

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

"'Tis time the Democrats admit yon Byrd is as a loon."

Rich Galen, writing in his ever entertaining and informative Cyber-Column, "Mullings," about West Virginian's crackpot Senator Robert Byrd's recent floor speech in opposition to military action in Iraq, in which he seemed hooked on the Shakespearian word "fie."

MORE OPTIMISM ON IRAQ. Many years ago, I asked my old friend and then-boss Greg Smith how many times I could repeat a story without being accused of having nothing new to say. His answer was, "You can keep saying it until it is widely accepted as true." So, with that advice in mind, I'm going to offer a short reiteration of a story I wrote in the September 3 newsletter entitled, "An Optimistic View of the coming War with Iraq," since the conclusion I reached in that piece does not appear to be "widely accepted."

The assumption underlying the piece was that if America attacks Iraq militarily, which seemed then, and seems today, entirely likely, the outcome will be as follows:

"... the effort will be an overwhelming military success. The United States is good at war. It has the best equipment, intelligence, officers, and soldiers in the world, and, when engaged, its armies can be ruthless. I think it is also safe to say that the Iraqi military will prove, once again, to be a joke."

I then said.

"I am also optimistic that Bush can pull this off without doing damage to America's relations with its allies, both in the Middle East and in the rest of the world. It is clear that a great deal of diplomatic work needs to be done in the next few months. But it is also becoming clear that a considerable amount has already been done behind the scenes.

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“The French, for example, are not as noisily opposed as they once were. And the Russians aren’t stomping their feet either, despite the fact that they have a great many financial and strategic interests in Iraq. 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.*”

I concluded with the following.

“If I am right about this, then the entire Middle East region could be in for some positive, long-term changes. Far from strengthening the hand of our enemies in the region, a Saddam-free Iraq, with lots of financial help and moral support from its “business partners” around the world, could put real pressure on the region’s hardliners, most especially on the mad Mullahs of Iran. Even the Palestinians might begin to wonder whether sending their kids off to blow themselves up makes more sense than having their own state and living in peace.”

In short, I think the naysayers are wrong when they say that both the military attack on Iraq and the aftermath will turn out to be a disaster. I think, in fact, that it could mark the beginning of a movement toward much greater stability in the region, as Iran and Arab nations from Saudi Arabia to Syria to Egypt are forced to recognize the presence of a free Iraq, pumping oil with the help of America, Russia, and France, and enjoying the fruits of the revenues along with new found freedoms. I don’t mean to be a Pollyanna about this. I don’t doubt that much trouble lies in the path of this optimistic scenario. But I think it is a good bet that Iraq will be a significantly better place, for Iraqis and for the rest of the world, when Saddam is gone.

DEMOCRATS IN LONG-TERM CYCLICAL DOWNTURN. Two weeks ago, I made the unexciting prediction that the Republicans would increase their numbers in the House and retake control of the Senate in the upcoming election. In the process, I called attention to my earlier, more specific prediction, made last January, in which I said that I expected that the GOP would pick up eight seats in the House and four in the Senate.

Both of these predictions, I noted, were based on general observations rather than on any in-depth analysis of the elections, race by race. I didn’t say so, but the January forecast to which I referred was really nothing more than a feeling I had about the competency of the leadership of the Democratic Party, a feeling that I had acquired and commented upon a year earlier, shortly after Bush took office. My thoughts then, 20 months ago, were:

The Democratic attack against Bush will begin early and be spearheaded by “three of the nation’s most unscrupulous, and most ruthless veterans of the political wars, namely Bill Clinton, Mrs. Clinton, and their friend Terrence McAuliffe, the new Chairman of the DNC.” It appears already that in this role “these three would make Larry, Moe, and Curly look like brain surgeons.”

“Terry, history’s all-time leading political fund-raiser, appears to have the tinniest of tin ears, when it comes to retail politics. While his duly elected colleagues on Capitol Hill

are desperately trying to give the appearance of acting responsibly in the face of Bush's high profile initiative to restore some civility to political discourse, their team leader, Terry, turns out to be a veritable Mount Vesuvius of splenetic rhetoric . . .

“Characteristically, Hillary, the great cattle futures trader, filches the furniture on the way out the door of the White House, gets caught, and has to give it back, all after having waxed weightily about how John Ashcroft tends to “bend the law to suit his needs” and how he didn't “respect the rule of law.” Say what?

“And Bill, our eudemonic ex-president, hasn't even moved into his high-priced New York romper room/office yet, and already he's a tabloid star, based on his ‘relationship’ with one Denise Rich, the ‘elegant and wealthy’ former wife of the newly-pardoned fugitive Marc Rich, once described by law-enforcement sources as ‘the most corrupt corporate executive in America.’”

One month earlier, in January 2001, I had said the following about the other two “leaders” of the Democratic Party, then Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt.

The press is “seemingly unaware that these two men have been spared being widely recognized as political lightweights only by the fact that their Republican counterparts, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott and House Speaker Dennis Hastert, are even more mediocre than they are.”

Now I bring all of this up this week because I am still convinced, two years later, that these five people are political bozos, and that this is one of the major elements working against the Democrats in the upcoming elections. Throw Al Gore and Barbra Streisand into the mix and the Democratic Party hierarchy takes on the character of a footlocker full of glue-sniffing civet cats, to borrow a phrase from political humorist extraordinaire, P.J. O'Rourke.

By the way, while I am no fan of Babs, I must say that in recent days she has been doing the Lord's work by publicly extolling her fellow Democrats to commit hari-kari by declaring what they actually believe rather than what the polls tell them they should say in order to have a chance of remaining politically viable. What a gal, stupid but oh so useful! Go Babs!

But this is not the only reason for my belief that the Democrats are in trouble. Indeed, I think something even more profound is at work here, something that could affect the long-term health of the party if I am correct.

The idea behind this theory of mine is an old one, dating back some 2,500 years to the good old days of Heraclitus, who, as every schoolboy knows, is said to have discovered the idea of “change.” “Everything is in flux and nothing is at rest,” this wise man said as he watched in horror as the Greek tribal aristocracies, of which he was a big shot, began to give way to the forces of democracy.

Heraclitus feared and abhorred this trend, believing that it was the first step toward mob rule and chaos. In one of his outbursts, he reportedly declared in disgust that the Ephesians (the tribe to which he was an heir to the royal family of “priest kings”) “ought to hang themselves man by man, all the adults, and leave the city to be ruled by infants,” a sentiment I take to indicate that he was also a seer of sorts, somehow knowing that the democratic forces that were being born around him would someday, somewhere, somehow produce people like Bill, Hill, Terry, Al, Dick, Tom and Babs, and that they would threaten all that is just and good.

Anyway, as Heraclitus discovered, much to his chagrin, change is a constant, and ruling parties that do not, or cannot, quickly adapt to it eventually find that they are no longer ruling parties.

In the United States, for the past 70 years or so, beginning with the great depression and FDR’s presidency, this rule has tended to favor the Democratic Party, it being the self-declared “liberal” or “progressive” party. Conversely, while the Republican Party has changed greatly during this period, change for it has never come easily or swiftly, being, as it is, the “conservative” party, or as its critics assert, the “reactionary” party. *My theory is that this is changing.*

My old colleague Steve Soukup and I raised this possibility in an article we wrote together while at Lehman, entitled “It’s The Liberal Republicans Versus The Reactionary Democrats.” I won’t quote at length from this piece, but here’s the idea we put forth, largely in reaction to Al Gore’s constant whining during the campaign that virtually everything Bush proposed was “risky.”

“For all intents and purposes, the Republican party has become the “liberal” party, advocating change, radical change, on a wholesale level, in education, Social Security, budgetary priorities, defense strategy, etc., etc., *ad infinitum*. The Democrats, in contrast, have become the reactionary party, the party of the status quo, which sees change, radical or otherwise, as the enemy. Today it is they, not Republicans, who are, to paraphrase William F. Buckley, standing athwart history yelling, ‘Stop.’

“The leading edge of the Baby Boom generation, the demographic anomaly that changed society, government, and the financial markets in unprecedented ways, is approaching retirement age, which will, without question, necessitate government flexibility. The technology revolution is ongoing, and is fundamentally altering both society and society’s expectations of government. The post-Cold War world order is emerging from a ten-year gestation; potential global concerns and rivalries are becoming more certain; and defense strategies are, by necessity, shifting to meet the needs of this budding order.

“In the face of all of this flux, the Democratic response has been to operate on the assumption that the underlying fundamentals of their New Deal, the Great Society and *detante* remain as solid as ever; that there is no problem that can’t be solved, no change that can’t be accommodated, by throwing more and more money at a host of old federal programs that have barely changed in decades, despite the fact that most of the problems they were established to address have either grown more complex or reached the limits of what government can do to solve them.”

Now I won't use any more space illustrating this rising tide of resistance to change among Democrats. Instead I want to speculate on the origins of this phenomenon. It goes like this.

For years, Republicans who advocated change had to convince people like me, the "conservatives" within their party, that these changes were good. More accurately, they had to drag us along kicking and screaming. Today, it is the change-advocating Democrats who have to overcome the inertia of large portions of their party, including but not limited to the teachers' unions, the public employees' unions, the industrial unions, the trial lawyers, and the tired "leadership" of a variety of social engineering organizations and "movements," most of which have run their course but are still hanging around at the core of the Democratic Party because they have no place else to go.

More recent examples of the "reactionary" influence of these groups on the Democratic Party's once vaunted ideological nimbleness abound, and include opposition to Bush's faith based initiative and his proposals to make changes in the tax code that would enhance the incentives for citizens to invest in the financial markets.

But the best example, the one that is first and foremost in the news today, is Tom Daschle's inability to pass President Bush's 'Homeland Security' program in the Senate because the public employee unions refuse to let him agree to Bush's demand that this important new department be exempted from the inefficiencies of union rules.

The whole thing reminds me of the old joke about the golfer named Clyde whose best friend Ernie died of a heart attack on the 14th hole. When Clyde told another friend about the terrible incident, the friend said, "Why that must have been awful." And Clyde said, "Oh, it was. Hit the ball, drag Ernie, hit the ball, drag Ernie, hit the ball . . ."

Poor Tom Daschle, says I. "Hit the ball, drag the unions, the trial lawyers, the radical wackos, and all the professional do-gooders who long ago forgot for whom they were suppose to be doing good. Hit the ball, drag the unions, the trial lawyers, the radical . . ." Well, you get the idea.

Hericlitus would have been proud of Tom and the Democrats, defending as they are, the worn out old tribal priest kings of a bygone era.

MORE THOUGHTS ON BLACK AMERICA. Three weeks ago, I wrote a long article entitled "The Times They Are A Changin'," in which I put forth my belief that the civil rights movement in America is over "because it was an astounding success, arguably one of the greatest sociological success stories in history." Toward the end of that piece, I discussed a host of national political issues that could be affected by the breakup of a solid liberal voting block of blacks. One of these issues, I said, was abortion.

Several people have asked me to elaborate on this contention. My response has been to provide them with a copy of a little essay included in Father John Neuhaus's always-insightful monthly observations in *First Things*, one of my all-time favorite periodicals. It was in the October 2001 issue and can be found at www.firstthings.com. It goes as follows:

If a racist who really despised blacks wanted to reduce their numbers, what might he do? I'm not suggesting that the abortion industry is driven by racism, although the founders of the industry, such as Margaret Sanger of Planned Parenthood, made no secret of their desire to eliminate the black, poor, and unfit. There are current data of more than passing interest. The U.S. census has now revealed that Hispanics have displaced African Americans as the nation's largest minority. That would not be the case were it not for abortion. Black women are 13.5 percent of the female population but have 34 percent of all abortions, their abortion rate (31 per 1,000 women) being 2.6 times the rate for white women (12 per 1,000). The best estimate is that 546,000 black children are killed each year, or about 15 million since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. There are related tragedies. For instance, the demonstrated link between abortion and breast cancer makes it unsurprising that, from 1975 to 1990, death from breast cancer increased 12 percent among young black women while, over the same period, it declined by 9 percent among white women. One would think that black leaders would be concerned. Fifteen million black Americans would likely mean fifteen to twenty more seats in the House of Representatives. Yet almost every African-American representative in Congress is pro-abortion. Nor have black spokesmen such as Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton been heard to say a word about public policy studies unabashedly tying the abortion of black children to the reduction in crime . . . Has there ever been a people whose putative leaders actively promoted a policy that had the certain effect, if not the intention, of massively reducing their numbers and influence? No parallels come readily to mind.

ISLAM: THE RELIGION OF PEACE. To those people who read the *Opinion Journal's* "Best of the Web" by James Taranto every day, I apologize for the following, since you will have already seen it. But I just couldn't ignore the following appalling segment, which appeared in a recent issue.

Thank Allah It's Friday

Today is Friday, the day of the *khutbah*, a sermon delivered during Islam's most important prayer of the week. In the interest of cross-cultural understanding, here are some excerpts from khutbahs delivered over the past few years in Saudi mosques, courtesy of the indispensable Middle East Media Research Institute:

[The complete texts from which these quotes are taken can be found at memri.org]

O "In this distorted and deformed religion, to which many of the inhabitants of the earth belong, we can see how the Christians deviate greatly from the path of righteousness by talking about the concept of the Trinity. As far as they are concerned, God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three who are one."

O "The Jews are the objects of Allah's [promised] wrath, while the Christians deviate from the path of righteousness. . . . The Koran described the Jews as a nation cursed by Allah, a nation at which he was angry--some of whom he turned into apes and pigs."

O "The [kind of] terror [in Arabic, "striking of fear"] that Islamic religious law permits is terrifying the cowards, the hypocrites, the secularists, and the rebels by imposing punishments according to the religious law of Allah. . . . The meaning of the term 'terror' used by the media . . . is Jihad for the sake of Allah. Jihad is the peak of Islam. . . . The Mujahed who goes out to attain a martyr's death or victory and returns with booty is a terrorist as far as the enemies of Allah are concerned."

O "[The Greeks and Romans] succeeded in their conquest, establishing mighty empires. When the woman began to beautify herself, and to go out to clubs and public places . . . she corrupted the moral values of the men, weakened their combat skills--and their civilization collapsed. . . . This is the strategic goal towards which the enemies of the Muslim nation strive, as is written in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. . . . The enemies of the Muslim woman are the Jews, the Christians, the hypocrites, the secular, and the opportunists trailing behind them."

The [Arab News](#) quotes Prince Naif, the Saudi interior minister, as saying his country's poor image in the U.S. is "orchestrated by the Zionist lobby which works against the American people's interests."

END NOTES:

Smart Europeans. Regular readers certainly have observed that I pick on the Europeans a bit. So when I recently stumbled on an example of some who appear to be lucid, I thought I owed it to the cause of healthy international relations to give credit where credit is due. With this in mind, the following quotes come from an article that appeared in the *Washington Post* last week entitled, "New U.S. Doctrine Worries Europeans," in which, wonder of wonders, two Europeans, unfortunately unnamed, said things which indicate that they actually have an inkling of what is going on in the world around them. So without further adieu, here they are.

"The Europeans say the [Bush] administration views them as 'Euro wimps' who don't pull their weight militarily, and who prefer prevarication to plain-speaking and appeasement to action." **[Right!]**

"Preemption says to us, 'This is an empire and we will not allow anybody to get close to our capabilities and we are ready to act to prevent that from happening.'" **[Exactly!]**

The Bottom Line On The House Races. Much has been written about the upcoming elections, but no one has boiled the House races down to a simpler proposition than Amy Walter, who works for the best political handicapper in the business, Charlie Cook, who publishes *The Cook Political Report*.

"As of now, the Democrats have an advantage in 202 House races, according to our latest calculations, while the Republicans have the upper hand in 217. The remaining 16 races are listed as tossups. If Republicans can hold their 217, they will need to win just one of those 16 tossups to maintain the majority. Even if the Democrats maintain all 202, they still need to win all 16. Those are tough odds."

Sanity, Sanity! Wherefore Art Thou Sanity? In case you missed it, the New Jersey Supreme Court's decision to allow Frank Lautenberg to pinch hit for "The Torch" in the upcoming Senate race, despite the fact that there is a law against it, is not the only goofy thing going on in the Garden State right now. It turns out that this cultural Mecca selected a poet laureate, one Amiri Baraka, a.k.a. Everett Leroy Jones, a.k.a. LeRoi Jones, a month or so ago to "promote and encourage poetry within the State" and who "shall give no fewer than two public readings within the State each year."

The problem now is that the governor apparently doesn't like Amiri's rhymes, and wants to get rid of him, but can't because Amiri was named for a two-year term. Why, you ask, doesn't "the Gov" like the work of the "Bard of New Jersey?" Well, get this.

Who do Tom Ass Clarence Work for
Who doo doo come out the Colon's mouth
Who know what kind of Skeeza is a Condoleeza
Who pay Connelly to be a wooden negro
Who give Genius awards to Homo Locus
Subsidere

Or this.

Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed
Who told 4000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers
To stay home that day
Why did Sharon stay away?

The interesting thing about this is that Amiri is not as dumb as he sounds. He has an impressive biography as a leading figure in various avante garde, radical, left-wing literary and political movements going back to the 1950s. So he knows full well what he's doing, and you can't help but wonder at the laughs this fading old pseudo-intellectual con artist must be getting at the expense of that sad bunch of politically correct, Democratic nincompoops in Trenton, who didn't have the good sense or the courage to stand up and say that appointing a race hustling, Jew baiter as the state's poet laureate was a bad idea. (Editors Note: Despite New Jersey's endorsement of this guy, there's no danger that he'll show up in "Mark's Weekly Poetry" e-mail.)