

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



October 06, 2013

## OVERHEARD AT MT. RUSHMORE

(As longtime readers of The K.F. Stone Weekly know, from time to time we pay a visit to the four-august gentlemen residing on Mt. Rushmore and listen in on a conversation. Our [last visit](#), in which the four former presidents had a late-night confab, appeared in this column about two years ago. This time, our visit takes place during daylight hours . . . and for a good reason: the park is closed. Please note that all italicized lines are actual quotes from the speeches and writings of these four great men.)

**G. Washington:** Gentlemen: can you believe it? Here it is a few minutes to noon and we have the park all to ourselves . . . nary a soul to be seen! Where are the tourists of yesteryear?



**A. Lincoln:** I'm afraid to inform you my dear General Washington, but Congress has shut down the government; there's simply no money to keep the national parks -- let alone much of anything else -- open. I'm sorry to have to inform you that more than 800,000 federal employees have been what they called "furloughed" -- sent home without pay. Hauntingly, this dire situation is akin

to words I spoke during the darkest hours of the Civil War, namely that *America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter . . . it will be because we destroyed ourselves.* One party, the Republicans, are essentially holding the government in thrall unless and until they get their way on the issues of health care and public debt.

**GW:** *Where are our men of abilities? Why do they not come forth to save their Country? Is it that once again . . . party disputes and personal quarrels are the great business of the day whilst the momentous concerns of an empire . . . are but secondary consideration? Is it that . . . business of a trifling nature and personal concernment withdraws their attention from matters of great national moment?*

**Thomas Jefferson:** Yes general, the Congress has devolved into the angriest of factions within factions. No one gets along with one another; tempers and tensions are scalding hot. This is so hard to stomach, for as you know, *I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend.*

**Theodore Roosevelt:** I certainly agree. I too have long believed that . . . *the most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.* Moreover, from what I can tell, there's hardly a whit of principle behind all this. *Behind the ostensible government sits enthroned an invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people. To destroy this invisible government, to befoul the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics is the first task of the statesmanship of today.*



**T.J.:** I must admit that I'm utterly fascinated by all these small-minded people -- and they seem to come from your party Mr. Lincoln, and Colonel Roosevelt -- claiming that were we, the founders still alive, that we would agree with them. Their purported understanding of what our original intent may have been is beyond reason. *Some men look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence, and deem them like the Ark of the Covenant, too sacred to be touched. They ascribe to the men of the preceding age a wisdom more than human, and suppose what they did to be beyond amendment . . . . But I know also, that laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times.*



**A.L.** I wouldn't lose a tremendous amount of sleep over all the folderol Tom. After all, *In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at*

*the same time. This too shall pass, and, I believe, some good will come out of it. For as sorry as I am that the skunks who have perpetrated this shutdown are from the party I founded, it has always been my belief that. . .what kills a skunk is the publicity it gives itself.*

**T.I.:** Skunks indeed! From what I hear, they are attempting to bring about what they deem fiscal sanity on the backs of the poor, the needy and the workers. They waste no time in blaming and pointing fingers at everyone save themselves -- and their wealthy backers.

**A.L.:** *If any man tells you he loves America, yet hates labor, he is a liar. If any man tells you he trusts America, yet fears labor, he is a fool. Then too, Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.*

**G.W.:** The Congress simply must find a way to stop all the finger pointing and learn to work together for the greater good. 99% of all failures come from people who make excuses.

**T.I.:** *A little patience, and we shall see the reign of witches pass over, their spells dissolve, and the people, recovering their true sight, restore their government to its true principles. It is true that in the meantime we are suffering deeply in spirit . . . We must have patience till luck turns, and then we shall have an opportunity of winning back the principles we have lost, for this is a game where principles are at stake. And if that doesn't work, ridicule is the best weapon which can be used against unintelligible propositions.*



**A.L.:** Well gentlemen, considering that we have no visitors and it's a bit of a chilly afternoon, I am going to do the unthinkable: I'm going to take a nap. But not before I deliver a message to the men and women who have seen fit to forget precisely what government *Of the people, by the people and for the people* is all about: *The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done, but cannot do at all, or cannot so well do, for themselves in their separate, and individual capacities.*

**Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and T. Roosevelt:** Spread the word oh fellow citizens of these United States: we miss you and await your return . . .

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October 13, 2013

## CRUZ CONTROL

Remember back to the waning days of the 20th century when Christian Millennialists were predicting the end of the world? I well remember listening to a piece done NPR's "Morning Edition" about a small evangelical group that had traveled from America's heartland to Jerusalem to await the Rapture . . . which they knew was about to happen. After giving their spiel to the reporter doing the story, she asked the leader of the group " . . . who from among all those inhabiting the planet is going to be saved from the turbulent end-time you all believe is going to occur in just a matter of days?"



Answered their leader, "Members of our church . . . true believers all . . . the ones who are gathered here in Jerusalem."

"And no one else?" asked the astonished reporter.

"No one else," the sect's leader boldly proclaimed. "We are the anointed of God."

I remember thinking at the time, "What kind of religious leader could ever put faith in a God who would blithely destroy all but a couple of dozen people on earth?" And just as importantly, "What kind of people would



*follow a leader who preached such noxious bilge?"* One need not accept -- let alone fathom -- such a world view in order to get an inkling of what goes on in the mind of Texas Senator Ted Cruz. For the Princeton/Harvard Law-educated Cruz is not only at the forefront of those who seek to wreck the American -- and thus the world's -- economy; he is doing everything in his power to bring about something akin to a political Rapture . . . an America that is made of, for, and by the "true believers amongst us." Senator Cruz and legions of his wealthy supporters, some of whom orchestrated the government shutdown, are rooted in a radical Christian ideology known as [Dominionism](#) or Christian Reconstructionism. This ideology calls on anointed Christian leaders to take over the state and make the goals and laws of the nation "biblical." It seeks to reduce government to organizing little more than defense, internal security and the protection of property rights. It fuses with the Christian religion the iconography and language of American imperialism and nationalism, along with the cruelest aspects of corporate capitalism. The intellectual and moral hollowness of the ideology, its flagrant distortion and misuse of the Bible, the contradictions that abound within it—its leaders champion small government and a large military, as if the military is not part of government—and its laughable pseudoscience are impervious to reason and fact. And that is why the movement is dangerous.

Cruz and his Dominionist supporters -- many of whom are members of the Tea Party -- believe that they are in an epic struggle against the forces of Satan. For the most part they inhabit a binary world of black and white. According to [a recent article](#) by journalist Chris Hedges, Dominionists " . . . have anointed themselves as agents of God who alone know God's will. They sanctify their rage. This rage lies at the center of the ideology. It leaves them sputtering inanities about Barack Obama, his corporate-sponsored health care reform bill, his alleged mandated suicide counseling of 'death panels' for seniors under the bill, his supposed secret alliance with radical Muslims, and 'creeping socialism.' They see the government bureaucracy as being controlled by 'secular humanists' who want to destroy the family and make war against the purity of their belief system. They seek total cultural and political domination."

Senator Cruz inherited his religious *Weltanschauung* from his father, the rabid right-wing preacher [Rafael Cruz](#), who is director of Purifying Fire International Ministry. The senior Cruz, who left Cuba in the 1950s -- after first supporting the Castro revolution -- has gone so far as to declare his son as "[the anointed one](#)." This is frightening stuff, though it goes a long way to explaining how Senator Cruz can spew some of [the vicious, vacuous and downright catty things](#) he is so fond of:

- **On the press:** "The media wants America to give up and allow this country to keep sliding off the edge of the cliff."

- **On the Constitution:** "This is an administration that seems bound and determined to violate every single one of our bill of rights.
- **On the Cold War:** "Our foreign policy is detente, which I'm pretty sure is French for surrender."
- **On Vice President Biden:** "You don't need a punch-line. You just say his name, people laugh."

It seems that whatever Senator Cruz proclaims, his followers believe to be *The Truth From on High*, given voice by the man they believe to be God's anointed prophet. These folks truly believe that Cruz will be the next President of the United States -- the man who will lead America to the Promised Land . . . a land devoid of all those they consider to be "deviants" and "unbelievers." And as with the Millennialists back in December 1999, their ideal world will have a teeny-tiny population . . .

But wait: there is indeed hope on the horizon. Republicans from all but the most hard core, knuckle-dragging wing of the party are turning their backs on the Crapulous Canadian. They don't want Americans to think for one minute that he speaks for them, let alone the Party of Lincoln. According to an [NBC/Wall Street Journal](#) poll released this past Thursday night, 44 percent of Americans don't know who Ted Cruz is. And among Americans that do, [twice as many](#) have unfavorable impressions of the Senator as have favorable ones.

With any luck -- and a dollop of God's grace, Ted Cruz will soon find a place alongside such other political roman candles as John Bricker, John Ashbrook, George Smathers, Herman Cain, Sarah Palin, and Michelle Bachmann -- people who quickly lit up the nation with chit chat about their presumed readiness for the White House, and then, in the wink of an eye, burned out only to become subjects of that eternal question "Whatever happened to . . .?"

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October 20, 2013

## LOS BERRINCHEROS

Out of all the sound bites, quips and comments made about the tragicomedy enacted on Capitol Hill this past week, perhaps none sums up its smarmy essence better than one made by the now senior senator from Massachusetts, Elizabeth Warren: *"According to the S&P index, the government shutdown has delivered a powerful blow to the U.S. economy.*



*By their estimates, \$24 billion has been flushed down the drain for a completely unnecessary political stunt . . ." Further questioning said "political stunt," Warren asked, "\$24 billion dollars. How many children could have been back in Head Start classes? How many seniors could have had a hot lunch through Meals on Wheels? How many scientists could have gotten their research funded? How many bridges could have been repaired and trains upgraded?"*

Let's face facts: no one in Congress -- from the most chuckle-headed Tea Partyite to the most ardent liberal -- comes out of this government-shutdown-raise-the-debt-ceiling debacle covered in so much as an [attogram's](#) worth of glory. What Congress has put the American people, its economy and stability through is beyond unconscionable; it is despicable. That a couple of dozen so-called "representatives of the people" would hold the full faith and credit of the United States -- our global reputation and standing -- hostage for political reasons which even they could not verbalize, makes us look like what used to be derisively termed a "banana republic."

And although both sides are attempting to put their own smiley faces on the outcome -- of passing a mostly-clean C.R. and raising the debt ceiling for the nonce -- it is clear that we're going to go through this once again come next January and February. Maddeningly, political brinksmanship -- puerile, noxious, carcinogenic brinksmanship - - has become the new normal in political strategy. Even if Moodys, Fitch and Standard & Poor's don't lower our heretofore pristine credit rating, our international reputation has taken a serious hit. It brings to mind Cassio's lament when Iago asks him if he's hurt: *"Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!"* (Othello: Act II, Scene 3).



What seems to have escaped notice during the ongoing political drama is how the world has been reacting to the diminishment of our dialogue -- of our inability to communicate or act like serious adults. Watching and monitoring the "food fight" on Capitol Hill has left much of the world asking whether we are really as unreasonable and self-destructive as we seem. Speaking to *New York Times* reporter Damien Cave, Ioanna Kalavti, a 34-year old teacher in Athens said: *"It just goes to show that it's not only Greece that has irresponsible and shortsighted politicians . . . . We've been held hostage by our reckless politicians, and the interests they serve, for more than three years now. I guess our American friends are getting a taste of the same medicine."* 33-year old Salomón Cavane, 33, the owner of a men's clothing business in Mexico City told journalist Cave *"They are supposed to be an example of consensus and democracy for the rest of the world . . . . The fact they can't come to an agreement because of their pride and their need to show who has the power -- it is just ridiculous. I find it quite irresponsible as well."*

In other words, regardless of whether Congress has reopened the government and staved off default for at least the next three to four months, the loss to our perceived stand with the rest of the world has taken a mortal blow. Playing chicken with America's political and economic stability is an unquestionably losing proposition. And, as with Cassio, once one's reputation has been severely compromised, *" . . . what remains is bestial."*

So what is the solution? How can we hope to stop playing these asinine games and get back to making politics the art of the possible? Depends on who's doing the talking:

- To the Tea Party, the answer is "total surrender" -- giving in to their demands and cutting taxes, regulations and entitlements, and getting the federal government out of the business of governing. Clearly, a majority of the



American public are in strong disagreement with a world-view worthy of the mid-19th century "Know Nothings."

- To those whose political problem solving skills are derived in large measure from those anonymous "pass this along to 5,000 of your best friends" emails, the solution is "throw every last member of Congress out of office and start all over again." This is sheer twaddle. It takes at least a year to get a feel for Congress -- of how it works, its rules, its physical layout -- before one can even hope to begin making a contribution. "Fire" every member of Congress and you're guaranteed that the only ones left with institutional memory are the army of the unelected -- the staff.
- Then there are those whose solution is for the Democrats to take back the House of Representatives. As much as one might personally find favor with this approach, it's not likely to happen. Through gerrymandering, Congressional districts have become the political equivalents of fortified medieval estates -- impervious to attack from both the inside and the outside.

My solution incorporates none of the above. Humbly, I would suggest that Democrats and whatever pragmatists still serve under the Republican banner make common cause to both stifle and stultify the Tea Party faction within Congress. Goodness knows it could save the Republican Party from implosion even while helping make Congress an arena in which once again discussion trumps dissent and collegiality cancels out contention. A week ago I would have thought this a 1,000% pipedream. However, after listening to dozens upon dozens of sound bites, quips, and comments -- and seeing just how freaked out pragmatic Republicans are by the most recent polls -- I am now inclined to think that a "hands across the political aisle" approach is possible. God knows it ain't gonna be easy. But in light of what we've just gone through -- and knowing who's to blame for most of it -- is there any other choice?

In colloquial Spanish the Tea Party could easily be called *los berrincheros* -- spoiled brats who throw tantrums to get their way. In the real world of adults and children, parents aren't supposed to cower before angry, rebellious brats. What they're *supposed* to do is corral them, give them a prolonged "time out," and then teach them that in adult society, being a *berrincher* is totally unacceptable.

We are sick and tired of *berrinches*.

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**October 27, 2013**

## **HAVE A HEART?**

On April 23, 1951, actor John Garfield (*The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Body and Soul*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Force of Evil*) spent the better part of the day being grilled by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Heartless committee members



put Garfield's past memberships, political associations and financial contributions under the microscope, seeking to trip him up and get him to admit that he was a member of the Communist Party. By 1951, members of HUAC firmly believed that there were communists under every bed, and that Hollywood was doing everything in its power to inject Marxist ideology into motion pictures. Somewhat prior to Garfield's all-day testimony, members of HUAC had learned from "expert" witness Adolphe Menjou that a "communist actor" like Garfield could add subversive elements to a film through a "look, an inflection, or a change in voice." Committee members browbeat Garfield -- a not particularly well-educated or worldly man -- to such an extent that he became unemployable. (Note: Garfield would succumb to a massive heart attack a year later at age 39. To this day, many believe his death was due in large measure to the ordeal HUAC put him through.)

When Garfield's hearing concluded and the cameras shut down, HUAC members -- the very men who had heartlessly subjected the man born Jacob Julius Garfinkle to hour upon hour of contumelious accusations -- actually stood in line seeking the actor's autograph, shaking his hand, and quarreling over who was going get the honor of taking take him out to dinner.

In other words, Garfield, a man the committee sought to portray as a dangerous subversive bent on the destruction of America when the cameras were on, was a most welcome dinner companion at day's end; too evil to be seen on the screen, but just fine for a feast. I guess all's fair in love and war . . . and political grandstanding.

Talk about heartlessness.

In doing research on Garfield -- as well as Edward G. Robinson, Danny Kaye, Judy Holliday and scores of other Hollywood icons -- for a new book tentatively entitled *In the Land of Mink-Lined Pools*, I can't help but shudder at the heartless hypocrisy, the affected dishonesty visited upon poor "Julie" Garfinkle by his HUAC accusers. It also brings to mind so many others in the political arena whose public posture is at stunning odds with their private predilections -- those who publicly decry a lack of morality or self-sufficiency in American society and culture while privately engaging in -- or benefiting from -- the very activities they revile.

When it comes to this degree of heartlessness, former Vice President Dick Cheney takes the cake. Cheney, a conservative's conservative, is one of our country's all-time "chicken hawks." He has long found war to be both totally correct and personally profitable. And yet, between 1959 (when he first became eligible for the draft) and 1967, [he gladly accepted 5 deferments](#): 4 because he was a student and 1 because he was a new father. How different is this from the heartless HUAC members who, after thoroughly sliming John Garfield, then stood in line begging for his autograph and a chance to grab a bite at the Hawk 'n Dove?



In addition to lacking a heart when it comes to war, Cheney is also one of those who is fervently anti-union and hyper free market; one who believes with every fiber of his being that government is *not* meant to provide a social safety net -- whether it be Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare or Obamacare. In [a recent interview](#) on NBC's "Today Show," Cheney called the Tea Party and its fierce opposition to government spending a "good thing." He also noted how the Tea Party made possible the insurgent Wyoming Senate campaign of his daughter Liz because she was "partly motivated" by the same concerns about high taxes, high national debt and the cost of the Affordable Care Act.

Out of that zeal to repeal Obamacare, the Tea Party and its congressional adherents provoked this month's government shutdown and near credit default. Yet, Cheney declared, "I've got a lot of respect for what the people are doing."

Where's the heart? Dick Cheney's family would never have escaped the financial ravages of the Depression if it were not for the Federal Government, for which his father worked for more than 30 years. Indeed, the Cheney family was so indebted to Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal that, according to Dick, "When I was born [on Jan. 30, 1941] my Granddad wanted to send a telegram to the president. Both sides of my family were staunch New Deal Democrats, and Granddad was sure that FDR would want to know about the 'little stranger' with whom he now had a birthday in common."

Somewhere along the way, Dick Cheney decided to stand in staunch opposition to much of that which helped make his family solidly middle-class. It would seem that as his physical heart weakened and his health became severely compromised -- he's had at least 5 heart attacks since age 37 and underwent a successful heart transplant less than 2 years ago -- that Dick Cheney's figurative heart turned to stone. How in the world can anyone who has repeatedly come back from the brink of death thanks to government provided health insurance and care, also stand foursquarely against healthcare for others? If it were not for Dick Cheney's government insurance -- or the Cadillac coverage he received during his years with Halliburton -- he would likely have become a member of the celestial choir years ago. Goodness knows, were it not for government health insurance -- or the vast wealth he acquired from his brief tenure in the private sector -- Dick Cheney would have been denied coverage due to a preexisting condition. And as for paying for a heart transplant out of his own pocket, even with [his vast wealth](#) (he's worth a minimum of \$50 million) the very costly procedure would likely have been denied due to his age -- 71. According to recent figures, a heart transplant costs a minimum of \$1 million.

Most anti-Obamacare folks have flatly concluded that as of January 2014 (when the Affordable Care Act goes into effect), heart transplants will either become a thing of the past or will bankrupt an already bankrupt government. How so many people know so much about what a program-yet-to-begin will be is beyond comprehension. Suffice it to say, many of those most fervently against government programs like Obamacare (which is in no way "socialized medicine" as Dick Cheney as his friends constantly claim) they are denying to millions the benefits they have gladly received for oh so many years.

It is reminiscent of those HUAC members who, once having destroyed the "evil" John Garfield, wanted nothing more than to shake his hand, get his autograph and take him to dinner.

Heartless is as heartless does.

How much the more so when you have to get a new one . . .

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*Many thanks to my lifelong friend Alad Wald for bringing this topic to my attention.*