

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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A MEMO TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IT'S "HEADS I WIN, TAILS YOU LOSE!"

To: Those Who Believe It's "Heads I Win, Tails You Lose!"

From: K.F.S.

Re: Reality

Like many, I receive tons of email on a daily basis. Unlike many, I have ten different email addresses . . . one for each of the various faces and facets of a wonderfully frenetic life. These daily emails run the gamut from those urgently



soliciting *gelt* for campaigns and causes, to requests for advice on issues of faith and religious practice. I have one address that is strictly for medical-ethics related protocols and others reserved for congregants, students at each of three different universities where I teach, family and friends, political co-conspirators and readers of this blog. Like you, I also receive more than my fair share of emails telling me how terribly important it is

that I "forward the enclosed to everyone in your online address book" - which I *never* do; I'm not a great fan of conspiracies.

Frequently, I receive emails asking me whether something a correspondent has read, received or heard is true, along with a request that I read an article, editorial or essay, and then write back and tell them what I think. Alas, the press

of time rarely permits the latter. However, from time to time I do receive an email that begs response. The other day I received one such electronic missive from a student in one of my politics classes. It contained a simple one-line statement that what followed represented his/her belief, and that he/she would be "interested in your take on it." What followed was a briefing-cum-fund-raising piece from the conservative [Heritage Foundation](#). The thrust of their message was that liberals are hypocrites who " . . . like to consider themselves open-minded but in reality . . . are responsible for building a culture of intolerance If you believe in constitutional rights like religious freedom, gun rights, and freedom of speech, you are labeled ignorant. Theirs is a dangerous approach, but an effective one. It's insulting to be called an ignorant bigot, and there's no way to counter ad hominem attacks like that."



Sen. Jim DeMint

How in the world is one supposed to respond to such heavily biased flap-doodle? It seems to me that the author of this screed - former South Carolina Senator and current Heritage Foundation President Jim DeMint - is just as guilty of intolerance as he claims liberals to be. It is difficult to be sanguine and not speak out when people avow that America, constitutionally protected freedoms, the nation's economic health and even Christianity are under serious attack from liberals and progressives. Not agreeing with the hydra-headed beast of fear, trepidation and victimization that the American right has carefully nurtured over the past generation should not mark one as an intolerant hypocrite; rather, it can indicate that others may have differing opinions and worldviews - often backed by cold hard facts.

The Heritage Foundation missive attacks Obama Care for being socialistic, big government for being anti-Christian and liberals in general for supporting higher taxes, greater government regulation, the confiscation of guns and immorality. At one point, DeMint quotes Heritage scholar [Lee Edwards'](#) lionization of President Ronald Reagan: ". . . conservatives understand that the way to win the electoral debate is to take a strong forward position and stick with it just as Reagan did with his 1981 tax cuts that triggered 90 months of economic growth and his Strategic Defense Initiative which forced the Soviets to abandon the arms race and agree to end the cold war at the bargaining table and not on the battlefield." I guess if I as a progressive disagree with Mr. Edwards, that makes me either ignorant of history, a doctrinal Marxist or an immoral sensualist. Truth to tell, I am none of the above; nor, do I firmly believe, are the vast majority of my fellow progressives.

Certainly, Reagan's boldest move as president was his 1981 tax cut, a sweeping measure that slashed the marginal rate on the wealthiest Americans from 70 percent to 50 percent. The legislation also included smaller cuts in lower tax brackets, as well as big breaks for corporations and the oil industry. That's precisely what conservatives do. But the fact of the matter is that the *following* year, as the economy was mired in recession and the federal deficit was spiraling out of control, even groups such as the Business Roundtable lobbied Reagan to raise taxes. And he did: [The Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982](#) was, at the time, the largest peacetime tax increase in U.S. history. Ultimately, Reagan signed measures that increased federal taxes every year of his two-term presidency except the first and the last. And when it comes to the collapse of the Soviet Union, bankrupting itself by spending untold billions in a senseless war in Afghanistan had even more to do with the tide of history than the Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars").

Over the past generation, conservatives and libertarians like Senator DeMint - along with the Tea Party, Fox News, right-wing radio talk-show hosts and internet sites like [The Drudge Report](#), [Breitbart](#) and [News Max](#) - have ceaselessly proclaimed that America, its culture, economy and Christian faith have all been under attack from the "African-born Marxist Muslim" Barack Obama," and his cadre of intolerant liberals. They have pushed the victimization button so many times and in so many ways that they've inevitably and somewhat predictably wound up with the likes of Donald Trump and Ted Cruz as their leading candidates for the Republican presidential nomination. That so many garden variety Republicans blanch at the thought of either of them - one a blowhard, the other a much-despised ideologue - becoming the G.O.P. standard bearer is unsurprising; there are still a lot of thoughtful people out in the hinterlands. That so many refuse to acknowledge that it is the merchants of fear, loathing and conspiracy who are largely guilty of having foisted this reality upon them is neither curious nor unsurprising; it is sadly tragic.

America has always had a socioeconomic and political divide between conservatives and liberals, between rugged individualists and what might be called communitarians. From our earliest days, we have debated - sometimes civilly, sometimes with arms - whether primacy should rest with the federal government or the various states. We have replaced slavery with Jim Crow, Jim Crow with integration, and integration with the beginnings of a color-blind society. And yet, according to a [recent poll](#), there are more Republicans who incorrectly believe Senator Ted Cruz was born in the U.S. (wrong, he was born in Canada) than correctly believe President Obama *was* born in the U.S. What hath the right wrought?

Today, conservatives like the folks at the Heritage Foundation push enhanced voter i.d. laws as a way of ensuring that cases of voter fraud are all but eradicated - despite a [comprehensive investigation](#) of voter impersonation finding a mere 31 credible incidents out of more than one billion ballots cast. Legislators supporting these bills [have all but admitted](#) that fraud had nothing to do with passage of the various bills. Rather, it was and is a tactic to place stumbling blocks in the paths of student, minority and elderly voters - a majority of whom tend to vote for Democrats.

Then too, there are all the so-called "Religious Freedom" bills currently being passed by various Republican-dominated state legislatures which permit businesses, religious institutions, members of the clergy and individuals to discriminate against members of the LGBT community; to do otherwise, it is argued, would be an abridgement of "true believers" First Amendment rights. The same goes for all legislation which has effectively made it next to impossible for women to get abortions - in the name of women's health and safety.

Let's get one thing straight: I do disagree with much of what is contained in the Heritage Foundation email. But this does not make me - or those who look at the world the same way I do - intolerant or hypocritical; just citizens with a different mindset who refuse to paint - or be painted - with a single brush. I for one refuse to demonize - or be demonized by - those with whom I disagree.

So far as I know, all coins are two-sided - heads and tails. For those who firmly believe it's a game of "heads I win, tails you lose," please, I beg you, take a long, hard look in the mirror. You might be shocked by what you see staring back at you.

Now, let's see what's arrived in today's endless batch of email . . .

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