: Washington, Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt are invariably ranked at the top of virtually every poll; likewise, Presidents Millard Fillmore, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Franklin Pierce and Warren G. Harding come in last.

Sometimes a president's ranking will depend as much on *when* the poll is taken as on *who* is doing the polling or responding. In other words, Herbert Hoover will generally rank higher in boom times than in bust, and will always score better with Pat Buchanans of this world than with the Keith Olbermanns. Then too, the further away in time one moves from say, the Reagan years, the higher our nation's 40th president will tend to score: in a 1996 Ridings-McIver poll, Reagan came in at number 26; according to those polled by the *Wall Street Journal* in 2005, the Gipper was our nation's 6th best chief executive.

This brings us -- not surprisingly -- to George W. Bush. In the above-referenced *Wall Street Journal* poll, an interesting pattern emerged: among Democratic-leaning scholars, George W. was ranked the sixth-worst president in American history. Among conservative-leaning scholars, he came in as sixth-best. Any self-respecting statistician would conclude that W had received a split-decision rating of "average." Then again, according to a statistician, if you've got your feet in the oven and your head in the freezer, on average, you're just fine . . .

Now, there are those who will argue that since there are still 11 days left in his presidency, it is too early for historians or pollsters to go to work; W. is *not* yet ready for ranking or assessment. With any president other than George W. Bush, this would be a potent argument. But America's 43rd president is a special case; thus, the argument for waiting until the end of his tenure is pure nonsense. In recent polls, slightly more than **80%** of the public disapproves of his presidency. This is the highest such rating in the history of presidential polling. Moreover, in a 2004 History News Network poll, 107 of 109 historians polled (98%) rated his presidency a failure. And mind you, this poll was

completed *before* Hurricane Katrina, the downturn in the housing market, the stock market collapse or the Recession/Depression of 2008.

Let's face it: When the Marlins are down 15-2 in the last of the 8th, one can comfortably predict that Florida is going to lose and start writing the wrap-up. In the case of George W. Bush and his 8 years as president, there is little mystery about where history will likely place him; as Warren G. Harding's *downstairs* neighbor.

When asked where he thought he'd rank among America's 43 chief executives, W. responded:

*"Look, everybody's trying to write the history of this administration even before it's over. I'm reading about George Washington still. My attitude is, if they're still analyzing No. 1, 43 ought not to worry about it, and just do what he thinks is right, make the tough choices necessary."*

W's 8 years of "tough choices" have resulted in:

- The bankrupting of America through combining a disastrous war with mammoth tax breaks for the rich.
- Turning a blind eye to torture and terror.
- Trampling on the Bill of Rights.
- The appointment of foxes to guard the nation's various hen houses.
- All but ignoring the planet's looming ecological crisis.
- Squandering much of the world's goodwill.
- Attempting to dismantle Social Security.
- Giving untold hundreds of billions of dollars of profit to the pharmaceutical industry.
- Encouraging a mindless retreat from science and rationalism.
- An ever shrinking middle class coupled with an ever smaller -- and ever wealthier -- "ownership class."

Is it any wonder that the Democrats now control the White House and both houses of Congress?

76 years ago, Franklin D. Roosevelt took the oath of office as America's 32nd president. His election came on the heels of a dozen years of conservative Republican leadership; a dozen years which dragged America down into the Great Depression. As history records, beginning on day one, Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration began addressing America's most pressing economic problems. In quick order, they pushed through Congress that great alphabet soup of programs and policies that became the New Deal. And although it would take years -- and many would say World War II -- to restore the American economy, FDR and his braintrust were swift to restore trust, hope and optimism.

In a less than 2 weeks, Barack Obama will take the oath of office and become America's 44th president. He is faced with no less daunting challenges than FDR in 1933. Like FDR before him, he must find a way to restore both trust and hope in the government, even as he and his administration begin digging America out of its deep fiscal, intellectual and spiritual hole. If he and his administration will use the tools of leadership with wisdom and sincerity, with nobility and purposefulness, then perhaps -- just perhaps -- we can once again become that "City on a Hill" which our Founding Fathers predicted we could be.

And as for George W., I hope he'll be happy living downstairs from Warren G. Goodness knows Warren will enjoy it; it will be the first time in 85 years he's been superior to anyone . . .

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



January 16, 2009

## *Shiites and Sunnis Redux*

As I write this article, Israel is entering the 21st day of its all-out assault on Hamas. The combined power of the Israeli Army, Navy and Air Force continues to pound Hamas strongholds, tunnels and armaments caches throughout the Gaza Strip. The Murbarak government is attempting to get Israel and Hamas to agree to a temporary, 10-day cease fire. And all over Europe, South America, the Middle East, and even parts of the United States, demonstrators are gathering in the tens and hundreds of thousands to denounce both Israel and the Jewish people -- equating the Israeli military action with the worst, most diabolical actions of the Nazis and call for the utter dismemberment of the Jewish State.

And in his farewell address which just ended a few minutes ago, President George W. Bush talked about "good and evil in the world" as if he really, truly understood what is going on. I'm really disappointed that during his eight years in office, not one reporter ever asked him if he could explain the difference between al-Qai'da and the Taliban, or between Hamas, Hezbollah and Fatah. I wonder if he realizes that Hamas is more Sunni than Shiite, and Hezbollah owes much of its orientation to the late Ayatollah Khomeini, who was, of course, a Shiite.

Wherever and whenever I speak on the situation in the Middle East -- whether it be Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Israel, people asked the kinds of questions I wish just one reporter had asked our 43rd president.

Please note well that Islam is a highly fragmented faith with two major sects, numerous sub-sects, and doctrinal disputes that have been festering for centuries. Understanding Islam without a "scorecard" or understanding of its history is rather like trying to understand the difference between Methodists, Presbyterians and Disciples of Christ without grounding in the history of Protestantism.

Do note that in the current engagement, Israel is going up against Hamas, which controls much of the Gaza Strip. Hamas is the Palestinian branch of the *Sunni* Muslim brother. Hezbollah, against which Israel did battle in Lebanon a while back, is a thorough-going Iranian proxy which takes its inspiration from the radical *Shiite* politics of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. For Hamas, Hezbollah like a big brother who gives you encouragement, teaches you how to fight, and keeps you supplied with all the weapons you need. And yet, from a point of Islamic doctrine, they don't agree with each other. About the only thing they do agree on is that Jews are descended from apes and pigs . . .

Nearly three years ago, I published an article in this space about the history and differences between the various Islamic sects and factions. Of late, I've received many requests to reprint it. Up until this week, I have never reprinted an op-ed piece. But it seems to me that with all that continues going on in this world of ours -- and not just the Middle East -- we can never know enough about those who are hell-bent on conquering as much of the planet as possible.

And so, without further ado, here is what appeared back in March of 2006.

Seems like no matter where I go these days -- a restaurant, the university, a cinema -- the debate and chatter is over Iraq. The major areas of argumentation are both legion and predictable:

- Should we leave immediately?
- Do we need to send in more troops?
- What was the *real* reason we went in in the first place?
- How long are American forces going to have to stay there?
- Will there or won't there be a civil war in Iraq?

On the last issue, I'm here to tell 'ya, the answer is not only a resounding "YES!" but an emphatic "IT STARTED THE DAY SADDAM WAS DEPOSED!!"

It both amazes and amuses that there is so much debate over whether or not Iraq will break out into a full-fledged civil war. By merely posing the question, it proves -- at least to me -- that those raising the issue are both politically myopic and historically astigmatic.

Those whose knowledge of civil war begins and ends with the American "War Between the States" as it is still referred to in the old South, must acknowledge

that there are generally two well-defined sides to a civil conflict, both of which hold fast to a set of political, economic, or even moral beliefs. In America's case, of course, the simple version has it that the Northern states opposed slavery, while the states of the Deep South overwhelmingly favored retaining their "peculiar institution." Never mind that this is a rather simplistic, junior-high schoolish version of history; never mind that this war had as much to do with Federalism-versus-States'-Rights as it did with slavery. That's a matter for another day and another article. History does accurately record that the regional antagonism, which eventually led to the firing on Fort Sumter, had been simmering, smoldering and sparking for nearly a hundred years before the first shots were ever fired.

In the case of Iraq [*and indeed, anywhere in the Muslim world*], the sides are just as distinct, though they certainly do not represent such clear-cut geographic regions. Their conflict isn't so much about ideology as it is about theology and religious history. And whereas the American Civil War's gestation was about a century, the civil war currently heating up [*and likely to get much hotter*] in both Iraq and throughout the Arab world, has been bubbling and boiling over for nearly 1,400 years.

"How's that?" you say. "1,400 years?" What in the name of God Almighty could keep people at each other's throats for 1,400 years?

Only one thing: religion.

In order to garner some understanding of what in the world's going on in post-Saddam Iraq, one must know something about Islam -- specifically the schism betwixt **Sunnis** and **Shiites**. One should know at the outset that of the hundreds upon hundreds of millions of Muslims in the world, approximately 85% are Sunni, and 15% Shiite. And despite their relatively low numbers, Shiites form a majority in Iraq, Iran, Bahrain and Azerbaijan.

Please do remember that despite comprising somewhere between 60-65% of the population of Iraq [a clear majority] the Shiites were under the thumb of

Saddam Hussein, his followers and homicidal henchmen -- all of whom were [and are] Sunnis. Talk about Apartheid!

Shiites and Sunnis. Sunnis and Shiites. Columnists, commentators, pundits and politicians blithely bandy about the terms as if everyone had taken a 101 course in Islamic history. The sad fact is that very few people know the difference between the sects. Heck, most people can't tell you the difference between Methodism and Presbyterianism! And although I am far, far from being an expert on Islam, the little *chutzpadik* imp that sits astride my left shoulder is urging me to give a brief [and hopefully comprehensible] tour of the terrain.

In order to better understand what in heaven's name is going on in Iraq in 2006 between the Sunnis and Shiites [*or indeed, in 2009 in much of the Islamic world*] one must first go back in time . . . to the year 632 C.E. [that's A.D. to non-Jews].

The differences between the Sunni and Shiite sects are rooted in disagreements over the succession to the Prophet Muhammad, who departed this mortal coil in the year 632. The disagreement also extends to the nature of political leadership in the Muslim community. The historic and often lethal debate between Sunnis and Shiites originally centered on whether to award leadership to a qualified and pious individual who would lead by following the customs of the Prophet, or to preserve the leadership exclusively through the Prophet's bloodline. Its sort of like saying: "*We declare that only the most pious, the most learned, the most charitable can become Chief Rabbi; whereas you declare that the only qualification is being the son of the former Chief Rabbi.*"

Shortly after Muhammad's death, community leaders elected one **Abu Bakr**, a close companion of the Prophet, to become the first *Caliph* [Arabic for "successor"]. Although a clear majority of Muslims accepted this decision, there were those who supported the candidacy of one **Ali ibn Abi Talib**, who was both Mohammed's's cousin and son-in-law -- he being married to the Prophet's daughter, Fatima. Although obviously closely allied with Muhammad,

there were those who sincerely believed that Ali lacked seniority with the Arabian tribal system, and therefore was bypassed as the immediate successor.

As one might expect, many of Ali's followers considered Abu Bakr and the two Caliphs who succeeded him to be illegitimate interlopers. This faction firmly believed that the Prophet Muhammad himself had named Ali as his successor, and that the status quo -- i.e. the elevation of Abu Bakr -- was both a corruption and violation of the Divine order.

Those who supported Ali's ascendancy became known as *Shi'a* a word stemming from the term *shi'at Ali*, namely, "supporters of Ali." There were many others who respected and accepted the legitimacy of his caliphate, but opposed political succession based on mere genetics -- being one of the Prophet's blood relatives. This group, which constituted a vast majority of Muslims, came to be known as "Sunni," meaning "followers of [the Prophet's] customs -- *sunna*."

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is where the schism began and, to a great extent, it has remained ever since. Theologically, there are a few interesting differences between the two factions. Most deal with the nature and interpretation of Islamic law [*shari'a*]. There are no codified laws in either Sunni or Shiite Islam. Rather, there are sources for the interpretation of law, which both groups share. Generally speaking, Shiite legal interpretation, in contrast to that of the Sunnis, allows quite a bit more space for human reasoning.

Shiite religious practice centers around the remembrance of Ali's younger son [the ironically named *Hussein*], who was martyred near the town of Karbala in Iraq by Sunni forces in 680. Each year, his death is commemorated on the tenth day of the Islamic month of Muharram in a somber and sometimes violent ritualistic remembrance known as *Ashura*, which is marked among some Shiites by the ritual of self-flagellation.



Sunnis reject the Shiite belief that the *imams* [religious leaders who are blood relatives of the Prophet Muhammad] are divinely inspired beings who should be revered. Sunni Muslims do not bestow upon human beings the exalted status given only to prophets in the *Quran*. By contrast, the Shiites' veneration of their *imams* the most exalted of whom are called *ayatollahs*] approaches a level of infallibility that the Sunnis find repugnant.

There are even subdivisions with the sects.

Within Shiite Islam one finds:

- **Twelvers:** the most common form of Shiism; "twelvers" accept a line of twelve infallible *imams* descended from Ali.
- **Ismali or Seveners:** the second largest Shiite sect, which recognizes only the first seven imams.
- **Zaydis:** a minority sect that only recognizes the first five imams, and
- **Alawite:** predominately found in Syria and Lebanon, they interpret the 5 Pillars -- duties -- of Islam as symbolic rather than applied, and celebrate an eclectic group of Christian and Islamic holidays.

The Sunnis have one sectarian subdivision called **Wahhabi**. The Wahhabi are arguably the most pervasive revivalist movement in the Islamic world. Unlike other Islamic sects, they tend to apply the Quran and **Haddith** [sayings of the Prophet and his companions] in a literal way. They occupy a position roughly equivalent to the ultra-orthodox **haridim** in Judaism. It should be noted that there is an extremely close relationship between the Saudi ruling family and the Wahhabi religious establishment. The most conservative interpretations of Wahhabi Islam view Shiites and other non-Wahhabi Muslims as dissident heretics.

So how in the world is it that these two groups [and their various sub groups] could be killing, fighting, and dying over something that happened nearly 1,400 years ago? Ah, there's the great distinction or difference between Western and Eastern history. Some people live and plan for their collective future by giving the past a vote but not a veto; others take marching orders strictly from their

collective past. Sunnis and Shiites have been going at it for hundreds and hundreds of years, as if the issues upon which they so violently disagree -- prophetic succession, legal interpretation -- occurred last Thursday. To be sure, the rise of secular ideologies in the first half of the 20th century -- Nationalism, Communism, Sadaam's Baathism -- did manage to temporarily mute or deflect tensions between the sects. But as Bill Cosby once quipped about Novocain, "It doesn't cure pain; it merely postpones it."

Any realistic game plan or strategy for a post-Saddam Iraq or indeed, for any further relations [or lack thereof] with Iran -- must begin with a solid, thoroughgoing understanding of the historic sectarian tensions that have shaped the Muslim world for more than a thousand years. To merely say "these people are crazy," or "they have no reverence for human life," misses the mark by miles and miles. Anyone who can get the recognized leaders of these two major factions to sit down and talk civilly, will no doubt merit the Nobel Peace Prize -- not to mention the undying gratitude of Allah, Muhammad and the Moslem in the street. But unless and until that happens, please remember one thing:

The most uncivil thing in the world is a civil war.

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**Beginning next week, this Blog will have a new name and a new look . . . stay tuned!**

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**January 23, 2009**

## *Style and Substance: An Essential Mix*

Now that the last of the revelers have gone home, the tuxedos and fancy ball gowns put back under plastic and the decorative bunting ready for recycling, the Obama Administration is open for business. And not a second too soon.

In his first 48 hours as president, Barack Obama has signed executive orders that put a hold on all further hearings at Guantanamo and set the wheels in motion for shutting down its detention facility within a year. He has also put his pen to orders that add transparency and limit cupidity within the Executive Branch, and started the process by which "renditions" will no longer be tolerated. He has spoken with the major players in the Middle East, consulted with his national security team, and started the process of working with those who a mere 10 weeks ago declared themselves to be his mortal enemies.

And while it is true that all the above actions are more style than substance, they do send a clear message; the message that a new, dynamic team is in place -- a team that unlike its predecessor, will *not* sugar-coat reality and *will* make demands on all of us. And for this -- even if it is merely style, rather than substance -- we should be terribly grateful. For among the things most lacking in the past several years have been:

- Optimism
- A sense of shared purpose;
- A feeling that there was wisdom at the top,
- A "Can-Do" attitude,
- Clear vision,

- A feeling that "We the People" is more than a rhetorical phrase, and above all,
- Hope.

Barack Obama began role-modeling all the above as far back as Iowa in 2007. His election imprinted these qualities upon the body politic. His Inaugural Address bequeathed these qualities to an entire nation and the world beyond its borders.

Prior to the Inauguration, there was much speculation as to whether President Obama would deliver an oration worthy of Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt or Kennedy. In truth, President Obama's speech was *not* up to the oratorical level of the "Rhetorical Four." He neither reached the heights of grandiloquence nor crafted a single phrase that will reach the top of Mt. Olympus. And although he was -- and is -- clearly capable of writing and delivering an address of unsurpassed eloquence and grandeur, he consciously chose *not* to. He clearly understood that to do so, would place Barack Obama the man first, and American History second. He correctly perceived that no amount of verbiage -- no matter how eloquent -- could hope to capture the moment as well as the simple fact of its occurrence.

What he *did* do, was to craft and deliver a speech, whose brilliance most of us will never grasp.

Unlike most of predecessors, President Obama did not shy away from using complex syntax. He did not resort to the simple sentence structure we've come to expect in inaugural addresses. It is likely that Barack Obama -- with the possible exception of Jefferson -- will turn out to be the best writer who ever occupied the Oval Office. As any serious writer knows, if one challenges readers by expecting the best of them -- by writing up to them rather than down -- one may just get it -- the readers' best. Similarly, by expecting the best of his auditors -- those listening -- and neither talking down to nor speaking over them -- President Obama just might get 'it' -- the best we have to offer as a nation -- in the coming years.

Unlike most presidential addresses which paint a glowing portrait in patriotic hues of red, white and blue, Obama's etched a highly sophisticated and realistic view of the world and our role in it; perhaps the best, most realistic, most sophisticated that any president has ever given voice to. And, lost in the "post-game" commentary was what for me, was perhaps the single-most unique aspect of his address: the all but total absence of the first person singular -- "I." Instead, time and again, our new president used the pronoun "WE" -- about as far removed from the past eight years as one can get with just a one-syllable word. To a great extent it is the "I" paradigm that got us into the dark calamitous times we now face; it is the "WE" that will likely bring us back to the light of day.

Of course, Barack Obama and company are *not* a panacea; they will neither solve every problem nor cure every ill. Plainly, there are those who -- whether knowingly or not, whether in good faith or with a generous dollop of cynicism --



have endowed him with almost Messianic abilities. This is of course wrong -- and for two reasons: First, he is obviously not the Messiah; second it makes any misstep, any misstatement, any compromise tantamount to utter failure. While still a candidate, Barack Obama addressed this issue of unreasonable expectations in a self-deprecating vein. Last October, while speaking at the annual Al Smith dinner, candidate Obama quipped: *"Contrary to popular belief, I was not born in a manger. Actually, I was born on the planet Krypton and sent to earth by my father Jor-El to save the world . . ."* Unbelievably, many "fright-wing" commentators took him to task for this quip, telling their gullible listeners that here was the "proof" that Barack Obama was delusional, highly dangerous, and unfit to be President of the United States. Did these pundits really, truly believe that Obama was delusional? Of course not. Its just that the role of conservative pundits is to be obtuse . . .

Other commentators are drawing comparisons between Barack Obama and Jack Kennedy. They see in the style and excitement of the nascent Obama Administration something of Kennedy's "Camelot." And, in matter of fact, there is one great similarity; both men -- and their families -- were as different in tone, style and deportment from the men they succeeded as day is from night or Bill O'Reilly from Edward R. Murrow. What one tends to forget about JFK after more than 45 years (!) is that his administration -- and his historic, emotive ranking -- are due far more to style than to substance. This is not necessarily a bad thing; the Kennedy style, after all, is what made us feel better about themselves, our country, our prospects for the future. That style served to energize and get much of America off its collective duff. Truth to

tell, the Kennedy years -- short as they were -- were long on style, and relatively short on substance.

In the early days of an administration, style can be as important -- if not more so -- than substance. We have already begun to feel the Obama style, and that gives many of us optimism that the substance will not only follow, but that it will be both good and purposive.

In the past 48 hours, I've heard many "fright-wing" mooncalves proclaim Obama to be the worst, most diabolical man to ever occupy the Oval Office. Already, they are sarcastically scoring him for "not having solved all of America's problem by the end of his first or second day." In all fairness, after having spent the past eight years playing defense, these conservative lagos can perhaps be given some slack if they are ham-handed in switching over to playing offense. It is, after all new, uncharted territory. I am sure that as time goes on, they will become more accustomed to their new role.

Let's hope they have to play on offense for a long, long time to come.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

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January 29, 2009

## *President Obama's First Hundred Days*

January 28, 2009: a day that will live in . . . ?

Yesterday, without the support of a single House Republican, President Barack Obama's \$819 billion stimulus package passed the lower chamber by a final tally of 244-188. The 188 "nay" votes were made up of virtually every House Republican and 11 "Blue Dog" Democrats to boot. Despite this lopsided "us against them" vote, its passage was never in doubt; after all, the Democrats do possess a sizable majority. Those opposing the mammoth package of spending and tax cuts argued that there was far too much of the former, and not nearly enough of the latter.

Now it's on to the Senate, where a slightly different version of the president's economic recovery plan is being considered. The Senate vote, which will take place next week is likewise, not in doubt. Heck, it will likely even pick up a few Republican votes. Then it'll be on to a House-Senate conference committee, where representatives of the two chambers will iron out their differences and come up with a compromise measure that both can live with though neither will love.

Because I'm a dyed-in-the-wool political junkie -- and a bit of a masochist to boot -- I decided to peruse H.R. 1/S.336/1, the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009," the stimulus package's official name. Turns out it's 1,588 pages and counting! And that's not even counting the Congressional Budget Office's Cost Estimate (33 pages), or Republican version, co-sponsored by Representatives Camp and Cantor, which adds yet another 31 pages. Nobody -- and that includes yours truly -- has had the time to either ingest or

digest the mare's nest of titles, subtitles, amendments, provisions, pie charts and last-minute pork. And yet, there are senators, representatives and commentators galore who have been both glibly and gleefully weighing in on the positive -- or negative -- effects of this truly Brobdingnagian bill.

Anyone who claims they have read it -- let alone understood its welter of sections, sub-sections, amendments and riders -- is either a member of both Mensa and the Society of Speed Readers, or a flat-out liar.

From what I've been reading and hearing, the latter category is showing every indication of filling up fast. A handful of examples from the Department of *"How in the Heck Are You So Sure of That?"*

- On his January 28 broadcast, **Rush Limbaugh** permitted House Minority Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA) to declare: *"Even the Congressional Budget Office [CBO], controlled by Democrats now, says it is not a stimulative bill."* In my perusal of the CBO's analysis of H.R. 1, [January 26] I came across the following: *"CBO anticipates that implementation of H.R. 1 would have a noticeable impact on economic growth and employment in the next few years."* [Page 1, 5th paragraph.] To make matters even more maddening, Limbaugh, that most listened to of all conservative talkers actually said -- speaking of our new president -- *"I hope he fails!"*
- In a piece he published in his January 26 FoxNew.com column, **Glen Beck** falsely asserted that *"[o]nly 3 percent" of the economic stimulus plan would be "spent in the next 12 months."* Actually, the same CBO report cited above estimated that \$92 billion in outlays -- 11.2 percent of the estimated 819 billion stimulus measure -- would be spent in the first seven-and-a-half months after its enactment. And, when taking the bill's tax cut provisions into account, that percentage comes up to 20.7 percent within the program's first seven-and-a-half months. [Page 1, 2nd paragraph.]
- Numerous media figures -- including **David Brooks**, **Larry Kudlow**, **Brit Hume** and **George Stephanopoulos** -- have asserted that every job created by H.R. 1 would cost *at minimum* \$275,000. The aforementioned probably got their statistics from a January 15 "Stimulus Quick Facts" press release by the Republicans on the House Appropriations Committee. That release stated that *"President-elect Obama has said that his proposed stimulus legislation will create or save 3 million jobs. This means that his legislation will spend about \$275,000 per job."* OK, \$816,000,000,000 divided by 3,000,000 jobs does equal \$272,000. The problem with this isn't the math; it's the assumption that every single one of the appropriated dollars are going for jobs, jobs, and nothing but. This is patent nonsense. There are other tangible benefits stemming from the stimulus package including infrastructure improvements, and investments in such widely diverse areas as health, education, and public safety.



Ever since the beginning of the first Roosevelt Administration and the 73rd Congress [1933-1935], the "First Hundred Days" have represented history's Gold Standard for Achievement when it comes to dealing with national crises. As any political junkie worth his or her salt knows, during Roosevelt's "First Hundred Days," the 73rd Congress successfully enacted or created:

- The Banking Acts
- The Civilian Conservation Corps
- The Federal Emergency Relief Administration
- The Agricultural Adjustment Administration
- The Tennessee Valley Authority
- The National Industrial Recovery Act
- The "Good Neighbor" policy

It is true that FDR had an even more overwhelmingly Democratic House and Senate in 1933 than does Barack Obama in 2009. FDR's House was 72.4% Democratic [312-114], his Senate 63% [60-35] (Yes, I know, the math doesn't exactly work, but you have to remember, there were a couple of vacancies and a handful of members of the "Farmer-Labor" Party.) And yet, it was not just the overwhelming numbers on the Democratic side of the aisle which led to the enactment of so much emergency legislation in those storied "First Hundred Days." It was also the fact that an awful lot of Republicans, sensing just how critical the situation was, voted with the new president. Unlike today's crop, they weren't primarily interested in grabbing a possible political advantage for the midterm elections two years hence; they were primarily concerned with righting the floundering ship of state.

In listening to the objections being voiced by Republican leaders Boehner, Cantor, McConnell and Kyl, what we hear are words directed as much to the Republican base as to anyone else. They are addressing those who will always favor tax cuts over increased spending, and those who find fault any time the Federal Government involves itself even remotely in areas like family planning, stem-cell research, or global warming. It is distressing in the max to think that the GOP is more interested in gaining points they can spend in the 2010 mid-term elections, than seriously addressing themselves to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

President Barack Obama's "First Hundred Days" will end on April 30, 2009. Let's hope that he, along with his advisers and members of the 111th Congress, will have by then enacted a smart, imaginative and purposive fiscal stimulus package; one that will ultimately right the ship of state and enable it to navigate the waves just over the horizon.



# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**February 06, 2009**

## *The Awakening of Sleeping Dogs*

It is a painfully incontrovertible fact of history that when a country -- or a region -- suffers devastating economic reversals, it can easily serve as a wake-up call for anti-Semites. It then becomes the "responsibility" of these awakened anti-Semites to proclaim that it was the Jews who conspired to either corner a market, release a germ, or invoke a curse that caused all hell to break loose. At such times of crisis, few people ever stop to ask themselves how such a relatively tiny group could be capable of wreaking so much havoc. Then again, this is nothing new; It has been that way throughout most of human history. Two examples from modern history will suffice:

- In Germany, hyperinflation in the 1920s and early '30s not only destroyed the economy; it was a proximate cause of the rise of Nazism. Hitler and his band blamed virtually every one of Germany's ills on the Jews.
- In America, one terrifying response to the Great Depression, was the rise of such anti-Semitic hate groups as Fritz Kuhn's German American Bund, William Dudley Pelley's "Silver Shirts," Art Smith's "Khaki Shirts," and Father Francis Coughlin's "Christian Front."

Truth to tell, it's not just economic dislocation and uncertainty that arouses Jew haters from their slumber; technology, modernity, changing patterns of

style, shifting balances of power and pandemic -- all have spurred that skewed worldview which sees Jews as the single-best answer to those two eternal questions:

- "What in the hell went wrong?" and
- "Who in the hell's to blame?"

Over the past several months, we have witnessed a horrifying rise in anti-Semitic words, acts and deeds.

Just last Saturday -- the Jewish Sabbath -- anti-Semitic vandals desecrated a synagogue in Caracas. In the weeks since Israel launched its retaliatory operation against Hamas in Gaza, Venezuela's 15,000-strong Jewish community has been the target of what the Anti Defamation League terms " . . . hateful rhetoric, intimidation, vandalism of property [and] the repeated target of organized boycotts." Clearly, these anti-Semitic activities can be easily tied to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez who has emboldened and empowered them through his increasingly hateful actions and rhetoric.

In response to the conflict in Gaza, Chavez expelled Israel's ambassador to Venezuela with six other diplomats and officially severed relations with the Jewish State. He then urged his country's Jewish community to formally speak out and condemn Israel's actions, and promoted a conspiracy theory that the Israeli Mossad and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency were responsible for poisoning former P.L.O. leader Yassir Arafat. He also trivialized the Holocaust and compared Israeli military actions in Gaza with Nazi "efforts" to exterminate the Jews of Europe.

It is interesting to note that during those years when oil was selling far above today's \$41.00 a barrel, the blustery Chavez never made these kinds of statements.

When economy crashes, anti-Semitism rises.

In another episode, Fatima Hajaig, South Africa's Deputy Foreign Minister, while attending an anti-Israel rally, charged that, "Jewish money controls America and most Western countries." As of this writing, South African President Kgalema Motlanthe has yet to issue any statement distancing himself and the country he leads from Hajaig's ridiculous, hateful statement.

Then there is the Vatican, where Pope Benedict XVI just this week reversed his earlier decision to welcome an excommunicated Bishop back into the church. In an unsigned statement, the Vatican announced formerly defrocked Bishop, Richard Williamson, would be "barred from resuming life as a priest" until he admitted "in an absolutely unequivocal and public way" that he was

wrong in insisting that the Nazis did not kill any Jews in gas chambers during World War II.

The British Williamson, along with three other clerics, had been excommunicated in 1988 after becoming bishops without papal consent. Williamson and his three colleagues were -- and are -- members of the "Society of St. Pius X" (SSPX), a Catholic sect that rejects most of *Nostra Aetate* ("In Our Times"), the Second Vatican Council's key document which repudiated the concept of collective Jewish guilt for Jesus' death and urged dialog with all major religions. It should be noted that SSPX also rejects the Second Vatican Council's reform which permitted churches to celebrate mass in languages other than Latin. Additionally, SSPX also endorses history's most notorious anti-Semitic forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Frighteningly, just a matter of days before the Vatican overturned Williamson's excommunication, the bishop, speaking on Swedish television, said: "I believe there were no gas chambers," and claimed that no more than 300,000 Jews perished in Nazi concentration camps, rather than the 6 million accepted by all reasonable and reliable historians. When queried as to how someone holding this dangerous, anti-historic, anti-Semitic belief could be welcomed back into the church, a spokesman for the papal press office said "His Holy Father was not aware of any such statement."

Seems like the Vatican and the nascent Obama Administration are suffering from the same vetting problems.

On the positive side, once word of the Williamson's reinstatement got out, Catholic Europe went absolutely crazy. German Chancellor Angela Merkel accused the Vatican of "creating the impression that Holocaust denial might be tolerated." Several German cardinals and bishops called on the Vatican to speak out strongly against Williamson and apologize to Holocaust survivors. Although Williamson did apologize for any embarrassment he may have given Pope Benedict, he did not recant the revisionist proclamations he has been making for nearly 20 years. According to an official Vatican spokesman, "the matter is officially closed."

The issue of anti-Semitism is, I am sorry to say, never closed.

We are currently in what may well be but the earliest days of a long world-wide recession -- perhaps even a depression. This means that the sleeping dogs of anti-Semitism are likely to awaken in even greater numbers. It is part of human nature to want to find out precisely who -- or whom -- is responsible for the problems that overwhelm and perplex us. Historically, it has always been easy to scapegoat the Jews. (And by the way, it was actually the Jews who invented the concept of the "scapegoat.")

During the Holocaust, there was a joke that made its way from Jew to Jew:

Two men, dressed in tatters, meet on a street in Berlin. After exchanging pleasantries, one asks the other: "Why in the world are we suffering so many problems? Why is the entire world so upside down? Who's to blame?"

"Oh," says his friend, "that's easy. It's due to two groups."

"Which two groups?" the first man asks.

"Why Jews and bike riders!" exclaims the second.

"What in the hell do bike riders have to do with all our problems?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," the first man responds. "What in the hell do Jews have to do with our problems?"

And so it goes. May we all keep our eyes, ears and minds open, and be ready at a moment's notice to combat whatever slanders, actions or conceits in which the enemies of reason may engage.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



**February 12, 2009**

## *Shades of Charles Ray*

While watching yesterday's televised grilling of the nation's richest, most powerful bankers, I was reminded of the sorry saga of Charles Ray.

"Who?" I hear you ask, "is -- or was -- Charles Ray, and what does he have to do with Messrs Kelly [Bank of New York, Mellon], Pandit Citigroup], Blankfein [Goldman Sachs] *et al*?"

Well, back in the late 'Teens and early 'Twenties, few stars shown more brightly in the Hollywood firmament than Charles Ray. Ray (1891-1943) shot to fame playing a series of rubes, hicks and down-home country lads in films with titles like *The Conversion of Frosty Blake*, *The Clodhopper*, and *The Old Swimmin' Hole*. By 1921 he had his own studio on Sunset, a mansion in Beverly Hills and was earning upwards of \$10,000 a week. For a couple of years, it seemed like he could do no wrong. But then, like many a long-forgotten star of that long-gone era, Charlie Ray began taking himself far too seriously, and ultimately lost touch with precisely what made him a star in the first place: he was a real-life, undereducated country hick playing a rube. When, in 1923, he decided to star in an epic, self-financed costume melodrama -- *The Courtship of Miles Standish* -- he lost not only his fortune, but his audience to boot. The tens of millions of fans who had flocked to see him as a barefoot, overall-clad Toby Watkins,

Billy Bates or Jimmy Duncan, stayed away in droves when he donned a long blond wig to portray Longfellow's John Alden.

The story goes that shortly after Charles Ray discovered he had lost virtually everything, he and his wife Clara threw an enormous dinner party at their mansion. According to one of the attendees, *"Here we were, at a dinner party with a butler behind ever chair, and Charlie announces 'Tomorrow, I'm declaring bankruptcy.' I just looked at him and said 'how can you do this if you're going bankrupt tomorrow?' Who will pay the bills?' And he said, 'We thought it was the thing to do.'"*

Unlike the 8 bankers sitting in front of Representative Barney Frank's House Financial Services Committee, Charlie Ray didn't have an M.B.A. from Harvard or know the difference between a dividend and a derivative. Heck, he didn't even have a high school diploma. Perhaps his throwing a lavish banquet on the eve of declaring bankruptcy -- although both boorish and the height of stupidity -- can be understood. For after all, beneath the bespoke tailoring and hand-cobbled shoes, Charlie was just an uneducated hick from Jacksonville, Illinois.

But what about the heads of Bank of America, Citigroup, J.P. Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo and the rest? What's their excuse for having gone on a mind-boggling spending spree on the eve of collapse? A mere ten minutes research reveals that together, the eight earned a staggering \$395.84 MILLION in 2008 -- a year in which their financial institutions lost billions upon billions of dollars. And, to make matters worse, that a goodly percentage of the \$165 billion Congress has appropriated for the purpose of shoring up these eight endangered financial institutions, has gone to pay executive bonuses. Just yesterday, New York attorney general Andrew Cuomo reported that despite losing a record \$27 billion in fiscal year 2008, Merrill Lynch managed to give 700 of its employees bonuses in excess of \$1 million apiece. The aggregate total of the bonuses amounted to \$3.6 billion. In his report, Cuomo noted that Merrill Lynch managed to disburse these bonus payments just before the firm was sold to Bank of America.

Cuomo also noted that had the \$3.6 billion been evenly disbursed among Merrill's workforce, each person would have received \$91,000. Instead, the four top recipients received \$121 million. At \$91,000 per head, the \$121 million would have taken care of 1,330 Merrill employees, rather than just four. This, from a company that lost a reported \$27 BILLION in 2008.



To add excessive insult to even greater injury, plans to pay brokers at the new joint venture between Morgan Stanley and the Smith Barney unit of Citigroup were also uncovered. James Gorman, co-president of Morgan Stanley was caught admonishing his employees to call these payments "very generous retention awards," not bonuses. When queried, a Morgan Stanley spokesman said that such payments were "necessary" and "will come out of operating revenue, not government bailout funds." Morgan Stanley has received \$10 billion, while Citigroup has received \$50 billion in largesse.

By comparison, Charles and Clara Ray's excesses were little more than pocket change.

One positive thing that seems to be coming out of these recent revelations is that the public may finally, finally be awakening from its decades-long love affair with the fabulously wealthy. Perhaps its finally beginning to dawn on us that helping make truly wealthy people even wealthier doesn't in the long run do one heck of a lot for the rest of us.

Think about it. A generation back, most of the families on television -- the Cleavers, Nelsons, Ricardos, Bendixes, Cramdens, Gillises, Sanfords and Stones ["The Donna Reed Show"] -- were lower-middle to middle-class. Somewhere in the 1980s or early 1990s, they started gaining in wealth; think the Ewings, Carringtons, Cranes, the young men and women of "Beverly Hills 90210" or "The Pride of Belaire."

Then too, in years gone by, those of us who are into sports knew the yardage, free-throw percentages and ERAs of our favorite players, not their salaries. Today, there is little difference between the sports and business sections of the daily news. We have become so blasé that we take it in stride when someone reports -- as an example -- that Minnesota Twins' catcher Joe Mauer is an "underpaid steal" at a mere \$6,250,000.00 a season. A steal? That's \$120,192.30 a week, 52 weeks a year; that's \$38,580.25 per game on a 162-game schedule; that's \$11,660.50 for every time he came to bat in the 2008 season. Heck, at \$28 million a year, it takes Alex Rodriguez slightly more than 9 *games* to earn what President Obama will make in the next *four years*.

Perhaps all the revelations about what has been transpiring on Wall Street and in the West Wing these past many years will have a salutary effect on we, the folks of Main Street. To wit, that if we are

ever going to get our financial house back in order -- which will be a tall, tall order to say the least -- it will require drastic changes in the ways we live, and in what demands we place on our government, our leaders and of course, ourselves. We will have to become more and more informed on the ABCs of economy and the market, relying less and less on the half-baked, ill-informed judgments of pundits and entertainers who pass themselves off as professors and economists. And perhaps most importantly, we will have to revive that most American of all passions: hope.

I've got to believe that we are a heck of a lot smarter -- not to mention more sensible and sensitive -- than Charles Ray.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



**February 20, 2009**

## *Some Dare Call It Treason*

For centuries, idealists and litterateurs have held an almost religious conviction that *calamity* brings out the best in *humanity*. It was precisely this conviction -- some might prefer the term "convention" -- which underlay the *Three Musketeers'* declaration, *Un pour tous, tous pour un* ("All for One and One for All!") Sweden adopted the Latin version, *Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno*, as its traditional -- albeit unofficial -- motto in the late 1860s. And of course the variant *E pluribus unum* ("Out of many, one") has been on the Great Seal of the United States for the past 233 years.

In keeping with this concept, it has been an enduring American belief that in times of crisis or challenge, "We the People" cast aside the trivialities which may divide us, and come together as a nation. Of course this unity-in-time-of-trouble vision is an ideal, and ideals are meant to guide and shape our actions. Throughout most of our history, we have managed -- sometimes better, sometimes worse -- to do just that. It was in the very nature of FDR's New Deal; a political crazy quilt that received quite a bit of bipartisan support -- on Capitol Hill, in the media, and throughout the heartland. It is instructive to check out Depression-era photos in *Look* or *Life*, or perhaps the films of a director like Frank Capra. What do you find? People filmed or photographed in groups, working together in an attempt to make things better for everyone. Yes, they are just photographs and films. Nonetheless, they are reflective of an "All For One and One For All" spirit which actually did exist; a spirit which in 2009, seems as dated, hokey and saccharin as an Andy Hardy film festival.

Oh yes, there were folks who accused Roosevelt and his braintrust of trying to attach a collectivist anchor to an already sinking ship of state. And there was a sizeable group of Republicans who voted against New Deal legislation. But not even FDR's most vocal detractors had the audacity to pray aloud for his

failure; to do so would have been to pray for the failure of the United States. And that would have been tantamount to . . . well . . . to an act of treason.

We all know that President Obama's massive stimulus plan was enacted without the support of a single House Republican, and that only Republicans Snowe, Collins and Specter voted for it in the Senate. What makes this final vote tally so maddening is that it came despite the president's willingness to talk with, listen to -- and take counsel from -- the disloyal opposition. Despite getting their way on so many issues -- larger tax cuts and fewer direct disbursements; despite getting both House and Senate leadership to agree to the elimination of billions of dollars worth of earmarks; the Republicans still stood arm-in-arm, shoulder-to-shoulder in opposition.

And it gets even worse . . .

- Fox Business Network reporter Tracy Byrnes "revealed" that Namasté Solar Electric, Inc., the Colorado solar energy company whose president introduced President Obama at this week's signing of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 [the stimulus package's official title] has a "progressive, maybe even socialist internal structure."
- Rush Limbaugh, the self-anointed, self-appointed "leader" of the Republican Party, has repeatedly told his listening audience he "hopes he [Obama] fails." Moreover, when commenting on President Obama's February 18th speech in Mesa, claimed the president said: ". . . we all must learn to live within our means and not expect the value of our homes to go up 10, 20 percent over our lifetimes ever again." Limbaugh told his audience, "This is what I mean by him talking down the economy." If El Rushbo had taken the time to read a transcript of the president's speech, he would have seen that what he really said was quite different: ". . . we should not assume that housing prices are going to go up 20, 30, 40 percent *every year*" [emphasis added] and not "over our lifetimes." Instead, Limbaugh would have his listeners believe that the president *should* fail, because he is somehow "against" America.
- South Carolina Jim DeMint asserted that under the Recovery Act, "[i]f [universities] take any money, you can't have a prayer group in a dorm anymore." This is patently untrue. The bill "prohibits the use of funds for modernization, renovation or repair of facilities . . . *used for* sectarian religious instruction, religious worship, or a school of divinity. . . ." [emphasis added]
- Arizona Rep. Jeff Flake has repeatedly claimed that the act "could lead to rationed health care," and will lead to "government deciding which procedures you can have and which you can't." Despite the fact that this is in no wise true, several media outlets have chosen to repeat the representative's charge verbatim. What the Recovery Act *does* contain, is a provision that establishes "a nationwide health information technology infrastructure that allows for the electronic use and

exchange information" in order to create "an electronic health record for each person in the United States by 2014."

- Republican governors Jindal, Barbour, Otter, Sanford, Perry and Palin have publicly stated that they may very well *not* accept any stimulus funds for their states. (Never mind the fact that their legislatures will have the final say.) Not surprisingly, all six have been mentioned as possible presidential aspirants.
- On an almost daily basis, national Republicans and their media allies "reveal" yet another venal, nefarious clause, rider or amendment attached to the stimulus package; in most cases, what they have unveiled is simply not true. It has been claimed, by way of example, that the stimulus package includes \$30 million "to protect the salt marsh harvest mouse in the San Francisco wetlands," which happens to be in Speaker Pelosi's district. This is patently false; no such provision exists. Then too, Republican lawmakers have repeatedly claimed that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid included a provision directing \$8 billion to be spent on a high-speed rail line between Southern California and Las Vegas. In truth, although the stimulus bill *does* include \$8 billion for high-speed rail lines, it nowhere states where it/they will be built. Furthermore, it leaves that determination up to the Secretary of Transportation, who happens to be Ray LaHood, a former *Republican* member of the House.
- Arizona Senator John Kyl has repeatedly claimed that the economic recovery plan is "going to be wasting an awful lot of money, putting permanent programs in place that over a ten-year period are going to cost \$3.2 trillion, according to the Congressional Budget Office." Wrong! In fact, more than half of the \$3.2 trillion figure comes from the cost of permanently extending more than 20 provisions of the bill, which the bill does not do!
- And on and on and on . . .

These misrepresentations are beginning to sink in. As I speak before groups, more and more I'm hearing people express severe reservations about the stimulus package, citing many of the erroneous "pork add-ons" as the source of their concern. The only thing I can suggest by way of encouragement is that they not be so quick to accept "facts" when they are presented by those who have a vested stake in seeing President Barack Obama and the Democrats fail.

Why in the world would anyone in their right mind wish failure? Is there a delineable strategy beneath the madness that some dare call treason?

Believe it or not, there does appear to be both a strategy and a purpose.

It would seem that the Republicans on Capitol Hill -- and many Republican governors -- are banking on failure so that they can eventually say, "See . . . we told you so!" Under terms of this scenario, they see themselves picking up lots

of seats in the 2010 midterm elections, thus putting them in a much better position for taking back the White House in 2012. But what if there *is* demonstrable recovery? What then? Well, apparently they believe that in the case of success, no one will remember their ever having been in opposition. In the latter case, this is highly unlikely; in the former, incredibly deceitful and downright unpatriotic.

With the likes of Limbaugh, Hannity, Beck and the boys and girls of Fox, one might give a grudging pass; after all, they are, at base, entertainers competing for ratings points. The more outrageous they are, the better their ratings. However, even with an understanding of show business and the ratings' game, there can be little or no justification for their blatant lies, misconceptions and dreams of failure. As even so politically conservative a figure as the Rev. Pat Robertson noted recently in speaking about Limbaugh's hope that the president fail: *"That was a terrible thing to say. I mean, he's the president of all the country. If he succeeds, the country succeeds. And if he doesn't, it hurts us all. Anybody who would pull against our president is not exactly thinking rationally."*

Without question, we are in the midst of a calamity, which ideally *should* bring out the best in humanity. For many, it has, it does and it will.

For others -- both in and out of office -- it brings out that certain something that some dare call treason.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



February 27, 2009

## *"That and a Buck Fifty . . ."*

Most intelligent people understand that time, tide and tax make for great change; not only in the relative price of say, goods, services and merchandise, but in the value of idiomatic expressions as well.

The old saw "A penny saved is a penny earned" has lost most if not all of its bite -- especially when the Treasury Department has just announced that the next generation of pennies will actually cost *more* than a cent per coin to produce! And where at one time a "penny for one's thoughts" was both fitting and proper, today one would likely need to take out a loan just to find out what another person was thinking.

Then, there is the old expression "That and a nickel will get you a cup of coffee." Who amongst us can remember how long ago it was that a cuppa' Joe cost five cents? Today, the idiom would be more like "That and a buck fifty will get you a cup of decaf," and even that's probably on the cheap side.

The intent or meaning of this rather tongue-in-cheek expression however -- regardless of price -- is both clear and consistent: that *actions* speak far louder than words.

But what about when words *are* the action? What of *their* relative worth?

In the world of philosophy, words which are in and of themselves actions are called "performative utterances." Obvious examples would be such statements as:

- "You are hereby sentenced to death."
- "I now pronounce you husband and wife."
- "This meeting is now adjourned," and
- "This court is now in session."

When British philosopher J.L. Austin first described the concept in his book *How to Do Things With Words* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962] he included two additional "performative utterances":

- "I apologize," and
- "I forgive you"

In other words, according to Austin, in order for a person to apologize, all they had to do was utter precisely two words . . . "I apologize." Likewise, all that it took for that apology to be accepted were the words "I forgive you," or "I accept your apology."

It is at this point that Professor Austin and I must go down diverging paths; for one's apology to be both true and acceptable, it must consist of far, far more than mere words. It must include honesty, contrition, the realization of just how much pain their words or deeds have caused, and an understanding that fundamental change is required. Otherwise, they are falling into the trap best described by yet another philosopher of language -- the late aphorist Mason Cooley, who once wrote,

*I regret.*

*I apologize.*

*I blame myself.*

*I continue as before.*

In the past several days we have seen a couple of stunning examples of "apologies" which not only fall far short of being "performative utterances," but will require far more than a buck fifty for that cup of coffee. And even then, I fear that it will be a deeply bitter brew . . .

The first such "apology" comes from British "Bishop" Richard Williamson, the Catholic prelate who not so long ago told a Swedish television interviewer that "historical evidence indicates that there were no Nazi gas chambers," and that a "maximum of 300,000 people died in concentration camps in the Holocaust." The "Bishop," who just the other day was kicked out of Argentina and sent packing back to his native England was seeking to have his excommunication ban lifted by Pope Benedict. Hoping to get back in the good



graces of the Holy Father [who denied knowing anything about Williamson's *weltanschauung*], the renegade priest issued an "apology" which in part stated:

*If I had known beforehand the full harm and hurt to which they [i.e. his words] would give rise, especially to the church, but also to the survivors and relatives of victims of injustice under the Third Reich, I would not have said them. . . . To all souls that took honest scandal from what I said, before God, I apologize."*

One will note that nowhere does Williamson say he is either contrite or apologetic for holding such ghastly, hateful, ahistorical beliefs; only that he is sorry for having been caught. Nowhere has he come to grips with the fact that his beliefs fly in the face of the most thoroughly-documented act of inhumanity in the history of humankind. Nowhere does he state that he now understands that indeed there was a Holocaust, and that indeed millions upon millions of Jews died horrible deaths in Nazi crematoria. His words offer not a scintilla of hope that he is a changed man.

To forgive him would have about as much reality as his apology. That and a buck fifty might purchase a cup of coffee . . . a very bitter cup of coffee.

Then there is the case of multimedia baron Rupert Murdoch, whose *New York Post* recently ran a cartoon showing a dead monkey with bullet holes in its chest and two cops, one with a smoking gun. The caption reads, "They'll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill." The cartoon was meant to connect two events -- the fatal police shooting of a violent "celebrity" chimp that seriously mauled a woman, and the recent passage of the federal stimulus package, which Murdoch sees as being horribly flawed. Almost immediately, a hue and cry went out demanding both an apology and retraction from *Post* publisher Murdoch and cartoonist Sean Delonas for running what many, many people saw as being a racist jibe at the expense of President Barack Obama. The *Post's* initial response was "no apology is due." Murdoch claimed that the cartoon was only meant to "mock a badly written piece of legislation."

Finally, after one week and tens of thousands of expressions of outrage and disgust, Murdoch issued an apologia . . . sort of:

*"Last week, we made a mistake. We ran a cartoon which offended many people. Today I want to personally apologize. It was not meant to be racist, but unfortunately it was interpreted by many as such. . . .Today I want to personally apologize to any reader who felt offended, and even insulted. I can assure you -- without a doubt -- that the only intent of the cartoon was to mock a badly written piece of legislation."*

Again, an apology that is far, far less than an act of self-understanding or contrition. No one at the *Post* has been terminated as a result of running

this deeply offensive, overtly racist cartoon. As in the case of Williamson, Murdoch only "apologized" for the negative reactions his readers may have had -- not that which caused their horror and anger in the first place.

Seems like not a day goes by without some celebrity uttering words of apology in the press. Whether it be third baseman Alex Rodriguez for using steroids, swimming champ Michael Phelps for toking on a bong, Michael Vick for dog fighting, or Mel Gibson for being a blatant anti-Semite, everyone is sorry for something. In the case of athletes or celebrities sometimes the public will accept their apologies and see them as being true, heartfelt and hopefully transformative. In other cases, no words, no act will do; the individual is consigned to the ash heap of public scorn and derision. Sometimes it just doesn't make sense. The same person who can forgive, forget and cheer on a Ray Lewis -- who at one time was indicted for murder and then given a year's probation in exchange for testimony -- will never forgive a Bill Clinton or Gary Condit for their sexual indiscretions. Yes, to forgive is divine, but only if and when the apology involves contrition, self-awareness and transformation.

The "apologies" of Richard Williamson and Rupert Murdoch are far, far less than convincing or satisfying. Their words contain none of the contrition or self-awareness than can lead to transformation. Not even a buck fifty will buy them that proverbial cuppa' coffee.

For them, a better adage comes to mind:

*"Put your money where your mouth is."*

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**March 06, 2009**

## *What Would General Bovay Say?*

History records that on March 20, 1854, a handful of disaffected Whigs, Free Soilers and Democrats assembled in a small frame schoolhouse in Ripon, Wisconsin. Alvan Bovay, the town's only lawyer [and a future Civil War General], was the fellow who had invited them to attend. The thing that brought them together was their mutual loathing for the newly-enacted "Kansas-Nebraska Act."

Authored by Illinois Senator Steven A. Douglas, the law granted settlers in the newly-created territories of Kansas and Nebraska the right to determine for themselves whether or not to allow slavery. Douglas hoped the bill's passage would help ease tensions between North and South, because in his eyes, the act would permit the South to expand slavery to the new territories, while the North still had the right to abolish slavery in their own states. He was wrong. Dead wrong. Opponents -- like the folks up in Ripon -- denounced the law as a terrible, cowardly concession to the South's "Peculiar Institution."

By the time Bovay's little group departed from the schoolhouse, they had given birth to a new force that would soon sweep the North: the Republican Party. Within less than four months, the party would hold its first official meeting in Jackson, Michigan;

within another two years, they would elect Edwin Denison Morse their party's first -- and still longest serving -- national chair. Precisely why the assembled Republicans chose Morse, a future New York Governor and United States Senator, and not the party's idealistic founder Alvan Bovay, is unknown. What is known is that in 1874, Bovay -- convinced that "The mission of the Republican Party has ended with the overthrow of slavery and the reconstruction of the old slave states on a free basis . . . " -- he left and joined the fledgling Prohibition Party.

Bovay's GOP, a party born in idealism and annealed in the fires of adversity used to stand for far more than tax cuts, deregulation and the further enriching of the "haves" and "have-mores." Bovay's G.O.P., which would become the party of such political titans as Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Fiorello LaGuardia and Jacob Javits -- is a far, far cry from our modern-day version -- that of Mitch McConnell, John Boehner, Michael Steele, Michelle Bachmann, and Bobby Jindal.

Or Rush Limbaugh.

You've got to wonder what Alvan Bovay would think or say about the current shape, direction and leadership of the party he birthed. Would he want to admit membership in a party so weak-willed, so misguided that it is seemingly taking its marching orders from a radio talk-show host? How might he react to the ceaseless drumbeat of invective; to the mindless catcalls of "Socialist" and "Left-Wing Communist?" I've got to believe he would be somewhere between dumbfounded and apoplectic.

And spinning in his grave.

The current contretemps with Rush Limbaugh and Republican National Committee Chair Michael Steele is but the latest indicator of how far Bovay's party has strayed from its original idealistic path. Where once the party had positive goals and aspirations -- progress, equity, and equality -- today its *raison d'être* appears to be nothing more than opposition and the demand for blind loyalty.

If Alvan Bovay were still among the living, he would likely at this point ask a handful of questions:

- "Loyalty to what?"
- "Loyalty to whom?"
- "Precisely what is it that you believe?"
- "Who leads you in those beliefs?"
- "What is it that shapes, defines and motivates you to action?"

To listen to Limbaugh -- or indeed, any of the other so-called "leaders" of the G.O.P. -- that which defines and motivates them is far more often negative than affirmative; far more contrarian than positivist. To today's GOP, the LIBERAL opposition [whom they persist in referring to as the "Democrat," rather than "Democratic" Party] is not merely a bloc that can espouse different ideas, opinions or proposals -- all of which are worthy of debate; no, the opposition is evil incarnate -- an organized conspiracy of LIBERAL sociopaths whose LIBERAL *raison d'être* is the very destruction of America.

To listen to the speakers who addressed last week's CPAC [Conservative Political Action Conference] gathering, one might reasonably believe that Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Reid, Chairman Frank and White House Chief of Staff Emanuel [to name but a few] get up each morning and partake in a conference call with none other than Satan himself. At the conference, speaker after speaker consistently demeaned, degraded and derogated LIBERALS. As such, these Republicans showed neither what they were for nor where they stood, but rather what -- or who -- they were against, and what -- or who -- was responsible for virtually all our present problems and ills. And believe me, it wasn't them . . .

Shortly after Chairman Steele referred to Limbaugh as an "entertainer," whose show is both "incendiary" and "ugly," a firestorm of controversy erupted; so much so that Steele had to back down and "make nice" with the "\$400 Million Man." In his retraction, Steele referred to Limbaugh as a "national conservative leader," and declared that, "There was no attempt on my part to diminish (Limbaugh's) voice or his leadership." It makes you

question what the definition of "conservative" is, and precisely who's in charge of the party.

It was not a pleasant sight to behold.

Adding his gleefully cheerful two-cents, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs expressed his "surprise at the speed in which Mr. Steele, the head of the RNC, apologized to the leader of the Republican Party." Gibbs then suggested that the media ask other Republicans whether they agreed with Limbaugh's hope -- expressed on both his radio show and before CPAC -- that President Obama fails.

Score one for the White House.

By the way: for those who feel the need to apologize to Rush Limbaugh for something -- for anything -- there's an [I'm Sorry Rush](#) website which has been established for this very purpose. Click and enjoy!

And while we're on the subject of apologies, it might not be a bad idea for Michael Steele, Rush Limbaugh and the party *one* of them leads to issue a blanket apology to Alvan Bovay. Just as a suggestion, it might go something like this:

*"General Bovay: We sincerely apologize to you and the gentlemen who originally formed the Republican Party. We apologize for having strayed so far from the ideals with which you created this party -- progress, equity and equality. We apologize for having allowed our political vision to become so myopic and bedimmed as to be virtually incapable of seeing anyone other than ourselves. . . ."*

*And while you're at it General, would you please be so kind as to express our apologies to Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Fiorello LaGuardia and Jacob Javits as well?*

*What do you say General Bovay?*

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**March 13, 2009**

## *The Cosmic 'Oy Vey'*

From almost the first moment it was known that President Barack Obama -- per the recommendation of National Intelligence Director Dennis Blair -- was going to name Ambassador Charles W. "Chas" Freeman, Jr. to head his National Intelligence Council, that appointment began its clockwise swirl around the political toilet bowl. Less than forty-eight hours ago Freeman, in withdrawing his name from consideration for the post -- which requires no approval -- let fly a stream of invective against the folks he believed were responsible for operating the plunger: the so-called "Israel Lobby." In the email announcing his withdrawal, Freeman decried the "barrage of libelous distortions of my record [that] would not cease upon my entry into office." Freeman further stated that, *"The libels on me and their easily traceable email trails show conclusively that there is a powerful lobby determined to prevent any view other than its own from being aired, still less to a factor in American understanding of trends and events in the Middle East."*

Oy Vey!

The "flushing" of Chas. Freeman raises several obvious questions:

- Who precisely is Chas. Freeman?
- What sorts of accusatory red flags were being raised by what sorts of folks?
- Were those accusations merited?

- In the long run, what does it all mean?

First things first: Chas Freeman [1943- ], a graduate of Yale and Harvard Law, is a career diplomat who served as President Nixon's principal interpreter during his 1972 visit to China, and later (1989-1992) as U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Among his many postings and positions, he also served as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the Clinton Administration. In 1997, he succeeded Senator George McGovern as President of the Middle East Policy Council, a group which "strives to ensure that a full range of U.S. interests and views are considered by policy makers." The Council, it should be noted, receives more than 10% of its funding from the Saudi Arabian Government.

Reportedly a brash, irascible fellow, Freeman is no stranger to controversy. At various times he has chided Beijing for "not crushing the Tiananmen Square democracy protests sooner," and referred to the Saudi King as "Abdullah the Great." And, at one time he served on the advisory board of a state-owned Chinese oil company. But its for his comments about Israel, the so-called "Israel Lobby" and the Middle East that Freeman has become most infamous. It is also likely that these latter comments and positions were most directly -- though not totally -- responsible for his not becoming the fellow charged with overseeing the National Intelligence Estimates.

Freeman lumped Israel's supporters on Capitol Hill, A.I.P.A.C. [America Israel Public Affairs Committee] and various other pro-Israel groups into a lobby whose aim " . . . is control of the policy process through the exercise of a veto over the appointments of people who dispute the wisdom of its views." One result of this, he claimed, is "the inability of the American public to discuss, or the government to consider, any options for U.S. policies in the Middle East opposed by the ruling faction in Israeli politics."

Further, in a 2005 speech Freeman gave before the Washington-based National Council on U.S.-Arab relations, he referred to Israel's "high-handed and self-defeating policies" stemming from "the occupation and settlement of Arab lands," which he termed "inherently violent."

Freeman's claim that its impossible to discuss "any options" that may be "opposed by the ruling faction in Israeli politics," flies in the face of political reality. Over the past several years, the U.S. has both supported and promoted a Palestinian election that "the ruling faction in Israeli politics" obviously opposed; the U.S. refused Israel weapons they may well have used for a preemptive attack on Iran's nuclear facilities; and, the U.S.



adopted a policy of direct talks with a regime that denies that the Holocaust ever occurred and promises that one day it will wipe Israel off the face of the earth. And our new president -- whose Chief of Staff is the son of an Israeli-born former member of the *Irgun* -- had his first televised interview on *al jezeera* TV. *This is walking in lockstep with "the ruling faction in Israeli politics?"*

Earth to Mr. Freeman: what in the world are you talking about?

Talk about a cosmic 'Oy Vey'! [Note: the term 'cosmic oy vey' is defined by its creator, journalist Aaron David Miller, as "*The tendency of many American Jews to worry about everything, without a capacity to identify what is important and what isn't. . .*"]

Interestingly, most of the major Jewish, pro-Israel interest groups, stayed publicly mum about *l'affaire Freeman*. AIPAC spokesman Josh Block said that his organization "took no position on this matter, and did not lobby the Hill on it." True, Senators Schumer and Lieberman *did* put in *their* very public two cents, as well as Republican Representatives Peter Hoekstra (MI) and Mark Steven Kirk (IL) and even Minority Leader John Boehner (OH) who sent a letter of inquiry about Freeman to Inspector General Edward Maguire on March 3rd. The *Weekly Standard's* Martin Kramer detailed what he called "Freeman's analytical incompetence," quoting the ambassador as saying, "*I'm a very practical man, and my concern is simply this: that there are movements, like Hamas, like Hezbollah, that in recent decades have not done anything against the United States or Americans, even though the United States supports their enemy, Israel.*" Kramer also noted that Ambassador Freeman strenuously objected to the U.S. designation of the two aforementioned groups as terrorist organizations, lest "*this invite them to extend their operations in the United States or against Americans abroad.*"

## Oy Vey!

Although one can well argue that the Obama Administration needs a couple of in-house contrarians to keep things honest and intellectually stimulating, one wonders about the wisdom of having that contrarian being a "bought man." Chas. Freeman's ties to both the Saudi Royal Family and Chinese state-run banking interests make his ability to objectively vet intelligence suspect at best, dubious at worst. And, as much as President Obama may relish the lively give-and-take of debate, intelligence briefings are not the best place for that kind of badinage. As Dan Froomkin of the *Washington Post* and *Neiman Watch* noted in a recent article, "Chas. Freeman is a One-Man Destroyer of Groupthink."

After reading and listening to the cantankerous broadside Freeman issued in announcing "his change of plans," the Obama White House should breath a sigh of relief. Ambassador Freeman was simply *not* the man for them.

Or for us.

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## *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



**March 20, 2009**

### *Nothing New Under the Sun*

Back in 1873, the great Mark Twain teamed up with the lamentably long-forgotten Charles Dudley Warner on a marvelous satiric novel they called *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*. The novel, which basically deals with the efforts of a poor Tennessee family named Hawkins to get rich through the sale of 75,000 acres of unimproved land, satirizes greed and political corruption in post-Civil War America. Peopled with avaricious Washington lobbyists, the rapacious rich and even a woman who aspires to become a doctor, *The Gilded Age* is both insightful and delightfully tart-tongued. And, with only a handful of minor changes, it could easily be a satire on our current addiction to hyper-wealth and celebrity. I've got to believe that if Twain and Warner were writing their novel today, they would have Silas "Si" Hawkins -- the fellow with the 75,000 acres -- peddling "credit- default swaps", "collateralized debt obligations" or "derivatives" instead undeveloped land. And who knows? Maybe Phillip Sterling -- the novel's upper-crust land speculator -- would be into "hedge funds."

The Twain-Warner collaboration not only sold a lot of books; *The Gilded Age* became the name for an era which lasted from roughly 1880 to 1893. Historically, this "Gilded Age" was

characterized by extreme wealth polarization, a shrinking Middle Class, the construction of all those so-called "cottages" along Newport's Bellevue Avenue and the coming to prominence of such legendary names as Vanderbilt, Carnegie, Fisk, Gould, and Rockefeller. This "Gilded Age" is best personified in that great world-class trencherman, "Diamond Jim" Brady.

Greed is greed, Avarice is avarice. Undue influence is undue influence. Indeed, as Koheleth noted so many eons ago, "There is nothing new under the sun." No matter whether it be in the middle of America's first "Gilded Age," or today -- when we are (hopefully) nearing the tail end of our second -- the sense of entitlement claimed by the few at the expense of the many remains unchanged. Unchanging too has been the "gildsters'" ability to both manipulate and maneuver the levers of government for their own personal benefit.

Without question, America's second "Gilded Age" began precisely 100 years after the first -- in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan. For in slashing the marginal tax rate for the nation's top earners from 70% to 28% and then putting the word "deregulation" on everyone's lips, the "Great Communicator" green-lighted that concatenation of financial tricks, products and processes that would make multi-billionaires of the few, and debt-ridden fools of us all. Over the course of nearly 30 years, America would go from being the world's greatest creditor nation to becoming by far its greatest debtor. Reagan and his team did everything in their power to enrich their allies, but in the process put America in grave risk that a bunch of barely-friendly nations could easily determine our financial fate. Moreover-- and here we must all share tons of blame -- we went from being a country of savers to one in which living beyond one's means was the norm. Remember when common wisdom held that with the exception of a house or perhaps an automobile, you paid cash?

One of the biggest and most obvious differences between the first and second "Gilded Age" deals with how -- and from where -- all the great wealth was made. In the first, it came almost exclusively from things manufactured right here in the good old U.S. of A. Whether it was in Carnegie's steel mills, Pullman's railroad yards or Rockefeller's oil fields, we mined, made and manufactured right here at home. Today, of course, most everything we purchase -- even if it is carrying the name of an American conglomerate -- was mined, made or manufactured in China, Bangladesh, Thailand, or someplace whose capital most of us cannot name. Why is this? Because one of the results of all this deregulation is that it is far, far cheaper -- and thus far, far more profitable -- to manufacture abroad than to remain here at home. For in China, Bangladesh and Namibia one can get by paying a dollar or two a day, and does not have to worry about unions, pensions or the like. That's good for American manufacturers; that's horrible for American workers. Indeed, over the past generation, our chief exports have been jobs and plants . . . the manufacturing sort.

The first Gilded Age came to a crashing end with the Panic of 1893 -- a deep depression that lasted for more than four years. Finally, with the election of 1896, a major political realignment was set in motion; it would eventually lead to the Progressive Era -- a time of reform, muckraking and a shifting of priorities. It was the era of the Clayton Antitrust Act, the direct election of senators, Teddy Roosevelt, Upton Sinclair, Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffans and Robert M. La Follette, Sr. These were the people -- and this was the energy -- that led directly to the New Deal, the next truly great realignment in our political history.

It may well be that the election of Barack Obama and a strongly Democratic Congress spells the end of America's second "Gilded Age." The challenges we face -- economically, politically, even spiritually -- are not all that dissimilar from those facing America 100 years ago. Like that earlier America,

we have seen a vast middle class sacrificed for the sake of an avaricious elite. Just as in 19th century America, those who raise their voices in protest have been quickly labeled -- then as "anarchists" and "socialists," today as "Marxists" and "liberals." Back then much of the fight was carried by on a generation of writers and activists using a new medium: the mass-circulation magazine. Today of course, it's the Internet and Blogosphere.

If indeed Koheleth was right that there is "nothing new under the sun," perhaps then this second "Gilded Age" is going to wind down and, like its namesake, take its place on the pages of a thousand musty history books. However, in order for this to occur, it will take a willingness to pull together, to relearn the use of the first person plural -- "we" -- to once again dare to dream, to create and to get our hands dirty, and to learn the lesson of patience.

Social, political and economic problems do not arise overnight; neither does their amelioration. We have finally broken the mold which shaped so much of the past generation. Now it is time to work, to struggle and to strive. There are going to be plenty of roadblocks along the way; plenty of pointing fingers and shaking fists; more than enough blame and recrimination for a thousand scandals. But know this:

Together we can like an earlier generation, turn a "Gilded Age" into one that is truly golden.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



March 27, 2009

## *An Infinitesimally Tiny Breath of Fresh Air?*

We begin this week with a solemn oath: this will *not* be another article about those asinine A.I.G. bonuses. For when you get down to it, what is left to say or write that has yet to be said or written?

Nada, Gar nichts, ρχσ ουα, ничто, zéro, Gornisht

OK, you get the point.

So just what is this piece about?

Well, how's about Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran and -- just possibly -- a teeny, tiny breath of fresh air?

"How in the name of all that's logical is this even remotely possible"? I can hear you asking. Your misgivings are completely understandable. For after all, **Pakistan** is a political power keg sitting astride a nuclear arsenal; **Afghanistan**, that "graveyard of empire," is like something out of Pirandello -- "35 Tribes in Search of an Authority"; and **Iran** . . . well, what can be said about that charter member of the "Axis of Evil" that is even remotely optimistic?

Looking around the regional chessboard, we find the following moves being made:

- In **Pakistan**, American missile-equipped Predator aircraft have been drone-dropping tons of ordinance on the suspected hiding places of top al-Qaeda leaders. And although it appears that these missile strikes are beginning to take a serious toll on Osama bin Laden's closest allies, the Pakistani government is expressing grave concerns about its territorial sovereignty. The U.S., you see, is no longer asking, informing -- even telling -- Pakistani officials about these attacks before they are launched. This has the effect of further weakening an already pathetic Asif Ali Zadari. Could Pakistan be headed for yet another military takeover?
- With regards to **Afghanistan**, just today, President Obama announced that we will be sending in an additional 17,000 American troops. And, for added measure, we will be committing an added 4,000 personnel whose job it will be to train Afghan security forces. Although the president has yet to set specific benchmarks for Afghanistan -- or Pakistan for that matter -- he is insisting that the two fractured countries "find ways to work together and transform their societies." Good luck! Afghanistan has a 2000-plus year history of tribal rivalry that has bedeviled folks from Alexander the Great to Alexander Haig. Expecting a democracy to arise in poppy-infested, poly-cultural Afghanistan, is one of history's most sleep-depriving dreams.
- And then there is the Islamic Republic of **Iran** . . .

A week ago, President Obama released a special video message for all those celebrating *Noruz*, which marks the arrival of Spring and the beginning of the New Year for millions in Iran and around the world. After wishing the Iranian people a happy New Year and reminding them of his administration's continuing commitment to "a future of honest and respectful diplomacy," he addressed the nation's leaders directly:



*"You too have a choice. The United States wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations. You have that right -- but it comes with real responsibilities, and that place cannot be reached through terror or arms, but rather through peaceful actions that demonstrate the true greatness of the Iranian people and civilization . . ."*

In his response to what was without question a proffered olive branch, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said, *"They chant the slogan of change, but no change is seen in practice . . . . He [Obama] insulted the Islamic Republic of Iran from the first day. If you are right that change has come, where is that change? Make it clear for us what has changed?"* Khamenei also "joked" that he hoped that the translation of his remarks from Farsi into English would not be given over to "Zionist translators."

So where oh where is this "infinitesimally tiny breath of fresh air?"

Right in front of our face, that's where.

It turns out that yesterday, the Islamic Republic of Iran announced that it will "join the United States in dispatching official delegations" to two international conferences on Afghanistan. For its part, the Obama administration has "welcomed Teheran's intended participation" at one in the Netherlands, and likely a second in Moscow, which is opening in just a few hours from now.

Amazing! Iran and the United States potentially on the same side of an issue?

What gives?

What "gives" can be summed up in one word: **drugs**.

Simply stated, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a terrible -- and growing -- drug problem; a problem they share in common with the United States.

A week ago, Irani drug enforcement officials seized 4.5 tons of opium, hashish and other drugs from nine alleged smugglers in

two cities near Teheran. Two days later, police in eastern Iran (near the Afghanistan border) stopped a pickup truck packed with a quarter ton of opium hidden under the vehicle's floorboards. Moreover, in the past two years, the drug war in Iran has cost the government in excess of \$600 million, with approximately 3,700 security officials killed and 11,000 maimed in more than 12,000 clashes between traffickers and narcs -- this according to a United Nations report. Additionally, in the single year between 2006 and 2007, drug seizures jumped 35% for heroin, 37% for opium and 52% for hashish. Total drug seizures for 2007 alone were in excess of 618 tons. Drug addiction has quickly become Iran's number one public health problem. Of late, in an attempt to hamstring the smugglers, Iran has been digging canals, raising earthen berms and laying barbed wire. But still the drugs flow in "sometimes strapped to camels crossing the desert, sometimes protected by well-armed gangsters equipped with satellite technology . . ."

In this, Iran and the United States have overlapping interests. It is part of the United States' program to get Afghani farmers to stop growing poppies -- the sale of which funds the Taliban -- and start growing edibles. If the United States succeeds in its goal, Iran benefits; if Iran realizes a dramatic lessening in the amount of drugs smuggled across its eastern border, the United States gains.

How to do this? By creating a more stable Afghanistan. That's how.

"Iran and the United States have a fundamental point of interest in the region vis-à-vis Afghanistan," said Sadegh Zibakalam, a professor of political science at Teheran University. "Both want to see a moderate, Democratic, stable Afghanistan because if there is chaos in Afghanistan, it means opium in Iran and Afghan refugees in Iran."

Towards the end of stabilizing Afghanistan, diplomats from Iran and the United States are going to be meeting with one another at a conference on that very subject to be held in the Hague next week. Up until now, the Iranis have steadfastly stayed away from international diplomatic conferences that involved the U.S.

Moreover, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization conference on Afghanistan, which opens today in Moscow, will be attended by the Irani Deputy Foreign Minister, and the American Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. And while these two events may not represent a hurricane of change, they are that infinitesimally tiny breath of fresh air that can give one hope.

It is true that many Iranis are "wary of giving America a possible public-relations victory without getting anything in return," as reported in today's *Los Angeles Times*. A recent editorial in the conservative *Sisat Rooz* newspaper complained that "Whenever they need us, they use our influence; but as they reach their objectives, they treat us as a major threat in the region."

Nothing new here. What *is* new -- and hopeful -- is that some Iranian hard-liners have begun to welcome the idea of cooperating with the U.S. and NATO in "helping to secure Afghanistan, calling it a victory for Iranian steadfastness." One Irani legislator, Hamid Reza Haji-Babai, went so far as to say that "The more the Islamic Republic of Iran interacts in the regional and international arenas the better. Easing tensions between Iran and the U.S., he said, "can be achieved within these interactions and participation in conferences."

This news -- coming from a region that has for so long been rife with fetid stagnation -- could indeed be that infinitesimally tiny breath of fresh area we have been craving. . .

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**April 02, 2009**

## *Of Spaghetti Trees and Ann Coulter*

Omnipresent though it may be, no one really knows the precise origin of April Fool's Day. It is, to say the least, obscure.

One creaky old theory holds that "April Fool's" was first celebrated in 1582, the year the Julian Calendar was replaced by the Gregorian (1582). The day of merriment was supposedly meant to poke fun at any and all who began their planting season the first of April instead of the first of May, as had been the custom for the preceding 15 centuries.

I don't know. Sounds pretty lame to me.

Then there are those who are convinced that "April Fools" referred to all those Frenchmen who continued observing New Years on the first day of April, rather than the first of January, as ordained by King Charles IX back in 1564.

Maybe . . .

One of my favorite theories -- though of course 100% unprovable -- comes from an April 1789 newspaper article from some long-forgotten British

journalist, in which he claimed that "April Fools" went back all the way to the time of Noah! "The day had its origin," he claimed, "in God's sending the raven off too early, before the flood waters had had a chance to recede." According to this theory, God had commanded the raven's "early journey" on the first day of the Hebrew month of Nisan -- roughly April -- thereby making an "April Fool" out of old man Noah.

Wheee!

Most everyone has a favorite "April Fool's Day" joke or prank. Two of my favorites are the following:

- A couple of years ago, Burger King ran an ad in *USA Today* saying that as of that day (April 1) they were going to be stocking and selling "Whoppers for left-handed people." Talk about "Have It Your Way!" Not only did customers order the "new" burgers; some specifically requested the "old" right-handed kind.
- Back in 1985, George Plimpton wrote an article in *Sports Illustrated* about a New York Mets' prospect named Sidd Finch, who could throw 168 MPH with pinpoint accuracy. This phenom, known as "Barefoot" Sidd[hartha] Finch, had learned to pitch in a Buddhist monastery. The article's sub-title, gave away Plimpton's gag: "He's a pitcher, part yogi and part recluse. Impressively liberated from our opulent life-style." [H-A-P-P-Y A-P-R-I-L F-O-O-L-S]
- The one I remember best from my childhood involves the fabled "Spaghetti Tree." Back on April 1, 1957, the television program *Panorama* ran a famous hoax showing the Swiss harvesting spaghetti from trees! On the program it was claimed that the dread "spaghetti weevil" had finally been eradicated. I remember asking my dad if we could plant our very own spaghetti tree. I thought that would be just about the best thing in the world. Imagine that! Spaghetti any time you wanted it just by going out into the backyard and plucking it from a tree! (Yes, I know it sounds completely dense, but I was only 8 years old at the time, and so perhaps I can be forgiven for not picking up on *Panorama's* April Fool's prank.)

But what about Ann Coulter? She's 47, and an Ivy League graduate with a law degree from Michigan. How could she be so incredibly, stupidly

gullible as to fall for an obvious April Fool's joke; and then, not realizing that it *is* an April Fool's riff, get indignant, shirty and spouting off like Mt. Vesuvius?

Here's the April Fool's Day gag that got her so incredibly exorcised:

## Obama Orders Chevrolet and Dodge Out Of NASCAR - Car News

With their racing budgets deemed "unnecessary expenditures," GM and Chrysler are ordered to cease racing operations at the end of the season.

BY JARED GALL, ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC WOODWARD  
April 2009



In a move sure to spark outrage, the White House announced today that GM and Chrysler must cease participation in NASCAR at the end of the 2009 season if they hope to receive any additional financial aid from the government. Companies around the globe—[Honda](#) and [Audi](#), to name two—have drawn down racing operations, and NASCAR itself has already felt the pinch in the form of reduced team spending. A complete withdrawal from America's premier racing series is expected to save more than \$250 million between GM and Chrysler, a substantial amount considering the drastic measures being implemented elsewhere.



Whaaa? How's that Ann Coulter?

Yes indeed, this is the one. You see, Ms. Coulter read -- or had brought to her attention -- a piece in the April 1 edition of *Car and Driver* that claimed that President Obama had ordered General Motors and Chrysler to cease their participation in NASCAR because it was an "unnecessary expenditure." Get it? "If the Feds are going to be putting so many billions into keeping GM and Chrysler afloat, they may as well tell what they can and cannot do. Right?"

Wrong! It's an April Fool's Day joke. . . to everyone but Ms. Coulter.

In a USA Today article, Larry Marshak noted that *Car and Driver* later pulled the fake story (which estimated savings of \$250 million between the



two auto manufacturers by not participating), and apologized for "going too far." Marshak quoted *Car and Driver* officials saying that their magazine "has a proud tradition of irreverent editorials, and we amplify that each year with our April's Fool Day joke."

For her part Ms. Coulter took the article *not* as an April Fool's joke, but as a deadly serious fact to which she felt compelled to angrily respond:

*"If Obama can tell GM and Chrysler that their participation in NASCAR is an 'unnecessary expenditure,' isn't having public schools force students to follow Muslim rituals, recite Islamic prayers and plan 'jihads' also an 'unnecessary expenditure?'"*

Coulter's -- and other conservative's -- outrage was so palpable and heated, that the folks at *Car and Driver* felt compelled to run a second version of the article which in large caps informed readers "THIS IS A JOKE. LIGHTEN UP PEOPLE":

[Print](#) | [Email](#) | [Digg](#) | [Del.icio.us](#)

## Obama Orders Chevrolet and Dodge Out Of NASCAR - Car News

HAPPY APRIL FOOLS' DAY! THIS IS A JOKE. LIGHTEN UP, PEOPLE.

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"Automakers used to operate on the principle of 'win on Sunday, sell on Monday,'



Ms. Coulter entitled her April 1 column responding to the *Car and Driver* ad, "Why is Rick Wagoner Fired and Nancy Pelosi Still Working?" (Note: *Rick Wagoner is the GM CEO who was told to step down, which got a lot of press. What didn't get much press is the fact that he walked away with a \$20.2 million retirement package.*) In her column, "Coultergeist" started swinging for the fences, bashing all those who, in her estimation, should have been fired instead of Mr. Wagoner: "Barney Frank, Chris Dodd and everybody at the Department of Education." She questioned why "all the former Weathermen like Bill Ayers, Bernadine Dohrn and Mark Rudd" weren't fired by their universities. (Rudd by the way, who came to prominence during the Columbia University anti-war riots more than 40 years ago, used to teach mathematics at Central New Mexico Community College. Bernadine Dohrn has been teaching law at Northwestern for the past 18 years. Bill Ayers is Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar at the University of Illinois.) Ms. Coulter then took off after Princeton University Bioethics Professor Peter Singer, whom she claims "believes sex with animals is acceptable and has no objections to necrophilia -- provided the dead gave consent when still alive."

And this is even before Ms. Coulter got into her jag about public schools "forc[ing] students to follow Muslim rituals . . . etc." When I first read this, I said to myself :

*"Ah, this article has got to be her idea of an April Fool's Day joke! She couldn't mean what she writes. No one could be that . . . well, that 'ya know . . . full of it!"*

But I'm afraid I gave Ms. Coulter too much credit. From the nearly 1,400 comments her readers appended to the article, they all found what she had to say -- or write -- educative, enlightening and enthralling.

In other words, this wasn't any April Fool's Day column. She really didn't get the *Car and Driver* joke. She really does have such inane, hostile notions.

Between you and me, I've had it. No more thoughts about Ann Coulter.

I'm going out back and water the old spaghetti tree. . .



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April 02, 2009 in [Oh Those Conservatives!](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**April 10, 200**

## *The Clean Deal*

Once upon a time long ago, a wealthy land baron summoned three overseers to meet with him in his study. Eyes twinkling with caprice, the baron issued a challenge:

*Gentlemen: I am going to pose three questions . . . questions whose answers, quite frankly, I do not know. Whichever of you gives what I consider the best answers will be permitted a share in the profits of this estate for the rest of his life. What do you say?*

Two of the men quickly agreed, figuring they had everything to gain -- and nothing to lose -- by playing along with their master's game. The third man, a rather simple soul, wasn't quite so sure, but not wishing to seem less of a person than his fellows, also agreed.

The baron congratulated the three for taking him up on his challenge. Then, holding up a finger, the baron said:

*I'm glad you have all agreed. And by the way, I forgot to mention one tiny detail: the two, whose answers are in my estimation, not best, will forthwith be banished from this estate.*

The three were no longer quite so enthusiastic. Then the baron continued.

*Here are the three questions:<="<">*

*What is the fastest thing in the world?*

*What is the biggest thing in the world?*

*What is the best thing in the world?*

Two of the men -- he who had charge of the estate's forests and he who oversaw its fisheries -- looked knowingly at each another and nodded silently. Then, the overseer of forests asked their master:

*Would you permit the two of us to go in on one set of answers? Could we then both reap the reward?*

The baron thought for a moment, then agreed. He then asked them for their answers.

*The fastest thing in the world is my lord's Arabian stallion. The biggest thing in the world is my lord's heart. And without question, the best thing in the world is being permitted to work for my lord . . .*

The baron, being a man highly addicted to flattery nodded and smiled broadly.

*You have provided three marvelous answers. It will indeed be next to impossible to improve upon them. I could easily proclaim the two of you the winners right now, but in all fairness, we must permit the stable-master to give us his answers. What say you?*

The simple man, sweating profusely, stammered . . .

*I . . . I . . . really don't know what the fastest thing in the world is . . . unless . . . unless it's an idea. And as for the biggest thing in the world, could it possibly be the world itself? And as for the . . .*

But the baron stopped him before he could give the third answer. Jumping up from his throne-like chair, he grasped the stable-master in a bear hug and said,

*Even before you give voice to the third answer, I declare you to be the winner. For indeed, what in the world could be larger than the world itself . . .  
..?*

At this point, let us leave the story for a few moments and consider the implications of the stable-master's answer. . .

Imagine if instead of asking what the "biggest thing in the world" might be, the question were "What is the most important issue in the world?" There is certainly no end of possible answers:

- War and Peace.
- Hunger
- Nuclear Disarmament.
- The Global Economy.
- Terrorism.
- Gender Equality.
- Saving Rain Forests.

And on and on. If we take a tip from the stable-master's response that "*The biggest thing in the world is the world itself*," then perhaps the most important issue in the world is the planet itself. In other words: **global warming**. For let's face facts; without a healthy sustainable planet -- a planet over which we were granted both dominion and stewardship -- nothing else matters. Over the past generation or so, scientists from around the globe have been amassing a welter of data on what's been going on with Mother Earth -- from the warming of its seas and the growth of greenhouse gasses to the disappearance of essential rain forests and the extinction of plants and animals.

On February 2, 2007, a United Nations scientific panel studying climate change declared that the evidence of a global warming trend was "unequivocal" and that human activity had "**very likely**" been the driving force in that change over the past half century. The group's previous report -- issued six years earlier -- had found that humanity had "**likely**" played a role. The addition of that single word "**VERY**" did more than reflect mounting scientific evidence that the release of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases has played a central role in raising the average temperature of the earth by more than 1 degree Fahrenheit since 1900. It also added new momentum to a debate that is far, far less centered on whether or not we humans are largely responsible for this incredibly dangerous trend, to one far, far more centered on what we can do about it.

There are studies without number that prove the dire fact of global warming. There are innumerable papers on what we can do to reverse the process before it is too late. There are international organizations making prize money available for those who come up with innovations in energy usage. There are already plans for the so-called "**Clean Deal**" -- an international program that will link the creation of renewable sources of energy with smart economics. Windmills, solar panels, electric-powered vehicles, new methods of construction -- all these require new industrial

concerns that will employ millions of people who will eventually be earning well by doing good.

And yet, there are voices out there -- loud, disparaging, well-funded megawatt voices -- continually proclaiming that the entire issue of global warming is a liberal hoax. One can hear these voices daily on the Fox News Network, or through a new website called [ClimateDepot.com](http://ClimateDepot.com). Created by Marc Moreno, former spokesman for Oklahoma Senator (and global warming naysayer) James M. Inhofe, "ClimateDepot.com" will be -- in Moreno's words -- a "one-stop shop" for anyone following climate change. For years Moreno, a ceaseless purveyor of the dissenting view that climate change is a hoax, was best known for compiling reports naming hundreds of "scientists" whose work, he says, undermines the consensus on global warming. In many cases, those he listed as scientists possessed virtually no scientific credentials.

"ClimateDepot.com" is mostly underwritten by the "Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow," a Washington-based nonprofit that advocates free-market solutions to environmental issues. It in turn is funded by Richard Mellon Scaife, a longtime financier of conservative causes best known for his efforts to have President Bill Clinton impeached.

So how could all of these "scientists" and "weather forecasters" possibly proclaim that far from going through a warming trend, the earth is actually cooling down? What is on their political plate? God only knows. And speaking of God, Chris Allen, weather director of WBKO in Kentucky is one of those loudly proclaiming global warming to be a hoax. On his web site, Mr. Allen has written that his major objection to the idea of human-influenced climate change is that "it completely takes God out of the picture." One presumes that Mr. Allen is also a fan of Intelligent Design.

Regardless of what Moreno, Scaife, Allen or their "scientific" minions say, global warming *is* both critical and very real. It far outweighs every other issue under the sun, for as the stable-master told the baron, "The biggest thing on earth *is* the earth."

By the way, when the baron finally got around to asking the stable-master that third question -- namely, "What's the best thing in the world" -- the gentleman looked him in the eye, smiled, and said:

*The best thing in the world is a good night's sleep.*

I agree. And of course, part of getting a good night's sleep is being reasonably free of worry. Once the voices and energies of all those working to create a Clean Deal begin realizing success, we will all get that good night's sleep.

Truly, the *best* thing in the world is intimately tied in to the *biggest* thing in the world . . .

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**April 16, 2009**

## *A Letter to Norm Coleman*

Dear Senator Coleman:

It's been less than 48 hours since a special three-judge panel issued a unanimous, unambiguous decision that the "overwhelming weight of evidence" proves that the race between you and Al Franken for the U.S. Senate was conducted "fairly, impartially, and accurately." Moreover, they concluded that Franken's 312-vote margin means that he is "entitled to receive the certificate of election."

In other words Senator it's time for you to look reality squarely in the *punim* and be a gentleman; time for you to step aside, admit defeat, congratulate Al Franken on his hard-fought victory, and permit him to take the oath of office. And then you can go about the task of looking for a high-paying, high-profile job . . . perhaps replacing Michael Steele at the RNC?

In order for this to finally happen of course, your buddy and fellow Republican, Governor Tim Pawlenty will also have to face facts; for he's the fellow who by law must sign the certificate of election. But alas, like you, Governor Pawlenty isn't ready to give up the ghost. Like you, the governor doesn't seem to be worried or even concerned about the fact that Minnesotans have been minus a United States senator for 3 1/2 months. And now, Texas Senator John Cornyn, the head of the Republican Senate Campaign Committee has joined this orgy of stupidity in announcing that he is prepared to take the battle into Federal Court.

You don't seem too worried. And neither does Governor Pawlenty.

Ah, but he may start worrying pretty soon. For as you will recall Senator, Governor Pawlenty is up for reelection next year and is considering a presidential run in 2012. Every extra day he delays signing that certificate makes him look less like a leader, and more like a partisan hack. And while that may well score him points with hardcore Republicans, it is damaging him with everyone else. OK Senator, Governor Pawlenty's political future isn't necessarily your concern. But isn't what's best and most fair for the good folks of Minnesota?

There was a time not so long ago when that was the tune you were whistling. Many of us remember that on election night -- when you appeared to be the winner by an eyelash -- you majestically warned that a recount would be extremely costly and expressed deep, honest concern about Minnesotans being denied full Senate representation. At that point you sounded more like a statesman than a politician. But now that the margin of victory -- slim though it may be -- belongs to Al Franken, you are whistling a tune that sounds like it was composed by the Prendergast Ring. Now its *"Damn the cost . . . mitigate, litigate, abrogate!"*

There was a time long ago when you would have picked up a bullhorn and raged against what you are currently doing. Once upon a time in the late '60s and early '70s, you stood foursquarely on the side of "the people." Back when you were student body president at Hofstra, you protested the war in Vietnam, took over the administration building, railed against the inherent unfairness of "the system," and vowed to knock the "entrenched elites" down a peg or two. Heck, you were even a roadie with "Ten Years After" and spent your 20th birthday with them up at Woodstock. *[You know something Senator; we were born just four days apart. And while you were celebrating your 20th up in Bethel at Woodstock, I was observing mine at Tanglewood attending the Berkshire Festival. As much as I may have enjoyed "I'm Going Home," or "Suite Judy Blue Eyes," I really preferred Beethoven's Ninth.]* Yours has been a most circuitous route, filled with plenty of *formers*: *Former* student radical; *Former* liberal Democrat, and now, *Former United States Senator*.

Senator, you and your attorneys claim that the sole motivation in drawing the election out is "to ensure no Minnesota voter gets left behind." It sounds noble Senator, but instead, what you and your people are really doing is leaving the entire state of Minnesota behind.

Senator, you have been quoted as saying that during this long ordeal, "I have had more dinners at home with my wife than I ever have before," and that now you put *on t'fillin* ever morning and say the traditional morning prayers in order to ". . . bind myself to God every morning because its in his hands." I know that since you stopped receiving your Senate salary, you have been working part time for the Republican Jewish Coalition. These are all things for which you should be grateful; to a certain extent you are on a path taking you back to



your roots. Hopefully you will continue on that path back to the old-time student activist who would have been aghast at the former Senator's obdurateness. If I were you Senator, I would let Governor Pawlenty, Senator Cornyn and the rest of your friends in the Republican Party know that you want them to cease and desist; that the time has come to act like a *mentsch* and gracefully bow out. You know Senator, ever since 1978, your about-to-become former Senate seat has been occupied by *mentschen* -- by good, warm-hearted people: first Rudy Boschwitz, next the late Paul Wellstone, and then you. Never before in American history had one Jewish senator been replaced by another and yet another. Once you finally do the right thing and give up the ghost, your seat will go to Al Franken, a fourth *lahntzman* and a Harvard grad to boot. And who would have ever thought that it would happen in Minnesota of all places? Ah, there's the beauty of America for you!

Senator, do the right thing. Bind that *t'fillin* strap just a bit tighter. Let it remind you that you are indeed made of bigger stuff.

The people of Minnesota will thank you.

The people of the United States will thank you.

History will thank you.

Be good to yourself,

*Kurt F. Stone*

PS: I must admit to having a personal reason (beyond what is written above) for hoping you will bring an end to this nonsense: Without closure, I cannot finish my biographic piece on either you or Al Franken for the next edition of *The Congressional Minyan: The Jews of Capitol Hill*, to be published by Rowman & Littlefield.

(Now how's *that* for a shameless plug . . . ?

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**April 23, 2009**

## *Don't Let the Light Go Out*

Writing a piece about torture with its attendant cast of thousands is as imponderable a task as writing an article about a Wimbledon match while it is still being played. In the case of the tennis match, no sooner would one begin describing a 125-mile-an-hour service before a forehand volley, backhand return, lob, and overhand smash might occur. Obviously, its one heck of a lot smarter to wait until the match has concluded before writing the story. In the case of the former -- torture -- about the time one finishes a paragraph or two, a new revelation, charge or declassified document becomes available, thus making what has just been written obsolete.

In the current unfolding story about torture -- which involves the Obama White House, the CIA, DOJ, OLC, DOD, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, "Scooter" Libby, Donald Rumsfeld, John Ashcroft, Condoleezza Rice, John Yoo, Jay Bybee, *et al* -- one obviously cannot -- and must not -- wait until the story has concluded before committing it to print. It is far too critical and deserving of far more light than almost any other issue before the American public. For the use of unlawful, immoral and inhuman forms of torture -- regardless of what "they" are doing and regardless of whether it is euphemistically referred to as "rendition" or "enhanced forms of interrogation" -- raises questions that are at the very heart of what defines the United States of America.

Over the past week or more, we have begun asking a lot of questions, such as:

- "Who was responsible for Okaying the torture?"
- "What if any acts of terror were averted as a result of the torture?"
- "When did the U.S. first begin using torture?"
- "Where were these interrogations carried out?"
- "Why did President Obama first state that no one will be prosecuted?"

Despite the fact that we still have more questions than answers, it is becoming clearer with each passing day that the Bush Administration used the horror of 9/11 for their own purposes. That day of unbelievable tragedy and pain became their rationale for legitimizing torture -- a kind of "any-port-in-a-storm" approach to national defense. Before too long, the administration proclaimed that they had uncovered "evidence" of a link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein and of the existence of WMD's in "al-Qaeda-backed" Iraq. All of this, of course, provided the rationale for beginning that preemptive war -- a war which is now the longest in our history.

Before the end of the Bush Administration, there was already evidence both the United States military and the C.I.A. were engaging in what at best were "questionable" -- at worst "illegal" -- forms of "enhanced interrogation." During the 2008 presidential campaign Barack Obama attacked the Bush Administration for such acts, and proclaimed that once in office he would move swiftly to root them out. Millions of voters were attracted to the Illinois senator because -- among other things -- he had an obvious moral center.

The disclosures occasioned by all the recently declassified documents have given birth to a myriad of debates. As of this writing, it is unclear precisely what role or roles will be played by the House and Senate. Which committee or committees will start issuing subpoenas? On the House side, will it fall to Ike Skelton's Armed Services, Jane Harman's subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism risk Assessment or John Conyers' Judiciary to hold hearings? Over in the Senate, will Carl Levin (Armed Services), Dianne Feinstein (Selected Committee on Intelligence), Joe Lieberman (Homeland Security) or Patrick Leahy (Judiciary) choose to pick up the gavel? And once the subpoenas begin flying, who will seek immunity and who will simply refuse to testify, thus bringing about both a legal challenge and a constitutional showdown?

Indeed, will the White House seek to outflank Congress by appointing its own "Blue Ribbon Commission on Torture?" Or, will Senator Reid and Speaker Pelosi (both of whom appear to have had knowledge of what the Bush Administration was up to) name their own "Joint Special Investigation Committee?" The possibilities are endless.

President Obama's initial response to torture was crystal clear:

The United States does not and will not engage in torture; the United States does not and will not violate international law.

Period.

But then came that gnawing, vexatious inconsistency:

Neither those who carried out these illegal acts nor those who formulated the legal justification for them will be liable to future prosecution! In the case of who actually performed the illegal acts, they were "only following orders" [This is hauntingly like the Nuremberg Defense, *Befehl ist Befehl*.] In the case of those who dreamed up the legal justification for said acts -- members of the Office of Legal Counsel at the Department of Justice -- all the president would say is that "we seek to look not backwards but forwards."

This was indeed a shocking conclusion, coming as it did from a president who spent the past 16 years as a professor of constitutional law at the University of Chicago. Well, within the past 48 hours, the president did "clarify" his thinking, and state that the matter of future prosecution belongs not to the White House, but to the Department of Justice. Without question, this is the right way to go.

To most thoughtful people, the issue of torture (and our response to it) is one of both legal and moral import. For generations, we have been a nation of laws and not one of men and women. For generations, we have been a beacon of light in a world that often languishes in darkness. Our devotion, our commitment to what is lawful and humane has given both hope and direction to people living on seven continents. But now it has been revealed that for a time, the United States of America has been operating not in the light but rather the shadows; that we have justified the use of illegal torture techniques by convincing ourselves that in order to assure security, we must become as diabolical as our enemies.

Regrettably, there are those who persist in seeing torture as a primarily political issue. Cheney, Gingrich and Rove -- among others -- say that those who are against "enhanced rendition" are weak, short-sighted cowards bent on giving aid and comfort to our enemies. Talk shows and so-called "news" programs are rife with "experts" who proclaim that not only does torture work; it has kept us safe. I have been told to my face that "If water-boarding, sleep-deprivation or tearing out their fingernails saves even one American life, it is worth it." I listened in on Rush Limbaugh the other day. In the middle of a rant about "weak-kneed, lily-livered liberals," there was a slapping sound, followed by the "Mouth That Roared" sarcastically proclaiming, "I just slapped myself in the face. Oh my, I've just been tortured!"

I do hope that both those who did the actual torturing and those who created the legal justification for those acts will be prosecuted. I don't care how high up the political food chain it goes . . . even if in the end it includes Democrats as well as Republicans.

This should be not a political issue. It is definitely no laughing matter. It is terribly serious and rests at the very heart of what has long made America a light unto the nations.

Don't let the light go out. . .

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April 23, 2009 in [Torture](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



May 01, 2009

## *Was Thomas Wolfe Wrong?*

Back in 1940, Harper Brothers published Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again*. Published posthumously, *You Can't Go Home Again* tells the story of George Webber, a young author who writes a novel about his family and home town -- Libya Hill. His book becomes a rousing success everywhere . . . except in Libya Hill. When George, now a world-famous novelist, returns home, he is unnerved by the force of the outrage and hatred which greets him. The "good folks" of Libya Hill are furious by how many of their "secrets" he has exposed in his novel. Far from being proud of their native son, his former neighbors and school chums begin sending him death threats; George has no choice but to flee. He then begins a monumental search for his own identity; a search that will ultimately take him to New York, Paris and Berlin. Despite the high regard he and his novel are held in throughout the literate world, poor George Webber learns a hard and difficult truth: that indeed, Thomas Wolfe was right: *You Can't Go Home Again*.

Or was he? Oh sure, if we're taking his words literally -- in the sense of Heraclitus' old saw *You can't throw the same stick into the same river twice* -- then Wolfe was undoubtedly right. Heraclitean flux aside, is it possible that Wolfe was in error? That there are cases in which one CAN go home again?

Fast forward nearly seventy years. It's no longer about George Webber; now, it's about Arlen Specter. And, it's no longer about a fictional novelist returning home to Libya Hill; now it's about a flesh-and-blood senator returning "home" to the Democratic Party. As many people know, the Kansas-born Arlen Specter

started out life as a Philadelphia Democrat. Heck, 45 years ago LBJ appointed him to a high level position on the Warren Commission, where the then 33-year old attorney became chief architect of what became known as the "single bullet theory." And most people know that when he wanted to run for Philadelphia D.A. in 1964, he switched to the Republicans. His reason for the change can be summed up in six simple words: He couldn't win as a Democrat. *[It should be noted that as D.A. he gave his first job to a young Penn law graduate from New York named Ed Rendell, who today is the Democratic governor of Pennsylvania.]*

Just about every political junkie knows that in his career, Arlen Specter has lost about as many elections as he has won. He lost his position as D.A. in 1973, and was beaten in Republican primaries for senator in 1976 and governor in 1978. In 1980, running once again for the United States Senate, he squeaked by in the Republican primary and then, riding Ronald Reagan's coattails, edged out former Pittsburgh Mayor Pete Flaherty 50%-48% to join "the most exclusive club in the world." He has been a Republican member of that club ever since . . . until 72 hours ago. With less than 2 years to go until his next reelection bid, and realizing that he likely would lose in the Republican primary to conservative former House member Pat Toomey [whom he had defeated by an anemic 51%-49% in the 2004 Republican senate primary], Specter decided that his only chance to remain in the Senate was to return "home" to the Democratic fold.

Throughout his now 29-year senate career, Specter's spot on the political spectrum has been variously defined as "moderate," "independent," "liberal," and "mostly unpredictable." One of the senate's brightest members, Specter has earned the grudging respect -- if not any honest degree of affection -- of his colleagues. Truth to tell, Specter has been neither liberal nor moderate, conservative nor, strictly speaking, independent. And despite the fact that his former colleagues now claim he was always a **R.I.N.O.** -- "Republican In Name Only" -- it's never been clear what he was -- or will be now that he's a Democrat. Possibly a **D.I.N.O.** -- Democrat In Name Only?

Those who cheer that Specter's defection -- added to Al Franken's eventual arrival -- will give the Democrats a filibuster-proof super majority, might want to stow the pompoms and megaphones. For although Specter is **pro-choice**, has no problems with providing **federal dollars for stem-cell research** and **voted against** invoking cloture on 163/SJRes 1, a **constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman**, he is no wide-eyed Kennedy-style liberal. Over the past 5 years, the liberal League of Conservation Voters has given him an average rating of only 25 [out of 100], the A.C.L.U. a 40, the pro-business Chamber of Commerce a 90, and the conservative Family Research Council a respectable 60. He is a decided pro-military hawk who voted in favor of providing detainee rights, and a social moderate who also voted in favor of Justices Antonin Scalia, Sam Alito and John Roberts. [In

matter of fact, Specter gave his solemn word to George W. Bush that if the president would support him for Chair of Senate Judiciary, he would in turn give his support to anyone Bush might nominate for the court.

As soon as Specter announced his change of party, the White House announced that President Obama would campaign for him in 2010. Governor Rendell, Majority Leader Reid and senate powerhouse Chuck Schumer have all likewise come on board. Prior to Specter's defection, it looked like his Democratic opponent would be 7th District Rep. Joe Sestak, a retired two-star admiral and the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to Congress. Whether or not Sestak drops out of the primary race is anyone's guess. What is not in question is the strategy the Republicans will employ in 2010 against Arlen Specter: they will target Democratic districts with campaign spots FOR Arlen Specter delivered in 2004 by none other than George W. Bush! In political circles, this is known as "taking revenge."

Despite all their efforts to put a "we-really-could-give-a-hoot-'n-a-holler" spin on Specter's party switch, the GOP is reeling, wondering "what else could go wrong?" And while it is true that Senator Specter wasn't the most loyal of Republicans, his departure is but one more proof that the "Big Tent" is nothing more than a hollow rhetorical device. The GOP is obviously floundering, rudderless and in a tailspin to mix several metaphors. Their base is as small and unenthusiastic as at any time in the past 75 years. As proof, one need only look at the most recent national polling figures: less than 25% of the American voting public now considers itself Republican.

But this does not mean that the rest of America is necessarily in love with -- or identifies itself as -- Democratic. Specter's transfer -- all positive spin to the contrary -- is not proof that all of America is "coming home" to the party of Kennedy, Johnson, Carter and Clinton. For indeed, it is neither the same party nor the same "home."

Perhaps Thomas Wolfe was right; you can't go home again.

Make no mistake about it; Arlen Specter has done what is best for Arlen Specter. I for one cannot and will not hold that against him; after all, winning is the first rule in both baseball and politics. And yet, something very very good may come out of it. I liken Specter's "coming home" to a baseball team's late season acquisition of some gnarled old pro whom they figure might help get them to the World Series. If he does, they look like geniuses; if not, oh well, you picked him up for a song and won't be resigning him anyway. In this case, the "team" is the United States Senate; the "late season pickup" is Arlen Specter; the "World Series" is National Healthcare -- something which the senator sees as a right, not a luxury. If Specter's presence on the Democratic side of the aisle can indeed put quality healthcare within the reach of all



Americans, then taking possession of the rest of his political baggage will be worth it.

And if this works, then in a strange sense, Arlen Specter will wind up proving that Thomas Wolfe was wrong; you CAN go home again. Except in this case, the "home" to which he will be returning is not the Libya Hill of George Webber. . .

It is the political party of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



May 08, 2009

## *Henry Waxman: The Moustache of Justice*

On November 19, 1945 -- barely 6 months after the death of FDR, President Harry S. Truman gave a major address to both houses of Congress. Unbelievably, his subject matter was neither war nor peace, economy nor education; it was the urgent need for a . . . **NATIONAL HEALTH CARE PROGRAM!** Yes, you read that correctly: a **NATIONAL HEALTH CARE PROGRAM!** And this was 1945 . . . nearly 65 years ago.

In his speech, the president argued that the federal government should play a major role in health care, saying "The health of American children, like their education, should be recognized as a definite public responsibility." After addressing five areas of concern -- including the lack of doctors, dentists and hospitals in rural and otherwise depressed areas of America -- Truman got to the controversial meat and potatoes of his talk: **NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE.** The plan that Truman outlined that day long ago called for a **NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE** fund, to be run by the federal government. This fund would be open to all Americans, but would remain optional.

Truman's health care proposals came to Congress in the form of a Social Security expansion bill, co-sponsored by Democratic senators Robert Wagner (NY) and James Murray (MT), and Representative John Dingell (MI). For this reason, it was known popularly as the "W-M-D Bill." (*In light of the fact that today, "WMD" refers to "Weapons of Mass Destruction," the acronym is more than a bit haunting.*) Predictably, the AMA characterized the bill as "socialized medicine," and as a *forshpize* (Yiddish for "appetizer") to the rhetoric and inanity of McCarthyism, called Truman White House staffers "followers of the Moscow party line." Eventually -- and despite his prescience -- Truman was forced to abandon the W-M-D bill.

Harry Truman was certainly not the last president or national political figure to seriously ponder or propose a system of **NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE**. In the 1960s JFK and LBJ got America part of the way there with the enactment of Medicare and Medicaid -- two programs, which despite being disparaged in some circles as "socialized medicine," have both weathered the test of time. In the 1990s then-First Lady Hillary Clinton came up with an ambitious **NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE** proposal which, due to a series of clumsy, ham-handed political maneuvers, died not with a bang, but rather a whimper.

Now, after many years of relative silence, a **NATIONAL HEALTH CARE** proposal has made its way back to center stage. But this time it feels different; this time it has a couple of added ingredients:

- **A widely supportive American public**, a growing percentage of which, can no longer afford health insurance.
- **A highly popular, politically deft president** who is willing to spend a good portion of his "personality capital" on behalf of something he believes in his heart of hearts is "a right, not a luxury."
- **A business community** that is not quite as vociferous or venomous in its opposition as in times past.
- **A loud-mouthed opposition** that is finding fewer and fewer takers for its dire warnings of "socialized medicine" and other slippery-slope prognostications, and last but certainly not least,
- **Representative Henry Waxman.**

How's that? Henry Waxman? Why Henry Waxman?

Henry Waxman has been involved in health issues ever since 1969 -- the year he was appointed to the California State Assembly Health Committee. A member of Congress for 35 years, Henry is, to my way of thinking as a Congressional historian, one of the five most important and significant people ever to serve in that body -- and that's out of more than 11,000. It is also likely that Henry Waxman has been responsible for more successful healthcare legislation than anyone in American history. He has been the sponsor of such measures as:

- The Ryan White CARE Act.
- The Breast and Cervical Cancer Mortality and Prevention Act.
- The Safe Medical Devices Act.
- The Orphan Drug Act.

Over the years, Representative Waxman has successfully led the fight for improved prenatal and infant care for low-income families, and for more services in the community for people needing long-term care. He has been an advocate for prescription drug coverage in Medicare for people with high drug expenses, and has long pushed for a system of **NATIONAL HEALTH**

**INSURANCE.** And now, as chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Waxman may finally see his dream come true.

Ironically, the man Waxman replaced as chair of the committee -- the legendary John Dingell, Jr., -- is the son of the representative who sponsored President Truman's original **HEALTHCARE PROPOSAL** back in 1945. (The Dingells, *pere et fils*, have represented *Michigan's* 15th District since 1933. John Jr., first elected to replace his deceased father in 1955, has now served in Congress longer than anyone in American history.) Unlike John Dingell, Jr., whom President Bush once called the "biggest pain in the ass" on Capitol Hill, Henry Waxman is well-liked, well-respected, and well-known not only for his tough, principled stands, but for his relentless investigations. Turn on the TV news almost any night, and there will be Henry Waxman, investigating everything from the use of steroids in Major League Baseball, electrical problems in Iraq, governmental secrecy, and U.S. trade agreements, to military contracts, Medicare fraud and "shortcomings in the third-party food safety audits performed on behalf of the Peanut Corporation of America." If there is one common thread in the myriad issues that capture Representative Waxman's attention, it is justice. As a short, myopic, unprepossessing man who grew up over his parents' grocery store in a Jewish section of Los Angeles and now -- ironically -- represents some of the richest, most glamorous folks in the world (his district includes Beverly Hills), Henry Waxman has always been on the side of the little person. To some, he is a self-serving political pariah; for many, he is both a revelation and a legend. Even Waxman's moustache has a nickname: the "Moustache of Justice."

To be certain, there are those who proclaim Waxman to be nothing more than a diabolic, demagogic Democrat -- a man who can barely contain his enthusiasm for having the government "take over" everything from the day-to-day operation of G.M. to health care. According to these finger-pointers, if Waxman and "his kind" have their way, then health care will become "substandard, subordinate, and apportioned . . . just like Canada and Britain," and "it will be up to some petty bureaucrat whether or not you can see a specialist." Funny, they never say anything about the insurance company wage-slaves who do the same thing -- for the sake of corporate profit.

The lack of affordable health care has gone beyond the crisis stage in America. Nearly 50 million of us go without; even a basic HMO-insurance plan now costs more per month than the mortgage on a quarter-million dollar home. And for many within this group, the only place they can go when they become ill or fall victim to an accident is to the emergency room at the local hospital -- where medical care is not always the best, generally the most costly and always covered by the entire community. Then again, how about all those "preexisting conditions" that health insurers won't cover? Isn't it wonderful to learn that although they absolutely will not cover you for the high-blood pressure, a bad back or digestive tract problems you've had [and

could be in remission], they will gladly pay all the costs for those who contract Chistosomiasis, Dengue Fever or the Yaws?

For too many years, our leaders, our legislators, were scared away from promoting -- let alone enacting -- meaningful **NATIONAL HEALTH CARE** legislation by that great phalanx of lobbyists and interest groups that could make or break them. And, for far too many of the uninsured, they were told in so many words that **NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE** was something straight out of the Marx and Engels rule book. Or, if not "socialistic," then a luxury that one could either work hard enough to afford -- like a Cadillac -- or else admit that the lack of was their own damn fault. Well, times and understandings have changed.

Thanks to people like Barack Obama and Henry Waxman, word is fast getting around that **NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE** is a right, not a luxury. Thanks to a new generation of activists, **NATIONAL HEALTH COVERAGE** is going to be enacted. Thanks to "we the people," the dream of Harry Truman is going to become a reality. Who knows, perhaps Representative George Miller (CA) and Senator Chris Dodd (CT) will join Henry and make up the new "W-M-D Bill."

My money is on Henry. Pray for the health and the success of the Moustache of Justice.

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**Please note that I am now on both [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). Hope to see you there as well! Twitter entries are on the right-hand margin . . .**

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



May 15, 2009

## *Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc*

Back in the day when I was majoring in Philosophy, I took a whole bunch of courses in Logic -- Aristotelian, Set and Symbolic. It pains me to admit how little I recall of those subjects, up to and including the names of the professors who taught them. Well, they did begin, as I recall, at 8:00 a.m., a perfectly indecent hour for anyone attempting to grasp such concepts like "premise," "deduction," and "conclusion." Honest confessions aside, one thing I do recall is how depressing it was to realize that much of what passed for public discourse or argumentation was inherently illogical; or, as they say in the philosophy biz, "fallacious."

If I recall correctly, the fallacy behind most political caterwauling was best summed up by the phrase "***Post hoc ergo propter hoc***," which is Latin for "after this, therefore because (on account) of this." Or, to put it a bit less literally: "**Since that event followed this one, that event must have been caused by this one.**"

Got that?

NO? Well, perhaps an example would help clarify things a bit. The example I have in mind has been all over the news these past several days, angering, confusing and numbing just about anyone with a bit of gray matter. For it is the "He said, she said," "When did she know it and what did she know?" sideshow surrounding the use of torture -- "**Enhanced Interrogation Techniques**" -- during the last administration. The Republican argument, if I follow it correctly goes something like this:

- The Bush Administration did not engage in torture, only E.I.T.
- If the administration *would have engaged* in E.I.T., it *would have been legal*, according to the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel.
- As per our instructions, leaders in the House and Senate -- including then-Intelligence Committee chair Nancy Pelosi -- were fully briefed by the CIA about our use of E.I.T., including waterboarding, which when suiting our purposes, we will continue denying we ever engaged in.
- Oh yes, our use of E.I.T. -- including waterboarding -- is what has kept America free of terrorist attacks since 9/11.
- For purposes of damaging the Democrats in general and Speaker Pelosi in particular, we will now stipulate that we did indeed use E.I.T.
- Since Nancy Pelosi was briefed by the C.I.A. as early as September 2002 about the use of E.I.T., we will further stipulate that for purposes of culpability, she is as guilty -- if not more so -- than anyone. Therefore, either:

1. The Bush Administration did not torture anyone, or
2. The Bush Administration did use E.I.T., which was all perfectly legal, or
3. The Bush Administration's use of E.I.T. is truly what has kept us from being attacked, or
4. Speaker Pelosi is far, far more culpable than anyone else, because she knew all about it and did not blow the whistle.
5. Not only is she an accessory after the fact; she is a pernicious liar.

Got all that?

It is at this point that the Aristotelian term "*Post hoc ergo propter hoc*" comes back into play. For what Republicans like Dick Cheney, Carl Rove and John Boehner are arguing is totally fallacious; that since Nancy Pelosi's briefing came *after* [*post hoc*] we had begun torturing terrorists like Abu Zubaydah and Kalid Sheikh Mohammed, it turns out [*ergo propter hoc*] that not only is she an accomplice; she is the *cause* of our resorting to such extra-legal activities!

Yes, I know, it doesn't make an ounce of sense. But wait . . . there's more!

The former Vice President has called upon the CIA to release classified documents that he claims will prove "beyond a shadow of a doubt" that the agency's harsh interrogation methods were largely responsible for thwarting further terrorist plots. On May 14, the CIA released a letter citing pending legal action as the sole reason for keeping the documents under seal.

On that same day -- May 14 -- Speaker Pelosi held a press conference at which she bluntly accused the CIA of misleading her and several other lawmakers about its use of waterboarding. For the record, CIA spokesman George Little said "It is not the policy of this agency to mislead the Congress of the United States." Nonetheless, he refused to answer directly when asked whether the

Speaker's accusations were accurate. "We were told that waterboarding was not being used," the Speaker said. "That's the only mention that they were not using it. And now we know that earlier they were."

Shortly after Pelosi's press conference, House Minority Leader John Boehner held one of his own. When a reporter asked about the Speaker's demand that the CIA release "all details on what members were briefed," and then said that "the CIA deliberately misled her time and time again," Boehner responded, "I think the problem is that the Speaker has had too many stories on this issue . . . I think she's posed more questions than she's provided answers . . ." In other words, Boehner is calling the Speaker a liar. Additionally, Boehner chided the Speaker and other Democrats for not "blowing the whistle" on the Bush Administration for its use of E.I.T. In other words, if they knew about the waterboarding and didn't raise a stink, then they are to blame . . . not the Bush Administration.

***Post hoc ergo propter hoc.***

As dizzying and maddening as all this is, it totally misses the point -- which may, when all is said and done -- *be precisely the point*. For in going back and forth as to "When did she know it and what did she know," Republicans and their allies in the media have managed to deflect attention away from the real issue: the morality and legality of the United States engaging in acts of torture.

Lost in all this fallacious argumentation and finger pointing are two pretty well-grounded -- and under-reported -- facts:

- That a letter from CIA Director Leon Panetta which was attached to the agency documents discussing the September 4, 2002 Congressional briefing [the one that the Speaker disputes] suggests that the information in the documents may not be "an accurate summary of what actually happened." In his cover letter to current House Intelligence Committee Chair Silvestre Reyes (D-TX) and Ranking Member Peter Hoekstra (R-MI) -- which has generally been overlooked by the media -- Panetta wrote that the information in the attached intelligence documents "is drawn from the past files of the CIA and represents MFRs ["Memorandums for the Record"] completed at the time and notes that summarized the best recollections of individuals involved . . . . You and the committee will have to determine whether this information is an accurate summary of what actually happened."
- That in testimony before a Senate subcommittee investigating Bush Administration interrogation techniques, former FBI agent Ali Soufan told Congress that he witnessed CIA interrogation methods on terror suspects that were, in his words, "borderline torture," and called the methods "ineffective," "unreliable," and "harmful." Further, Soufan stated that "the informed interrogation approach outlined in the Army



Field Manual "is the most effective, reliable, and speedy approach we have for interrogating terrorists; it is legal and has worked time and again. It was a mistake to abandon it in favor of harsh interrogation methods that are harmful, shameful, slower, unreliable, ineffective and play directly into the enemy's handbook." To a great extent, this refutation of torture went unreported.

Instead what has captured the attention of both the media and the public is this "he said, she said" nonsense that keeps the debate far away from where it should be.

To wit, is torture illegal and immoral?

To give any other answer than "Yes, torture is both illegal and immoral," is to engage in fallacious reasoning.

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May 15, 2009 in [Torture](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(5\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



May 22, 2009

## *Which Came First?*

It's simply amazing how many gifted writers and thinkers have given serious quality time pondering that greatest of all causality dilemmas, namely "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

- **Aristotle** was greatly puzzled by the idea that there could be a *first* chicken or a *first* egg, and concluded that *both* must have always existed.
- **Plato** got around having to answer the question as asked by declaring that "Everything before it appeared on earth had its first being in spirit."
- **Stephen Hawking**, argued that the egg likely came before the chicken, but that the real importance of the question has greatly faded since Darwin's "On the Origin of the Species," and his accompanying Theory of Evolution.

Before getting on to my answer, permit me to pose a similar dilemma of causation:

### ***Which came first . . . the Jew or the anti-Semite?***

Believe it or not, over the course of decades, I have given a lot of thought to this question, and have somewhat cheekily concluded the following: That if God, in his or her infinite wisdom had *not* created the Jew as an eternal witness to all of human history, the anti-Semite, in his or her infinite wickedness would have done so just in order to possess an eternal target for baseless, ignominious blame.

Well, I *did* say my conclusion was a might cheeky, didn't I?

One might think that after the Holocaust, humanity would have smothered anti-Semitism; that that particular strain of malevolent psychosis would have been extirpated. But no, it did not. And while I am not one of those who see an anti-Semite lurking behind every rock or shadow, it nonetheless staggers me

to realize how many people *do* continue to fear, loath or hate the sons and daughters of Israel. And what is even more staggering is the realization that some of the worst fear and loathing exists in countries and among people who have virtually no daily contact with individual Jews, let alone the Jewish community. Many around the globe have convinced themselves that its not Jews they revile; its the Zionists.

There are, of course, tens of millions -- if not hundreds -- who have their doubts about whether the Holocaust truly occurred or was just some sort of Zionist invention. There are also untold millions who possess an unvoiced "knowledge" that all Jews know and communicate with one other; that there is truth in the conspiracy "revealed" in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. And many more believe that we Jews think ourselves to be superior to other peoples; that *this* is why we call ourselves "The Chosen People."

Yes, yes, I can hear you at this juncture blurting out "But we don't call ourselves *The Chosen People*, its God who does." Of course; you're absolutely correct. But remember: I'm not reporting on what we say or believe. Rather, I am recounting the idiotic prevarication of our detractors. One question that is rarely asked -- by Jews or Gentiles -- is: "Chosen for what?" If one were to pose that question to an anti-Semite he or she would likely respond "Chosen to rule the world," or some such nonsense. I think the real answer to the question "Chosen for what?" is simply, "Chosen to exist. Chosen to be a witness to history in all of its pain and glory." I firmly believe that at the end of time -- whenever, however or even if that will come about -- at least one Jewish person will remain. And in that "still small voice" of which the Prophet Elijah spoke, that one Jew will say something like, "You see, all we were trying to tell you was to be nice to one another . . . to feed the hungry, cloth the naked and take care of the stranger, the widow and the orphan. To make peace where there was strife and to bring light where there was darkness. But for whatever reason, you just didn't listen . . ." This is *not* the scenario of a people who are in any manner superior. What it is *is* the destiny of a people who have witnessed that which is best and worst in human history.

Believe it or not, Jews told jokes during the Holocaust. There is even a collection of jokes and stories told in the Ghettos and camps. In one of the most famous, two men meet on the street in Berlin during the dark, dark days of the Depression. One man asks the other:

"Why are things so terrible? Who's to blame?" The other man responds,

"The answer to your question is simple; there are two groups to blame."

"And who might they be?" the first man asks, all ears.

"Why the Jews and the bicycle riders," he said.

"What in the hell do the bicycle riders have to do with all our problems?" the second man asked.

"Beats me," the first man said, "What do the Jews have to do with all our problems?"

As with most "black humor," this little story carries an underlying truth that is both painful and cogent. To wit, that for anti-Semites, the Jew is a "straw man," or a "scapegoat" -- a convenient bit of misdirection that keeps peoples' eyes and minds diverted from the true sources of human misery.

Misdirection, however, can go both ways. For just as some point an accusing finger at "the pernicious, conspiratorial, venal" Jew in order to have an object of blame, fear and hostility, so too are there those who point accusing fingers at others and call them anti-Semites. Of late, there are a bunch of emails going around the Internet "proving" that President Obama and his administration hate Jews and are intent upon destroying Israel; that the president is a Muslim, that Secretary of State Clinton is an ardent anti-Semite, and that Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel is a self-hating Jew. The purpose of these emails, so far as I can fathom, is to convince as many Jews as possible that the only hope for Israel is supporting the Republican Party -- the only party that truly loves, understands and supports the Jewish State.

Yes, misdirection *can* indeed go both directions.

I don't have a snappy answer to the question "Which came first, the Jew or the anti-Semite?" All I know is that for as long as the Sons and Daughters of Israel have walked this earth, there have been those who have feared and despised us. Why, I really don't know.

However, when it comes to the chicken and the egg, I think I do:

Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

Neither one. What really came first was . . . the question!

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



May 28, 2009

## *The Children's Hour*

What's this, yet *another* article on Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor? Haven't we already read, watched or listened to enough of them in the past seventy-two hours to last a lifetime?

You betcha! And that's why this piece, "The Children's Hour," is *not* about the Sotomayor nomination.

Well, not exactly . . .

To be perfectly honest, it *is* about one aspect of the nomination -- the politics of it all . . .

Today's *New York Times* contains an [article](#) detailing the slow, deliberate, obsessively thorough process the president and his staff employed in finally settling on Judge Sotomayor. Understandably, this process began back in late 2008, when Mr. Obama's title was still "President Elect." This only makes sense, for Mr. Obama and his advisers knew full well that before too long they would have the duty and honor of nominating someone for the nation's highest court, and they wanted to select *the* perfect person. Being political pros with a thorough knowledge of political history made the Obama team acutely aware of several facts:

- That the process of confirming a Supreme Court nominee is a high stakes political chess match;

- That other administrations have lost matches by being improperly prepared.
- That the other side has been prepping for the match just as long and as hard as you have;
- That even when "check mate" is pretty much a given -- as in the case of Judge Sotomayor -- you must nonetheless prepare for the match as if the odds were overwhelmingly against you and,
- That the spoils of victory -- the glory of "check mate" -- can be far greater than the seating of a single justice.

In making their selection -- preparing for the match -- the Obama team had two very unique things going for it:

- A president with a greater knowledge of law -- and specifically Constitutional Law -- than perhaps any president in American history, and
- A Vice President who had voted on the confirmation of every member of the current court.

To be sure, the Republicans have also been meeting, planning and strategizing over this upcoming political chess match since late last year. But interestingly, their goal has *not* been identifying the perfect strategy by which they could defeat Mr. Obama and whoever his nominee turned out to be. Rather, it was putting together a game plan that could fatten their coffers, stir up their base, and hopefully put them in better shape for the upcoming 2010 elections. Don't take my word for it. Even before President Obama announced Judge Sotomayor's nomination, [Wendy Long](#), counsel for the conservative *Judicial Confirmation Network* characterized the upcoming fight as "a basis for a Republican renaissance. . . . If there is any issue that can get dispirited Republicans ginned up . . . its a Supreme Court fight." Or, read the words of conservative activist [Richard Viguerie](#), who told the *New York Times* even before Obama had named his choice that the fight over a Supreme Court nominee, *"[is] an immense opportunity to build the conservative movement and identify the troops out there. It's a massive teaching moment for America. We've got the packages written. We're waiting right now to put a name in."*

No matter who President Obama would have nominated for the Supreme Court, the Republicans already had their script, their strategy -- Viguerie's "package" -- fully prepared:

- To characterize the nominee as a "far left liberal."
- To question the nominee's intellectual heft.
- To accuse the nominee of being "an activist judge."
- To warn that the nominee is one who favors "legislating from the bench."

- To pick out one or two out-of-context statements or legal decisions by to characterize the nominee.

This is precisely what the "RNC [Rush-Newt-Cheney] Axis" have done. Everyone from Sean Hannity and Pat Buchanan to the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Times* have characterized Judge Sotomayor as "gruff," "intellectually challenged," the most far-left judge in American history," and "a reverse bigot." They have characterized her decision in the New Haven case [one out of literally thousands in which she has participated] as an example of "judicial activism," **[Note: In that controversial decision, Judge Sotomayor ruled against 18 white firefighters, including one Hispanic, in their lawsuit against New Haven, Conn., after city officials scrapped a promotional test that showed the plaintiffs more eligible for advancement within the fire department. The white firefighters scored much better than their African-American peers on the test.]** Say the facts of the case had been different (that the city of New Haven had let the test results stand and plaintiffs had been the African-American firefighters) and Judge Sotomayor had ruled in the city's favor -- Republicans would have then gladly patted her on the back and said that she was merely applying the rule of law and respecting New Haven's sovereignty. When Republicans agree with a ruling, the judge is a "strict constructionist." When they disagree, the judge is an "activist."

Likewise, Judge Sotomayor has been repeatedly taken to task for an October 2001 speech she gave at the Berkeley *La Raza Law Journal's* 12th annual symposium. The part of her speech that her detractors have excised and repeated *ad nauseum* has Judge Sotomayor stating, *"I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life."* This one sentence -- lifted out of context -- has caused Republican commentators to refer to her repeatedly as a "bigot" and "reverse racist." Yesterday Newt Gingrich Twittered:

*Imagine a judicial nominee said 'my experience as a white man makes me better than a Latina woman' new racism is no better than old racism. White man racist nominee would be forced to withdraw. Latina woman racist should also withdraw.*

The problem with all this is that her detractors have chosen to leave out what Judge Sotomayor said next in that Berkeley speech:

*"Each day on the bench I learn something new about the judicial process and about being a professional Latina woman in a world that sometimes looks at me with suspicion. I am reminded each day that I render decisions that affect people concretely and that I owe them constant and complete vigilance in checking my assumptions, presumptions and perspectives and ensuring that to the extent that my limited abilities and capabilities permit me, that I*

*reevaluate them and change as circumstances and cases before me requires. I can and do aspire to be greater than the sum total of my experiences but I accept my limitations."*

When these words are added, it becomes rather clear -- at least to me -- that Judge Sonia Sotomayor is no racist -- reverse or any other kind.

Interestingly, the vast majority of all the negative comments about Sonia Sotomayor are coming not from members of the United States Congress, but from their sideline, unelected "Marching and Chowder Society" -- from the likes of Rush, Newt, Michael Steele, Ann Coulter, Matt Drudge and the rest.

It would appear that Congressional Republicans are exercising a bit of taste, and restraint. Some of them understand that this is a chess match they are going to lose; that Sonia Sotomayor is going to be seated on the Supreme Court. Further, some recognize that adopting the *RNC Axis'* stridency, will neither refill their coffers nor add new members to their party. They have already lost much of the Hispanic vote -- the fastest-growing segment of the voting public. They don't score well with women, the better-educated, Northeastern urbanites . . . perhaps even Yankee fans for all I know. To bitterly and publicly oppose Judge Sotomayor's nomination is a horrific strategy in a political chess match that they are already on track to lose.

Do the Hannaty's Coulters, Buchanans and O'Reillys of this world really, truly believe that Sonia Sotomayor is a dangerous fire-breathing ultra liberal judicial activist? Does Karl Rove really, truly believe that Judge Sotomeyer is of questionable intellectual ability? [He who attended at least 5 colleges, never got a degree and was responsible for the nomination of that intellectual giant Harriet Miers!] For that matter, does Rush Limbaugh really, truly believe that President Barack Obama is a "dyed-in-the-wool Marxist Leninist hell bent on turning America into a Socialist-Communist nation?"

Obviously, the answer to the above is either "Yes" or "No."

I'm going to give them the benefit of the doubt and say:

*"No, they really, truly don't believe all the things they say about Judge Sotomayor, President Obama, the Democratic Party and 1,001 other things. They just say these things because it's great for their ratings, guarantees they will continue making millions upon millions of dollars, and continues to feed their perpetually starving egos."*

What they either don't realize -- or worse, don't care about -- is the extraordinary damage they are doing to our Democracy. They are treating serious issues as just more fodder for entertainment.



This week it's Judge Sonia Sotomayor single-handedly destroying the American judicial system. Last week it was National Health Care as the precursor to a Communist takeover. And next week? Who knows.

One thing I do know . . . and this really, truly angers me, is how childish, how cavalierly, all these so-called "shapers of public opinion" go about frightening the daylights out of a vast swath of the American public. It's frighteningly reminiscent of Lillian Hellman's "The Children's Hour."

For those who don't remember, Hellman's play is set in an all-girls boarding school run by two women, Karen Wright and Martha Dobie. Mary Tilford, an angry, spiteful student, runs away from the school, and to avoid being sent back, tells her grandmother that the two headmistresses are having a lesbian affair. The accusation -- which suits Mary's diabolic purposes even though she is constantly aware of the fact that it's a lie -- destroys the women's careers, relationships and lives. To my way of thinking, there are a lot of folks out there who are auditioning for the part of Mary Tilford -- spreading horrendous untruths because it suits their diabolic purposes.

The politics behind a Supreme Court nomination should be more like a championship chess match than a lamentably long-forgotten -- though eminently relevant -- Broadway Play.

So why does the current match feel more like Lillian Hellman than Gary Kasparov?

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May 28, 2009 in [The Second Oldest Profession](#), [The Supreme Court](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#) | [TrackBack](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**June 05, 2009**

## *Death, Taxes and . . . ?*

Ben Franklin is undoubtedly the most oft-quoted of all our Founding Fathers. Consider if you, a mere five "Franklinisms" that most literate people have heard, but likely don't know that they originated with the old boy:

- *"A place for everything, everything in its place."*
- *"God helps those who help themselves."*
- *"Time is Money, money is time."*
- *"Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today."*
- *"There never was a good war, or a bad peace."*

My favorite Franklin maxim -- bar none -- happens to be the one for which he is likely best-known:

*"Certainty? In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes."*

Over the course of decades I have added various third "certainties" to my favorite Franklinism:

- *". . . death, taxes and the swallows returning to Capistrano."*
- *". . . death, taxes and the L.A. Clippers having a lousy team."*
- *". . . death, taxes and Law 'n Order."*
- *". . . death, taxes and the Pres. in trouble with someone."*

This last one -- *the president being in trouble with someone* -- although not a fact of nature like the swallows, a natural fact like the Clippers or an Arbitron Actuality like *Law 'n Order* is, nonetheless true and certain. Consider for just a moment the following:

- When President and Mrs. Obama decided on getting a Portuguese water dog, owners of mixed-breeds and champions of dog pound adoptions criticized their choice. (Bo is hypo-allergenic, the Obama girls hyper.)
- When President and Mrs. Obama flew to New York in order to take in a Broadway show, the Fox Phalanx complained bitterly about their extravagance. (They wanted to fly commercial, but the Secret Service nixed it.)
- When it was announced that G.M. had declared bankruptcy, the President was accused of leading the country down the ruinous road to Socialism.

Yesterday, the President went to Egypt, gave a major address at Cairo University, and then went out to see the Pyramids of Giza. Today, the president toured Buchenwald with Nobel-laureate Elie Weisel. Anyone want to guess how many people he's in trouble with?

In some quarters, President Obama was castigated for speaking of his Muslim heritage and roots before a Muslim audience. Some self-proclaimed "right-thinking" folks bitterly objected to his quoting the Koran -- '*Be conscious of God and speak always the truth*' -- despite the fact that this passage drew more applause than any in his 55-minute speech. Those who objected seem to be unaware that in the same speech the president also quoted the Bible, made passing reference to the Talmud, and proudly announced that he is a Christian.

When was the last time -- or indeed the first? -- that an American president went before a large Muslim audience in a Muslim country and spoke not only of America's "unbreakable bond" with Israel, but of the Holocaust to boot? The president told the assembled students and faculty: "*Tomorrow, I visit Buchenwald, which was part of a network of camps where Jews were enslaved, tortured, shot, and gassed to death by the Third Reich . . . Six million Jews were killed -- more than the entire Jewish population of Israel today.*" Indeed, this took courage.

What came next took even more courage: "*Denying that fact [i.e. the Holocaust] is baseless, ignorant and hateful. Threatening Israel with destruction -- or repeating vile stereotypes about Jews -- is deeply wrong, and only serves to evoke in the minds of Israelis this most painful of memories while preventing the peace that the people of this region deserve.*"

And yet, that third certainty -- about the president being in trouble with someone -- was clearly on display. President Obama was roundly pilloried in some quarters for speaking fervently about the rights and aspirations of the Palestinians and the creation of a Palestinian state; as if in thus speaking, he was revealing himself to be an enemy of the Jewish State.

In speaking of the aims, rights and aspirations of the Palestinians, President Obama urged them to "abandon violence." *"Resistance through violence and killing is wrong and does not succeed."* He then spoke of how for centuries, *"black people in America suffered the lash of the whip as slaves, and the humiliation of segregation."* He stressed that it was not acts of violence that eventually brought about "full and equal rights," but *"a peaceful and determined insistence upon the ideals at the center of America's founding."*

Many who listened to the president's speech did not hear these words. Rather, what they did hear was what he had to say to the Israelis: that the United States "does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements." The president told the assemblage, *"This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop."* In other words, while many found fault with his speaking positively about Israel; about his stressing that the Holocaust did happen, and that 6,000,000 Jews did die; others criticized him for calling upon the Israelis to halt construction of further settlements.

Then again, the president scored negatively in other camps for what he did *not* say; for those issues which he did *not* address. He had precious little to say about how he hopes to bring Hamas or the Iranians -- who supply Hamas -- to accept a two-state solution. He did not talk about how continued American military action in Afghanistan and Pakistan will affect his vision for an eventual peace. While those on the right were pillorying him for even suggesting that America engage Iran without preconditions, the left was accusing the president of being inconsistent -- of disparaging violence even while sending drones into Pakistan.

*"Violence is a dead end,"* the president told them. *"It is a sign of neither courage nor power to shoot rockets at sleeping children, or to blow up old women on a bus. That is not how moral authority is claimed; that is not how it is surrendered."*

When read or listened to in its entirety, President Obama's speech is really quite remarkable. It showed courage and understanding, and was delivered with the eloquence and sensitivity for which he has become known in these parts. This speech was a way of introducing himself to a part of the world that "knows" America and her leaders more as stereotypes than as creatures of flesh

and blood. And despite being taken to task by the Fox Phalanx for "turning his back on America," the president has done the right thing.

Face it. If he is drawing fire from both Israelis and Arabs, from Jews and Muslims, from hyper-conservatives and ultra-liberals, then he certainly must be doing the right thing.

For the three certainties are "Death, taxes, and . . . ?"

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



**June 12, 2009**

## *Sam Goldwyn Was Right*

Back in mid-1920s, film producer Sam Goldwyn [*Schmuel Gelbfisz*] tried to interest his fellow moguls in an "investment with a purpose." It was Goldwyn's idea that he and his colleagues [Goldwyn would have undoubtedly been more comfortable calling them his *lahntsleit*] should purchase some distant, sparsely inhabited desert island. According to Goldwyn, they would then divide the purchase price -- whatever it might be -- equally amongst the natives of said island, in exchange for the right to make the islanders the "bad guys" or "villains" of all their future movies! Not surprisingly perhaps, Goldwyn's fellow moguls turned him down flat; to them it was utter *meshugas* -- insanity. What's worse, from that point on, they considered Goldwyn himself *meshugeh ahf toit* -- crazy as a loon. But as *g'mahtert* -- as farfetched -- as Goldwyn's scheme was, it did address a serious problem: society's need to blame the blameless, to make targets of the innocent.

Goldwyn simply couldn't live with the filmic stereotypes of his day; most if not all movie "heavies" were portrayed as Gypsies, pawnbrokers as Jews, drunkards as Irish, and drug addicts as Chinese. Although he may not have had the ability to put it all in words, he obviously understood the great power film had to shape both thinking and prejudice. By suggesting that he and the rest of the moguls purchase that as yet unidentified island, Goldwyn may have been amusing, but in his own way, was being deadly serious. He was highly sensitive to the fact that he and virtually every other major producer was a Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe. He was terribly concerned lest the Jewish community in general and the "motion picture *minyans*" in particular, become targets of blame during times of frustration, crisis and confusion.

Nonetheless, despite his perceptive intentions, Goldwyn's fellow moguls -- Mayer, Zukor, Fox, Selznick, Thalberg, Cohen, Loew, Warner and Lasky -- considered him *ah leytz un ah pyeahtz* -- both a buffoon and a clown.

Despite having less than a grade-school education and frequently coming off like a baggy-pants comedian, Samuel Goldwyn possessed an innately sophisticated understanding of the link between tough, uncertain, changing times and racism, bias and prejudice. He also grasped what tremendous power the "flickers" had to influence taste, style and people's "understanding" of the world around them. To his way of thinking, it was better to "blame it all on the folks of Tristan de Cunha" [who were going to be well paid for being the targets of blame] than to place real people in real harm.

Sam Goldwyn was right. In tough, rapidly-changing, challenging times (such as ours), some people seek to affix blame and then do something about it. They are the ones who see change as inherently evil; as the desired, self-conscious product of malevolent, internationally-connected conspirators. Sam Goldwyn took his role as a shaper of public opinion very seriously; he sought to exercise both restraint and even-handedness. Despite the fact that the term "mass media" did not yet exist, he -- along with his *lahnsleit* -- had just of much of an impact on society as the modern shapers of opinion, people like Limbaugh, Hannaty, Savage, O'Reilly, Gingrich, Beck and Buchanan.

Because of the fact that they always need to blame someone, to inflame the already confused and whip up the fires of frustration, people like James von Brunn seek to "cleanse" the world of those they see as "pernicious vermin." Now, I am *not* blaming the "Fox Phalanx" for von Brunn's atrocity; they are *not* the proximate cause of him taking a rifle into the Holocaust Museum and killing guard Stephen Tyrone Johns. They are obviously *not* responsible for the many decades this man spent as an obviously deranged, vicious, anti Semitic, Holocaust-denying bigot who firmly believed that Jews exercised malevolent control over virtually every aspect of American society, culture and economy.

But while they were not the *cause* of this 88-year old psychotic mess doing what he did -- or of Dr. George Tiller being shot point-blank in the head by "anti-abortion activist" Scott Roeder -- they nonetheless do bear responsibility for their words. As much as a Rush Limbaugh or Bill O'Reilly may take valuable air time to deplore Dr. Tiller's murder, they are the ones who spent months -- if not years -- referring to him as "Tiller the Baby Killer." O'Reilly once told his rapt viewers that Tiller "destroys fetuses for just about any reason right up the birth date for \$5,000." No, O'Reilly never told anyone to kill Dr. Tiller, but what did he expect his viewers and listeners to think? That O'Reilly was being hyperbolic? That he was merely exercising his First Amendment right to speak and was really nothing more than an entertainer? I wonder. Certainly those with microphones have advertisers. And where there are advertisers, there are demographic charts. And where there are demographic charts, there's a finely-

honed understanding of precisely the sort of person who is watching or listening . . .

Then too there is Rush Limbaugh, who has repeatedly:

- Accused President Obama of being "*more dangerous than Al Qaeda*"
- Proclaimed that "*He (Obama) has one thing in common with God -- he does not have a birth certificate*"
- Announced that "*Socialism is the Obama vision for America*"
- Said repeatedly that he hopes the president fails
- Has termed the president's recent trip to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Germany "*The International Apology Tour*" in which he "proclaimed that America is a Muslim nation," and flat-out said that "*The president equated the Holocaust with what Israel is doing to the Palestinians.*"

As Samuel Goldwyn or your *Tante Ruchel* would have said: *NARISHKHEYT!!*

What are we to understand Limbaugh's (or O'Reilly's, Beck's, Shnutt's or Savage's) motivation to be? If its higher ratings, then shame on them; they have placed their own narcissism far above the safety and security of the President of the United States and millions of utterly innocent, blameless people. If they truly believe what they are saying about Obama, abortionists, and all those folks they tar with the brush of "liberal" or "progressive" then what in the Hell do they expect their acolytes to do? Just sit back and continue being angry and frustrated? Doesn't Rush, like the rest of his conservative talk show brethren, bear some responsibility for the effect their words have?

Sam Goldwyn must be turning over in his grave.

I have spent the better part of the past 36 hours monitoring various conservative radio talk-shows in order to hear what they have to say about von Brunn's attack at the Holocaust Museum. In many cases, the hosts and commentators -- Schnitt, Savage, Van Susteren and Levine most notably -- have gone to great lengths to deathlessly inform their listeners/partisans/true believers that "There are just as many -- if not more -- crazy, violent, murderous whack jobs on the Left as on the Right." They want their listeners to know that *they* are *not* -- God forbid -- singling out conservatives for blame or opprobrium. And, unbelievably, Rush Limbaugh actually blamed the recent growth in anti-Semitic rhetoric on President Obama, Progressives and -- who else? -- Liberals. He actually went so far as to characterize James von Brunn as . . . ready for this? . . . A LEFTIST!

Permit me to quote his narcissistic rotundity at some length [emphasis added]:



*Very predictably, ladies and gentlemen, the media, the American left, is trying to score some political points as a result of this tragedy at the Holocaust Museum . . . and as predictable [sic], **they are trying to blame this on me**, other conservatives, and right-wingers. It's the traditional approach taken by the American left.*

*The facts of the case, however, are such that if we want to start assigning blame for this beyond this nutcase Jew-hater . . . and notice that very few people actually want to do that. They want to claim this guy didn't have the ability to act on his own. He only could act if he was inspired by somebody.*

*Well, who did he hate? He hated both Bushes. He hated neocons. He hated John McCain. He hated Republicans. He hated Jews, as well. He believed in an inside job conspiracy of 9-11. **This guy is a leftist if anything.** This guy's believes [sic], this guy's hate stems from influence that you find on the left, not on the right.*

*Now, this Jew hater who killed yesterday was a nut . . . . It is not helpful when a political party and a president and leaders of Congress engage in a very dangerous political game that creates anxiety, hostility, and down-right hate among citizens.*

*The Left runs our government. It is creating a very dangerous climate, folks, on purpose, for the purpose of distracting us so that they can accomplish their socialist games . . .*

Sorry Rush, but you've got it all wrong. Sorry Greta, you're having perpetual brain cramps; sorry: President Obama is not some alien bent on destroying America; he is not being guided by the "dangerous Communist operative" William Ayres or viewing society through the eyes of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright -- who just the other day told an interviewer that "my son" the president is a captive of all the Jews who surround him.

Yes, the Constitution does give all of you the freedom and protection to call the president "Nobama" and "Mr. Teleprompter," and to "knowingly" inform your audience of what his "true" motivation is. Yes, you all have the legal right to blame everything from 9/11 to the current state of the economy on "liberals," "leftists," and "socialists." No one has the right to stop you from calling anybody anything you wish, just so long George Carlin's "seven little words" are not employed.

But know this:

Words do carry consequences just as certainly as Constitutionally-guaranteed freedoms require responsibility. Just because you possess powerful

microphones that doesn't make you political scientists . . . just entertainers with big mouths, outsized egos and one hell of a lot of *chutzpah*.

Now there's a truth Sam Goldwyn understood.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**June 19, 2009**

## *Anyone Surprised?*

At about 3:30 this morning Eastern Daylight Time, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameni addressed a crowd at Tehran University. In his televised speech -- which took place during Friday prayers -- Khameni praised President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election as a "definite victory," and sloughed off any and all charges of vote-rigging. While he called on those who don't believe the results to use "proper legal avenues," such as requesting the recounting of ballots in their presence, he did not issue a call for a new vote.

Anyone surprised?

Khameni roundly criticized the street protests and proclaimed that "those who cause violence during demonstrations will be held accountable." Speaking of Ahmadinejad's 11-million vote victory over his primary rival, Mir Hossein Moussavi, the Supreme Leader lectured, "Eleven million votes difference? Sometimes there's a margin of 100,000 or 200,000, or 1 million maximum. Then one can doubt maybe there has been some rigging or manipulation or irregularities . . . . But there's a difference of 11 million votes. How can vote rigging happen?"

"How can vote rigging happen?" Let us not insult anyone's intelligence by presuming to answer the question. Unbelievably, what Khameni posits -- and expects people to swallow -- is that the larger the criminal haul, the less likely a felony has taken place! In its own way, it's reminiscent of the old Tammany tyrant George Washington "Boss" Plunkett, who famously proclaimed that "In politics, there are two kinds of graft: honest graft and dishonest graft."

Ignoring for the nonce the hundreds of thousands of protesters taking to the streets of Tehran in support of Moussavi, the Supreme Leader proclaimed the election, "A great show in which people indicated their responsibility towards the destiny of the country . . . . It depicted very well people's solidarity with their establishment."

Oh really? What about the hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of folks downtown, all dressed in black and green? With precisely which "establishment" were they expressing "solidarity?"

It should be noted that one of the unsung heroes of what is quickly becoming known as the "Twitter Revolution" is a State Department official named Jared Cohen. Cohen, who at 27 is the youngest member of the State Department's policy planning staff, convinced the heads of Twitter to delay a scheduled maintenance of its global network (which would have cut off service) while Iranians were using the service to swap information and inform the outside world about the mushrooming protests around Tehran. As a result of Cohen's urging, Twitter remained operative, and outsiders could read such tweets as:

- " . . . don't listen to what iran govt says u can or can't do! You can report the pics/vids coming from Twitter!" and
- "We need ppl around world helping to raise the issues put pressure on Iranian gyvt."

After warning all those protesters that they continue gathering at their own peril, Kahmeni then criticized the international media for having the "temerity" to report that the election pitted "people who support the government against those who oppose it." He then proclaimed that all four presidential candidates - - Achmadinejad, Moussavi, Mohsen Rezaie and Mehdi Karrubi -- all support the Islamic revolution. Predictably, he also took a swipe at the United States, Great Britain and Israel, labeling them "Zionist ill-wishers."

Anyone surprised?

There is no telling where all this will lead. Some in the West see the massive protests as the opening salvo in what may be the downfall of the Islamic Republic. Then too, there are others who warn -- and fear -- that the millions who support reform will wind up being bowled over; an Iranian Tienanmen Square.

And then there is the American reaction. President Obama has been, shall we say, intentionally "measured" in his reaction and response. Predictably, suspects both usual and surprising have attacked the president for not being far more forceful, far more vocal, in his support for democracy and freedom in Iran. What they are saying is that the president should be exercising far more belligerency -- something like "Ayatollah Kahmeni, tear down this revolution!" -

- and far less diplomacy. The president's initial response was the soul of diplomacy. First, he said that he was "deeply troubled by the violence," and then went on to say that since no international observers were allowed to monitor the fairness of the election,

*"I can't state definitely one way or another what happened with respect to the election. But what I can say is that there appears to be a sense on the part of the people who were so helpful and so engaged and so committed to democracy who now feel betrayed. And I think it's important that, moving forward, whatever investigations take place are done in a way that is not resulting in bloodshed and is not resulting in people being stifled in expressing their views."*

Anyone surprised? And here I don't mean to ask if anyone's surprised that the president is being attacked by Republicans for being "squishy soft" and "not standing up for freedom and democracy like President Reagan." Rather, I am asking if anyone's surprised at how many people seem to be misunderstanding precisely what the president's game plan is vis-à-vis Iran.

Many of the president's most starry-eyed partisans have suggested that the current ferment in Iran is due -- at least in part -- to his appeals to Iranians and Muslims. According to *Washington Post* columnist Robert Kagan, the president "Never meant to spark political upheaval in Iran, much less encourage the Iranian people to take to the streets." Rather, Kagan opines, the president's diplomatic strategy calls for dealing directly with the Iranian government -- especially over the issue of nuclear weapons -- regardless of who that government may be.

I for one do not agree with Kagan. I believe the president's response to the unfolding events in Iran has been measured for a different reason: that he doesn't want to make this a clash between America and the Imams. He has correctly concluded that if any reform or "liberalization" is to take place, it must be as a result of the clash of ideas -- between the Iranian people themselves.

As I write this, word has gone out that the House of Representatives has just voted overwhelmingly (405-1) to condemn Kahmeni's crackdown on demonstrators and the government's interference with Internet and cell phone communication. (Libertarian Ron Paul cast the lone dissenting vote.) In the eyes of House Republicans -- who initiated the measure -- its passage is meant to serve as a not-so-veiled criticism of President Obama. To House Democrats, it is one of those measures for which one votes "Yay" while firmly holding one's nose. According to House Foreign Affairs Committee chair Howard Berman, "It is not up to us to decide who should run Iran, much less determine the real winner of the June 12 election." Up to this point, Berman is solidly echoing President Obama. What comes next is, as they say, "the rub": "But we must

reaffirm our strong belief that the Iranian people have a fundamental right to express their views about the future of their country freely and without intimidation."

Whether Iranian protests lead to greater reform or repression remains to be seen. But regardless of what happens in the short-run, the genie is out of the bottle. And once out, genies, like spilled water, are next to impossible to put back.

Anyone surprised?

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June 19, 2009 in [Barack Obama](#), [Iran](#), [Politics](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(3\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



**June 26, 2009**

## *The Thriller's Gone*

Back in late 1968, early 1969, I wrote a really bad futuristic short story -- blessedly long since forgotten -- entitled *Hello Goodbye*. Taking place in London in the year 2033, the story was in the form of a long newspaper article reporting on the funeral of Lord Paul McCartney, the last surviving member of the Beatles, who had passed away at age 91. The scene was a cold, darkly-cloudy-drizzly late November morning at London's Bunhill Fields Cemetery, the final resting place of such immortals as Daniel Defoe, Thomas Hardy, John Bunyan, William Blake and now, Lord McCartney. Peopling the story were hundreds -- perhaps thousands -- of extremely elderly men and women. Most were decked out in ancient, ill-fitting Levis, moldy navy pea coats, bandannas and beads. Nearly all were leaning on canes, tearfully daubing their eyes with large red railroad handkerchiefs. Under the canopy at the front of the crowd, a foursome of aged gray-haired musicians was playing a trio of Beatle classics: *I Will* from "The White Album," *There's a Place*, from "Please Please Me;" and *Hello Goodbye* from "Magical Mystery Tour." Between these pieces, the minister, an elderly Church of England Deacon (who strangely looked an awful lot like an octogenarian Mick Jagger) attempted to deliver the eulogy. Being nearly as disconsolate as the throngs he was addressing, his voice could barely be heard anywhere but under the canopy. Other speakers included the 86-year old Peter Noone ("Herman's Hermits"), Marianne Faithful (age 87) and the "Who's" Roger Daltry (age 89).

As I recall, the three spoke of Lord Paul's lyric brilliance, his long-lasting partnership with the late John Lennon (who had passed away seven years earlier at age 85) and of the tremendous impact he had made on an entire generation in terms of fad, fashion and passion.

And of how an era had definitely come to an end. . .

I had not thought about this long-forgotten "literary" travesty for nearly a quarter of a century . . . until yesterday when word came over the Internet that Michael Jackson, the "King of Pop," had died at the unbelievably young age of 50. For with his all too real passing -- much like the fictional demise of "Lord" McCartney -- an era has definitely come to an end. And just as Paul McCartney and the Beatles exercised tremendous influence over the tastes, ideas and passions of a generation, so too did Michael. In fact, the two both overlapped and intertwined in several eerie ways. First, up until the time of his death, Michael Jackson owned the rights to much of the Beatle musical catalog. Second, he and Sir Paul [to give him his real title] did collaborate on at least two pieces --- *Say, Say, Say* and *Ebony and Ivory*. And third, it is likely that Jacko, who in one of his last incarnations took to wearing colorfully embellished satin jackets festooned with gold braiding and brass buttons, took the idea from Sir Paul and the Fab Four -- just look at what the boys are wearing on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. McCartney was knighted by the Queen of England; Michael -- the "King of Pop" -- was enthroned by the public.

Whether or not one was a fan of Jackson's music, there is no denying that he is was and always shall be an electrifying performer. The moon-walking Jackson was probably the most imaginative and influential dancer since Fred Astaire first took the stage in the early 1920s. With the 1983 release of his zombie-themed album "Thriller," he all but single-handedly invented the music video and quickly made it an art form. In terms of his artistic longevity and the ability to reinvent both his style and onstage persona, Jackson was *sui generis*; a performer without peer.

However, beyond Michael Jackson the performer -- the singer/lyricist/dancer/actor/"King of Pop"/"Gloved One" -- there is, of course, Michael Jackson, the human train wreck. For more than a generation, both public and press alike have been mesmerized by the ever-changing, eccentric-to-the-point-of-absurdity, "Wacko Jacko." Whether it be his ever-evolving facial features and pigmentation, his retrogression from adorable, immensely talented 8-year old to preposterous middle-aged quasi-hermaphrodite, or the many peaks and valleys of his personal, financial and sexual life, we haven't been able to take our eyes off him for a long, long time. To my way of thinking, this says far more about ourselves and the times we inhabit than



about Michael Jackson. Having grown up in and around the world of celebrity - indeed, the Jackson Family compound was just up the hill from my parents' home -- I know how difficult it is to remain sane when the spotlight is always on; how much more difficult -- and terrifying -- when that spotlight dims or is extinguished.

Although the cult of personality and celebrity likely goes back to the time of the Greeks, it took the 20th century to make of it an immensely successful cottage industry. The lionization and adulation afforded the likes of a Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Rudolph Valentino or Charles Chaplin [who absolutely fascinated Jackson] in the 'teens and 'twenties; a Clark Gable, Cary Grant or Russ Columbo in the 'thirties; or a Frank Sinatra in the 'forties, is but a brief candle flicker compared to the perpetual blaze surrounding a James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley or Michael Jackson. One huge difference is that in days of yore, what we "knew" about our idols was precisely what their publicists wanted us to know: that they were good, high-minded folks who loved their mothers, were passionate about puppies, and were almost too good to be true. Over the past generation or generation-and-a-half, we have become addicted to "knowing" (or having exposed for our own enjoyment and entertainment) every blemish, foible, phobia or prosecutable offense of those in the public eye. The media's glare is, of course, far far more intense today than yesterday. And we, the public are far far more addicted and insatiable today than yesterday. The sad fact is that today, we "know" far far more about folks in the public glare than we do about the people who live next door.

Although I have long recognized Michael Jackson's immense talent, I can't say that I was much of a fan after the breakup of the Jackson Five. My tastes in rock or popular music have always been more attuned to Crosby, Still, Nash and Young, the Byrds or the Beatles; I am the sort who will pick "Tommy" over "Thriller" eight days a week. And yet, I daresay that like most, I have paid more than my fair share of attention to Michael Jackson's train wreck of a life. It has been buoyant. It has been sad. It has been maddening. It has also been a thriller.

Like Paul McCartney and the Beatles, he has exercised tremendous influence over an entire generation of newer musical artists like Justin Timberlake and the "Backstreet Boys." Like the real Sir Paul, his work has been "covered" by a diverse group of artists such as "Soundgarden's" Chris Cornell, "Fall Out Boy", and James Chance and the "Contortions."

But just as with the fictional "Lord Paul" from *Hello Goodbye*, the "Thriller's" gone.

May he rest in peace.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**July 03, 2009**

## *You Don 't Have To Be A Star . . . But*

Finally, after more than six months, Minnesota has two United States Senators.

Finally, after more than half a year, the United States Senate has its full compliment of members.

Finally, Alan Stuart "Al" Franken\* can add "United States Senator" to an already impressive resume.

And yet, to listen or watch various conservative entertainers, pundits and assorted troglodytes, one might think that the "Greatest Deliberative Body in the World" is about to be invaded by a debauched, foul-mouthed, plague-ridden scandal-mongering deviant.

And no, they are not referring to Senators Larry Craig, John Ensign or David Vitter. They are referring to Senator Franken who, unlike the aforementioned "gentlemen" has been married to the same woman for 32 years without a hint of scandal. To be certain there are all sorts of rumors about Senator Franken's past actions, addictions and activities, but most all of them were started by Franken himself -- that's just part of the job of a self-denigrating satirist.

The one charge his detractors have endlessly tossed about on television, radio and the Internet is that Franken lacks *gravitas* -- that indefinable something which separates the professionals from the poseurs.

"Al Franken," they monotonously posit, "is nothing more than a third-rate, potty-mouthed comedian from *Saturday Night Live* . . . and we all know what *that* means . .

. And if it weren't for being an incredibly minor celebrity, who in the world would have ever heard of him?"

By this, they are of course inferring that:

1. Anyone associated with *Saturday Night Live* is nothing more than a clown or comedian.
2. Being a clown, comedian, or mere celebrity is no qualification for political office.
3. Al Franken is all three, and is therefore clearly out of his element.
4. Franken will be an embarrassment.

Hold on there for just a second. Al Franken is a lot more than some "third-rate comedian":

- He is a graduate of Harvard College.
- He is a best-selling author with six books to his credit.
- He is an actor who has either starred or been featured in a dozen-and-a-half films.
- He is a gifted political satirist and pundit who until just before launching his senate campaign, had a much admired radio talk show on the *Air America* network.
- He is a patriot who has, over the past decade, conducted overseas tours entertaining American troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as "handshake tours" to military hospitals all over the world.
- And yes, he is a celebrity . . .

So let's ask the question: Does being a celebrity disqualify one from office? According to the likes of Hannaty, Limbaugh, O'Reilly *et al* it certainly does . . . at least when it comes to Al Franken.

(In support of full disclosure, it must be noted that in many of his satiric books -- most notably *Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot and Other Observations* and *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*, he gleefully skewers the aforementioned with a pen that could only have been dipped in Jonathan Swift's inkwell.)

All those who continually classify Senator-elect Franken as "nothing more than a celebrity" suffer from a curious inconsistency. "Who," we may well ask, "Who is the *one* elected official they revere more than any other; the one who more than any other successfully led the country along the path of peace, prosperity and honor?"

Why the greatest of all celebrities who ever got elected to office -- Ronald Reagan, that's who! Could it be then that what these guys are really, truly disparaging are celebrities who happen to be liberal Democrats?

Hmmmmm.

Now, the mere fact that one has achieved a certain level of celebrity should by no means be a disqualifier for leadership. Then too, achieving a certain level of celebrity by no means makes one qualified to be a representative, senator, governor or president . . . but it sure can help one get elected. For in hard-ball campaigning, the first and highest hurdle to clear is getting your name out there; making yourself known. Unless one is already famous -- or in some cases *infamous* -- this can cost an arm and a leg and a pancreas gland. For those whose names, faces and basic accomplishments are already known -- i.e. those who have already achieved a level of celebrity -- that hurdle is measured in millimeters, not miles.

Neither Ronald Reagan nor Al Franken, of course, are the first celebrities to succeed in getting themselves elected. That honor likely goes to a late 19th century Shakespearean actor named **Julius Kahn** who the good people of San Francisco elected to Congress in 1898. Kahn (1861-1924) would be reelected 11 times and serve three terms as Chair of the House Committee on Military Affairs.

Since then nearly two-dozen men and women have used their celebrity status in order to get elected to office. Among them are:

- **Helen Gahagan-Douglas:** Broadway Actress and wife of actor Melvin Douglas, she served two terms in the House from California, and lost a senate election to Richard Nixon, who called her "The Pink Lady." In turn, Rep. Gahagan-Douglas was the first to call the future president "Tricky Dicky." She was a liberal Democrat.
- **George Murphy:** One of Shirley Temple's costars who served a single six-year term in the Senate from California. Murphy was a conservative Republican. Topical songwriter Tom Lehrer wrote a piece about him -- "Now we have a senator who can really sing and dance!"
- **Sonny Bono:** A conservative Republican Congressman from Palm Springs, California, he took quite a while to figure out that being a celebrity and being a member of Congress were two very different things.
- **Fred Grandy:** "Gopher" on *The Love Boat*, Grandy, a graduate of Harvard, served four terms in the House from Iowa. He was a moderate Republican.
- **Fred Thompson:** Originally an attorney with the Watergate Committee, Thompson went on to a movie career -- frequently portraying the president -- and did several seasons as D.A. Arthur Branch on *Law and Order*. Thompson served two six-year terms in the senate from Tennessee, and tried to capture the Republican presidential nomination in 2008 . . .
- **Bill Bradley:** NBA star with the New York Knicks. Bradley, who was also an Olympian, a graduate of Princeton and a Rhodes Scholar, was a liberal Democrat who served three terms in the senate from New Jersey. Vied for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2000 . . .

- **Jesse "The Body" Ventura:** Professional wrestler and actor who became a one-term Governor of Minnesota. Ironically, Ventura acted in the 1987 film *Predator* with future California Governor **Arnold Schwarzenegger** and future Kentucky Gubernatorial candidate **Sonny Landham**.
- **Jim Bunning:** Hall of Fame pitcher (224-184, 3.27 era, 2,855 strikeouts), now in his third term as senator from Kentucky; a conservative Republican.
- **Wilmer "Vinegar Bend" Mizell:** Spent nine seasons pitching for Cardinals, Pirates and Mets; served three terms in Congress from a North Carolina district; a conservative Republican.
- **Jim Ryun:** For many years, the World record-holder in the mile (3:51:1); served five terms in the House from Kansas' Second District; conservative Republican.
- **Heath Schuler:** A first-round pick of the Washington Redskins in 2001, Schuler was a so-so quarterback for five NFL seasons. Now in his second term as Representative from North Carolina's 11th District. Moderate-to-conservative Democrat.
- **Steve Largent:** Hall of Fame wide receiver for Seattle Seahawks; served 4 terms in the House from Oklahoma's First District; conservative Republican.
- **J.C. Watts:** Two-time Orange Bowl MVP (1980, 81) and Canadian Football League Quarterback; served four terms in the House from Oklahoma's Fourth District; a conservative Republican.
- **George W. Bush:** Son of President George H.W. Bush; grandson of Senator Prescott Bush; managing partner of Texas Rangers baseball team. Conservative Republican.

To the best of my knowledge, I don't recall Hannaty, Limbaugh, O'Reilly or the rest ever question the qualifications of folks like J.C. Watts, Steve Largent, Jim Ryun, Jim Bunning or any other conservative Republican celebrity. I do know that they have disparaged the likes of Chicago-area Representative Jesse Jackson, Jr. (whom they claim would never have been elected if his father wasn't famous); Rhode Island Representative Patrick Kennedy (his father is Senator Ted); and now, of course, Al Franken. Perhaps their problem isn't so much with their celebrity or "stardom" but with their politics.

I predict that Al Franken will become a pretty good senator. Having read all of his books I can tell you that not only is he both witty and bright; he is also very well versed on a lot of issues. He also cares passionately about making this a better world, much in the mold of his political mentor, the late Senator Paul David Wellstone. I predict that as the years go by, Franken's career as a writer/comedian/satirist/radio talk show host will fade from memory . . . except when the boys and girls Fox remind us. . .

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\* *Al Franken's election to the U.S. Senate marks an interesting bit of American history. Minnesota is now the only state in American history to have elected 4 Jewish senators. Moreover, Al Franken is the fourth Jewish person in a row to occupy this senate seat. He takes over the seat that had previously been held for one term by Republican Norm Coleman; Coleman took over the seat held for two terms by the late Democrat Paul David Wellstone; Wellstone had defeated Republican Rudy Boschwitz, who himself had served two terms. In other words, this marks the sixth term in a row that this seat has been held by a Jew. Really quite remarkable when you consider how few Jewish people live in Minnesota. Hey wait a second . . . come to think of it, my maternal grandma, Grandma Ann, was born in St. Paul way back in 1896 . . .*

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**July 10, 2009**

## *Sarah Palin: Another One Bites the Dust*

Ninety-nine years ago this month a young sports writer named Franklin P. Adams published an eight-line poem in the *New York Evening Mail* whose refrain is still recognizable even if its author and content are not:

*These are the saddest of possible words:*

*"Tinker to Evers to Chance."*

*Trio of bear cubs, and fleeter than birds,*

*Tinker and Evers and Chance.*

*Ruthlessly pricking our gonfalon\* bubble*

*Making a Giant hit into a double -*

*Words that are heavy with nothing but trouble:*

*"Tinker to Evers to Chance."*

(\* A long medieval banner or flag.)

"Tinker to Evers to Chance" is of course just one of many trios that fall trippingly off the tongue. Consider too:

- Wynken, Blynken & Nod.
- Shadrach, Mesach & Abednego.
- Crosby, Stills & Nash.

- Harvard, Princeton & Yale.

With all the above trios, there is an obvious linkage:

- "Tinker, Evers & Chance" were three infielders with the Chicago Cubs.
- "Shadrach, Mesach & Abednego" were three who survived the fiery furnace.
- "Wynken, Blynken & Nod" were three fishermen sailing and fishing in the stars.
- "Crosby, Still & Nash" are three superb rock musicians.
- "Harvard, Princeton & Yale" are America's three oldest Ivy League colleges.

There are now a couple of new trios to add to the litany:

- Gingrich, Vitter & Craig
- Ensign, Sanford & Palin

For those who have been out of town, the first trio is made up of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, current Louisiana Senator David Vitter, and former Idaho Senator Larry Craig. The second triad consists of current Nevada Senator John Ensign, current South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford and the "*As of today and supposed to become former*" Alaska Governor Sarah Palin.

As with the above referenced trios, "Gingrich, Vitter & Craig" and "Ensign, Sanford & Palin" also possess obvious linkage. To wit:

- Both trios are made up of self righteously confident conservative politicians whose public posture turned out to be dangerously divergent from their private practice.
- In both cases (with the possible exception of former Senator Craig) the trios are made up of individuals who had until recently been referenced as potential 2012 Republican presidential contenders. Today, they are in that collective category called "*Rotza ruck!*"

In the main, conservative commentators, faced with the necessity having to write or say something -- *anything* -- about the moral/ethical lapses of a Gingrich, Vitter, Craig, Ensign or Sanford or the sheer 1984-ish absurdity of a Sarah Palin [Orwell: "War is Peace." Palin: "Resignation is advancement."] have, without batting an eyelash proclaimed, "Well, the liberals are far, far worse!" Within the past few weeks, they have seen most of their presidential hopes go up in smoke or, in the case of Governor Palin, simply bite the dust:

Instead of announcing that *Sarah Palin* is resigning her office in midterm, Fox Noise ran a crawler proclaiming, "Palin will not seek a second term." Rather



than attempt to decipher or explain what she said at her press conference or in her interview with Andrea Mitchell, most conservative commentators have gone on the offensive -- attacking "lefties" for making Palin's life so impossible that resignation became a necessity. One commentator, Milwaukee's Mark Belling went so far as to blame Palin's downfall on . . . are you ready for this? . . . the SDS! No really! While filling in for Limbaugh this past Tuesday, Belling ranted on and on about how those who ". . .admire and support Castro; Che Gueverra, whose t-shirts they still wear; Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua; Robert Mugabe in Africa -- African self determination; Idi Amin in Africa; Ho Chi Minh; Mao -- remember how they were running around in the '60s with the *Little Red Book*?" Egad! *These* are the folks who forced Pain to resign?

When Nevada Senator *John Ensign* announces that his parents have given his ex-mistress and her husband nearly \$100,000 based on "humanitarian concern for two friends," the conservative press applauds their generosity. There is nary a peep about the fact that Ensign, a prominent member of the Christian men's organization "Promise Keepers," has publicly admitted that he has had a long-term relationship with another man's wife. [It should be noted that one of "Promise Keepers" core beliefs is, "*A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer and obedience to God's word in the power of the Holy Spirit.*"]

That when Governor *Mark Sanford* publicly admits that he lied to his wife, his cabinet and the people of South Carolina, and disappeared for five days so that he could travel to Buenos Aires and have a rendezvous with his Argentine "soul mate," all Rush Limbaugh can say is, "I guess we have learned something. Republicans like sex too," and then lament that Sanford "could have been another Kennedy . . . without the Mafia connections." So far as El Rushbo was concerned, if anyone were to be surprised by what Sanford was admitting to, it was likely the fault of the Democrats. "How's that?" you ask. Well, try and follow Limbaugh's logic: "Up until now (whether or not "Republicans like sex") has been debatable. Republicans are these church going, moralistic no-fun-in-life kind of people **according to the libs**. Mark Sanford developed . . . an email frienship, started innocently, the girl from Ipanema. He went down to Argentina to see the girl from Ipanema." (*sic* -- emphasis added).

[*If I weren't concerned about being labeled a "G.D.G.E." -- a 'G.D. Geographic Elitist,' I would hasten to inform Rush that Ipanema is in Brazil and that Brazil is definitely not in Argentina. But I am concerned, so won't mention it.*]

With the recent demise of such front-line players as Ensign, Sanford & Palin -- and understanding that Gingrich, Vitter and Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal bit the dust quite a while ago -- who's left on the GOP bench? Mike Huckabee? Mitt Romney? Michael Steele? How about a tickwt of Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter?

When will the conservative entertainers ever figure out that just because we Americans are for the most part a good understanding and forgiving folk does not mean that we are all fools. There is a big difference between being a truly repentant sinner -- otherwise known as a human being -- and a hypocritical blowhard. A vast majority of Americans understand that difference. Too bad so few of them are on radio or television.

Who will be the next one to bite the dust?

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July 10, 2009 in [All Politics All The Time](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



July 17, 2009

## *National Health & Care*

The following has actually been said for the record on Capitol Hill:

- "Without question, there is a deliberate attempt to retard recovery. . . We have charged the administration with planning to impoverish the country in order to make its communistic experiments acceptable."
- "There is an organized effort to protect the first Communist president of the United States . . . against adverse criticism."
- "The nation may require a more blistering rebuke from the Supreme Court and the pressure of an aroused and enraged public opinion to restrain this Congress from continuing to be the tool of those who would destroy the Constitution. But the time is not too distant when those who believe in constitutional government will speak with force and finality."
- "The people of my district elected me to represent all the people of this country, as is the case with all the other members of this body. And in order to do this they intended me to be governed by reason, and not by propaganda, and to use my own best judgment; and before I will fail in that duty and violate the oath I took by voting for and helping to fasten upon my country which would destroy its economic system, a thing which I know to be unsound, I will, if necessary, let the people retire me at the end of this session."
- "To pay the medical bills and hospital bills of individuals . . . is socialism. It moves this country in a direction which is not good for anyone . . . . It charts a course from which there is no turning back."
- "No one can doubt for a moment that this is simply another step toward the neutralization of private responsibility which will eventually end when the Government assumes complete control over the destinies of all our citizens from cradle to grave. The principle established here, when carried to its logical conclusion cannot fail also to be damaging to two segments of our free enterprise system -- our physicians and our insurance industry."

"Blah, blah, blah," I can hear you responding. "Big deal! You can hear all this puerile claptrap on CSPAN every day. And the stuff you hear on talk radio is even worse So what else is new?"

What *else* is new? Sorry to burst your bubble, but we're not even within 45 years of what's new. For you see, the first three quotes are taken from the floor debate over the Social Security Act of 1935; the last two from the July 1965 debate on Medicare and Medicaid.\* And you thought all this was said last week!

In comparison to the dire warnings, predictions and base scare tactics being used here and now in 2009, not much has changed. Oh perhaps the term "communistic" has been replaced with "socialism" and today there are tales of all those poor abused Canadians who must travel to Washington, Michigan or upstate New York just to get a boil lanced; but aside from a few style points, the nature and content of opposition are basically the same.

What *has* undoubtedly changed is the willingness of the "loyal opposition" to be "loyal," let alone civil. You see, despite all the negative verbiage and dire predictions, Republicans were one heck of a lot more supportive of the Social Security Act of 1935 and 1965 (the one that created Medicare/Medicaid). In 1935, 16 senate Republicans joined 60 Democrats in voting "aye," as opposed to a mere 5 voting "nay." Over on the House side, 81 Republicans voted for Social Security as opposed to a mere 15 voting against. Then too, in 1965, 13 of 43 Senate Republicans voted in favor of Medicare, and 70 of 138 House Republicans. The current health care proposal will be lucky to get even two Republican votes in the Senate or as many as five in the House.

Another difference is that as opposed to 1935 and 1965, much of today's opposition and "scaring the pants off the public at all costs" has more to do with keeping the well-heeled happy than basic political philosophy. Without question, there are powerful interests groups with extraordinarily deep pockets who are willing to do whatever it takes to keep their clients -- insurance companies and hospitals in the main -- happy, healthy and profitable. On the other hand, there are lots of politicians -- mostly Republican but Democrats as well -- who are seemingly more concerned about winning the next election than supporting that which a vast majority of the public wants -- some form of national health care. (Don't take my word for it; a recent CNN/Opinion Research Corporation survey reveals that **72%** of those polled *"favor increasing the federal government's influence over the nation's health care system in an attempt to lower costs and provide health care coverage to more Americans,"* as compared to **27%** who oppose such a move."

The campaign we choose to call "National Health sCare" has put the words "Socialized medicine" on the lips of people who haven't the slightest idea of what that term really means. Let's be clear: physicians are *not* going to be employed by the federal government; health care decisions are *not* going to be made by nameless, faceless bureaucrats with 9th grade educations; health care is *not* going to be rationed.

The campaign has also convinced a solid minority that President Obama's proposal is more plot than platform; that it is merely "one more step" in "a concerted effort "to have "the federal government take over virtually everything." Back in 1935 -- and to a lesser extent 1965 -- many of those who expressed grave doubts -- even fundamental opposition -- to extending the reach and influence of the federal government nonetheless voted to give the president what he wanted. Today? Not a snowball's chance.

I doubt there is one amongst us who does not have a story to tell about how a health crisis turned our family, our finances, our future, topsy-turvy. About how the ever-rising cost of health insurance and health care is giving us sleepless nights and knotted intestines. About a loved one who has become impoverished due to their need for extended care.

We cry out for assistance. We understand that no program will be perfect, but that having no program is not an answer. Despite it all, we maintain the firm conviction that in America, we are not on our own; we all in this together.

And no National Health sCare campaign will ever convince us otherwise.

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\* In order, the speakers and Congressional Record references are:

- Sen. Thomas Schall, R-MN (1878-1935) 6/13/35 p. 9,539 col. 2.
- Rep. Daniel Alden Reed, R-NY (1875-1959), 4/17/35 p. 5,891, col. 1.
- Rep. Frederick James Sisson, D-NY (1879-1949) 4/19/35 p. 6,049, col 2.
- Sen. Carl Curtis, R-NE (1905-2000), 8/8/65 vol. 111 part. 12 p. 15,870.
- Sen. Karl Mundt, R-SD (1900-1974), 8/9/65 vol. 111, part 12 p. 16,122.
- Anyone interested in reading the debates can go to [Congressional Debate on Social Security](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



July 24, 2009

## *Help! Help! Paranoid People are Everywhere!!*

The other day, while listening to yet another conspiracy theorist blather on about Barack Obama's "true place of birth," I was motivated to do a bit of Googling, and learned the following:

- That "Elvis is Alive" brings up more than 76,000 sites. Heck there is even an "Elvis is Alive Museum" in Laurel Mississippi. [The "Elvis is Alive" Museum Website](#)
- That typing in "Franklin Delano Rosenfeld" reveals more than 97,500 sites that either discuss or "reveal the truth" about Roosevelt's ethnicity. What is more, there is even a website that "proves" that the only two non-Jewish presidents were Kennedy and Nixon " . . . and they were disposed of!" [Roosevelt was Jewish!](#)
- That the term "Illuminati" -- one of the earliest of the "New World Order" conspiracies -- fetches nearly 80,000 sites. See [The New World Order](#)
- That when one types in **Bilderberg+conspiracy+Obama**, there suddenly pops up more than **1.8 million** sites that give credence to yet another outrageous bit of piffle. [Barack Obama and the Bilderberg Conspiracy](#)
- According to Google, if you are one of those who believe that global warming is a hoax, there are 2,160,000 places you can look for verification that you are correct, not cracked. For but one example, go to [Global Warming Hoax](#)

And then there are the so-called "Birthers."

Inputting the words **Obama+birth+certificate** gives you a staggering 4,220,000 possible places to go. As but one example, you must try [Positive Proof That Obama is an Alien](#).

Switching over to LexisNexis, and again inputting the words **Obama+birth+certificate**, I came up with precisely 172 places to go. "Why so few?" you are likely asking. Because LexisNexis deals primarily -- if not exclusively -- with reputable news sources, not with the "vast depths" of the Internet. These 172 sites are, for the most part, editorials decrying the canal water the birthers are demanding we imbibe. As but one example of sanity and logic, go to [Birth of a Nutty Nation](#)

So why all this "birther" blather? How in the world can people sit in front of TV cameras or behind radio microphones and actually question whether or not President Obama was born in the United States? Are their listeners or viewers really that stupid, gullible and detached from reality? Are they doing this for the sake of ratings or entertainment?

Or, is there something else going on here?

The purpose of this piece is neither to rebut, debunk nor deflate the charges and arguments of these broadcast buffoons. To do so in any way, shape or form would be to lend credence to their caterwauling. And, to give them even so much as a molecule of the precious stuff would indeed be a crime against reason. No, our purpose is rather to spend a few moments hanging out at the corner of "Conspiracy and Paranoia." (By the way, a Google search of *Conspiracies in American History* brings us a staggering 3,720,000 different places to go. Why there's even an "Alternative News & History Network" website: [Conspiracy Planet](#))

Almost 75 years ago, commentator H.L. Mencken wrote:

*"The central belief of every moron is that he is the victim of a mysterious conspiracy against common rights and desserts. He ascribes all his failure to get on in this world, all of his congenital incapacity and damnfoolishness, to the machinations of werewolves assembled in Wall Street or some such other den of infamy."*

In other words, when today's reality turns out to be a bit different from yesterday's -- as it inevitably must -- there are, just as inevitably, those whose fear fuels paranoia. Where most might greet the "new today" with anything ranging from detached resignation to excited curiosity, others turn away in fear; for these, "yesterday" becomes beatified -- a paragon of moral perfection. Moreover, the more that "today" and "tomorrow" change, the better, the more perfect "yesterday" becomes.

Better the devil you know . . ."

And of course, when going off to do battle with "the devil you don't know," no weapon, no cache of arms is off limits. Even if one must lie, double-deal or rewrite history it's all permissible, for as the old saying goes:

*Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum* -- "If you wish for peace, arm for war.

Since its inception, America has been the "Land of the Free, and the Home of the Brave." And, according to the paranoid -- those who are scared to death by change -- it has also been a paradise for plotters. Anyone with a bit of time on their hands would do well to read Richard Hofstadter's incredibly trenchant essay [The Paranoid Style in American Politics](#). You will be amazed to see how there truly is nothing new under the sun:

- **Looking backward from 1776:** As the new nation is about to be born -- an entirely different "tomorrow" -- a theory sweeps through the colonies declaring that ten years earlier Benjamin Franklin traveled to Europe to begin assembling "a vast conspiracy of Masons" including "the surviving networks of John Milton, Richelieu and Leibnitz." This conspiracy seeks to make Franklin, "the Master Mason," the leader of the world.
- **In the mid 1840s:** A time of economic panic and collapse, the "Nativist Party" comes into existence. Its leaders proclaim that America's problems are due to all the Irish Catholics the Pope has "sent across the seas" in order to take over the country and make it Catholic. As a result, churches are burned and people lynched.
- **In the mid 1930s:** With unemployment still high, the sweeping growth of the federal government under the Roosevelt Administration, "Brown Shirts" "Silver Shirts" and Father Coughlin -- the "Radio Preacher" declare that the president is leader of a Jewish cabal to bring America under the wing of the Soviets.
- **In the late 1960s:** As hair grows longer, music gets louder and sex gains freedom, a "plot" is uncovered to overthrow the United States. It culminates in the trial of the "Chicago 7."
- **Today:** Once again, the economy is on its backside, the Internet has turned reality on its head, and America has elected its first African-American president. The president and his minions are talking about making changes in the way we do business; about revamping America's medical delivery system, addressing global warming and seeking to replace rampant bellicosity with diplomacy. As a result, the exponential growth of those planting and harvesting in the vineyards of paranoia. . .The "birthers," the Limbaugh acolytes and those who "know" all about the conspiracy to "take America away from all true Americans."

Yes, the lunatic fringe has lived in America for a long, long time. And as frightening, frustrating and fear-provoking as they can be, do remember that we -- the reasonably sane, those who look to tomorrow with hope rather than dread -- we are the ones who write the history books.

We are the ones who ultimately turn paranoid conspiratorialists into mere footnotes.



We'll see your millions of paranoid websites and raise you an Internet address suffused with sanity:

[1600 Pennsylvania Avenue](#)

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July 24, 2009 in [Conspiracies](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(8\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



July 31, 2009

## *Marys-With-Mikes*

I actually expected to have this article -- which was supposed to be entitled *The Children's Hour* -- finished and posted yesterday. But then, as I started reading the opening paragraphs to Annie, she commented "Didn't you use that title just a couple of weeks ago?" Astute woman, my wife. For in checking over recent op-ed pieces, I indeed did find that I had used *The Children's Hour* for a May 28 piece on the Sotomayor nomination. And so, I dutifully deleted this week's article.

But then I got to thinking, and said to myself, "What the heck . . . let's revisit Lillian Hellman."

And so, here goes.

You may recall that Hellman's 1934 play deals with Karen Wright and Martha Dobie, two women who together run a successful New England school for girls. One of their students, Mary Tilford, an angry, mean, mischievous, diabolic teen runs away from the school. In order to avoid being sent back, she tells her grandmother that Karen and Martha are lesbian lovers. As a result of this lie -- and the community's willingness to believe it -- the women lose their school and reputations; Martha winds up committing suicide.

To my way of thinking, what has always made *The Children's Hour* so incredibly acerbating, so gut wrenching -- and so great -- is that it is oh so very real. Since just about forever -- to coin a weird phrase -- we have had "Mary Tilfords" living among us -- angry, mean, mischievous diabolical sorts who are more than happy to spread untruths for their own warped reasons. Likewise, since just about the dawn of time, far too many have been happy to listen to -- and repeat -- "Mary Tilford's" untruths, whether they believe them or not. And,

like the fictional Mary Tilford, these folks seem at best to be unaware -- at worst unconcerned -- that lies, rumors and innuendos can have extraordinarily tragic results.

It would seem that of late there has been a virtual population explosion within the Tilford "clan." For not a day goes by without some new lie, rumor, innuendo or mis-characterization hitting the airwaves or clogging one's inbox. Precisely what has Mary been up to? She has been repeatedly telling anyone who will listen that:

- The president is an "African-born alien who by law must be removed from office."
- That the president and his wife are "angry black racists."
- That he is a "virulent anti-Semite bent on the destruction of Israel."
- That the Democratic health care proposal would enable the government to "tell us where we may live, what we may eat, and what medical procedures we may have."
- That the Democratic healthcare plan "is very specific that private insurance would be ended."
- That the Democratic health care plan contains "mandatory counseling sessions for the purpose of telling seniors 'how to do what's in society's best interest . . . and cut your life short.'"
- That the president "fooled the vice president into thinking he likes white people."
- That Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has recently said "he agrees with Malcolm X that 'the white man is the devil.'"

One will undoubtedly note that from the above, it would seem that the Mary Tilfords of this world tend to be conservative Republicans. And while I have not done a statistical analysis to either prove or disprove that proposition, I will tell you that its been hard finding equally obvious -- and egregious -- examples of untruths emanating from the more liberal side of the political aisle. Rest assured I will get a slew of examples from my more conservative readers before the day is out. Be that as it may, the truth remains that "Mary" has far more access to mikes and cameras than the so-called "state run media."

What is it that these "Marys-With-Mikes" expect or want to happen? Merely that their ratings remain sky high and their salaries stratospheric? That next time around all these horrible liberals get voted out of office and replaced with people who think like they think, see what they see, and love what they love? How would they feel or respond if one or more of their listeners/viewers were actually to take matters into their own hands? After all, just how long can a group be told that a person, a platform or a program is purely evil and bent on destroying all they hold as dear without someone deciding that definitive action is required? Remember, in *The Children's Hour*, it was likely not Mary Tilford's intention that Karen and Martha's school be destroyed or that Martha

should commit suicide . . . but it did happen. What did she think her rumor would lead to? Likewise, what do all the "Marys-With-Mikes" think their untruths will lead to? Shouldn't they bear some responsibility for what they put out over the airwaves?

Now, I am neither so naive nor innocent as to wonder why people can't play fair, "just make nice" and stop spreading malicious lies about each other. Politics *is* after all a full-contact sport, and definitely not for those who are either weak-hearted or thin-skinned. (*Note to Sarah Palin: repeat this last sentence out loud at least 100 times.*) I fully realize that while the relationship between public and private interest *should* be symbiotic or mutualistic -- in which both parties benefit -- it is far too often parasitic -- in which one party benefits while the other is harmed. What *does* fill me with fascination and frustration is how relatively easy it is to convince folks to oppose that which is ultimately in their own best self interest.

I suspect that the overwhelming majority of you who read *The K.F. Stone Weekly* have not -- and will not -- buy in to the mendacious drivel our present day "Marys-With-Mikes" broadcast. Good for you. But what of all those who, like the community complicit in destroying Karen Wright and Martha Dobie, find nothing wrong in believing and repeating that which is either demonstrably untrue or patently absurd? What can be done about them? (*Note: This is not to say that Karen and Martha being engaged in a lesbian relationship was 'patently absurd.'*)

In some cases, and with some people, facts can overcome fiction. That is why it is good to have such debunking resources as the [Annenberg Public Policy Center's FactCheck.ORG](#) and [Snopes](#). Of course for many others, fiction is just one whale of a lot more fun (and much easier to grasp) than fact; witness those who continue to pass along the "fact" that the Democratic health care plan includes "forced euthanasia" despite an easily accessible copy of the bill in question -- see [The Truth About End of Life Care](#). (Please be warned: legislative language ain't literary!)

I for one would love to see a revival of *The Children's Hour*. Its theme and message is as poignant today as it was 75 years ago -- or during the early 1950s when its revival was construed as an attack on the House Un-American Activities Committee. A revival today just might serve to remind people that those who consciously play fast and loose with the truth -- for whatever reason -- are possibly setting in motion events that are well beyond their power and potentially tragic.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



August 7, 2009

## **SHOYN GENUG!!**

By now, we have all the seen media clips of the so-called "grass-roots teabag protesters" hectoring, screaming, debasing, threatening and otherwise disrupting Democratic town hall forums across the country. By now, we are all painfully, angrily aware that, far from being an organic, bottom-up rebellion made up of "average Americans voicing real concerns" about the future of health care in America, these boorish, uncivil protests are being stage-managed by highly professional lobbying firms with unlimited financial resources at their disposal. And, as much as we may disparage the tactics, demeanor and dishonesty of what's going on, it is all perfectly legal; it is all covered by the First Amendment.

But just because something is legal -- like converging on a town hall meeting and shouting down an elected official, calling him or her a liar, a scoundrel or a traitor -- doesn't make it right or tolerable. To my way of thinking, there *are* -- or at least *should be* -- limits to what's acceptable; a place where we all draw a line in the sand. One of these limits, one of these lines is likening the President of the United States and members of the United States Congress to Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.

To this I shout out **SHOYN GENUG!!** Enough already!

Over the past weeks and months, we have seen more and more placards, and heard more and more commentators comparing President Obama to Hitler, labeling his programs as fascistic, and warning of dire consequences unless he is stopped in his tracks.

On July 30, [Orly Taitz](#), the dentist/real estate agent/attorney who is leading the so-called "Birther" movement took her case to the "Colbert Report." Taitz started speaking in defense of Major Stephen Cook, who said his orders to

deploy to Afghanistan were "invalid," because "President Obama wasn't born in America." After listening to Taitz's defense of Major Cook, Colbert said,

*"It's good for the country for the soldiers to be questioning their Commander in Chief."*

Whether or not Taitz understood that Colbert was being both sarcastic and ironic is debatable, because she responded,

*"Well, I think that if in Nazi Germany, the soldiers and the officers would have questioned the orders that came from the commander in chief, maybe 65 million people wouldn't have died."*

To which Colbert, not believing what he had just heard responded,

*"Thank you. So few people are willing to compare the Obama administration to Nazi Germany. It's refreshing to hear that."*

One could only wish that what Steven Colbert was hearing was rare. But it's not:

At a recent protest held outside the Ft. Collins offices of Representative Betsey Markey (D-Colo), a woman protesting Democratic plans for health care reform was photographed holding up a sign of a Swastika, with the president's name below it, encircled and crossed out by a red line. The clear implication, of course, is that President Obama is a Nazi, though in the protester's defense she did add a question mark. Similarly, at a town hall meeting in Texas Representative Lloyd Dogget's district, one protester carried a sign emblazoned with the Nazi S.S. symbol, a second with a cartoon of the congressman sporting horns, and yet a third, a tombstone with Dogget's name on it. The other day, out on Maryland's Eastern Shore, Representative Frank M. Kratovil, Jr. was met with protesters -- one of whom who had the tasteless brass to place an effigy of the congressman hanging from a noose just outside his office. On August 6, Rush Limbaugh told his ditto-heads that "Obama's got a health care logo that's right out of Hitler's playbook," and asked, "What are the similarities between the Democratic Party of today and the Nazi Party in Germany?" His answer, in part:

*"Well, the Nazis were against big business -- they hated big business. And of course we all know that they were opposed to Jewish capitalism. They were insanely, irrationally against pollution . . . . They were against cruelty and vivisection of animals, but in the radical sense of devaluing human life, they*

*banned smoking. . . . It is liberalism that's the closest you can get to Nazism and Socialism . . . . Adolf Hitler, like Barack Obama, also ruled by dictate."*

**SHOYN GENUG!!**

One wonders whether it has dawned on the likes of Rush Limbaugh and such sponsoring organizations as [FreedomWorks](#), [Americans for Prosperity](#), or [Conservatives for Patients' Rights](#) that they are making it look as if the entirety of the Republican Party -- and not just a gullible gaggle -- is made up of nothing but "wing nuts," Luddites and other assorted "Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton." (For those not familiar with this latter allusion, see [Marat Sade](#)). If this be the case, it's fine by me; occasionally one *does* reap what they sow.

To all those being goaded by radical right organizations into doing their bidding; to all those who persist in comparing Democrats to Fascists and liberals to Socialists; and, to all those who find the leap from "Barrack Obama" to "Adolf Hitler" to be measured in microns and not temporal dimensions I say precisely two things:

**Shame on you! and**

**"SHOYN GENUG!!**

**Enough already!!**

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



August 14, 2009

## Is There Life After Birth?

"A foolish consistency," Ralph Waldo Emerson famously penned, "*is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.*" For the nonce, let's take America's favorite philosopher at his word; he pretty much knew what he was talking or writing about. One wonders how Emerson would react to today's crop of "*. . . little statesmen and philosophers and divines,*" those who have raised inconsistency to the level of religious credo and made foolishness -- and far worse -- a prime weapon in the arsenal of public discussion. How would he have reacted to folks who hold that life begins at conception yet stand resolutely against gun control? Who are just as staunchly anti-Food Stamp as they are staunchly pro-life? Who demand that government stay the heck out of the boardroom but be granted full access to the bedroom?

My sense is that Emerson would marvel *not* so much at their foolishness or lack of consistency, but at the fact that anyone would even pay them heed. He would no doubt shake his head in disbelief at how so many supposedly moral, educated people can blithely put so many obstacles before the blind; can actually convince folks to oppose that which is inherently in their best interest. Surveying and analyzing all that passes for public discourse in the current



health care debate, he would likely conclude that for lots of Americans, "Life begins at conception and ends at birth."

The current bugle oil about "death panels" -- in which federally-paid functionaries decide who lives and who dies, who receives medical treatment and who is cast adrift -- is just that: crappola. And what's worse, just about everyone tooting this tinny old horn *knows* its crappola -- well, perhaps not Sarah Palin, Glenn Beck or Dick Morris. By now it should be abundantly clear that this preposterous charge is being made at the behest of a medical insurance industry whose two favorite words are *laissez* and *faire*, and a ton of politicians and hired mouthpieces who make Polly Adler look like a vestal virgin.

One group that has yet to weigh in on this whole "death panel" lunacy are the medical ethicists -- those whose job it is to weigh moral values and judgments and then apply them in practical clinical settings. Medical ethics is a fairly new field; its creation largely a response to two horrific cases of abuse:

- The ghoulis experiments of the Nazis that became a focus of the post-World War II "Doctors' Trial," and
- The "Tuskegee Syphilis Study," a project conducted between 1932 and 1974 by the U.S. Public Health Service on black men in rural Alabama.

Unbeknownst to -- or totally ignored by -- those megaphoning this notion of government underwritten "death panels" is the world of the I.R.B. -- the "Institutional Review Board." These boards, made up of doctors, scientists and laypeople, are governed by Title 45 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) Part 46. They are further defined by the National Research Act of 1974 and regulated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP). *Any* institution that wants to do medical research must have one of these boards. *Everyone* appointed to such a board must first successfully complete C.I.T.I. ("Collaborative Institutional Trainig Initiative") and receive proper certification. And believe me, its not easy.

I know of what I write.

I have been a member of the Cleveland Clinic Florida I.R.B. for the past 15 years, and have successfully completed the C.I.T.I. course several times. Over these past 15 years I have been privy to hundreds and hundreds of discussions on cutting-edge research and compassionate-use medical procedures, always with an eye to protecting patients' rights, and making sure that everything is spelled out in words that lay people can easily grasp. There are so many layers and levels of protection as to make the "death panel" rant a virtual impossibility. We take our work *very* seriously; protecting patients' rights is both our moral and our legal responsibility. In a sense, we are the modern, hyper-extension of the Hippocratic Oath. Now, I cannot claim to know that every single I.R.B. in the United States works with the same utter seriousness of purpose as ours at Cleveland Clinic Florida. I mean we *do* have some of the planet's most gifted physicians, and our staff director Donna Simonovitch *is*, quite simply, as good as they get -- the best in the business.

Personal prejudice aside, we take patients' rights -- patients' lives -- very, very seriously in these United States. In the world of the I.R.B. the beginning premise is that the better informed the patient is about treatment options, the more intelligently involved he or she and their families can be in their own care. The "death panel" fear which the Limbaughs, Palins, Becks and Grassleys of the world are trumpeting is not only a gross distortion of the truth; it is an out-and-out lie meant to scare the bejesus out of the unlettered masses, all the while doing the bidding of their well-heeled masters. That these well-heeled masters encourage them to spread such vicious lies is perhaps understandable. After all, there *are* hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars at stake. That many have bought into these lies -- i.e. that Barack Obama and the Democrats don't give a tinker's damn about the lives of the sick or elderly -- is not only maddening; it shows just how far out of touch with reality some people really are.

Hey guys: Respecting life means having the ability and courage to discuss death. Considering a living will or contemplating a D.N.R.

("Do Not Resuscitate") order can often provide enough peace of mind to make whatever time one has left even more content and peaceful. It in no way disparages or denies the utter sanctity of human life.

Those spreading lies about government-financed "death panels" are the same folks who put Terri Schiavo's name in the ears and on the lips of countless millions. They are the ones who believe that the perquisites of the powerful -- themselves -- must be protected at all costs. And if in order to do so they find they must resort to lies, deceptions, fear-mongering, racism or worse . . . well, that's all just part of being the power elite. Right?

WRONG!

Those of us who see this noxious claptrap for it really is must push back; must use the weapons we have in *our* arsenal to ensure the greatest good for the greatest number.

And please, spread the word that no one -- I repeat, no one -- is going to die before their time.

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August 14

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



August 21, 2009

## *Some Thoughts on Turning (Gasp!) Sixty*

*"It's been a long time comin'  
It's goin' to be a long time gone"*

So wrote David Crosby more than half a lifetime ago. So sang Crosby, Stills and Nash last night at the Hard Rock here in Ft. Lauderdale. They were great. They were note-perfect, their harmonies still as tight as a gymnast's abdomen. But my god! Crosby just turned 68, Stills, the baby of the group is 64, and Graham Nash is 67. Weren't they just playing at Woodstock? Was a generation's "going' down to Yasgur's farm" really **forty years** ago?

*"We are stardust, we are golden,  
We are billion year old carbon,  
And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden."*

When we took our seats at the Hard Rock last night I was 59; by the time we got home, I was . . . gasp! . . . 60. After nearly two hours of communing with the sound track of youth -- of a time when "Don't trust anyone over the age of 30" was the Eleventh Commandment -- here I was,

trying hard not to think about precisely how long ago "it" all was. I've got to admit that there were quite a few moments during the concert when my eyes -- which have required bifocals for more than a decade now -- were bedimmed with tears; tears of joy and sadness, tears of recollection and reflection.

*"Think about how many times I have fallen,  
Spirits are using me, larger voices callin'  
What heaven brought you and me cannot be forgotten."*

Forty years ago my friends the Toppings offered a choice: I could either go to "some rock concert" in Upstate New York or attend the Berkshire Festival at Tanglewood. I chose the latter. I remember thinking at the time, *"Hell, I can catch Hendrix, Baez or Creedence Clearwater any time I want. But Eric Leinsdorf and the Boston Symphony? Beethoven's Ninth? Now there's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!"*

And so, off to Lennox I went. Over the past forty years I have on occasion asked myself if I made the right decision. Invariably, I am torn. As much as I *do* relish the remembrance of Tanglewood -- its beauty and utter civility -- at the same time I think "Ah, what a piece of history you missed out on!" And history it was, with Crosby Stills, Nash & Young providing the score. It was a time when we really truly believed that our generation *could, should and would* make the world a place of love, peace and harmony.

*"I think it's time we  
Stop, hey, what's that sound?  
Everybody look. What's goin' down?"*

Forty years ago the world took an entire generation by the scruff of its collective neck, gave a jolting shake, and set us on a path we thought would lead to a revolution. To us, the world was fraught with evil: Nixon, Agnew, and Reagan; the Draft, mindless consumerism, the murder of Bobby Kennedy. We really, truly believed we could end war, hunger and poverty; that together we could roll back the dark clouds and restore sun-drenched skies. All we needed was courage -- and the right message.

*"Speak out, you've got to speak out against the madness  
You've got to speak your mind  
If you dare . . .  
But you know, the darkest hour  
Is always just before the dawn."*

It is so eerie to realize just how long ago it all was; how back then, a person of sixty was . . . well so incredibly old and out of touch. I think back to when my own father turned that magic age. It was back in 1975, and by then, he had already seemed old for a long, long time. I remember wondering if he ever had been really, truly young. Of course, he and his generation had had a totally different set of realities and experiences including the Great Depression and World War II. We were the beneficiaries of their struggle; we were the ones who were fortunate enough to go to universities, bum around Europe, thumb our noses at the "Establishment" and see the world through (literally) rose-colored glasses.

Experiencing Crosby, Still and Nash last night, I discovered that much of what made youth so exciting, so memorable, so important, is still with me. The idealistic grounding -- although made a bit uneven by experience -- is still there. The inability to accept violence, bigotry, duplicity and intolerance still courses through the veins. Oh sure, I am still accused of having a Pollyanna-ish streak in me; of seeing this harsh old world through those same old rose-colored glasses. To any and all who hurl this accusation, I gladly plead guilty. That's just the generation I was born into. In the long run it's that idealistic cord which binds this sixty year old to the past, and makes him feel far, far younger than what today's calendar proclaims.

There is still so much to be done; so many wrongs to right, so many, many songs yet to be sung. And as long as we keep singing, we will never truly grow old. Oh sure, the hair may thin, the back weaken and the need for licit pharmaceuticals increase; but so long as we have dreams and causes, we will ever maintain our youth.

*"Teach your children well,  
Their father's hell did slowly go by,*

*And feed them on your dreams  
The ones they picks, the ones you'll know by.*

*Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you will cry,  
So just look at them and sigh . . . and know they love you."*

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



August 28, 2009

## *Ted Kennedy: Of Wickedness and Good Deeds*

This past Wednesday I woke up from a semi-shallow sleep; it was about 2 hours before first light. Flipping on the TV, the sound down low, the first word my groggy brain made sense of was "Chappaquiddick." With that single word, I was immediately awake -- and knew precisely two things: that Senator Edward M. Kennedy had passed away, and that the TV was undoubtedly on the wrong station -- Fox. For what other TV news channel could be so abysmally classless and clueless as to use a 40-year old tragedy/scandal as its lead in a breaking story about the death of the man known as the *Last Lion*?

Fox, Fox, and only Fox.

That's just the way it is with the *chasidim* of Roger Ailes and Rupert Murdoch. They are oh so terribly sanctimonious and smug when it comes to those who are "not of our faith." But for those who "pray in our church," they can apparently be forgiven for anything from serving divorce papers on an anesthetized spouse (Newt Gingrich) and committing perjury before Congress (Oliver North) to cheating on one's wife (Mark Sanford). In other words, "When one of *our* guys get caught doing bad things, we quote the verse *Let him who is without sin cast the first stone*. But when it's one of *your* guys, *s'vet dir gornisht helf'n* -- viz., Ain't nothing gonna help 'ya . . . !"

About 60 years ago poet John Berryman, in his "Sonnets for Chris" -- which was



about an earlier act of adultery -- asked "Is wickedness soluble in art?" What Berryman wanted to know is whether he could be forgiven -- or redeemed -- for his act of immorality by striving for the artistic heights? It is, no doubt, a question worth serious contemplation. It is also quite likely that if one were to address Berryman's question to the boys and girls at Fox they wouldn't have the slightest idea what in the world was being asked. So be it; that's their problem. Let's leave *B'nai Fox* to their own devices and discuss this amongst ourselves. I for one am not sure that wickedness *is* "soluble in art." I mean, no matter how powerful or important Wagner's "Ring Cycle" may be, it does not and cannot make up for the fact that the maestro was a roaring, wicked anti-Semite. Or, that despite his many accomplishments on the gridiron -- which many would consider a form of 'art' -- there is no getting around the fact that O.J. Simpson is a very evil, wicked man.

So what does this have to do with Senator Kennedy? What was *his* art that he should become a subject for discussion? In an article in yesterday's *Guardian*, Princeton professor and author Joyce Carol Oates -- whose 1992 novella *Blackwater* was inspired by the Chappaquiddick incident -- rephrased Berryman's question as: "Is wickedness soluble in good deeds?" Now there's a fascinating question; one that directly impacts on the life, times and accomplishments of the only Kennedy brother who lived long enough to "comb gray hair." Admitting upfront and making no bones about the fact that Edward Moore Kennedy *was* a weak, flawed -- and yes, occasionally wicked -- human being, we are thereby freed to examine his good deeds. Yes, he cheated on a Harvard exam hoping to stay eligible for football. Yes, in his early days in the senate he was looked upon as a lightweight who got by on charm, a famous name and a great staff. And yes, he closed down many a bar in Palm Beach and Cape Cod, and was known to be inarticulate one moment, as eloquent as William Jennings Bryan the next. This fellow who entered the Senate in 1962 at age 30 brought with him a storied name and virtually nothing else. And now at his death some 47 years later, he leaves that chamber as quite likely the most effective senator of the past 100 years.

Ted Kennedy's first senate tutor was Phil Hart of Michigan, who told him "You can accomplish anything in Washington if you give others the credit." He learned that lesson well. During his nearly 8 terms in the United States Senate he drafted and shaped more landmark legislation than such liberal giants as Robert Wagner, Hubert Humphrey, Estes Kefauver and Herbert Henry Lehman. Among the many, many measures that never would have been enacted without Senator Edward M. Kennedy are:

- The 1964 Civil Rights Act, for which he delivered his maiden Senate speech.
- The Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Expanding the franchise to 18-year olds.
- The 1985 legislation that imposed sanctions on the apartheid government of South Africa. (Despite a filibuster by Jesse Helms and a veto by President Reagan, Kennedy mustered 78 votes to override the veto.)
- Led the fight against the confirmation of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court.
- The 1988 bill that provided \$1.2 billion for AIDS testing, treatment and research.
- The 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act.
- The 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act.
- The Kennedy-Hatch Act of 1997, which provided health insurance for children.
- Heightened taxes on tobacco.
- The Kennedy-Kassebaum bill which made health insurance portable for workers.
- Co-sponsored with John McCain the "Patients' Bill of Rights."

It is frightening to think that Ted Kennedy may turn out to be the last true public liberal; the last public person who lives, acts and believes that people are inherently good and that government has a positive role to play in our lives. Despite all his personal foibles and humiliations, his public losses and private tragedies, he has soldiered on. He has done good. He has done more than his share to help make this world a better place. Nonetheless, there will always be those who -- like the boys and girls of *Fox* -- dismiss him with that single polysyllabic place name: "Chappaquiddick." They are the ones who would say that wickedness can never be soluble in good deeds; that "For you guys, once a sinner always a sinner." To them I say, "Before you congratulate yourselves on your moral profundity, think long and hard. " There are some folks -- like Senator Edward Moore Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts -- who spend the lion's share of a lifetime in engaged in the act of overcoming.

Overcoming loss.

Overcoming tragedy.

Overcoming foibles, follies and frailties.

One wonders how, with all the loss, all the tragedy and all the foibles, Ted Kennedy could soldier on for so many decades. What was it that made him get up each day and do the best he could to make this a better world? Although no one

can ever know for certain, this, according to one of his friends, has always been his defining quality.

Joseph P. Kennedy, the father of the dynasty was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a saint. He was a scoundrel in business, a cheat in marriage and a bigot in foreign affairs. Nonetheless, he and his wife Rose did provide the world with remarkable sons and daughters. No Kennedy has ever lived a useless life. No Kennedy has ever accepted more than a dollar-a-year for their government service. No Kennedy has ever had to ask the definition of *noblesse oblige*.

Because of all he went through in his family, Ted Kennedy became what the great political writer Jack Newfield called "America's grief counselor." By way of example, Newfield noted that "when two planes were hijacked out of Boston's Logan Airport on 9/11 and 93 residents of Massachusetts went to their death, Senator Kennedy personally called more than 125 family members offering assistance and solace." One conversation with a grieving father so moved the senator that he sent the man a copy of a letter that his father, Ambassador Kennedy, had written to a friend in 1958 upon hearing of the death of the friend's son. That note, perhaps better than anything else, provides the key to what, when all is said and done, made Senator Ted Kennedy so utterly unique and irreplaceable -- not to mention the greatest United States Senator of the past century.

*"When one of your loved ones goes out of your life, you think of what he might have done for a few more years, and you wonder what you are going to do with the rest of yours.*

*Then one day, because there is a world to be lived in, you find yourself a part of it, trying to accomplish something -- something he did not have time to do. And, perhaps, that is the reason for all. I hope so."*

Yes, wickedness *can* be soluble in good deeds.

*Pacem in terres.*

*Gatias tibi ago.*

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



September 03, 2009

## *Where There's a (George F.) Will . . .*

There is a legend that when Mohammad, the founder of Islam, was asked to give proofs of his teaching, he ordered a particular mountain (Mt. Safa) to come to him. When the mountain did not comply, Mohammad supposedly raised his hands towards the heavens and proclaimed, *"Allah is merciful. Had the mountain obeyed my words, it would have fallen on us and we would have been destroyed. Therefore, I will go to the mountain and thank Allah for showing us mercy . . ."*

Somewhere along the line, the tale came to the attention of Sir Francis Bacon who, in his book "Essays," simplified and popularized it as *"If the mountain won't go to Mohammad, Mohammad will go to the mountain."* This expression is pretty well known to most literate folks even though its history may be a tad hazy. Don't ask me why, but I have long thought it to be distantly related to the locution about "Hell freezing over." To me, both expressions speak of things which although possible, are grossly improbable -- like the Cubs winning the World Series, or Sean Hannity saying something positive about Nancy Pelosi.

Well, after reading an op-ed piece by George F. Will in Tuesday's *Washington Post*, I find myself wondering if perhaps it has started hailing in Hades. For in his piece "Time to Get out of Afghanistan" Will, as consistent and intelligent a conservative as we've got -- now that William F. Buckley has shuffled off this mortal coil -- argues that Washington "must rapidly reverse the trajectory of America's involvement in Afghanistan." He argues that far from *increasing* the number of troops we have on the ground, we should pull them out. Now, suddenly, he grasps what everyone from Alexander the Great and the Mongols to Sir Robert Peel and Mikhail Gorbachev

eventually learned: that no matter what you do, no matter how hard you try, you're never going to conquer, tame or remake Afghanistan in your own image. Commenting on the recent, as yet inconclusive elections in Afghanistan, Will inquires about their worth: "Creation of an effective central government? Afghanistan has *never* had one."

Will recommends that "Forces should be substantially reduced to serve a comprehensively revised policy: America should do only what can be done from offshore, using intelligence, drones, cruise missiles, air strikes and small, potent Special Forces units, concentrating on the porous 1,500-mile border with Pakistan, a nation that really matters." (By the way Mr. Will, please note that Afghanistan is a totally land-locked country, making it rather doubtful that anything could be done "from offshore.")

Could it be? Is this really, truly George F. Will -- a CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN -- cooing like a dove? Isn't cooing supposed to be the job of the liberals? Aren't conservatives like Will supposed to be the expert saber rattlers? Is it really beginning to precipitate in purgatory? Or is something else going on here?

For the moment, Will hasn't got too many conservative -- or neo-conservative -- allies joining in on the cooing. Writing on the *Commentary* website, former George W. Bush administration official Peter Wehner calls Will a "defeatist," and claims his column "could have been written in Japanese about the USS Missouri." Wehner also calls Will "a defeatist" who "sound[s] more like Michael Moore than Henry Kissinger."

Ouch!

William Kristol the neo-conservative editor of the *Weekly Standard*, accused Will of "urging retreat, and accepting defeat." And Frederick Kagan, a military historian at the (neo-conservative) American Enterprise Institute, who is pushing for a huge surge of US troops into Afghanistan, called Will's column "reprehensible."

Double Ouch!

So who is cooing along with Will? Why liberal Democrats like Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold, whose recent op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* called on the president to a time line for troop withdrawal. And increasingly, a higher and higher percentage of the American public are turning against American involvement in Afghanistan. According to a recent *Washington Post-ABC News* poll, 51% of respondents believe that the "war is not worth fighting." Another poll has the percentage of those who see Afghanistan as a "war of choice rather than necessity" to be as high as 57%. Could it be that George F. Will has gone over to the other side and become a card-carrying liberal? That he will soon come out in favor of same-sex marriage and start pulling for the Obama health care plan?

Has the Mohammad ventured to the mountain?

In a word, NO. The fact that Will's call for a US pullout comes at precisely the moment the Obama administration is leaning toward a further escalation of the war effort should raise eyebrows. And, when Will mocks American efforts to eradicate Afghanistan's opium trade as "Operation Sisyphus," bells should be going off.

What in the world is going on here? "Conservatives generally support a president they generally distrust because they think it important the country win the war in Afghanistan," William Kristol wrote the other day. "As for today's liberals, they just don't want to see Americans win wars." And what of Mr. Will? He has always been a staunch supporter of American military wars and ventures; he was a hawkish about Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Granada, Kosovo and Iraq. To my way of thinking his new-found dovishness has as much to do with practical politics as with morality or anything else.

George F. Will is a shrewd, calculating conservative. What I think is going on in this mind goes something like this: the more obvious the link between President Obama and the quagmire of Afghanistan; the broader the rift this war causes in both the country and on Capitol Hill; the greater the likelihood of cutting into Democratic majorities in 2010 and perhaps taking back the White House in 2012. Then too, Will knows that historically, the American voting public has a terribly difficult time turning out a president when the country is at war. Just ask Tom Dewey, George McGovern or John Kerry. Perhaps then what Will is banking on is that if and when we pull our ground forces out of Afghanistan, the American public will have turn away from Obama and the Democrats and shift both their allegiance and their votes to . . . ? To whom? To the party of Rush Limbaugh, Mitt Romney, Sarah Palin and Tom Coburn? To those who brought us tax-cuts for the wealthy, "No Child Left Behind," and WMDs in Iraq?

I think not. When it comes to Afghanistan, there will undoubtedly be even greater cleavage and separation between the "yeas" and the "nays." But unless and until George F. Will and conservatives like him can identify a positive path, they will continue to languish in the minority.

Then again, now that you've "gone to the mountain" and come out as a dove, perhaps we can interest you supporting a nifty public health option or some serious programs aimed at curbing global warming. Perhaps together we *can* make hell freeze over.

After all, where there's a (George F.) Will . . .

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



September 11, 2009

## *The Great American Earache, Jr.*

John Elliott Rankin (1882-1960) represented Mississippi's 1st Congressional District in the House of Representatives from 1921-1953. In his day, Rankin was without question the most narrow-minded, racist member of that body . . . and that's saying one whole heck of a lot. Rankin was what one might call an "equal opportunity bigot." He hated Jews and Blacks with an equal passion, and made no bones about it. His Congressional speeches were invariably laced with lies, half-truths and obnoxious racist epithets; so much so that one artful wag nicknamed him "The Great American Earache." As a member of the notorious House Un-American Activities Committee Rankin came under fire for failing to investigate violence and murder perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan. "After all," Rankin said on the House floor, "The KKK is an old American institution." When Rankin was taken to task by columnist Walter Winchell, "The Great American Earache" dismissed Winchell (Winschel) as "The little Kike." When Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. was elected to the House in 1944, Rankin repeatedly referred to him as "The *nigger* from New York." Powell was so incensed that he rose to say "The time has arrived to impeach Rankin, or at least expel him from the party." The House did neither.

On June 4, 1941, New York Representative M. Michael Edelstein engaged Rankin in a colloquy. In a debate over whether or not America should become engaged in the war in Europe, Edelstein argued for intervention. Rankin then rose and charged that the pro-interventionist faction was being "orchestrated, financed and led by a little group of our international Jewish brethren." Incensed, Edelstein immediately went on the attack and accused the "Gentleman from Mississippi" of "demagoguery and hate mongering." His voice rising with emotion, Edelstein cried out, "Mr. Speaker, Hitler

started out by speaking about 'Jewish brethren' and 'international bankers.' The last speaker speaking about international bankers coupled them with our 'Jewish brethren'. . . I deplore the idea that any time anything happens . . . men in this House . . . attempt to use the Jews as their scapegoat."

At this point, Edelstein began to sway, his face quickly losing color. Nonetheless, he continued on to his peroration: "I say it is unfair, and I say it is un-American. All men are created equal, regardless of race, creed or color; and whatever a man be, Jew of Gentile, he may think what he deems fit." Edelstein staggered from the House floor, collapsed in the Capitol lobby, and within seconds died of a massive heart attack -- murdered, some say, by John Rankin, "The Great American Earache."

In finishing the newest edition of *The Congressional Minyan: The Jews of Capitol Hill*, I of course did a "touch up" on Rep. Edelstein's entry. During the several days I was "hanging out" with Edelstein, I watched as angry, sometimes gun-toting "birthers" and assorted irate, fearful Americans screamed at the top of their lungs, proclaiming that our president is an "alien," a "racist," a "socialist" and that he and the Democrats are "dedicated to tearing this country down and imposing Islamic law."

I found myself wondering if these could be John Rankin's great grandchildren.

And then along came South Carolina Representative Joe Wilson. He is, of course, the fellow who had the temerity and cosmic bad taste to cat-call "YOU LIE" to President Obama as our Chief Executive was addressing a joint session of Congress on the status of Health Care reform in America. For his efforts -- and despite his extremely lukewarm, halfhearted apology -- I hereby bestow on him the honorary appellation:

*The Great American Earache, Jr.  
Inhonesto Causa*

One might argue that Wilson's two-word tirade is in no way comparable to the hate-filled invective of his "appellation-sake," John Rankin. Then again, Rankin's ravings weren't broadcast for the entire world to see and hear . . . over and over and over again; neither the technology nor the desire existed in 1941. Back then, the country was faced with many crucial problems and issues, all of which demanded critical examination and response -- from Congress, the media, from the people themselves. It simply was not in the cards to waste precious time either defending or condemning Rankin's hate-filled invective. That was a side-show America could ill afford at the time. True, Rankin should have had his sorry *tuches* kicked all the way back to Tupelo. But the fact of the matter is that he remained in Congress for another decade, at which time he ran for the Senate, coming in 5th in a five-man race with a mere 13% of the vote. He had been marginalized, and spent the last decade of his



career being mostly ignored. That was the 1940s, a time when a bigot like John Rankin was barely a sidebar, let alone a story.

2009 is of course, a different story. A fool like Joe Wilson is the story. Now we have tens of dozens of media outlets all competing for a slice of the audience -- an audience they consider as customers and consumers first, and only then, as citizens. They are more than happy to put the name, face and tirade of Wilson on TV and invite him on their talk shows . . . or spend the better part of a day writing about him for a weekly Blog article.

Shame on us all!

How to reform health care; what to do about the economy, the environment and Afghanistan -- these are the issues that matter, not a Brobdingnagian bigot like Joe Wilson. Yes, what he did was terribly wrong. He showed consummate disrespect for the President of the United States. But then again, so did a majority of the Republicans sitting on their hands in the House last Wednesday night -- some sneering, others snoring, some even texting. As a result, much of what President Obama said has already been forgotten -- or worse, misreported or mischaracterized. President Obama says, "Insurance executives don't do this because they are bad people; they do it for profits;" Hannity reports, "The president said 'Insurance executives are bad people.'" May we say here and now that Hannity lies? Rush Limbaugh proclaims that the only thing Rep. Wilson did wrong was in offering an apology! Isn't it obvious that Limbaugh will stir up any pot or kettle he finds for the sake of ratings?

So much of what passes for dialogue and discourse these days is anything but. We have reached a point where for many, incivility is courage, prevarication is patriotic, and the First Amendment guarantee of free speech is absolute[ly] for those with whom you agree.

Enjoy your new nickname for the while, oh "Great American Earache, Jr." It is my sincere wish that you achieve irrelevance even quicker than your appellation-sake.

And that we get back to the true challenges at hand. . .

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*En passant:* For those who found *Rankin v. Edelstein* of interest, please know that the new edition of *The Congressional Minyan: The Jews of Capitol Hill* -- which will be out shortly -- has nearly 200 such stories drawn from the Halls of Congress. It is published by Rowman & Littlefield.

September 15, 2009

## *"The Pianists: A Parable"*

*This week, instead of the normal political op-ed piece, I've written a short story entitled "The Pianists: A Parable." In addition to being this week's piece, it is also going to be my sermon for Erev Rosh Hashanah. In its own way, it's plenty political.*

*(Note: The following was discovered on a papyrus scroll in a cave. Due to its extreme age, estimated at not less than 1,800 years old, there were many gaps (or lacunae) which made the text difficult to render . . .)*

Once upon a time long ago, a group of weary wanderers received a Divine Commandment from on high. It forever changed their lives. The resonating basso voice of the Nameless Muse said: "Thou has been chosen for greatness. Hear now this commandment that I command thee this day: Thou shalt become Piano Players and lovers of music. Throughout all thy generations, thou shalt diligently teach thy children to study and to practice, to play and to love, the music of the Piano. For Piano is thy life and the length of thy days. It shall add glory, meaning and contentment to thy lives. Piano shall fulfill thy souls. I am thy Muse."

To facilitate their lives, Co\* [***This pronoun means "he/she"***] gave them a manuscript with explicit step-by-step instructions on how to build a proper piano. To further guide them along their path, the Muse also provided the Piano Players (or "Pianists") with The Holy Score, which contained Sonatas, Fantasies, and Concertos, Partitas, Trios and Quartets. Needless to say, those hearing the Muse's Divine Directive were moved beyond compare; slowly they began seeking the means to fulfill Co's awesome

decree. This they did throughout their generations, as they continued wandering the wilderness, ever searching for their place in the sun.

After many years of meandering, the nascent Pianists did find a permanent home in a land they called “Pastoral.” Once settled, they began devoting their lives to Piano and its attendant joys. Over many generations, they became renowned for the skill and artistry, the dedication and single-mindedness with which they fulfilled their Prime Command. They endlessly studied the Holy Score, adding variations and brilliantly original compositions of their own. They were a happy people living happy, creative lives. But there were dark clouds on the horizon. . .

Other peoples and cultures (whom they simply referred to as “Outsiders”) mocked them and scorned them. They seemed so different. In a sense, they were. For owing to the extreme discipline required in order to become players of Piano and lovers of music, the Pianists generally lived by apart from all others. They even developed their own language with which to speak amongst themselves; they called it “P’santayr.” Not having been witness to the original Command on High, Outsiders could not understand the commitment and devotion with which the Pianists lived their lives. They kept strange hours and seemed to do nothing but practice, practice, practice. They played pieces from the Holy Score religiously three times each day. One day in seven they rested, doing nothing but attending the Odeon - their place of musical devotion. They dressed alike and all ate high protein diets. They rarely participated in activities that the Outsiders considered “important” or “necessary.” How, the Outsider’s wondered, could any people devote so much of their lives to something as frivolous and nonproductive as Piano playing and music?

Because of their uniqueness, they were often persecuted. In fact, many Outsider cultures tried to eliminate them. Many believed that the Piano Players were an powerful, monolithic force bent upon taking over the entire world. Strangely, others saw in the Piano Players an inherent weakness that made them susceptible to the will of the devil. Against all reason, the Outsiders became convinced that the Piano

Players believed themselves to be better than everyone else, although this certainly was not the case. True, the Muse had long ago informed the Pianists that they were Co's "Chosen People." But that did not make them better - only chosen. But Chosen for what? Why to be Players of Piano and devotees of music - not an easy task when you think about it. No, they were not better, but they were different and unique. Unfortunately, many people could not (and still cannot) understand that people who are "different" or "unique" need not be feared.

After generations of living extraordinary lives in Pastoral, the Pianists were conquered by Outsiders and forced to leave their homeland. Before long, they were dispersed to the four corners of the earth. As the generations came and went, the Piano Players contributed greatly to the countries and cultures in which they found themselves living. They continued to be persecuted and scorned for their uniqueness. To the Outsider way of thinking, they just didn't fit in. Nonetheless, they did continue to provide both themselves and the entire world with sonatas, concertos and symphonies of dazzling brilliance and profundity. They created a body of musical literature that covered virtually every emotional aspect of life. No matter where they found themselves in the wide world, they continued to study, to play, and to luxuriate in the heavenly music they had been commanded to create. It gave their lives meaning and purpose, just as the Muse had predicted. And, despite the fact that they were grossly misunderstood and even harmed, music continued to be the central focus of their lives - the driving force that kept them together as a people.

After 2,000 or more years, the Pianists lived in almost every country in the world. Never vast in number, they were nonetheless believed by the Outsiders to be an enormous monolithic congregation. In a sense, one can readily understand how the Outsiders might reach this unwarranted conclusion. Because of their unique culture and common purpose, they felt themselves to be a single family. There was a singular global connection. Since all Piano Players adhered to roughly the same daily ritual of practice and study, they understood each other's lifestyles, needs and expectations.

And since they all spoke “P’santayr,” they could communicate with one another whenever the need arose.

For countless generations, Pianists would only marry amongst themselves. This they felt to be their sacred obligation. Whenever or wherever a community of Pianists might suffer, their fellows could always be counted on to come to their aid. Additionally, when finally permitted to enter mainstream professions - law, medicine, banking and academics - the Pianists tended to become rather successful. This was due in great part to the tremendous discipline and love of learning that had been instilled in them throughout all their generations. Simply stated, they approached each and every challenge as if it were part of the Holy Score. The Outsiders - perhaps through jealousy, envy, or sheer ignorance - had a tendency to look upon their success as positive proof that the Pianists were international conspirators - evil people bent upon taking over the entire world. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

With the arrival of modern times, many strange things began to occur amongst the Piano Players. They found the pull of Outsider society to be increasingly strong and alluring. The time they devoted to playing Piano and studying music became less and less. While most considered themselves devoted Pianists in the cultural sense, many turned from age-old forms of study and practice. They no longer trained their children for a lifetime of playing and love of music. Why? Many said that they were deeply concerned lest their children feel “odd” or “strange” around their Outsider neighbors. No longer did they play Piano three times a day, as had their ancestors. Rarely did they attend the Odeon on the Seventh Day. No longer did they steep their children in the musical culture of their grandfathers and grandmothers.

Rather, now they began sending them to twice-weekly lessons for three or four years in order to learn to play but a single piece of Piano music - and largely by rote at that. The parents rarely, if ever, took their children to the Odeon on the Seventh Day. In far too many homes, the children were unable to practice, for the parents did

not even have a Piano. The message these children often received was: “Piano must be important to you for the next several years.”

“Why?” their children would ask.

“Because we say so,” the parents would answer.

Often they would add: “But, if after you have completed your lessons, you do not want to continue, that will be your decision.” The children questioned why something that should be important to them was rarely seen or heard within their own homes. It was a very good question, a very good question indeed.

It eventually became the custom that at the age of thirteen, each child would play his or her single piece of music at a glorious recital that would be attended by family and friends. Plans for the recital (and the banquet that would follow) began years before the child knew how to locate Middle C, or had ever heard of Bach, Beethoven or Brahms. The day of the recital was filled with tension and anxiety, lest the child not “perform” up to capacity. It became increasingly obvious that many of those who attended these recitals did not have the slightest idea of how to act or what to expect. They had become, in short, a musically illiterate folk.

Many of those in attendance would recall their own recitals, and realize that it was really the last time they had ever played Piano, attended the Odeon, or devoted themselves to music. Some would remember their parents and grandparents, and how they devoted their lives to the pursuit of Piano and music. But these children - the ones who played the single recital piece - were different. Despite the fact that they might play their single piece with ability and skill, they were incapable of reading the musical score or recognizing its worth. Moreover, few, if any, had the true love of music, which the Muse had long ago commanded. True to form, few would ever play Piano after their recital. This new generation merely went through the motions without much feeling or understanding. What they did understand, was that after the recital, they would receive gifts of money. After the performance, the family would

throw a magnificent banquet that would last until all hours of the night. Quite often these festivities cost far more than the family could truly afford.

The elders grew fearful. "How silly it is to spent all that time and money just to teach our children a single piece of music," they said. "And for what? For the sake of a single recital and a great feast? It is a tragedy. Our children no long truly know how to play Piano, speak 'P'santayr," or have that great love and devotion to music which has always been our heritage. Where will it all end?"

But the elders came to realize that they were, at least in part, to blame. They were the ones who took to speaking “P’santayr” only when they did not wish their children to understand. Then too, they were the ones who let the very culture of Piano slowly slip through their fingers, preferring instead the ways of their non-Pianist neighbors.

Fortunately, the elders, working in consonance with their children and grandchildren, came up with a solution that not only solved their growing problem, but actually caused a musical renaissance among the Pianists. In short, they . . .

*(At this point, the manuscript suddenly ended, leaving posterity to ponder just what the solution was).*

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*Ani m'achayl lachem shana tova u'mtuka . . .*



# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



September 25, 2009

## *The Confirmed Unteachability of Mankind*

In a speech delivered before the British House of Commons nearly 75 years ago, Winston Churchill gave voice to perhaps the most pessimistic expression ever heard in that august chamber: ". . . *the confirmed unteachability of mankind.*" At the time he gave his speech, fascism was on the march in Europe; Winnie was obviously appalled, frustrated and likely depressed by the all but total lack of action or response to either Hitler or Mussolini on the part of European democracies. He continued his oration bemoaning a certain "*Want of foresight, the unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, the lack of clear thinking, the*

*confusion of consul until emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong.*" In his peroration, Churchill lamented ". . . *these are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history.*" Churchill's gloomy cynicism can be easily forgiven; to a great extent, he knew of what he was speaking.

In *his* speech before the United Nations General Assembly yesterday, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu quoted Churchill, similarly lamenting what he called "The unfortunate habit of civilized societies to sleep until danger nearly overtakes them." Netanyahu spent the lion's share of his speech excoriating those who, like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad deny the Holocaust ever happened; those who accuse world Jewry of having created a myth out of whole cloth in order to gain international sympathy and thereby justify the very existence of the Jewish State. In his speech Netanyahu argued forcefully, eloquently and passionately that anyone who can believe such perverse nonsense is either self-deluded or else suffers from the most perverse form of willful blindness.

Most intelligent people can concur that there is room for disagreement over what Israel should, can or must not do in order to achieve peace with its neighbors.

Indeed, if we all were to agree on one particular approach it would mean one of two things: either that we were acting in a really inane "B" movie, or that the Messiah had already arrived. Let's face it: for many, debate is a contact sport. Similarly, those who read history honestly with both eyes wide open know that on those rare occasions when the Jewish State has been offered a chance for peace -- as with Egypt and Jordan -- it has both greeted and embraced it with all the ardor and passion of a long-lost lover. And although Israel is by no means perfect, it remains the only functioning democracy in that part of the world. Of course, we all know that this fact, along with a couple of hundred others, don't amount to a hill of beans for those who are anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic, or anti-Democracy. To them, facts don't mean a thing.

Many years ago I had a math professor named Tom Lehrer. He was a wonderful teacher and an even better writer of topical, satirical songs. One of his more memorable tunes -- "Daily News" had the lyric "Don't try to confuse me with the facts . . ." Although Dr. Lehrer's lyric wasn't referring to anyone or anything in particular, it could easily describe those who, like Ahmadinejad, the oil sheiks of Saudi Arabia or Willis Carto and the creeps of the Institute for Historical Review who, despite tons and tons of documentation, persist in telling anyone who will listen, that the Holocaust never occurred. Talk about the "confirmed unteachability of mankind!" Of course, they probably do know that the Holocaust did occur; they just have another agenda . . .

We have always had our own unteachable faction right here in the good old USA. Generally speaking, those who deny the Holocaust -- or see Communists under every bed, or firmly believe that all Jews know and speak with one another at least once a week -- have been so far out of the mainstream as to be invisible to everyone save their acolytes or such groups as the Anti-Defamation League or the Southern Poverty Law Center whose job it is to keep track of them. Mass media -- and the vast majority of sane people -- don't pay them any attention; there's just too many facts out there proving them wrong, wrong, wrong. Of late however, a lot of Americans suffering from "confirmed unteachability" have been getting one heck of a lot of coverage in the media. And here, I'm referring to those who, despite a welter of documents and facts, persist in the belief that President Barack Obama was born in Kenya; that he is a Socialist -- or a Communist, a Nazi, a Fascist, a gang-banger from the 'hood, an effete Harvard snob or an ardent Israel-hating anti-Semite. From what is portrayed on the nightly news, it would seem as if the numbers of the unteachable have reached the point of no return. Well, as a professor once told me, "If you put a single-cell amoeba under an electron microscope it's going to wind up looking like a Stegosaurus." Shame on all the news editors for putting them on the tube in the first place.

Just yesterday, House Minority Whip Eric Cantor -- the only Jewish Republican left on Capitol Hill -- told *Politico*, "If you look at the policy that this White House has followed, it certainly does not seem as if we are dealing with a true friend of Israel." The White House declined to respond to Rep. Cantor's remarks, stating instead that

"achieving a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians is how you can be a true friend to Israel." What I find amazing is that Cantor's charge -- that the President is not a "true friend" of Israel -- came on the very day when he hosted a trilateral meeting between P.M. Netanyahu and President Abbas. According to Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY), chair of the House Appropriations State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, Cantor's criticisms "appear to be timed deliberately to weaken the administration's ability to lay the foundations for peace negotiations." Could it be that Mr. Cantor is among the "unteachable?" Or, is it something else?

I have interviewed Eric Cantor, and know him to be both intelligent and skillful. I also know him to be a highly partisan, deeply conservative Republican; a man who believes the answer to every fiscal issue is lowering taxes and whose mistrust of the federal government is akin to a religious obligation. Perhaps in questioning President Obama's *bona fides* vis-à-vis Israel, Cantor is really attempting to convince those for whom the Jewish State is an issue of primal importance that they would be better served belonging to -- and voting for -- the Republican Party.

From where I sit, and from what I've learned, there are certain incontrovertible facts in this vexatious, headache-inducing world of ours:

1. Israel really, truly does want peace.
2. The Holocaust really, truly did happen.
3. Barack Obama is really, truly a native-born American.
4. The current administration -- although it may not always agree with everything Israel does or says -- is really, truly a steadfast friend.
5. Winston Churchill was -- regrettably -- for the most part correct; there *are* a lot of unteachable, unreachable people out there.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



October 02, 2009

## *Shocked! Simply Shocked!*

Who in the world is Alan Grayson, and why oh why are Daniel Burton, Virginia Foxx, Michelle Bachmann, Louie Gohmert and Steve King saying such nasty things about him? Come to think about it, who is the heck are Daniel Burton, Virginia Foxx, Michelle Bachmann, Louie Gohmert and Steve King? Well, all of them -- with the exception of Alan Grayson -- are Republican members of the House of Representatives. Each one of them has steadfastly voted *against* increasing the minimum wage (HR 2); *against* reauthorizing and expanding SCHIP, the "State Children's Health Insurance Program" (HR 976); *against* banning gay bias in the workplace (HR 3685) and *against* raising CAFE (fuel-efficiency) standards to 35 miles per gallon by 2020 (HR 6).

I'm sure you get the picture. And for all you political junkies, Burton represents Indiana's 5 District; Foxx, North Carolina's 5th; Bachmann, Minnesota's 6th; Gohmert Texas' 1st; and King, Iowa's 5th.

As for Alan Grayson, he's the new Democratic representative from Florida's 8th District -- Orlando. He's kind of like Barney Frank: an incredibly intelligent bear of a man, who's Jewish, fast on his feet, tells it like it is, has a great and caustic sense of humor, wears his liberal *bone fides* like a badge of honor, and did his undergraduate, graduate and legal studies at Harvard. Unlike Barney Frank he's straight and the 12th richest member of Congress with an estimated net worth in excess of \$31 million. (*Grayson, who was born and raised in the Bronx, had a rough childhood, and made it to Harvard on the basis of brains, not family connections. While in school he lived very modestly and took odd jobs cleaning toilets and working as a night watchman. After graduating law school he started a telecommunications firm, which he eventually sold; hence his great wealth.*)

Wonderful. Marvelous. So what is this piece all about? Well, a couple of days ago (Tuesday September 30 to be precise), Rep. Grayson got up on the floor of the House and spent five minutes sticking his tongue firmly in his cheek. In brief, his speech went like this:

*It's my duty and pride tonight to announce exactly what the Republicans plan to do for health care in America. It's this: Very simply, it's a very simple plan. Here it is, the Republicans health care plan for America: Don't Get Sick. That's right, Don't Get Sick. If you have insurance, don't get sick. If you don't have insurance, don't get sick. If you're sick, don't get sick. Just don't get sick. That's what the Republicans have in mind for you America. That's the Republicans health care plan.*

*But I think that the Republicans understand that that plan isn't always going to work; it's not a foolproof plan. So the Republicans have a backup plan -- in case you do get sick. If you get sick in America, this is what the Republicans want you to do: DIE QUICKLY! That's right. The Republicans want you to DIE QUICKLY if you get sick.*

*Now, the Democrats have a different plan. The Democrats say that if you have health insurance, we're going to make it better. If you don't have health insurance, we're going to provide it to you. If you can't afford health insurance, then we'll help you to afford health insurance.*

*So America gets to decide: Do you want the Democratic plan or do you want the Republican plan? Remember the Republican plan: Don't get sick. And if you do get sick, die quickly!*

And its at this point that Burton, Bachmann *et al* got to their feet and expressed their shock, anger and outrage at their liberal colleague. Dan Burton was outraged by what he saw and heard to the point of apoplexy. As far as he and his Republican colleagues were concerned, Grayson's speech was a "grave offense to the dignity of this body," and along with others, demanded that Grayson apologize. Georgia Republican Tom Price -- himself a practicing orthopedic surgeon who, according to the *National Journal* votes with the Republicans 97% of the time -- went so far as to draft a formal resolution of condemnation and demanded that Grayson "apologize to our leader" for what he termed "a breach of decorum."

Here is Grayson's "apology":

*I wish to apologize to America . . . to the dead . . . to the 44,789 who die every year in this country because they have no health insurance. I want to apologize to the families of the dead that we haven't voted sooner to end this Holocaust in America.*

OK, I'll grant you that his use of the term "Holocaust" is way over the top and should have been replaced with something like "unmitigated tragedy," "horrifying spectacle" or even "*shanda*" -- well, Grayson *is* Jewish. But the use of so insensitive a term should not take away from his basic purpose -- of drawing attention to the Republican's game plan -- of simply standing in firm opposition to virtually anything and everything that Democrats propose -- whether it's on health care, the economy, foreign relations, education or the environment.

The "utter shock" with which Republicans responded to Alan Grayson's tirade reminded me of a scene from *Casablanca*: Major Heinrich Strasser (Conrad Veidt) "urges" Captain Louis Renault (Claude Rains) to shut down Rick Blaine's (Bogie) cafe.

**Rick:** *How can you close me up? On what grounds?*

**Captain Renault:** *I'm shocked, shocked to find out that there's gambling going on in here!* [a croupier hands Capt. Renault a pile of money.]

**Croupier:** *Your winnings sir . . .*

Just as Louie knew that Rick knew that the whole thing was a setup, so too, I believe, do the House Republicans know that their Democratic colleagues know that their "shock" is about as phony as a three-dollar bill. And just as Louie had long participated in that which so "shocked" him -- gambling -- so too have Republicans long participated in that which they now contend "shocks" them -- Grayson's comment to "die quickly."

Need proof? The following are direct quotes:

**Rep. Steve King on July 15, 2009:** *They're [Democrats] going to save money by rationing care, getting you in a long line . . . places like Canada, the United Kingdom and Europe . . . people die when they're in line.*

**Rep. Ginny Waite Brown on July 21, 2009:** *Last week the Democrats released a health care bill which essentially said to America's seniors, "Drop Dead!"*

**Rep. Virginia Foxx on July 10, 2009:** *Republicans have a better solution that won't put the government in charge of people's health care . . . and it's pro-life, because it will not put seniors in a position of being put to death by their government.*

**Rep. Michelle Bachmann on July 15, 2009:** *The President's adviser, Dr. Emanuel, says medical care should be reserved for the non-disabled . . . so watch out if you're disabled.*

And they're shocked at Alan Grayson's words? Give us all a break.

For untold years, Congress worked because its members worked with one another regardless of party affiliation. They worked with each other, did each other favors and tried to persuade each other of the fundamental correctness of their position. The very nature of the legislative process demands collegiality. Without it, the process does not and cannot work. Ever since the Republican Revolution during the Clinton years, collegiality has been in short supply. Progress has been an even rarer commodity.

When I got my first job on Capitol Hill 40 years ago, I loved hanging around one particular senator -- a venerable Southern gentleman who had been a Rhodes Scholar in the 1930s. He was without question the most intelligent member of Congress at the

time. One day I asked him how in the world he could act with such utter civility towards all of his colleagues -- some of whom were utter Neanderthals.

"It's not always easy," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "If I think a man's an idiot or a fool, I simply refer to him as ***My distinguished and learned colleague.***"

"But what about when you're absolutely positive that the man's both a fool *and* an idiot?" I asked. "What do you do then?"

"Ah," he said, "If I'm positive that the man's a horse's hind-end, I refer to him as ***My MOST learned and distinguished colleague!***"

From where I sit four decades later, he had the right idea. Its one heck of a lot better than feigning shock, thus gumming up the gears of government.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



October 9, 2009

## *A New Definition of Chutzpah*

According to every third-rate Borscht Belt comedian who ever took a pratfall, the definition of *chutzpah* goes like this:

*"Chutzpah is a youngster killing his parents and then throwing himself on the mercy of the court because he's an orphan . . ." (drum roll please)*

After untold decades, there's now a new, far longer definition:

*"Chutzpah is "Dr." Rush Limbaugh and "Dr." Glenn Beck overriding the best available medical advice and informing their listening audience that the H1N1 vaccine -- the one being used to combat Swine Flu -- is dangerous, causes autism, and therefore must be avoided at all costs. Moreover, according to Drs. Limbaugh and Beck, the whole "Pig Flu" (their term) scare is a nothing but a malevolent conspiracy whose sole purpose is to subject unsuspecting, innocent 'real Americans' to a deadly toxin."*

Now, I am as big a defender and proponent of the First Amendment right to free speech as anyone who ever paid dues to the ACLU. I firmly believe, in the words of the late Abbie Hoffman, that "Free Speech is the unfettered right of people to yell *theater* at a crowded fire." However, what the aforementioned medical mal-practitioners don't seem to get is that freedom is not free; it requires both intelligent and responsible action. Repeatedly announcing to their listening audience that they will never "subject" themselves to a "dangerous, unproven vaccine" against a "non-existent illness" is the height of idiotic irresponsibility. Oh yes, they can say whatever they want; that's the essence of free speech. However, when what they have to say is heard by tens of millions of people who -- for better or for worse -- believe that what these guys



say is as infallible as the law from Mt. Sinai -- then there's a huge problem. Because as sure as Carter made Little Liver Pills, there are going to be folks who refuse to let themselves -- or worse, their children -- be vaccinated against Swine Flu because both Rush and Glenn said so. And herein lies both the crux of the problem and the new definition of *chutzpah*. For if just one person is needlessly afflicted with Swine Flu; if, heaven forbid, just one child or at-risk adult needlessly dies because they preferred heeding the "medical advice" of a radio/TV talk show host/entertainer over that of:

- Dr. Regina Benjamin, M.D., Surgeon General of the United States,
- Dr. Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., Director of the National Institutes of Health or
- Kathleen Sebelius, M.P.A., Secretary of Health and Human Services,

That will be one person too many.

Just yesterday, October 8, Rush Limbaugh went on the following rant against Secretary Sebelius and Dr. Nancy Snyderman, chief medical editor for NBC News:

*"When did medicine get hijacked by politics? Have you heard of the people you vote for Dr. Snyderman? The Democrat Party! No, in her warped world view, I, El Rushbo, your devoted host, have hijacked medicine. By politicizing my announced refusal to follow the 'command' of the Health and Human Services Secretary, Kathleen Sebelius . . . that you 'must take' the Pig Flu vaccine . . . you must take it. SCREW YOU MISS SEBELIUS; I am not going to take it precisely because you're now telling me I must."*

Limbaugh then continued his rant, somehow tying the H1N1 vaccine and the government's strong recommendation -- NOT mandate -- for at-risk people to be inoculated, with that which he persists in calling "Obama Care." Talk about the dangerous misuse of free speech; Talk about *chutzpah*!

If the Limbaughs of the world wish to forgo being inoculated against the Swine Flu, fine; that is their right. However, when they argue with seeming certainty that both the ailment and its counter-agent are nothing more than fraudulent chips in a game of political tiddlywinks, they run the very real risk that people will believe them and follow their lead.

Tell me what's more important Dr. Limbaugh: human life or Arbitron ratings? If you want to continue railing against ACORN, Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid Barney Frank, the "Democrat" Party and President Obama, fine. If you want to criticize the president for going to Copenhagen, great. If you want to get on your knees and pray for the Obama Administration to fail, make our day. That's show business.

But in the name of all that's holy, stop endangering the lives of your listeners. That's not show business; that's *chutzpah*.

You're nuttier than a fruitcake Rush; but so too were lots of folks on the Borscht Belt Circuit. . .

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***Note:** As this piece was being written, word came that President Obama has won the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. I'm sure most of our readers will agree that this is a stunning achievement. Predictably, the boys and girls at Fox News have a different take: that the sole reason he won is precisely why Al Gore won . . . neither one is George W. Bush. How's that for logic?*

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



October 16, 2009

## **Ad Captandum Vulgus**

For the longest time now, a niggling, indefinable, "can't-exactly-put-my-finger-on-it" something has been tying my *kishkes* in knots. And believe me, as anyone who has ever been afflicted with Crohn's Disease will understand, knotted *kishkes* are the last thing in the world one needs or wants.

This niggling discomfort began shortly after the 111th Congress convened back in January, and has gotten progressively worse with each passing month. It has been a chronic condition with occasional acute spikes. Regrettably, until just a few days ago, I have had neither the time nor the talent to determine its precise cause. Oh I knew that it had a lot to do with all those conservative chatterboxes I listen to while driving from lecture to lecture. But it was more than just that; the fact that guys like Limbaugh, Hannatty, Savage, Beck *et al* disagree with everything the president or congressional Democrats propose is nothing new. This couldn't possibly be the source of my malady. So what was it?

Well, late the other night, while making the long, exhaustive jaunt home after delivering six lectures in three days, I decided to confront this distress head-on in an attempt to discover its source. By the time I reached my front door, I had fairly well figured it out. What was bugging me; what was making me seethe like a copper kettle and giving me a nasty case of what old Doc Lipton called the "Flying Whipsidingles," could be summed up in a single six-letter word:

M-O-T-I-V-E.

Yes, motive. What I finally figured out was that both my agony and my anger were being caused by listening to so many members of the "media" elite attack the motives -- if not the character -- of those with whom they violently disagree. It is one thing to opine that those who want to close down Guantanamo and hold trials on American soil are

wrong; it is another to accuse them of consciously being allied with these terrorists. It is one thing to strongly disagree with any or all of the various health care reform measures currently being discussed in Congress;; it is quite another to baldly state that "Democrats want nothing more than to strip away our freedoms and bring Socialism -- or "Communism," or "Nazism" to America." Then too, it is one thing to hold fast to a belief that the single best way to cure the country's economic woes is to enact tax cuts for the wealthy, and quite another to damn those who disagree by proclaiming that "They hate America and want to bring the country to its knees." This is not argumentation based on fact; it is a bald-faced assault on the motives, the sincerity -- indeed, the very humanity -- of one's opposition. In rhetorical terms, what they are doing is called *ad captandum vulgus* -- "capturing the crowd" through unsound, specious arguments. An *ad captandum vulgus* argument declares that "we all know that this is the truth," even when what we "all know" is anything but.

Years ago Monty Python brilliantly parodied an *ad captandum* statement: "*I think all right-thinking people in this country are sick and tired of being told that ordinary, decent people are fed up in this country with being sick and tired . . . I'm certainly not! But I'm sick and tired of being told that I am . . .*"

When the self-anointed archangels of the airwaves gut those with whom they disagree by impugning their motives, they are engaging in a most seductive form of casuistry. It is beyond disconcerting to hear someone proclaim oh so matter-of-factly that President Obama's various proposals and appointments are motivated solely by a desire to "bankrupt," "enslave" and "ultimately destroy" the United States of America. First of all, none of these idiotic charges are true. Secondly, how in the world do these mavens know what motivates Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi, Timothy Geithner, Michael Moore -- or Mary Tyler Moore -- for that matter? It is both dangerous and diabolic to impute and impugn the motives of public figures. For not only are those who do so giving the *vulgus* -- the "common clay," the "crowd" -- the sense that they are now uniquely empowered with "the truth"; they are also turning the *vulgus* into a potentially malignant mob.

Running hand-in-glove with *argumentum ad captandum* is *argumentum ad hominem* -- an argument in which one attacks a person's character rather than the content of their point of view. Sometimes the *ad hominem* is done obliquely; the other day one of the talkmeisters dismissed any thought, opinion or bit of research ever done by liberal Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Seymour Hersh simply by referring to him as "The insane, drug-addled Seymour Hersh." Other times, *argumentum ad hominem* can hit you right between the eyes; in responding to negative statements made by the Rev. Al Sharpton about his potentially becoming a limited owner of the St. Louis Rams, Rush Limbaugh, spoke not on point, but rather about how Sharpton had "come to fame and fortune in the infamous Tawana Brawley case." (*In this widely publicized 1987 case, Tawana Brawley, a 15-year old African American girl, accused 6 white men of rape -- some of whom were police officers. The Rev. Sharpton was among those who came to her defense. A series of investigations brought her credibility into question; in all likelihood, no rape ever took place.*)

Sometimes it is hard *not* to presume knowledge of what motivates another person. Sometimes it is terribly difficult *not* to dismiss a person's opinion or argument with an attack on their character -- or lack thereof. I do presume that that which motivates most of the guys and gals behind the mikes and cameras is profit, plain and simple. Hell's bells, who among us wouldn't want to make \$50 million dollars a year for working three hours a day, five days a week? Then again, maybe they are motivated by something far less benign . . . but who am I to say?

If I could get the masters of *ad captandum* to pay heed for just a second, or two I would quote for them a little gem from Peter Pan's creator, James M. Barrie:

"Never ascribe to an opponent motives meaner than your own."

You know something? My kishkes are beginning to feel better . . .

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



October 23, 2009

## *Of Time and Bacterium*

A couple of days ago, the good folks at the Pew Research Center for People & the Press released a fascinating poll. From September 30 through October 6, Pew polled 1,500 U.S. adults, asking them "Do you see evidence of climate change?" According to their findings, 57% of those surveyed answered "yes," 33% answered "no."

The poll's margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.

Amazingly, less than eighteen months ago, when asked the same question, 71% of those polled answered in the affirmative -- that yes, they did see "evidence of global warming" -- and 21% "no." And about a year before that -- January 2007 -- **77%** of those polled answered in the affirmative, a mere **16%** in the negative.

In other words, in less than three years, the percentage of American adults who believe that the earth is warming up has *decreased* by 26%, while those who, for whatever reason, are of the opinion that global warming or climate change is not occurring has *doubled*.

This is a real jaw-dropper. I mean, how in the world can it be that fewer and fewer people see evidence of global warming, when virtually everyone I know understands it to be a self-evident, haunting and dire reality? In attempting to explain this trend, Andrew Kohut, the Pew Center's director opined, "*The priority that people give to pollution and environmental concerns . . . is down because of the economy and because of the focus on other things.*"

To me this comment may explain why global warming and other environmental issues have been taking more and more of a back seat in people's priorities. It in no wise sheds light on why people are increasingly seeing climate change as both a myth and -- in some cases -- a conspiracy. Oh sure, part of it has to do with all those knuckle-draggers who loudly proclaim "We've got proof that climate change is a myth:

1. It's only October, and already there's been snow in both Denver and Boston;
2. The other day the low temperature in Ft. Lauderdale was in the 50s;
3. Anything that both Michael Moore and Al Gore believe is true cannot be true.

OK, so at least *part* of the upsurge in climate change denial can be laid at the feet of the guys and gals with the big microphones and brassy voices. But this isn't even close to being a satisfying explanation. The more I reflect on what the Pew findings tell us, the more I am coming to think that the answer lies in our changing conception of, toleration for, and patience with . . . time.

"How's that?" I can hear you asking. "What in the world does 'time' have to do with anything?"

Well, when one thinks about all the changes we've undergone in the past generation or so, no one thing has been altered quite so much as time itself. Remember when a 14.4k dial-up modem was super fast? Or how about a 60mb hard drive? Once we 'traded up' to a 56k modem, or a 100 mb hard drive we wondered how we ever could have survived back in the tortoise-slow stone age? With each passing half-year the speed of down- and uploading got quicker and quicker; our computers became more and more powerful. And we became less and less tolerant of time.

There once was a time when getting or making a long-distance telephone call -- traversing time and space -- was quite a big deal; only for special occasions. Now, of course, its as ho-hum commonplace as swallowing or blinking. Then too, remember when figuring out who said "Time flies on restless pinions . . . constant never" could take the better part of a day at the library? And then, when you found out it was some German guy named Schiller, you actually had to go and find him in the Encyclopedia Britannica, which was on another floor? Today, of course, all one has to do is a simple Google search -- "restless+pinions+constant" and voila! Within .42 seconds you have the answer. By comparison to Google, the public library seems positively Neanderthal.

And on and on.

The point is, that as technology has given us increased resource speed, our level of patience -- indeed, our feel for the true length of a day, week, month or year -- has decreased. If something cannot be accomplished quickly, we lose interest. If we are flush with cash today, it rarely dawns on us to put some of it away against a distant tomorrow. Likewise, if we go through a couple of days of extremely frigid weather, then global warming is a myth. But of course in the latter case, two days -- or five weeks or an entire season -- of grossly sub-par temperatures does not mean that humankind's carbon footprint is benign; merely that we aren't perceiving the big or long term picture. Even the Ice Age had its hot spells . . .

Let us say that there is a microscopic bacterium residing in Lake Tahoe that doubles in size every hour. Let us further posit that it takes 50,000 years for it to become visible to the naked eye -- say a circle of roughly two inches. Within 24 hours that little 2-inch circle of algae or whatever it is will have increased to a size of just over 132 miles -- more than

enough to fill the entire lake. To the casual passerby, it will appear that overnight the lake became contaminated; in reality, it took 50,000 years -- and one day.

In a sense, this is the perspective many have on global warming, war, peace, the economy, getting things done in 2009. If the problem isn't solved immediately -- regardless of how long it took for the problem to fester -- we point fingers and accuse the problem solvers of incompetence or malevolence.

Patience and perspective have been replaced by politics and perversity.

And polling . . .

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



**October 30, 2009**

## *Who's Up for Reading 1990 Pages?*

"The era of the 1,000-page bill is over," Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander quipped at a press conference yesterday discussing H.R. 3962, the new House health care proposal. "We have the 2,000-page bill," he deadpanned. Actually, the legislative text of the "Affordable Health Care Act for America," a bill "To provide affordable, quality health care for all Americans and reduce the growth in health care spending, and for other purposes," is a staggering 1,990 pages -- far far more than the English translation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. And, after having skimmed my way through a couple of hundred pages of this bill by Messrs Dingell, Rangel, Waxman, Miller, Stark, Pallone, Andrews *et al*, I can tell you it's far, far less interesting than Tolstoy's masterwork -- which isn't exactly a page-turning to begin with.

Republican Dave Camp told reporters he was going to read the bill while flying back to his Michigan home. Upon hearing Camp make this comment I thought, "Either he's the fastest reader in the House of Representatives or he's taking the slowest flight in the world." As it turned out, Camp was stymied in his plans to stow the bloody thing on board; it turned out to be too big to fit in the overhead compartment. And with good reason: H.R. 3962 stands nearly 9 inches tall and weighs 19 pounds.

The fact that this bill is of both staggering length and stultifying lingo makes one wonder precisely how many people are actually going to read and digest it in its entirety. And, to make matters more intense, H.R. 3962 is merely one of at least 5 *different* omnibus health care proposals currently floating around Capitol Hill. Who but the Platonic Absolute of a legislative wonk would even attempt such a task? It strikes me that anyone actually reading the bill in its entirety is in serious need of getting a life.

Presuming that the aforementioned is true -- that few if any will ever master the "Affordable Health Care Act for America" -- one wonders how it turns out that so many are issuing dire warnings about specific aspects of a bill they have not read. I really

rather doubt that people like Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, John Boehner or Tim Pawlenty have read HR 3962 -- or HR 3200 or Senator Max Baucus' "America's Healthy Future Act of 2009," or any of the others. And yet, there they are -- along with dozens upon dozens of their Republican colleagues -- attempting to scare the daylights out of the American public by "disclosing" such perniciousness as:

- Last Friday, **Sarah Palin's** Facebook page contained the following: "The America I know and love is not one in which my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama's 'death panel' so that his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment, of their 'level of productivity in society,' whether they are worthy of health care." *[Note: There is a provision which authorizes Medicare to pay doctors for counseling patients about end-of-life care, if the patient wishes.]*
- Working from almost the same script, House Minority Leader **John Boehner** warned that this same provision "may start us down a treacherous path toward government-encouraged euthanasia." *[Note: Page 425 of the current House bill contains a provision requiring Medicare to pay for some end-of-life counseling sessions with a health care practitioner. Period]*
- Representative **Michelle Bachmann** has claimed in numerous speeches that "The real issue is, will illegal aliens have access to taxpayer-subsidized health care? Well, the answer is yes, they will. In the bill, 3200 has a section that says illegal aliens will not have access to health care, and that's why President Obama is able to say that. But the practical effect is that illegal aliens will have access to health care because there is no provision for enforcement in the bill." *[Note: HR 3200 specifically says that "no federal money will be spent on giving illegal immigrants health coverage."]*
- Additionally, **Bachmann** has said that the bill contains a provision that will "put sex clinics in our schools . . . and puts Planned Parenthood in charge of these sex clinics because the bill requires [it] under this provision." According to Bachmann, "School children will be able to go to a sex clinic during lunch, obtain an abortion, return to school and then go home . . . without anyone being the wiser as to their having had an abortion." *[Note: According to the legislative service Politifact, "We see no language in the three main versions of the bill that would allow school-based clinics, which have a long history of providing basic health services to underprivileged students, to provide abortions."]*

And on and on.

In the days and weeks to come these scare tactics and outright untruths will no doubt be receiving a lot of exposure. And the folks who scream the loudest will no doubt make it appear that they have poured over the various bills with a fine-tooth comb. In raising fear levels across the country, they will be seeking nothing less than to convince folks that it is most appropriate for them to stand in opposition to things which are inherently in their best interest -- a really nifty trick when you think about it. One wishes that every time one of these folks uncovered another malevolent clause they were asked to cite section, clause, page and verse. For if they were, it would then soon be revealed that they really

don't know what in the world they are talking about; that they are merely doing the bidding of those who pay their bills.

And now, if you will excuse me, I'm in the mood for an easier, quicker read . . . perhaps *War and Peace*?

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



November 06, 2009

## **“Paging Emmanuel Goldstein”**

While reading, watching and listening to the interminable analyses surrounding this week's elections in Virginia, New Jersey, Maine, New York and California, I found myself remembering George Orwell's *1984*. How so and why? Well, hearing Republican pundits proclaim that a Democratic victory in New York's 23rd Congressional District was actually a victory for the GOP, while Democrats were arguing that losing governorships in both New Jersey and Virginia had nothing whatsoever to do with the popularity of President Barack Obama or the future of the party, I couldn't help but remember all those "perpetual war" slogans from Orwell's dystopian novel:

WAR IS PEACE!

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY!

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH!"

For those who recall *1984*, these slogans are part of a "newspeak" dictionary entitled *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, authored by one "Emmanuel Goldstein," who in fact does not exist. When coming from the pen of the fictional Goldstein, such shibboleths as "War is Peace!" and "Freedom is Slavery!" are to be understood as the height of dystopian lunacy. When "Defeat is Victory!" comes from the mouth or quill of the not-so-fictional Jonah Goldberg, William Rivers Pitt, Michael Steele or even David Plouffe it is understood to be "political spin" which,

although not necessarily a synonym for "lunacy," is nonetheless fairly maddening.

So what conclusions *can* be drawn from this week's various elections?

Let's begin with the New Jersey and Virginia governors' races, where Republicans took back the state house. As much as Republicans claim that their victories represented "clear defeats" for President Obama, it is good to remember that his name did not appear on either state ballot.

New Jersey voters had a choice between Governor John Corzine -- an exceptionally unpopular incumbent who ran an unbelievably bone-headed campaign -- and challenger Christopher Christie, a former United States Attorney. Predictably, Christie won 91% of Republican votes while Corzine won 86% of Democrats. And among those who said they were "very worried about the shape of the economy" Christie pulled in 61% of the vote as opposed to Corzine's 34%. Although he outspent Christie by a better than two-to-one margin and had the benefit of three campaign appearances by President Obama, Corzine just had too much crummy baggage. Additionally, independent candidate Chris Dagget -- who at times polled in significant double digits -- received a little under 6% of the vote. Intriguingly, 46% of his votes came from independents, 37% from Democrats, and a mere 17% from Republicans. Results from various exit polls made it a toss-up as to whether Christie won or Corzine lost.

In Virginia, Republican Robert F. McDonnell, a polished fiscal/social conservative easily defeated Democrat R. Creigh Deeds, who by comparison came off as an ill-informed, ill-at-ease amateur. McDonnell won 92% of Republicans, Deeds 93% of Democrats. McDonnell also had history of his side: the state has been a "tough get" for any Democrat for several generations. Obama's success there in 2008 was the exception, not the rule for Democrats historically. It is fascinating to note that whichever party wins the White House has gone on to lose the Virginia governor's office one year later every time since the Carter administration.

Anyone concluding that these two Republican victories offer "overwhelming proof" that the GOP is back on track, is reading a script penned by Emmanuel Goldstein. For despite these two victories, the country's opinion of Republicans remains "monumentally bleak." Two weeks ago, a *Washington Post/ABC News* poll reported the following:

*Less than one in five voters (19%) expressed confidence in Republicans' ability to make the right decisions for America's future, while a whopping 79% lacked that confidence.*

*Among independent voters, who went heavily for Obama in 2008 and congressional Democrats in 2006, the numbers for Republicans on the confidence questions were even worse. Just 17 percent of independents expressed confidence in Republicans' ability to make the right decision, while 83 percent said they did not have that confidence.*

*On the generic ballot question, 51 percent of the sample said they would cast a vote for a Democratic candidate in their congressional district next fall while just 39 percent said they would opt for a GOP candidate.*

*And, perhaps most troubling for GOP hopes is the fact that just 20 percent of the Post sample identified themselves as Republicans, the lowest that number has been in Post polling since 1983. (No, that is not a typo.)*

Then there were the Congressional elections. In California's 10th District, Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi -- a down-the-line liberal, easily defeated conservative Republican David Harmer. In winning, Garamendi now takes over the seat vacated by 5-term representative Ellen Tauscher -- a moderate, pro-business Democrat -- who resigned her seat in order to become Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

Lastly, there is Democrat Bill Owens' election to Congress from New York's 23rd District. This will likely turn out to be the most telling -- and significant -- race of all. Up until spring 2009, a Republican has represented the 23rd for the past 18 years. That man, moderate John McHugh was named Secretary of the Army by President Obama last spring. Moreover, the 23rd, which covers most of New York's "North Country" -- starting at Lake Champlain, running westward along the St. Lawrence Seaway and over the Adirondacks Forest Preserve to Lake Ontario -- has been represented by nothing but Republicans since the days of President Andrew Johnson. In fact, in one part of the district, the last non-Republican to represent the citizens in Congress was a Whig!

Originally, the race appeared to be between moderate Republican Deirdre "Dede" Scozzafava -- a ten-year veteran of the New York State Assembly -- and moderate Democrat Bill Owens -- a Plattsburgh attorney who until he decided to run in the special election, was a registered independent. Rounding out the race was Lake Placid CPA Doug Hoffman, running as a third-party candidate on the Conservative Party ticket. Scozzafava, who is pro-choice and pro-same-sex marriage, opposes gun control and has strong ties to labor, received the endorsements of former Speaker Newt Gingrich, New York Congressman Peter King, the NRA, and the New York State United Teachers. Liberal Democrat blogger Markos Moulitsas of the *Daily Kos* wrote an October 1, 2009 column in which he said he was "rooting for her."

Scozzafava -- who by all rights should have won the special election -- conflicted with her party's high priests and priestesses by not being as far-right as Sarah Palin or Michelle Bachmann. Conservative luminaries such as Limbaugh, Beck, Bachmann, Pawlenty and Palin, denounced her for being "a dangerous socialist," derided her for being "to the left of Nancy Pelosi," and threw their support behind Doug Hoffman. The resulting bedlam caused Scozzafava to leave the race and, with around-the-clock prompting from such Democratic heavyweights as Senator Chuck Schumer, Representative Steve Israel, NY Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and NY Attorney General Andrew Cuomo, Scozzafava actually endorsed Democrat Owens. National conservatives poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into Hoffman's campaign, but he proved to be both inadequately prepared and dreadfully uninformed about local issues. Running a lackluster campaign promising "lower taxes, less government and more freedom," Hoffman looked, acted and sounded lost. In the end, Bill Owens -- who also received a lot of financial backing from around the country -- wound up defeating Doug Hoffman by more than 5,000 votes, 49.2%-45.2%.

Unbelievably, the GOP's unreconstructed right-wing is labeling this a victory. How so? How in the world can Doug Hoffman's defeat be considered a victory? And by whom? It would appear that what these true believers are celebrating is the fact that they chased Dede Scozzafava -- that "far-left socialist" -- from the race. What they are thereby implying is that there is only room for one platform in the GOP: that which is most conservative, most closed-minded and most in lockstep with the positions and values of the Harding-Coolidge-Hoover years.

If this is the case, and if they truly consider having kept Dede Scozzafava -  
- an electable moderate -- out of the race to be a "victory," then they had  
better prepare themselves for a lot more "victories" in 2010 and 2012.

"Paging Emmanuel Goldstein . . ."

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



**November 13, 2009**

## **In the Words of Joseph Nye Welch**

**Which is worse:** *Really truly* believing that President Obama was born, raised and thoroughly indoctrinated by Communists -- and as such is consciously doing everything in his power to destroy the United States of America,

**Or:**

Knowing full well that the above is a total crock, but nonetheless broadcast it *ad nauseum* because:

- A) You're an *entertainer* merely posing as a journalist.
- B) It's great for ratings, which keeps those advertising dollars flowing.
- C) You think your listening/viewing audience is made up of gullible cretins.

Sorry to disappoint, but I really don't know which of the above scenarios is worse.

**Anyone** who *really truly* believes that our president is a Communist (is that Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist, Maoist, Trotskyite, Shachtmanite or Lovestoneite?); **or** that there are already plans on the drawing board to build mass internment camps for any and all who do not purchase health insurance; **or** that the various "Democrat" proposals for health care are

nothing more, nothing less than "an agenda for death" . . . Anyone who *really truly* believes this kind of moronic prattle is either terminally gullible or a direct descendant of the late Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy. Like "Tailgunner Joe," folks holding these beliefs -- whether they possess microphones or not -- see enemies under every bed and easily ascribe those things they neither understand nor agree with to a pernicious, highly organized and malevolent conspiracy. As we well know, there are any number of folks with access to broadcast microphones and cameras spewing what is essentially neo-McCarthyism seven days a week, three-hundred-and-sixty-five days a year. And just as in the days of McCarthy and McCarthyism, there are millions of people who firmly believe they now see the world clearly -- because they are looking through "lenses of understanding" provided by "physicians" like Rush Limbaugh, Michael Savage and Mark Levine.

Remember, what we're discussing here is who or what is worse: those who *really truly believe* the things they broadcast, versus those who merely create scripts that permit them to reach the top of the entertainment heap.

There are times when it seems nicer and more generous to give guys like Limbaugh the benefit of the doubt and say "Well, he's an entertainer . . . he couldn't possibly believe all the drivel he spews. He's figured out how to make \$50 million a year. Who can fault him for that?" Then again, there are other times when it seems nicer and more generous to conclude that guys like Limbaugh *really truly* do believe what they broadcast; otherwise, they are breaking a prime Biblical injunction: "*Do not put a stumbling block in the path of the blind.*" But, if they are innocent of violating that Biblical command, they are guilty of being spiteful, hateful and filled with fear.

So which is true . . . which is worse . . . and how to decide?

Perhaps Senator McCarthy can provide answers. . . .

Nearly 40 years ago, I wrote my senior thesis on the role that Senator McCarthy and McCarthyism played in the 1952 presidential election. In doing research on the senator, I discovered that prior to "discovering the menace of Communism," he had tried to make a name for himself by becoming identified with two very different issues: Pepsi Cola and the Malmedy Massacre.

Early in his senate career, McCarthy decided that it would be smart -- and profitable -- to lead the fight for continued government regulation of sugar prices. He managed to successfully keep the government ceiling on the price of sugar. His dalliance with Pepsi became so blatantly obvious -- he accepted bribes from the soft drink giant -- that his colleagues derisively nicknamed him "The Pepsi Cola Kid."

Oops! On to another issue . . . the Malmedy Massacre.

On May 17, 1944, members of the 1st Panzer Division (*Kampfgruppe Peiper*) murdered 90 American prisoners of war -- in clear violation of the Geneva Convention of 1929. A trial, in which the highest-ranking officer charged was SS General Sepp Dietrich, was held at the Dachau concentration camp in May-July 1946. The soldiers were found guilty and sentenced to death; enter Senator McCarthy. Desperately looking for a way to garner publicity, he actually decided that it was in his best self-interest to lobby for the commutation of the death sentences meted out to *the Waffen* SS soldiers! McCarthy was highly critical of their convictions because of -- unsubstantiated -- allegations of torture during the interrogations that led to their confessions. McCarthy accused the U.S. Army of engaging in "a coverup of judicial misconduct," but never presented any evidence to support his accusation. Shortly after this, a poll of the Senate press corps voted him "the worst U.S. Senator" currently in office.

Oops! That's when he "discovered" the Communist menace.

In other words, he never believed there were Communists infiltrating the Army, Navy or Federal Government. He "broadcast" it because it greatly increased his visibility -- his political "Neilson Ratings." McCarthy continued blithely on for several years, destroying lives and careers by accusing thousands of being part of a mass Communist conspiracy.

Joe McCarthy finally got his comeuppance on June 9, 1954, the 30th day of the so-called "Army-McCarthy Hearings." On that day, McCarthy accused Fred Fisher -- a young Jewish lawyer and assistant to United States Army counsel Joseph Nye Welch -- of being a Communist. (While a student at Harvard Law School Fisher had been a member of the "National Lawyers Guild," which J. Edgar Hoover had at one time tried to get the Attorney General to add to a list of supposed "subversive organizations.") \

As McCarthy was dragging Fisher's name through the mud on nationwide television, Joseph Nye Welch interrupted him and uttered several sentences that would effectively destroy first the senator's "ratings," and then his career:

*Until this moment, Senator, I think I have never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness . . . . If it were in my power to forgive you for your reckless cruelty, I would do so. I like to think that I am a gentle man, but your forgiveness will have to come from someone other than me . . . . Senator, may we not drop this? We know he belonged to the Lawyers Guild . . . . Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You've done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?*

At that point, the gallery erupted into applause. Senator Joseph McCarthy had been unmasked for the egregious unprincipled bully he truly was.

I say the same thing to Rush Limbaugh: "At long last, have you left no sense of decency?"

Yesterday, November 12, 2009 Limbaugh, like Joseph McCarthy before him, went too damn far. He began his show by accusing the president of being "a destructive ideologue," and proclaiming that Obama "doesn't really want to create jobs," but instead wants to "wipe out the rich." Nothing terribly new here. But then he compared House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Adolf Hitler and Health Care Reform to what transpired at Dachau!

THIS IS GOING TOO DAMN FAR!

If you *really truly believe* that Speaker Pelosi is no different than Hitler; if you *really truly believe* that health care reform is "how Dachau got started," then I urge you to take an extended leave of absence, go back and devote a couple of years to studying the *real* history of the 20th century. For it is obvious that you haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about.

However, if you *really truly do not believe* that Speaker Pelosi is no different from Hitler; if you *really truly do not believe* that health care reform is "how Dachau got started," then I say:

"HOW DARE YOU?"

"WHO IN THE HELL DID *YOU* LOSE IN THE CAMPS?"

"DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT A DISGRACEFUL DISSERVICE YOU DO TO THE DEAD?"

"HOW CAN YOU SO TRIVIALIZE THE MOST BRUTAL EVIL IN ALL RECORDED HISTORY?"

"ARE RATINGS POINTS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TO YOU THAN BASIC HUMANITY?"

"DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT A TOTAL ASS YOU ARE?"

And, in the immortal words of Joseph Nye Welch:

"HAVE YOU AT LONG LAST NO SENSE OF DECENCY?"

You don't have to answer this last question Rush; we all *really truly* know the answer.

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November 13, 2009 in [Lunacy and Outrages](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(3\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



November 20, 2009

## **Dream a Little Dream With Me?**

New York State Senator George Washington Plunkitt, "The Sage of Tammany Hall," summed up his political career in eight immortal words: "I seen my opportunities and I took 'em." Plunkitt (1842-1924) was the Platonic absolute of the "Machine Politician" -- one who practiced a patronage-based brand of politics and was brutally honest about exercising power for personal gain. Plunkett famously believed there to be a real and significant difference between "honest" and "dishonest" graft. To his cynical mind, that which separated the two was partly whether one got caught, and partly for whom the swag or booty was meant. According to Plunkitt, in the case of "dishonest graft," one worked solely for one's own interests; in that of "honest graft," one pursued the interests of "one's party, one's state *and* one's personal interests all together."

But no matter how you parse or prettify it, graft is graft, corruption is corruption. And despite imaginative distinction he may have drawn between "honest" and "dishonest" graft, the fact remains that Senator George Washington Plunkitt was a corrupt politician.

I found myself thinking about graft, corruption and "The Sage of Tammany Hall" the other day while reading results of Transparency International's annual ranking of the relative corruption levels of 180 countries in the world. Not surprisingly, the five least corrupt (or most honest) countries in the world -- and their scores out of 10 -- were:

1. New Zealand (9.4)
2. Denmark (9.3)
3. Singapore (9.2)
4. Sweden (9.2) and
5. Switzerland (9.0)

The five most corrupt countries on the planet were:

180. Somalia (1.1)
179. Afghanistan (1.3)
178. Burma (1.4)
177. Sudan (1.5)
176. Iraq (1.5)

Other findings of interest:

- Canada was tied with Iceland and Australia for #8 (8.7)
- The United States of America was ranked #19 (7.5)
- Qatar was the highest-ranked Arab country (#22 -- 7.0)
- Israel #32 (6.1)
- Cuba #61 (4.4)
- Italy #63 (4.3)
- Pakistan #139 (2.4)
- Russia #146 (2.2)

*(Note: For those wishing to see the complete listing, please go to [Transparency International Index](#))*

So what is it that makes the United States more corrupt than Norway, Hong Kong, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, Japan and a dozen other countries, but far, far less corrupt than Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Paraguay, Ecuador, Lebanon and oh so many many others? And, assuming we could figure out where or what the corrupting influence(s) is/are, what could be done about it so that in the next decade, we could rank up there with all those clean-as-a-hound's-tooth countries and kingdom's?

In eight simple words:

**TOTAL ABSOLUTE PUBLIC FINANCING OF ALL  
POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS.**

Yes I know, the above is terribly idealistic, totally unrealistic and stands about as much of a chance of happening as Sarah Palin receiving a Pulitzer Prize or Rhodes Scholarship. But heck, what good is living if you can't dream? Let's dream a not so little dream together . . .

One of the major reasons why scads of legislation that *should* -- and at least theoretically *can* -- be enacted dies aborning, is that those who underwrite the senators and representatives have other ideas. In simple terms and by way of example:

- Over the past 20 years, the National Rifle Association has made \$17,299,836 in contributions to hundreds of legislators (17% Democrat, 83% Republican) in order to guarantee that no significant gun control legislation passes.
- Over the past 20 years, the AMA has made \$26,277,243 in contributions to Democrats (39%) and Republicans (61%) in order to safeguard their interests -- which of course includes any and all health care reform proposals.
- Over the past 20 years, Blue Cross/Blue Shield have made \$16,210,718 in contributions to Democrats (51%) and Republicans (49%) to safeguard their interests.
- Over the past 20 years, Bristol-Meyers Squibb has contributed \$7,263,612 to Democrats (41%) and Republicans (58%) to make sure that their voice is heard whenever the issue affects the pharmaceutical industry.

This doesn't even get into advocacy groups -- the so-called "527s" -- whose contributions are made not to "candidates" but rather to "issues," and typically fund advertisements and commercials which are meant to sway voters. And of course, there are tens of thousands of wealthy individuals who contribute hundreds of thousands -- sometimes millions -- of dollars to candidates in order to guarantee "access" -- a friendly ear.

Is it any wonder that senators and representatives frequently stand foursquarely against that which their constituents want? If laws were to be enacted which totally eliminated corporate, lobby, and "527" contributions (which classically go to incumbents, rather than challengers) then legislators would have to pay far more attention to the wishes of those who truly put them in office -- the voters of their state or district.



Seems like a no-brainer . . . but it's not.

Back in 1976 in *Buckley v. Valeo* (424 U.S. 1) the United States Supreme Court upheld a federal law which set limits on campaign contributions. (Heretofore, if I, as an individual wanted -- and could afford -- to contribute say \$10 million to a candidate, it was kosher. After this decisions, limits were set.) However, in the process of so doing, the court ruled that "spending money in order to influence elections is a form of constitutionally protected free speech." Although the court's decision was far from unanimous -- both Chief Justice Warren Burger and Associate Justice Byron White dissented -- the decision stands; money is tantamount to free speech.

In 2002, Congress passed the "Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act" (McCain-Feingold), which included a prohibition on so-called "soft money" as well as limits on independent expenditures by private groups. The court gutted many provisions of the law, citing *Buckley v. Valeo's* admonition that money was tantamount to free speech. The one aspect of McCain-Feingold that is still with us is a provision which forces candidates to append an announcement at the end of each ad: "*I'm . . . , and I approve this message.*"

It is or course the height of naiveté to presume that total, complete public financing of American political campaigns are going to become the law any time soon. For that to happen, the halls of Congress would have to be filled with idealists who were more interested in doing what was right and fair rather than that which was safe and self-perpetuating. Until that day comes - - if ever -- that which some refer to as "Gold's Law" will continue to prevail. Simply stated, "Gold's Law" states that "He/she who has the gold will make the law."

Under the circumstances, is it any wonder then that significant health care, or cap-and-trade, or gun control, or dozens of others critical pieces of legislation are rarely enacted? It's almost as if old George Washington Plunkitt had moved from Albany to Washington, D.C., and was now practicing "honest vs. dishonest graft" in the nation's capitol.

The single most important change we could make in the way we handle our political business is moving to total, absolute public campaign financing. Not only would it go a long way toward giving our voices as much volume and clarity as those of the lobbyists, special interest groups,

and 527s; it would move the United States up higher and higher on the ladder of least corrupt nations on the planet.

Until the day comes when idealism becomes realism, all we can do is lobby, write articles, try to win over hearts and minds, and dream.

Care to dream a little dream with me?

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November 20, 2009 in [Politics & Cash](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(5\)](#) | [TrackBack](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



November 26, 2009

## **Es ist Shver Tzu Zein a Yid . . . Fershtayst?**

Few religious, ethnic or national doctrines have attracted more virulent, emotionally-charged criticism than the idea of a/the "chosen people." Indeed, type the word *chosenness* -- the abstract form of the concept -- on to your screen, and you will quickly learn that -- properly speaking -- no such word exists. (I no longer have that problem; I added it to my personal dictionary a long time ago.)

For at least three millennia, we Jews have referred to ourselves as "The Chosen People." And for at least three millennia, that self-referent -- whether loudly proclaimed, softly whispered or merely contemplated -- has been at least partly responsible for placing us in more dire peril, making us the butt of more opprobrious commentary and stereotyping, and leading us to more gaols, gallows and gas chambers -- than anything real or concrete.

Although differing in historicity and proof texts, Judaism, Islam, Catholicism, Mormonism, Rastafari, -- even Unification and Brahma Kumaris -- all know about *chosenness*; that which adds strength, power and purpose -- if not superiority -- to their theology and *weltanschauung*. Very briefly, and by way of examples consider the following:

- *Rastafari* belief structure contain six fundamental principles, including the complete chosenness of the black race in the eyes of *Jah* -- God incarnate -- rendering them supreme physically and spiritually to all other people.
- *Mormons* view all Latter Day Saints as covenant, or chosen, people; they have accepted the name of Jesus Christ. (Interestingly, Mormons do not dispute the "chosen" status of the Jewish people; rather, they believe that ultimately, Jews will accept Christianity . . . or else)

- *The traditional Christian concept of "Supersessionism"* holds that Christian believers have replaced physical Israelites as God's chosen people. They believe that Israel's chosenness found its ultimate fulfillment through the message of Jesus. Therefore, Jews who remain faithful to Judaism are no longer considered chosen, since they reject Jesus as both messiah and the son of God.
- *Brahma Kumaris* (the "New Spiritual University") believe in a strict hierarchy of human souls . . . that they are the only religion which God talks to in person and the only one that will both inherit and rule the Heaven on Earth for 2,500 years.

It is a sad fact of history that as times become more fraught with economic uncertainty -- indeed, as society goes through more rapid, uncharted changes, as the gap between "haves" and "have-nots" widens -- intolerance, racial and religious bigotry, discrimination and demagoguery all grow. For Jews, this means a heightened sensitivity to growing levels of anti-Semitism, and an increased awareness of just how many untruths frightened people are willing to believe.

And this gets us back to the concept of the "Chosen People."

The term "chosen people" has been more closely identified with the Jews than any other group for a long, long time. The reason is simple; Jews were the first to be called by that name. And for those who care to ask the question "Chosen for what?" the original answer was also simple: chosen to receive The Law at Mt. Sinai. And anyone - Jew, Christian, Muslim, Rastafarian or atheist -- can read the relevant passages in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) in Deut. 7:6, 12:5, or 18:5. as but three examples. Over the course of time, that question -- "Chosen for what?" -- has been asked with far less frequency. As anyone who has studied history knows, in far too many cases, Jews have been accused of understanding that "chosenness" to mean being superior to everyone else. And although nothing could be farther from the historic truth -- about Jews considering themselves superior -- it is perhaps understandable how people in times of change, uncertainty and dislocation might come to that unwarranted conclusion.

It seems to me that were that question to be asked today -- "Chosen for what?" that a proper answer would quite simply be, "Chosen to be faithful witnesses to -- and to have a positive effect on -- all of human history."

Nowhere does superiority enter into that answer.

I believe that the Jews have done just that: acted as both faithful witnesses while having as much of a positive effect as possible. Consider, if you will that despite being something like 0.227% of the world's population (14.6 million out of 6.43 billion), the Jews have:

- Won 29 Nobel prizes in chemistry, 44 in physics, 49 in medicine, 24 in economics, 11 in literature and 9 in peace.

- Virtually created the motion picture industry . . . Meyer, Zukor, Goldwyn, Cohen, Thalberg, Lubin, Selig, Fox, Laemmle, Warner . . . including the most successful filmmaker of all time: Steven Spielberg.
- Created the field of psychoanalysis . . . Freud and Adler, Fromm, Erikson, Rapaport and Maslow.
- Responsible for creating the *New York Times*, Pulitzer Prize, Random House, Simon & Schuster, and Alfred A. Knopf.
- Clothing and design: Levi Strauss, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein and Donna Karan.
- Department stores: Macys, Federated, Bloomingdales, Filene's, Saks, Abraham & Strauss, Neiman Marcus, Bergdorf Goodman and Sears.
- Created the world's largest and most valuable computer company (Dell, Michael Dell).
- Co-founded the world's most successful search engine (Google, Sergey Brin).
- Head of the world's largest software company (Microsoft, Steve Ballmer).
- Co-founded and head of the world's largest software company (Oracle, Lawrence Ellison).
- Co-founded, led and served as chairman of the world's dominant microprocessor and memory chip company (Intel, Andrew Grove).
- Served as CEO or COO at three of the world's four most valuable Internet companies (Yahoo, Terry Semel; eBay, Jeff Skoll; and IAC, Barry Diller).
- Co-founded and head the communications protocol/chip company whose chips are in most U.S. cell phones and are slated to be utilized in the next generation of cell phones to be used worldwide (Qualcomm, Irwin Jacobs).

And yet, even with all this, many will counter with the names Bernard Madoff, Ivan Boesky and Michael Milken, and claim that America's current batch of problems are due to people like Barney Frank, Chuck Schumer, Lawrence Summers, Rahm Emanuel and David Axelrod.

So maybe it's not so much that Jews are the "Chosen People," as the "Choosing People," a folk who have chosen to roll up its sleeves and make as much of a difference in the lives of others.

But there's just so pleasing some folk.

As we have long said, *Es ist shver tzu zein a yid* . . . namely, "It's hard to be a Jew."

Or, to put it another way, "The Jews are just like everyone else . . . only more so."

*Fershtayst?*

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**HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!**

November 26, 2009 in [Anti-Semitism](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



December 03, 2009

## **The Irony of Unity**

*Note: For the next couple of weeks essays appearing on "The K.F. Stone Weekly" are going to be somewhat shorter than usual; I am in the final throes of completing the manuscript for "The Congressional Minyan," and am writing around the clock to beat a December 18 deadline. Please bear with me. . .*

Unbelievably, he's gone and done it: President Barack Obama has unified the country. I mean, he's given liberals and conservatives, progressives and Palinoids something they can pretty much all agree on: that they don't like his new Afghan surge policy. And while there is fairly broad unity of disapproval, there is also an underlying irony: that no two factions dislike his recently disclosed policy for the same reason.

How ironic! How unifying!!

The left, of course, is condemning the president for taking a chapter out of Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam playbook. By adding 30,000 more troops to a distant land made up of ancient tribes with ancient animosities, liberals fear he's committing the U.S. to a conflict for which the concept "victory" is somewhere between mercurial and meaningless. *"What did the Pashtun ever do to us?"* liberals demand? *"Is this still about Osama, al Qaeda and the Taliban?"* *"And how in the hell are we going to pay for it?"* they want to know.

Indeed, why are we there?

In a word: P-A-K-I-S-T-A-N. I can't believe that anyone in the Obama Administration is naive enough to believe we're going to turn the Karzai regime into a model of civic honesty. Afghanistan simply has too long a history of autocracy, duplicity and factional friction for anything like that to happen. No, our policy has far more to do with the fragility of Asif Ali Zadari's nuclear-armed Pakistan than the future of Hamid Karzai's corrupt landlocked mess of a country.

Then too, arming and training Afghans to take over responsibility for their own safety is a good thing. And, it cost one heck of a lot less to maintain an Afghan soldier than an American Marine.

Conservatives, of course, are condemning the president for *only* committing 30,000 more troops (*"Anybody with an ounce of brains would send a quarter-million!"* several radio commentators are proclaiming). Then too, *"How in the world can he commit troops with one hand, and then with the other commit the United States to a pullout? That's tantamount to giving away strategic secrets to our worst enemies!"* Conservatives contend that *"America should be prepared to stay in Afghanistan just as long as it takes to get the job done"* -- whatever that job may be. It's amazing how many strategic geniuses sit behind microphones or represent districts in the Deep South and Midwest.

Yes, there certainly *is* an ironic unifying principle at work these days. There is so much disagreement with the president's strategy that one might conclude he is the only one who hasn't grasped an obvious truth. But there is no obvious truth -- other than the fact that any nation or empire committing its military might to Afghanistan is swimming against the tide of history. Just ask the Greeks, Scythians, White Huns, Turks, Ghaznavids, Monguos, Pashtuns, Brits or Russians.

I am just intelligent and educated enough to realize that I possess neither an answer nor a strategy for Afghanistan. What I do know is that all those who condemn the administration's newest strategy while pretending to know some simple, objective truth about what we really should be doing, are fooling themselves.

And that, perhaps, is the greatest irony of all.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



December 10, 2009

## Chanukah 101

OK, once again, Chanukah is here. And once again:

- **Folks are disputing the proper way to spell it.** (In matter of plain fact, "Chanukah" is a Hebrew word, and unless you use the academically-agreed upon system of transliteration, it really doesn't matter what English letters you use. So long as when you pronounce what's on the page you don't say "Thanksgiving" or "Valentine's Day," you're in good shape.)
- **The age-old "Latke-versus-Sufganiot" debate:** What will it be? Potatoes fried in oil and served with apple sauce (or sour cream or jam or sugar) or jelly-filled donut holes?
- **Municipalities around the country are debating** whether it is proper to place a *menorah* next to a Christmas tree in the public square. (Actually, the correct name for the eight-branched job is *chanukiah*; a *menorah* has seven branches and is meant to indicate the day of the week.)
- **Wherever you go and whatever you read**, the holiday is made to seem far, far more important than it really is. (In point of fact, Chanukah is truly a very minor celebration.)
- **It is time to engage in the *real* story of Chanukah** in an attempt to understand what it's all about, and hopefully see that there *is* something truly miraculous behind it.

In order to understand get to the *real* miracle of Chanukah, we have to engage in a bit of history and go back in time . . . to June 11, 323 BCE, to be precise. For on that day, in a palace in Babylon, a young man -- barely 33 years old -- died. That man, Alexander III of Macedon, more popularly known as Alexander "the Great," had in the span of 13 years, conquered what was then considered the entire civilized world. According to ancient sources, Alexander took ill, and within two days, lapsed into a coma. As he lay on his bed, his generals came into the room, demanding that their comatose leader name a successor. According to one historian,



Alexander then opened his eyes and said: "A successor? A successor? Who should succeed a God except the King of the Gods? I bequeath my kingdom to Zeus!!" And then he fell back dead.

What this scene lacks in verisimilitude it more than makes up for in high drama. And what is true is that from the moment of Alexander's death, his kingdom became divided amongst his generals, most notably Seleucus and Ptolemy and their successors. Over the course of the next century-and-a-half, there were battles and upheavals aplenty between the two camps. At one point Ptolemy was Pharaoh of Egypt; Seleucus became Satrap of Babylon. In order to get from one dynasty to another, armies regularly traveled through Judea, which at times was Seleucid and others Ptolemaic. This situation meant that the Jews were in essence neither, although many did become Hellenize . . . sort of like the ancient world's version of Reform Jews.

Then, in 175 BCE, Antiochus IV -- called *Epiphanes*, meaning "Manifest of God" -- ascended the Seleucid throne. During his brief (175-164 BCE) reign, Antiochus (whose subjects called him *Epimanes* -- the "Mad One" -- behind his back) nearly conquered Egypt, and sacked Jerusalem. (Note: During his failed Egyptian campaign, the Roman Ambassador to Egypt, Gaius Popillius Laenas delivered a stern warning from the Roman Senate ordering Antiochus to stand down -- or else. When Antiochus said he needed "time to think," the Roman envoy drew *a line in the sand* around him and said, "Before you cross this circle, I want you to give me your answer for the Roman Senate!" Hence the birth of a famous metaphor . . .)

Where Ptolemy, Seleucus and their successors followed Alexander's lead by forcing neither their culture nor religion on the Jews (figuring they'd see its superiority and adopt it of their own free will), Antiochus -- who considered himself to be divine -- outlawed Jewish religious rites and traditions, deposed Jason as High Priest (*cohyān gadol*) and installed Menelaus -- his own functionary -- in his place. When Antiochus ordered the worship of Zeus as the supreme God, the Jews rebelled. Under the leadership of the elderly Hasmonean Mattathias and his sons -- most notably Judah (Judas), the Jews more than held their own against what was, at the time, one of the first professional armies in the history of the world. What the Hasmoneans lacked in arms or military knowledge, they more than made up for in spirit and knowledge of the terrain. They soon began history's first "hit-and-run" war -- guerrilla warfare -- and fought and defeated the enemy all the way back to Jerusalem.

It is at this point in the historical record that fantasy takes over . . . the story of the oil that lasted for eight days. When a later generation got around to shaping the history and meaning behind Chanukah, they very pointedly sought to downplay the Hasmonean's role in the war against Antiochus. Why? Because as good as they were when it came to waging war, that's how bad the Hasmoneans were when it came to running a kingdom. They appointed members of their family to be both king and High Priest -- something totally forbidden in Jewish law -- and were both corrupt and inept. Eventually they had to turn to an outsider -- the nascent Roman Empire -- to assist them in reestablishing order. To a later generation, the Hasmoneans were only remembered for one thing: for planting the seeds of the ultimate destruction of the Jewish Commonwealth. For they were the ones who introduced the Romans to Judea.

Is it any wonder that the rabbis of a later generation made the "miracle" of Chanukah Divine?

And yet, there are actually two *real* miracles associated with the holiday:

1. That for the first time in human history, people went to war for something totally ephemeral: the ability to pray, worship and observe as they saw fit. Up to this point, all wars had been waged over tangible things like borders, resources, harbors, gold . . . even women.
2. That a rag-tag assortment of farmers, artisans, and scholars actually defeated one of the most powerful professional fighting forces in the world. In so doing, the Hasmoneans taught all future generations a critical lesson: that beliefs, ideas and ideals are incredibly powerful motivating factors.

And so, with this brief lesson, let's get back to debating how the holiday is properly spelled and whether the tradition calls for eating *latkes* or *sufganiot*.

For my money, a meal of both is ideal . . .

*Chag samayach!*

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## RETURN OF THE KNOW- NOTHINGS

Historically, the one great divide that progressives and other fair-minded Americans have tried to bridge is that between the "haves" and "have-nots." No, not to take from the "haves" and give to the "have-nots" as the conservatives would tell it; but rather to provide opportunities that might enable the former to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps -- with an assist from members of a compassionate polity. Historically, one side has angrily classified this as "Socialism;" "an unlawful transfer of wealth;" "the utter destruction of Democracy," while the other has responded that the expansion of opportunity is what America is all about.

To be sure, as a nation we've gone through periods when the divide has narrowed, and others when it has widened. Ever since our earliest days we have debated back-and-forth precisely what role government can and should -- or should not -- play in narrowing that gap. For some, the only role the government should play in creating wealth is cutting taxes for the "haves," and then getting out of their way, so that they might create the jobs which will eventually serve to lift up the "have-nots." For others, the government's role should be the creation of so-called "safety nets" -- like Social Security, unemployment insurance and AFDC for the "have-nots" -- funded (at least in part) by upping taxes on the "haves." We can see evidence of this classic debate in the current health care reform imbroglio, although interestingly -- and frustratingly -- most of the debate is either within one political party (the

Democrats) or between Democrats and the unelected members of what H.L. Mencken once called the "Boobiosie."

The main reason why almost all Congressional debate is amongst members of the Democratic Party -- as opposed to being Democrats vs. Republicans -- is that for the most part, the GOP has made a tactical decision to absent themselves from the whole health care reform debate and just be "The Party of No." Moreover, the tactical decision isn't just for the health care debate alone; the Republicans have decided that the best way back into power is to say "no" to virtually everything. However, while the GOP is off in the corner undergoing the political version of the "terrible twos," their allies within the "Boobiosie" have taken up the cudgels of battle in their stead.

Their wildly-swung cudgels are aimed at, among other targets, "Socialized medicine," "death squads," and "abortion on demand." Just yesterday, a new truncheon was unveiled: the one protesting the White House "threat" to Nebraska Democratic Senator Ben Nelson, that unless he fell in line and voted in favor of the "Marxist-Leninist health care bill," "they" would shut down Nebraska's Offut Air Force Base.

Never mind that the commission empowered to decide which bases are closed doesn't meet again until the year 2013.

Never mind that no such threat was ever made.

People actually believe this . . . just like they believe that the Democratic health care bill includes "death squads," and "forces American taxpayers" to pay for any and all abortions.

What we see in operation here is a divide far, far wider and far, far more pernicious than that merely between the "haves" and "have-nots."

This consciously-created divide is between what we might call the "Knows" and the "Know-Nothings" -- between those who make up their own minds after getting their news from a plethora of sources such as NPR, CSPAN, MSNBC, CNN, magazines, books and the like; and those who simply take as gospel any drivel they hear or see coming from the chief "Know-Nothings," the "Barons of the Boobiosie."

These "Barons" are the ones responsible for the so-called "birthers" (those who really, truly believe that President Obama was born not in Hawaii, but in Kenya). They are the ones who broadcast the "unassailable fact" that

economically-speaking, everything was just hunky-dory under George W. Bush; that all our woes began the day the Obama crowd moved into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. These are the ladies and gentlemen who swear that liberals are incapable of telling the truth and want to forcibly remove both Jesus and Christianity from the United States of America.

And on and on and on . . .

This is not, of course, the first time in our history that there was a great divide between the "Knows" and "Know-Nothings." Back in the 1840s and '50s, there was actually a political party -- known variously as the "American Republican Party," the "Native American Party," and the "American Party," which instructed its members to answer any and all questions about its positions and/or philosophy with the simple retort "I know nothing!" Hence, they became known collectively as the "Know Nothings." Unbelievably, they managed to elect mayors in Chicago and Washington, D.C., several members of Congress, and even ran former president Millard Fillmore for chief executive in 1856.

That which gave rise to the "Know Nothings" was fear -- fear of Irish and German Catholics who started coming to America in droves in about 1830. Unscrupulous politicians, seeking their share of the pie, actually convinced the unwashed and unlettered that Pope Pius IX had sent all these folks to America as part of a conspiracy; a plot in which he/they would subjugate the U.S. and do away with both liberty and Democracy. Fortunately, relative sanity prevailed, and by 1860, the "Know Nothing Party" was all but gone.

But I fear they have returned -- with a vengeance. How much real difference is there between the one who really, truly believes that the Pope is out to take over America, and he or she who really truly believes that the president is a Muslim bent on joining his "brethren" to destroy America? Between those who burn down Catholic churches -- as was done in many cities -- and those who call for the destruction of Islamic mosques? Between those who cloth hatred in the garments of patriotism, and those who . . . well, cloth ignorance in the garments of knowledge?

The answer -- most hauntingly -- is not one whole hell of a lot.

The logic these modern purveyors of "know-nothingism" use goes something like this:

- All Democrats are ultra-liberals.
- Marxists and Socialists are all ultra-liberals.
- Therefore, all Democrats are Marxists and Socialists.
- Marxists and Socialists are incapable of telling the truth.
- One should believe nothing said by a Marxist or Socialist.
- Therefore, one should believe nothing said by a Democrat.

I actually heard this on the radio the other day. And then, the Boobiosie Baron asked rhetorically, "And how do you know you can trust me? Because I only speak the truth. And you know that is true, because I just said so!"

The gap between the "knows" and the "know-nothings" is terribly unnerving and discomfiting. Precisely what we can do to narrow the gap -- if that is even possible -- is, as this moment, unknown.

Perhaps -- just perhaps -- the answer will lie in closing that other gap: the one between those who have and those who have not. For a person with a job, hope and a future is far more likely to want to know who has lent the helping hand than the one who seeks only to know who is to blame.

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*Great News! As of Tuesday, December 15, the completed manuscript for **The Congressional Minyan: The Jews of Capitol Hill**, is in the hands of the publisher. We got it done three days early. Now its on to editing, printing and getting out on the road selling . . .*

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**December 25, 2009**

## *The Next Generation of CliffsNotes®*

Who amongst the Baby Boomers doesn't remember **CliffsNotes®** -- those little yellow and black booklets that took up less than a couple of dozen pages "teaching" us everything we thought we needed to know about chemistry, French, algebra or *Great Expectations*? Remember the sample essays at the back of the booklet that were so difficult *not* to copy verbatim and hand in as our own? Whatever became of all those little academic crutches? Well, I'm here to tell you that **CliffsNotes®** is still in business. And what's more, not only do Cliff and the posse have a great user-friendly website; they are more up-to-date, more technically advanced than **Windows® 7**.

Unbelievably, nowadays, students in need of becoming "expert" on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, Thoreau's *Walden*, or Plato's *Republic*; those wishing to bone up on Calculus, Economics or English Grammar -- need not even go to Borders or Barnes & Noble to purchase the **CliffsNotes®** version of the work they've been assigned. All they need do is download Shakespeare, Thoreau or Plato via "**CliffsNotes® To Go**" or **CliffsNotesmobile™** to their iphone™ or iPod touch®. If you wish, you can connect with **CliffsNotes®** through either "Facebook" or "YouTube." Why there's even an audio version of all this that Cliff calls "**Cramcasting**."

Really something, no?

And yet, despite all the techno injection, regardless of how many megabytes there are in *Middlemarch*, it's still the same old deception -- glancing at shadows, and declaring them to be the real McCoy. It's still the same old pity: permitting others -- Cliff *et al* -- to make up our minds

for us about what things mean and how we should feel about them. Dickens had a great expression for this: ***The moral infection of claptrap.*** (Note: This expression, 'The moral infection of claptrap,' is used by Dickens in describing the pompous Josiah Bounderby in chapter seven of Hard Times. Sorry to report that CliffsNotes® has never seen fit to publish a booklet on this most satiric of novels.)

To a haunting extent, *headlines* are the "claptrap," the CliffsNotes® of modern discourse. As our lives become ever more complex and societal changes seem to take place at the speed of light, we have increasingly come to rely upon "claptrap," where previously, knowledge born of study and patience would have sufficed. How many know far, far more about the indiscretions of Tiger Woods than the amazingly heroic reform movement in Iran? How many who have never read word one of the recently passed Senate health care bill "know" everything that's wrong with it? How many knowingly proclaim things like:

- "Global warming is a total fraud,"
- "Since Obama became President, suicides are at an all-time high."
- "The Department of Homeland Security is targeting anyone who believes in limited government as a potential terrorist . . . "

as if they had studied -- and then seriously contemplated -- the subjects upon which they are now declaiming so vociferously. To my way of thinking, this is no different from the student who, having thumbed through the CliffsNotes® version of a novel, essay or foreign language, feels him- or herself to be an expert. But of course, they are not; CliffsNotes®, useful though they may be, cannot replace the real thing -- the actual text. In the same vein, headlines -- especially as provided by the modern molders of opinion -- are far more often based on fiction rather than fact.

In the case of CliffsNotes® and class work, the potential dangers are two-fold:

1. That the student will only *seem* to have learned the text or subject at hand,
2. That the student may well commit an act of educational dishonesty by passing off what has been gleaned as their own knowledge.

Perhaps they will pass the test or get a passing grade on the term paper; they will, however, have failed in their primary pursuit; to actually



learn enough to be able to employ critical judgment. This does not necessarily bode well for their post-educational career.

In the case of "headlines," rather than **CliffsNotes®**, the potential danger is even more severe. For in repeating the "headlines" that are broadcast by others; in concluding that these "headlines" contain the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; people can easily put their trust and confidence in those whose true genius -- or purpose -- is not in teaching, but rather in manipulating. And a society in which a vast number of folks are easily manipulated is a society in which freedom may well one day find itself on the critical list.

"Cramcasting" is simply not the antidote to the "moral infection of claptrap" -- whether it be in school or society.

Sorry Cliff . . .

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