

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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THEY SAID IT

*"Principes est bien, cela n'engage point."
(Principles are fine, they don't commit you to anything.)
Napoleon I*

A MODEST PROPOSAL. I thought that President Bush's speech to the United Nations last week was very good. It wasn't a *great* speech. But it didn't have to be *great*. It had to be functional. It had to establish that the United States has the high ground in its dispute with Saddam Hussein and that the United Nations must enforce its own Security Council resolutions dealing with Iraq or risk becoming "irrelevant." Bush did this, and he did it well.

My question is, "What took him so long?" Now don't get me wrong. I am not now, nor have I ever been, a fan of the United Nations. Indeed, during the cold war, when the U.S.S.R and China used it as a base for elaborate spy networks, as a prop for their worldwide propagand machines, and as a means to thwart American foreign policy initiatives via their membership on the Security Council, I thought that America should pull out and move the whole thing to Moscow, or wherever its remaining members wanted to put it.

As for the present day U.N., I agree with Jonah Goldberg, Editor of the *National Review On-Line*, who described the organization in a recent column as follows:

"It is a parliament of thugs masquerading as the authentic voice of the world's people. It is a megaphone for simultaneously childish and serious America-bashing. It is a place where utopian schemes and Malthusian nightmares will always find a sympathetic ear. It is a gold rush for criminals and cranks looking to drain the treasuries of nations too racked with guilt to put up a 'No Panhandling' sign once and for all."

Some conservatives, including Jonah, appear to think that Bush deliberately "dissed" the U.N., just to show the world how little he cared about what Kofi and the rest of the gang there think. Then, the theory goes, in response to the noise from these obstreperous ne'er-to-wells, banging

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“their spoons on their U.N. high chairs,” as Jonah put it, Bush took a few minutes off from his busy schedule to go to New York to slap them down like a bunch of stupid, errant children.

This is an interesting theory. And if it were true, it would be the stuff of which legends are made. But I don't buy it. I think Bush put off dealing with the U.N. because he and his advisors weren't sure how to go about it, given their determination not to seek, or even appear to seek, U.N. approval for any actions connected with Bush's “war on terror.” As time went on, this decision began to cause difficulties, both with the Democrats in Congress and with some of America's key allies abroad, so Bush was forced to do something about it. Hence, the speech.

Now it is true that, as the Bard put it, all's well that ends well. It is also true, when all is said and done, that Bush doesn't *need* the United Nations. In fact, if that organization is to remain relevant, it must have continued U.S. support. Nevertheless, I think the whole thing could have been handled better. I believe, for example, that if Bush had given the same speech early this year, the road to Baghdad would have fewer obstructions than it has today, and the speech last week could have been a follow-on rally-the-troops effort rather than a reclamation project.

So with this in mind, I will close with a theory that I have been contemplating for some time, namely that it is high time for conservatives to adapt a new attitude toward the U.N. I base this theory on the premise that the U.N. is a permanent fixture in the world; that there is no practical hope that it will ever go away; and that Democrats will never allow the United States to resign its membership. If this is true, and I believe it to be so, then I believe that it is about time conservatives came up with a plan to take advantage of its vast international network to facilitate, rather than obstruct, U.S. foreign policy objectives.

While this sounds like a tall order, it wouldn't be impossible. After all, if conservatives are correct when they maintain that the U.N. is deeply corrupt and full of thugs, crooks and cranks, all completely lacking in principles, then it would seem to be ripe for an ideological coup d'état. All that needs to be done is to change the nature of the reward/punishment mechanism that governs the actions of these thugs, crooks and cranks.

As a practical matter, I believe a good start could be made by not appointing individuals like Bush's U.N. ambassador John Negroponte, who makes H.G. Wells' “Invisible Man” look like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. Conservatives should find a person with the heart, energy, skill, and personality to play politics on a grand, global scale. He or she should have the raw intellectual political insights of “Prince” Machiavelli, the political acumen of Prince Metternich, and the zest for politics of Prince Talleyrand, someone who can walk the halls of the U.N. like a giant, making deals, breaking up cliques, kicking butt, and rewarding “friends.”

Maybe this couldn't be done. Maybe there is no such person alive today. Maybe the task would be too great even if there were. But what a challenge. And what fun. And what a tremendous asset it would be for the United States to be able to call up the “moral authority” of the U.N. at will, so to speak, rather than always being seen as an antagonist to the “world body.”

Complying with all of the requirements of a “just war,” as defined by St. Augustine, is a very good thing, for example. Augustine is, after all, a real hoss when it comes to such matters. But

in today's world, being philosophically correct, even by the standards of someone like the Bishop of Hippo, doesn't mean as much as having "U.N. approval." With U.N. approval, anything goes. Right? So why not have it?

So, under the theory that it's never too late, I think Bush should come up with and implement a long-term plan for a conservative take-over of the U.N. And to those conservatives who retch at the idea of playing footsie with that organization, I would offer the following thought. Wouldn't it be a kick someday to hear the world complain that "the U.N. is nothing but a tool of the U.S.?"

TO THE VICTOR GOES THE SPOILS. Two weeks ago, I wrote a piece entitled "An Optimistic View of the Coming War With Iraq," in which I noted that the French and the Russians were slowly, but ever so surely, pulling back on their total opposition to a U.S. assault on Saddam. Then I said: "I don't pretend to know what the Bush administration is saying to these and other countries, but *my guess is that the talk is all about dividing up the spoils* (emphasis in the original).

Yesterday, in a front page Sunday *Washington Post* story entitled "War Could Unshackle Oil in Iraq," the following paragraphs appeared, which, I think it is safe to say, confirm my suspicions as to the origin of France and Russia's new found spirit of "cooperation," all of which basically comes down to the proposition that "spoils" often give rise to new "principles" in the place of the old ones.

A U.S.-led ouster of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein could open a bonanza for American oil companies long banished from Iraq, scuttling oil deals between Baghdad and Russia, France and other countries, and reshuffling world petroleum markets, according to industry officials and leaders of the Iraqi opposition.

Although senior Bush administration officials say they have not begun to focus on the issues involving oil and Iraq, American and foreign oil companies have already begun maneuvering for a stake in the country's huge proven reserves of 112 billion barrels of crude oil, the largest in the world outside Saudi Arabia.

The importance of Iraq's oil has made it potentially one of the administration's biggest bargaining chips in negotiations to win backing from the U.N. Security Council and Western allies for President Bush's call for tough international action against Hussein. All five permanent members of the Security Council -- the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China -- have international oil companies with major stakes in a change of leadership in Baghdad.

"It's pretty straightforward," said former CIA director R. James Woolsey, who has been one of the leading advocates of forcing Hussein from power. "France and Russia have oil companies and interests in Iraq. They should be told that if they are of assistance in moving Iraq toward decent government, we'll do the best we can to ensure that the new government and American companies work closely with them."

But he added: "If they throw in their lot with Saddam, it will be difficult to the point of impossible to persuade the new Iraqi government to work with them."

Indeed, the mere prospect of a new Iraqi government has fanned concerns by non-American oil companies that they will be excluded by the United States, which almost certainly would be the dominant foreign power in Iraq in the aftermath of Hussein's fall. Representatives of many foreign oil concerns have been meeting with leaders of the Iraqi opposition to make their case for a future stake and to sound them out about their intentions.

And so it goes, as Kurt Vonnegut used to say.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN'. I have been reading a lot of coverage about the upcoming mid-term elections in which "experts" cite numerous changes that are going on in society that are having an impact on politics and politicians. Some of this coverage is weak. Some it is very good. But it seems to me that everyone is overlooking one of the biggest, big-picture political stories in the last half a century. And that is that the civil rights movement in America is over.

It was a very big deal for a very long time. And now it's over. Yet, funny thing, to my knowledge at least, no one has ever said this before. Besides me, of course. Which is interesting, because the civil rights movement was at the epicenter of domestic U.S. politics for some 40 years, and now that it's over American politics is likely to change quite dramatically.

Before discussing the nature of these changes, let me note here that the civil rights movement is over because it was an astounding success, arguably one of the greatest sociological success stories in history. If there weren't so many politicians and other public figures still feeding off the carcass of this movement, in one way or another, and thus with a strong stake in denying that it is dead, there would be parades, celebrations, and lots of speeches.

With tremendous courage and against formidable obstacles, America's black community managed in an all-out, four-decade-long action to overcome several centuries of blatant, legally-sanctioned discrimination, propped up and perpetuated by hateful prejudices and negative stereotypes deeply imbedded at all levels of American life, from the highest offices of government to the lowliest workplaces.

I am not saying here that all formal and informal discrimination and all prejudices against black Americans have come to an end. I am simply pointing out a fact that the mainstream press seems unable to acknowledge and celebrate, namely that African-Americans are today, as a direct result of the civil rights movement, an integral part of mainstream American society at virtually all levels and in all geographical locations, in a way that few people could have believed possible in the early 1960s when the civil rights movement shifted into high gear. And I am simply pointing out that the movement that made this happen is slowly but ever so surely running out of steam, a victim of its own great success.

In many ways the American civil rights movement is a terrible story of pain, suffering, and death. But it is also a wonderful, Pauline story of faith, hope, and charity. It is a story that should make every American proud; not proud of the fact that the battle needed to be fought, but proud that it ended in a victory of good over evil.

Victory didn't happen overnight, of course. But anyone who has been paying attention has seen it coming for a very long time. In fact, I wrote a piece on the subject almost 10 years ago, in June 1993, entitled "Lani Guinier Is An Idea Whose Time Has come . . . And Gone." I quoted extensively in that article from a wonderful book that had just been published entitled *Edge City*, written by *Washington Post* reporter Joel Garreau. It was a long piece and I won't rerun it here. But the following passages will provide an idea of what was then becoming obvious.

In a chapter called "Atlanta: The Color of Money," Garreau notes that there is a huge demographic change occurring among America's blacks. He illustrates this point with a discussion of a prosperous middle-aged couple living on the north side of Atlanta. They are well educated, he says, and after successful careers working for others, they have both started their own businesses. They are, says Garreau, in every way typical of the new citizen of Edge City; except for one thing: they are black.

"For [they] and people like them" Garreau says, "are part of one of the biggest changes in black affairs in American history . . . They are part of a new black middle class without precedent in size and accomplishment in the more than four hundred years blacks have been in the New World. This black middle class is succeeding by the standards of the majority white culture in mainstream American careers . . .

By the second decade of the next century, Garreau argues, this new American black middle class could be as large in percentage terms for blacks as the white middle class is for whites. Already, he says, in the Atlanta area, of the 19% of all families that are black: 40% are suburbanites; a third live in predominantly white areas; and almost a third make more money than the typical white family in America. In Atlanta, he notes, middle-class black families living in middle-class neighborhoods have virtually the same incomes as their white neighbors.

Nor is Atlanta an aberration. According to Garreau, in the Oakland area, 36% of all black families are more prosperous than the typical white family in America. On Long Island, it's 49%. In the Chicago area, it's 30%. In the Miami area, it's 24%. In the Los Angeles area, 33%. In the Detroit area, 31%. In the Washington area, it's 46% . . .

Garreau's explanation? He notes that following the civil rights reforms of the 1960's, a large number of blacks began, quietly and without fanfare, to do what generations of poor immigrants--Irish, Italian, Polish or whatever--had done: they pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. And just as for the immigrants before them, they did not join the great middle class overnight; in fact, it was the work of generations, as parents struggled to give their children a better life . . .

The result, Garreau continues, is that the black population in America today is divided roughly into thirds. One-third is the largely suburban middle class. Garreau notes that black sociologist Bart Landry has argued that if you include those areas within the city limits that are suburban in character--something found in most cities--the proportion is 46%.

Roughly another third--30% of black families--continues to be in poverty. However, Garreau points out, according to most calculations, only about a third of that third--perhaps 10% of the total black population--is "swept up in those profoundly depressing problems clustered under the rubric 'underclass.'"

Estimates by researchers at the Urban Institute indicate, Garreau says, that "underclass neighborhoods"--areas where high school dropouts, unemployed men, welfare recipients, and female-headed families are especially numerous--contained a total of 2.5 million people in 1980; a dreadful number, Garreau admits, but he adds that even if that population were all black, which it is not, it would work out to only 9.4% of America's blacks . . .

In historic terms, Garreau concludes, the post-civil-rights-era black is in much the same position today that the Irish immigrant was in 1920. Indeed, he says, the one-third of black America that is fairly described as suburban middle class is becoming indistinguishable statistically from whites of the same class, not only in income and education, but in consumer behavior and attitudes toward government . . .

Yet, according to Garreau, "what can be said with a fair amount of confidence . . . is that the rise of Edge City has not had an evil effect on the aspirations of all black people. It has been at least matched by the rise of a large, churchgoing, home owning, childrearing, back-yard-barbecuing, traffic-jam cursing black middle class remarkable only for the ordinariness with which its members go about their classically American suburban affairs."

I've thought about this story and Garreau's book numerous times over the past year or so as I have watched certain events unfold.

O The descent of Jesse Jackson and his organization into disrepute on evidence of moral, ethical, and monetary corruption.

O The rise into prominence of the sleazy and corrupt Al Sharpton.

O The bombastic but entirely ineffectual speeches of the professional "poverty entrepreneurs," people like Jackson, Kweisi Mfume, and Julien Bond, at the July convention of the increasingly irrelevant and frousty NAACP.

O The desperate, recent, last ditch attempt by the vanishing movement's politically passé leaders to attract new followers with a new hustle, namely the promise of a big check from the government in the form of something called "reparations."

This is the way “movements” often end. Bombast replaces substance. Corrupt and silly people take over. Desperate attempts are made to create new “reasons for being.” And the flock thins, as new generations grow up with new heroes and new troubles, based on new circumstances.

This last point is illustrated by the difficulty that the once-revered NAACP is having attracting new, active, younger members. In an article last year in *The Nation*, entitled “Till Earth and Heaven Ring,” Bob Dreyfuss quotes NAACP Chairman Julien Bond as saying: “If you ask me how we are doing among people aged 25 to 35, the answer is: terrible. We’re not doing well at all.” Even more telling is the fact the organization’s agenda is no longer dominated by issues of specific interest to blacks alone, i.e., to the civil rights movement, but now reads like that of any of the other tired-out, liberal activist organizations that want a higher minimum wage, lower mortgage rates, increased taxes, better housing, and lots more government.

It is an unfortunate way for so noble and successful a cause as the civil rights movement to end. For that, as I said above, there should be celebrations, parades and speeches to honor the brave heroes who suffered humiliation, beatings and, for many, death for the cause. But it isn’t to be.

The good news is that this civil right movement created the environment for the emergence of a new breed of young leaders from the black community, whose common bond is that they don’t want to be known as “black leaders” because, as one told the *Washington Post* recently, it limits the scope of their dreams and ambitions. They want to be known as national leaders, whose interests transcend race and span the entire range of the problems and aspirations of home owning, childrearing, back-yard-barbecuing, traffic-jam cursing Americans of all races, colors, and creeds. And this will change politics in America in many varied ways.

It is commonly understood that Republicans will pick up some black votes along the way. But this is only one of myriad ways in which America’s melting-pot politics is likely to change. For starters, both parties will have to rethink their positions pertaining to the principal federal tools of the civil rights movement, from affirmative action to income transfer programs, as blacks become less and less dependent on them and other minority groups, most especially Hispanics, begin to utilize them for their own purposes, possibly at the expense of some blacks.

Political debates over a host of other issues could take some interesting turns also, as black politicians no longer constitute a solid liberal voting block on such matters as school vouchers, gun control, military expenditures, taxes, immigration policies, labor unions, and yes, abortion. This will be a slow process, of course. But, as I said earlier, it has been coming for quite some time and has a pretty good head of steam up. To illustrate this point I’ll close with a few paragraphs from a piece my old partner Steve Soukup and I wrote just over four years ago.

We still think that change in Black voting patterns is in the wind. We base this on two admittedly speculative notions. The first is that if such a shift were to occur, it would be preceded by a change in the intellectual and moral leadership in the black community. The second notion is that such a shift is in fact occurring.

Space doesn't permit us to amplify this point, except to make the purely subjective observation that black men and women such as Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, Milwaukee school activist Molly Williams, nationally syndicated columnists Armstrong Williams and Walter Williams, author Thomas Sowell, former presidential candidate Alan Keyes, and Oklahoma Congressman J.C. Watts are together, along with countless others like them, forming the nucleus of a powerful, conservative black intellectual establishment.

As each of these individuals would probably attest, their support for conservative causes hasn't been without cost to them and to their families. But the movement is gaining strength daily. Just last week, in fact, Alveda King, niece of Martin Luther King, Jr., declared, according to *The Washington Times*, that "it is time for African-American conservatives to emerge into the light of the new day of the coming millennium and speak out for the values that the Republican Party so wholeheartedly embraces."

Amen!

END NOTES: "People need to have sex:" Those who have not been paying attention to the New York gubernatorial race have missed one of the great political quotes of the year, as cited above. This observation was uttered by Stanley Aronowitz, the Green Party's candidate in the race, when he made it known that besides two children from his first marriage, his family includes two children from relationships that did not end in marriage, and a third with a New York University journalism professor. Aronowitz's revelations followed by one day a similar one by Dennis Mehiel, running mate for the Democrat Party's candidate Carl McCall, who said he had fathered two children out of wedlock himself, both conceived while he was married to his first wife. One wonders why, between Bill Clinton and these guys, the Democratic Party doesn't change its symbol from the donkey to the goat. Just a thought, mind you.