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THEY SAID IT

Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon
For the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who
That it's namin'.
For the loser now
Will be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'.

--Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A-Changin'"

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HE JUST TELLS THE TRUTH AND THEY THINK IT'S ZELL.

There is little question that for the GOP faithful gathered both in Madison Square Garden and around television sets throughout the nation, the most invigorating moment of the Republican National Convention last week was the "stem-winder" of a speech given Wednesday night by keynote speaker, Georgia's Democratic Senator Zell Miller.

I won't relate the details of that address here, since the speech has been excerpted, highlighted, and replayed unremittingly since it was given. But it should suffice to say that Miller's attack on Kerry was devastating, not the least because it came from inside the Democratic nominee's own Senatorial caucus. Like the Swift Boat veterans who have been relentless in their attacks on Kerry, Miller too "served" with Kerry, albeit in the Senate, not Vietnam, and his critique therefore carries unmistakable authenticity.

But there is also little question that Miller's speech was the most controversial moment of the convention. Almost before the Senator had finished speaking, the Democratic establishment was hard at work attempting to paint him as a cynical old crackpot whose words should be paid no credence whatsoever.

Our good friend Rich Galen (www.mullings.com) declared that the "Democrats - and their allies in the popular press - were apoplectic about the speech . . ." If anything, in my opinion Rich understates the intensity of the Democratic reaction. Indeed, Democrats have been charging for four years now that Dick

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Cheney is the rough equivalent of Satan incarnate, yet in their frenzy over Zell, party functionaries almost completely overlooked the Vice President and the solid, if less flashy and raucous attack he leveled at the Democratic nominee.

While Democrats and their surrogates spent the next several days throwing around all sorts of adjectives to describe Miller, the most oft used such modifier was almost certainly “angry.” *Time* magazine’s Joe Klein, the erstwhile “Anonymous” author of *Primary Colors* (the “I love him so much I hate him” book about Bill Clinton), declared that he didn’t think he’d ever seen “anything as angry or ugly as Miller’s speech.” CNN’s Bill Schneider concurred, calling Miller emblematic of a “very angry convention” and noting that he too had never heard “such an angry speech.” For his part, Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe, whom the inimitable Senator Miller has less-than-affectionately dubbed “Terry McAuwful,” called Miller a bitter, angry old man.

The funny thing about this chorus of “angries” that greeted Miller was that Democrats and pundits alike appeared to believe that the charge itself was enough to counter Miller’s speech. It was as if they expected that Miller’s inspired and inspiring delivery, his soaring rhetoric, and his compelling charges against Kerry would be rendered impotent simply because Miller was a bit tetchy when he spoke.

Now, I am not, I’ll concede, much of a fan of “root causes” arguments, but it seems a little odd to me that the Democrats and the media would prattle on endlessly about how angry Miller is, but would never once stop to consider the source of that anger. Many, if not most of these same people spent months after 9/11 talking, writing, and preaching about how it was absolutely imperative that Americans figure out why the Arabs are “angry” with us. But while it is beyond stupid to try to justify the murder of 3000-plus innocent souls, it might actually be helpful to the Democrats to try to figure out why Miller is so ill humored.

After all, Zell Miller is not easily dismissed as your typical right-wing attack dog. He is, although one could be forgiven for forgetting it given the invariable comparisons between his speech and Pat

Buchanan’s fire-and-brimstone address at the 1992 GOP Convention, a Democrat. And more than merely being a Senate colleague of Kerry’s, Miller is a Democrat with long and strong ties to some of the Democratic establishment’s favorite sons.

As a fellow Georgian, he is (or at least was) an old and dear friend of Jimmy Carter. He followed in Carter’s footsteps, serving two highly successful terms as Governor of his home state, and was, upon the untimely and tragic death of Paul Coverdell, appointed to the Senate by another Georgia Democrat who at one time had his own presidential ambitions, former Governor Roy Barnes. Most importantly, Miller is no stranger to the role of “keynote speaker,” having been esteemed enough by his Democratic colleagues to be asked to give that same address at the 1992 Democratic National Convention, the convention at which, you may recall, another of Miller’s old and dear friends, Bill Clinton, received the party’s nomination.

Think for a minute how the media would have treated the situation if a Republican had turned so violently on President Bush. When, for example, John McCain merely declared his personal fondness for his fellow Senator John Kerry, the media essentially tripped all over one another to try to be the first to report on how poorly that reflected on Bush and what a powerful indictment it was of the Bush administration’s policies. And not only did McCain go nowhere near actually attacking Bush, much less attacking him as vituperatively as Miller did Kerry, he has nowhere near the partisan *bona fides* that Miller does. Very few Republicans are terribly fond of McCain, yet for a long, long time a great many Democrats thought very highly of Miller.

But still, no one, either in the Democratic establishment or in the media establishment, seemed to think it made much difference why, exactly, Miller was so angry, angry enough, in fact, that he would give the most “partisan” speech at the *opposition* party’s convention.

I can’t say for sure, since I don’t know Senator Miller personally, but if anyone had bothered to ask him, I think it distinctly possible that he would have given more than a handful of reasons for the rage he displayed Wednesday night. Perhaps, for example,

they would have learned that Miller, who was raised in the rural hills of Georgia, who has never been a terribly rich man, and who, like most Democrats his age, has always prided himself as a defendant and champion of the “little guy” or “common man,” is unhappy with the sharp turn his party has taken away from that “common man” and toward this nation’s elites - academics, movie actors, rock stars, and outlandishly rich philanthropists who manage multi-billion dollar charitable trusts.

Perhaps he would simply have pointed to last Wednesday’s *Wall Street Journal* piece by Karl Zinsmeister and said, “That’s not my party; that’s not my father’s party; that’s not my grandfather’s party.” As Zinsmeister noted:

The extent to which the parties have flipped positions on the little-guy/rich-guy divide is illustrated by research from the Ipsos-Reid polling firm. Comparing counties that voted strongly for George W. Bush to those that voted strongly for Al Gore in the 2000 election, the study shows that in pro-Bush counties only 7% of voters earned at least \$100,000, while 38% had household incomes below \$30,000. In the pro-Gore counties, fully 14% pulled in \$100,000 or more, while 29% earned less than \$30,000 . . .

Today’s most aggressive election donors by far are lawyers. As of July, law partners had donated \$112 million to 2004 political candidates; by comparison, the entire oil and gas industry donated only \$15 million. And wealthy lawyers now tilt strongly Democratic: 71% of their money goes to Democrats, only 29% to Republicans.

Wall Street, traditionally thought of as a GOP bastion, is no longer any such thing. Ultra-income brokers and bankers now give heavily to the party of Andrew Jackson. Six of the top 15 contributions to Democratic nominee John Kerry came from partners at firms like Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and J.P. Morgan.

John Kerry is a perfect embodiment of the takeover of the Democratic Party by wealthy elites. If elected, he would become the richest man ever to sit in the White House; experts describe his bloodline as “more royal than any previous American President”; his educational path was pluperfect upper crust.

Or perhaps Miller would have said that he is just plain sick and tired of the fact that his party has unofficially affiliated itself with the most radical and, frankly, offensive elements in American politics and with the values (or lack thereof) that those elements embrace.

Perhaps he would have told his questioner that he is genuinely upset that the chairman of his party (the aforementioned Terry McAwwful) not only showed up at, but actually had the gall to talk to reporters after the U.S. premier of Michael Moore’s painfully dishonest and grossly misrepresentative film “Fahrenheit 9/11,” telling the press that one of the more ludicrous charges in the film was interesting and deserved further inquiry. Perhaps he would have said that it drives him nuts that the Kerry campaign would accuse a Bush campaign lawyer of serious crimes simply for advising the Swift Boat Veterans, while one of its own lawyers was also pulling double duty, advising Moveon.org, the organization perhaps best known for its ad comparing the President of the United States with Adolf Hitler.

Or perhaps Miller would simply have pointed to one of several articles about the demonstrators in New York last week, and asked, “can a serious party interested in serious issues really traffic with the likes of these folks, who will do or say anything about the President, Vice President, and the Republican Party, regardless of its truthfulness or offensiveness?” Perhaps he would have looked for an example and would have come up with, say, the one published last week by CSNNews, which detailed the goings on at one protest that featured representatives of a number of Democratic constituency groups and at least one Democratic member of Congress as speakers. To whit:

Poet Molly Birnbaum read aloud to a crowd of feminists gathered in New York’s Central Park on Wednesday night, as part of a

NOW event dubbed “Code Red: Stop the Bush Agenda Rally.”

“Imagine a way to erase that night four years ago when you (President Bush) savagely raped every pandemic woman over and over with each vote you got, a thrust with each state you stole,” Birnbaum said from the podium. (If something is pandemic, it affects many people or a number of countries.)

“A smack with each bill you passed, a tear with each right you took until you left me disenfranchised with hands shackled and voice restrained. Thanks for that night, Mr. President, I can barely remember my tomorrows,” Birnbaum said to applause.

The crowd carried signs reading, “Keep your politics out of my vagina,” “The religious right is neither,” “I don’t want a president who believes that I am going to hell,” “Keep your God out of my government, keep your laws off my body,” and “War is not pro-life.”

Earlier in the rally, U.S. Rep. Major Owens, a New York Democrat, warned a crowd of feminist protesters that the Bush administration is taking America “into a snake pit of fascism.”

Owens also said the Bush administration “spits on democracy” and is leading the country down a path reminiscent of “Nazi Germany.”

I suppose it would also have been possible that, if asked why he was angry, Miller would have restated and expanded upon one answer he did give when asked why he was speaking at the Republican convention. Perhaps he would have repeated his story of the dismay with which he viewed his party’s congressional leaders when they openly discussed the Homeland Security bill (which created the Homeland Security Department) not in terms of how they could strengthen it to ensure the safety of all Americans, but

how they could turn it into a tool by which to pay off an important political constituency, organized labor.

Perhaps as well Miller would have taken the story one step further and expressed his resentment with his party that that particular strategy cost his friend, fellow Georgian and fellow Democrat, Max Cleland, his Senate seat. Moreover, perhaps he would have expressed his further aggravation when, rather than admit a political miscalculation, his party’s leaders instead took Cleland’s loss and turned it into their anti-Bush rallying cry, namely “How dare they question my patriotism.” Perhaps he would have expressed his utter frustration that party leaders would actually believe it acceptable to use Cleland, a man who lost three limbs in Vietnam and who lost what he considered to be his very identity in the 2002 midterm election, as a prop in their extremely ill-advised “we’re braver and more patriotic than they are” presidential campaign strategy.

Perhaps Miller would have said a lot of things about why he was angry. But he didn’t. And he didn’t because no one asked.

And this, I think, is the point of most lasting significance that can be gleaned from the reaction to Senator Zell Miller’s speech. A good part of the reason why Democrats in general and liberals in particular have done so poorly in Presidential campaigns since Vietnam is that neither they nor their accomplices in the mainstream media ever ask the right questions.

They didn’t ask why Zell was angry, and they never ask anything else that might necessitate some self-reflection. You see, the Democratic big shots tend to believe wholeheartedly in the righteousness of their causes and simply refuse to acknowledge that any dissent might spring from earnest differences of opinion rather than more ignoble sentiments. Disagree with affirmative action? You must be a racist. Oppose partial-birth abortion? Well, then you must be a retrograde misogynist. Believe that fiscal policy (taxes in particular) might affect behavior, thus necessitating analytical tools that attempt to define and account for behavioral effects? You must be crazy. Etc., Etc., *ad infinitum*.

As for members of the mainstream media, they tend to agree with the Democratic elites, and tend as well to attribute dastardly motives to any variance from liberal orthodoxy. And in so doing, they do the Democrats a tremendous disservice. If the Democratic ideologues can pick up *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, two papers they invariably see as “unbiased,” and see their views confirmed, then they have no reason to believe that anyone other than a few wackos might disagree. The mainstream media has, in essence, created an echo chamber in which the Democratic elites declare their ideas, the media elites confirm those ideas, and no one ever bothers to find out what average Americans actually believe.

So neither the Democrats nor the media thought it necessary to find out why Zell was angry. For them it was enough to call him angry, call him a few names, and then call it a night. Of course, if they had asked the question and then bothered to listen to the answer, they may well have learned that Zell is not alone, and that many other erstwhile Democrats feel much the same way. Heck, they might even have found out why it is they’ve lost six out the last nine presidential contests; why they’ve lost their once seemingly insurmountable majorities in both houses of Congress; and, most pertinently, why John Kerry has fallen behind by double-digits in a contest that he and his advisors believed they had wrapped up just a few short weeks ago.

POLITICS DURING THE “WAR ON TERROR.”

I have been writing about politics and national affairs for over 30 years, and never have the thoughts and observations contained in an article of mine been confirmed as quickly as they were following publication of the piece I wrote two weeks ago in which I noted that neither President Bush nor John Kerry could explain how he was going to win the “war on terror” or what victory would look like when it was achieved.

Just a week after that article was published, the President publicly remarked that he didn’t think the war could be won. But then one day later, he quickly disavowed this observation and announced that the war could indeed be won and that he was just the guy

to do it. Of course, John Kerry had already jumped all over him like a duck on a June bug, declaring that, if elected president, he would win the war on the terror, no question about it.

But as I pointed out in the above-mentioned article, neither man has ever explained how this victory will be achieved, or what it will look like when it is. In fact, by all appearances, neither took the opportunity presented by the flap over Bush’s remarks to even seriously consider the issue. Yet once again, I ask, as I did two weeks ago, if neither can give a description of victory, “how can either achieve it?”

It is worth noting also that, to my knowledge, not a single news hound or pundit thought to probe too deeply into the nature of Bush’s flip-flop, even though many of them treated it as a noteworthy story. Fox News’s Bill O’Reilly dismissed it as a blunder, when discussing it with pundit Dick Morris, who offered the observation that while it was a dopey remark, it wouldn’t hurt Bush politically. Columnist Robert Novak said Bush was “seemingly absent-minded” and thus “misspoke,” and then, like O’Reilly and Morris, went on to discuss the political implications. Liberal commentators and pundits all seemed to agree that it was confirmation of their long-held belief that George Bush is just dumb. And it seemed never to have occurred to any of them to even consider the issue itself, once again confirming Wittgenstein’s well known observation, *das denken ist schwer*, or, “the thinking is hard.”

In fact, judging from the universal reaction to the story by the media, everyone, everywhere, liberal and conservatives alike, is so certain that victory is assured that no one is even curious as to how it might be achieved. Will the United States kill every militant Muslim in the world, beat the entire lot of them into submission with guns and bombs and sanctions, erect an impenetrable technological barrier around the United States and its assets worldwide, convert all the Muslim nations into “liberal democracies,” or win the terrorists over with something resembling Rodney King’s famous, plaintive question, “Why can’t we all just get along?” No one seems to know. Or care.

In any case, with this in mind, I thought that this week I would follow up on that earlier article and ruminate

a little on a related question that, once again, seems not to interest either of the two candidates, or anyone else for that matter, namely, how this war will impact American politics over the long term.

This question cannot, of course, be addressed with a high degree of confidence. But with a burgeoning peace movement afoot in the land, gnawing around the edges of the Democratic Party and central to the efforts of Ralph Nader's third party bid, I thought it might be fun to look a little further out than the upcoming election. After all, the Vietnam War had a profound impact on American politics, and as we have seen with the public controversy over John Kerry's record during and after that war, it is still affecting politics today, three decades after its conclusion. So let's begin.

For starters, as I have said many times in his newsletter, this "war on terror" is going to result in the federal government becoming much larger, much more powerful, and much more intrusive than anyone today can even begin to imagine.

Besides prompting large increases in the size, budgets, and responsibilities of the federal law enforcement and intelligence gathering agencies, the "war on terror" has spawned a new cabinet level department, which is rapidly ramping up its influence over both the public consciousness and the public purse, all under the unassailable umbrella of "homeland security" and thus assuring itself healthy funding for years to come. In short, as I put it over two years ago, in the eighth issue of this newsletter, "Wars and other national crises are to executive power what Miracle-Gro is to houseplants."

What I haven't said before in these pages is that this increased size and concentration of power in Washington, all directed at what everyone expects to be a highly dangerous and long lasting security threat, is likely to have a significant impact on the long-term fortunes of the two parties and American politics in general.

In fact, I can't help but believe that one of the reasons that Democrats are so foot-stomping angry and frustrated right now is that a "conservative" Republican president is presiding over what likely will

turn out to be the largest expansion of raw federal power since Roosevelt converted the sleepy little Southern town of Washington, D.C. into a global colossus during World War II.

I don't think any of the big shots in the Democratic Party has yet grasped the long-term importance of the fact that they are on the sidelines while this is happening, with little or no control over either the process or the outcome. They seem to understand it well enough to hate it. But they remind me of the greyhound named Lancer in Kurt Vonnegut's classic satire *Breakfast of Champions*, who lives with his owner in a one-room apartment in a six story New York walkup. His entire life, Vonnegut says, is devoted to relieving himself each day in a roasting pan in front of the Westinghouse refrigerator. Vonnegut notes that this dog has a very small brain but is still capable of suspecting from time to time that some kind of terrible mistake has been made.

The terrible mistake being dimly perceived by Democrats today is, of course, that they are not writing the rules for this on-going explosion in government power, not placing their own people in the top slots, and not establishing the mechanisms for long-term control over the behemoth.

Even worse, this new bureaucratic structure is taking on a decidedly anti-liberal bent. Besides building more aggressive and intrusive police methods for protecting the home front from individual terrorists, the Bush administration is formulating a policy of preemptive military strikes coupled with aggressive occupation capability cloaked in the comforting phrase of "democracy building," while eschewing the preferred tools of liberal statecraft, such as personal diplomacy; extensive, drawn out peace talks; formation and support for liberal, multilateral organizations; and an apologetic posture to the world.

Adding to the discomfort of Democrats is the unavoidable fact that they missed their chance to fashion and launch their own liberal version of a "war on terror" after the first World Trade Center bombing in January 1993. After all, there was plenty of evidence in the aftermath of that attack to indicate that more terrorism was on the way. So why didn't Bill seize that opportunity to dramatically expand the

reach of both the federal establishment and possibly even the United Nations? Did Homer nod? Or was he wide-awake chasing skirts? Or busy covering up the looting of a cheesy little Savings & Loan in Little Rock, Arkansas and an even cheesier crooked land deal?

Like Lancer, Democrats sense that something is wrong when a Republican president is building magnificent new government edifices of immense power to be used “conservatively.” They sense that this is especially dangerous to them at a time when the Republicans control both houses of Congress and are likely to have a strong majority of like-minded justices in the Supreme Court within the next several years. But like Lancer, they have small brains, so they have yet to figure out that the exact cause of their discontent is that this “war on terror” is likely to turn into a “war on liberalism.”

Think about it this way. When President Johnson committed the nation to a “war on poverty” in 1965, conservative Republicans had no choice but to enlist in the effort. After all, Johnson presented first hand evidence of children living in terrible conditions, suffering from health problems directly related to insufficient quantities and types of food. And he made the case that this was not just a moral tragedy but also a terrible waste of human resources that threatened the continued prosperity and security of the nation itself.

Of course, Republicans weren’t as good at the “compassion” thing as liberals, and they had considerable doubts about the way that Johnson wanted to go about achieving victory in this war. But they found themselves constantly on the defensive whenever they complained or offered alternative approaches. So year after year, they voted to fund a seemingly endless parade of new federal programs, agencies, offices, bureaus and departments, all claimed by liberal democrats to be absolutely necessary in the extended war on poverty.

The kind of poverty that had prompted Johnson to declare war was quickly defeated, but the war went on, of course, as liberals identified new enemies and designed new programs to defeat them. Over the years, a huge and vibrant new industry formed

in America to look after the needs of “the poor,” which included an elaborate new statistical system that manipulated the definition of poverty in order to guarantee that the poor would always be among us, so that those who were paid large salaries to serve “the poor” would always have jobs.

Scores of huge and expensive new programs sprang into existence, including food stamps, federal rent and energy subsidies, tax rebates for people who don’t even pay taxes, and myriad other schemes, along with an endless parade of “activists” who served as highly paid advocates for these “poor.” And all along the way, Republican politicians obligingly endorsed and supported the movement because they could not risk being labeled, horror of horrors, “lacking in compassion.”

Nixon, Reagan and the first President Bush publicly committed themselves and their administrations to virtually all aspects of this effort, and all were still vilified by liberals for not being committed enough, for being reluctant warriors in this war. And even today, a huge army of liberal bureaucrats soldier on, dedicated to the destruction of a long defeated enemy, voting for Democrats, and spinning endless stories of how their important work is being hindered by hard-hearted Republicans.

But suddenly Bush’s “war on terror” enters the picture, and Democrats have no choice but to enlist in the effort. After all, on September 11, 2001 all Americans witnessed first hand evidence of the horrors of terrorism. Of course, liberals aren’t as good at the warrior thing as conservatives, and many have considerable doubts about the way that President Bush wants to go about achieving victory. They especially don’t like his assertion that it isn’t just terrorism itself that threatens the continued prosperity and security of the nation, but the root causes of this terrorism, namely rogue states that provide succor to terrorists and the widespread lack of freedom, free enterprise, and democracy around the globe. But they find themselves on the defensive whenever they complain or offer alternative approaches, not wanting to risk being labeled, horror of horrors, “soft on defense.”

And this, of course, is where the question of “what victory will look like” becomes so important. The

analogy between the war on terror and the war on poverty is not perfect, but there are certainly some similarities. As with poverty in the 1960s, there is no one who can dispute the necessity of the war on terror and few who can or will dispute the necessity of the expansion of the size of government to fight it. More to the point, as with poverty, since there has been little attempt even to address the idea of victory, it is therefore conceivable that the goal posts will continue to be moved as the “war on terror” is waged. And given the natural inclinations of government entities to maximize both the scope of their missions and their budgets, Democrats are understandably concerned that the longer the war on terror continues, the more powerful this “conservative” government bureaucracy will become.

They see a giant new “conservative” bureaucracy being built on foundations of the “war on terror,” just the way the liberalism was built on the foundations of the “war on poverty.” And they suspect that this “war on terror” will last a very long time, as its troops follow in the footsteps of the poverty soldiers who preceded them, inventing ever new enemies for the military, new missions for the intelligence and law enforcement community, new targets for democracy builders, and new international “coalitions of the willing,” to act as alternatives to the recalcitrant United Nations, all in the name of an elusive victory over an equally elusive enemy.

One early result of all this is that John Kerry, the U.S. Senate’s most liberal member and a former leader of the Vietnam peace movement, insists that he is a deeply committed warrior in this new struggle, every bit as aggressive and tough as Bush. His fellow liberals cringe when he says this. So in deference to them, he hints at favoring alternative approaches, but he is on the defensive when he does so because he knows that voters tend to be as skeptical of his commitment to the “war on terror” as liberals used to be when Nixon, Reagan and the two presidents Bush proclaimed their commitment to “the “war on poverty.”

In short, by making the “war on terror” a huge enterprise, supported by a giant new bureaucratic structure, President Bush is putting traditional liberals on the defensive, possibly for many years to come, as they struggle to support initiatives that they despise and which compete with those that define their ideology.

At the same time, of course, he is causing nervousness among the ranks of traditional conservatives, who are wary of a huge new government enterprise that threatens to impinge on civil liberties and who are equally wary of highly speculative, foreign policy adventures of the sort that seek to turn Muslim nations into liberal democracies. But that’s a story for another time. In the meantime, it is interesting to note that the changes that Bob Dylan foresaw in 1964 are small potatoes compared to the ones that lie ahead.

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