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## THEY SAID IT

"The Democrats' worst week and a half since Black Tuesday (November 2, 2004, when the U.S. election returns came in) began on January 18, when Barbara Boxer took on Condi Rice in the Senate, and ended on Black Sunday (January 30, 2005, when Iraq held its first free election). In one comparatively short window of time, the Democrats managed to exhibit all of the class, grace, wisdom, presence, good sense, and strategic and tactical brilliance that had allowed them to move from absolute parity after the 2000 election to the loss of the House, Senate, and White House in the 2004 election, and left them apparently poised to lose even more. You too can turn yourself into a loser if you study and follow their recent behavior...."

--Noemie Emory, "The Dems' Week from Hell," *The Weekly Standard*,  
February 14/February 21, 2005.

## THE LOSER PARTY.

At the end of his article in the *New York Post* last Monday, columnist John Podhoretz called the leaders of the Democratic Party "losers." Writing about the Iraqi elections, which had taken place the day before, Podhoretz took the Democrats to task for turning a day that most observers considered a great triumph for the Iraqi people into just another occasion for narrow-minded partisan carping. Specifically, he wrote:

Yesterday was a day for Democrats and opponents of George W. Bush to swallow their bile and retract their claws and join just for a moment in celebration of an amazing and thrilling human drama in a land that has seen more than its share of thrilling human drama over the past 5,000 years.

But you just couldn't do it, could you? Losers.

There is no question what Podhoretz meant by this. Though he could have substituted a dozen or so other words or phrases, none would quite have captured the sentiment as precisely as "losers." His was, obviously, a pejorative use of the word.

But while I tend to agree with Podhoretz that the term, as a subjective pejorative, applies to the current leaders of the Democratic Party, it is worth noting that the term "loser" could also be applied to these folks as an objective observation, which would not only have the benefit of being less provocative, but which could actually add to the discussion of the Democratic Party and its current problems.

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You see, if you look closely at the current *de facto* leaders of the Democratic Party – not the official Congressional leaders, mind you, but the people who actually represent the party to the public and who therefore set the party’s public agenda and the tenor of its rhetoric – they are, generally speaking, a singularly unsuccessful bunch.

Some have significant blemishes on their political record that would, in another day and age, permanently disqualify them from any role in the leadership of a reputable political party. And more to the point, most, if not all have something else in common, namely that they are “losers” in an objective sense, meaning that they have the distinction of having lost important, national-level elections; of having been rejected, for one reason or another, either by the American electorate in its totality or by that portion of the electorate who are themselves Democrats. Let’s take a look.

Almost without question, the most prominent Democratic figure of late has been Senator Ted Kennedy, who has been a very public spokesperson for the party and critic of President Bush both on foreign and domestic policy. An overwhelming majority of Democratic elites undoubtedly think that this is a good thing, seeing Kennedy as both a paragon of modern liberal principles and a representative of one of the nation’s most cherished and respected families. Unfortunately for the Democratic Party, an overwhelming majority of average Americans and, I believe, of average Democrats as well, have a very different impression of the Senior Senator from Massachusetts.

Yes, Teddy is part of that most fabled Democratic family. But he is also the black sheep of that family, whose failings are not just moral but electoral as well. A couple of weeks back OpinionJournal’s James Taranto noted that Kennedy’s “15,423 days of service make him the second most senior U.S. senator,” but despite this otherwise impressive accomplishment, he “is best known for driving off a bridge and leaving a young woman to drown.”

Taranto is undoubtedly correct that Chappaquiddick will be Teddy’s lasting legacy, but, for the purposes of this piece, it should be noted that he is also known as the guy who actually *lost* to Jimmy Carter in 1980. Even with the supportive breezes of Camelot blowing at his back, Teddy carried too much baggage to mount a credible challenge to one of the least popular presidents in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When given the choice between a feeble, immobilized, political incompetent and Teddy, Democrats chose the former.

Kennedy’s junior colleague from Massachusetts has also recently been a prominent spokesman for the party and critic of the President; so prominent, in fact, that NBC’s Tim Russert dedicated an entire hour of “Meet the Press” exclusively to him last week. One would think that losing a presidential contest to an alleged “idiot,” with his own party’s base purportedly united behind him, would be enough to shame John Kerry into hiding or at least taking a lower profile. But one would be wrong.

After only a very short hiatus, Kerry has been taking every opportunity to disparage the Bush administration, primarily for its Iraq policy. Between his high-profile meetings with foreign leaders, his speeches, and his television appearances, it is almost as if Kerry still believes he is a presidential candidate. And, indeed, he probably is. Despite the fact that his opponent last November garnered more votes than any other presidential candidate in the history of the nation, Kerry appears to believe that he is still a viable candidate for 2008 and is concomitantly maintaining his “leadership” role within the party.

And while it is more than a touch bizarre that the man voters rejected last November still insists that he can and should be an effective spokesman for his party, at least Kerry can actually claim to have at one time won the support of a significant number of voters within his party, which is something that cannot be said of the man who, as of Saturday, will become the chairman of the party and thus its official public face. Despite the fact that only about a quarter of Democrats (27%) even have a favorable opinion of

him, when the party Pooh-Bahs select a new chairman this weekend, they will select the 2004 primary season's least loveable loser, Howard Dean.

Dean, you may recall, was the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination for most of 2003, before choking in Iowa and then completely imploding in his attempt to recover from the "Debacle in Des Moines." Dean put up a truly feeble challenge in the race for the nomination, losing all but one of the primaries in which he competed last spring; that one being in his home state of Vermont. He horrified supporters and scared small children with his now infamous "scream" in Iowa. And, perhaps most ominously, he managed to burn through a huge wad of cash - a virtually unprecedented amount of money for a primary challenger - without ever producing anything even approaching political success. As Jonathan Chait, Senior Editor of the liberal *New Republic*, noted last Wednesday:

Dean . . . raised about \$50 million by positioning himself as the most anti-Bush candidate, but blew through it so fast that he was nearly broke by January. This represents the sort of financial acumen you associate with deluded, flash-in-the-pan celebrities — cue the narrator for VH-1's "Behind the Music": "But the good times and lavish spending couldn't last for M.C. Hammer" — not with chairmen of major political parties.

Mark and I have often written over the last four years about how truly awful we thought outgoing DNC Chairman Terry McAuliffe was at his job, and how his tin political ear cost him and his party dearly. But in his defense, McAuliffe was at least very good at raising money and, indeed, got the job because he had been exceptionally successful in his previous career as the Clintons' bag man.

Howard Dean's immediate pre-DNC political resume boasts no such success. Dean may well have been a successful Governor of Vermont and he may have benefitted from his advisors' foresight with regard to internet fundraising, but that limited success is at best

a distant memory to a national political audience that knows him almost exclusively as the guy who went nuts and lost the nomination. Thus, with his selection as Chairman of the DNC on Saturday, the Democratic Party will, in essence, have declared that success is no longer a prerequisite of the job.

The list of still prominent Democratic losers hardly stops with these three. Indeed, it goes on and on.

For nearly two years before John Kerry emerged as the presidential nominee, the Democrats' most visible and forceful voice on foreign policy matters was Al Gore, the man who shocked the world by managing to lose to George W. Bush in 2000. Had it not been for the intervention of a number of party donors and advisors, Gore was poised to run again, and party voters, shockingly enough, appeared willing to nominate him again, thereby letting the loser of the 2000 race have a rematch.

Today, one of the leading characters in the Democrats' campaign against President Bush, his foreign policy, and his foreign policy advisors is Senate Foreign Relations Committee ranking member and former chairman Joe Biden (DE), who has been at the center of the contentious confirmation hearings of both Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales.

Though Biden touts himself as "as one of the nation's most powerful and influential voices on foreign relations, terrorism, drug policy, and crime prevention," it is far more likely that those Americans who have actually heard of him remember him as the guy who lost the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination to wunderkind Michael Dukakis (can you imagine?), or the guy who used to sound so eloquent, but whose eloquence has faded with time, at least since it was learned that he had a propensity for filching speech material from British Labor Party Leader Neil Kinnock.

...And the list goes on and on....

Over the past couple of months it has become conventional wisdom, both on the right and the left, that anti-Bush filmmaker Michael Moore unwittingly contributed to Bush's victory by allowing himself and his caustic ideas to be associated too closely with the Democratic Party and, specifically, by showing up at the Democratic National Convention in Boston, where he and his "sponsor," former President Jimmy Carter, attracted considerable media attention. And while I would be the first to concede that Kerry was damaged by this episode and by the association with Michael Moore, I think it equally likely that Kerry was damaged by the association with Carter.

Carter has, at times, been ubiquitous in denouncing President Bush and his foreign policy. This despite the fact that no one, outside of his immediate family, cares what he has to say about politics, war, and foreign affairs. Recall that Carter was not only crushingly rejected by the American voters in his attempt to win re-election, but that the mercilessness of the defeat was, in large part, a response to Carter's fecklessness in the face of the dawn of radical anti-American Islamofascism.

For a guy like John Kerry, who was fighting desperately to counter the common perception that he would be especially weak on national security issues, being linked to a dishonest documentarian was one thing, but being tied to the guy who hid in the Rose Garden for a year while a group of ragtag Mullahs held 52 Americans hostage was something very different – and much more devastating – altogether.

So why did Carter show up in Boston on the arm of Michael Moore, knowing full well that he would draw attention to himself and, by extension, to his voter-rejected political record? I can't say for sure. But then, why do any of the proven Democratic losers cited above continue to believe that the American people cannot possibly live without them, despite the fact that those same people have rejected them? Again, I can't really say. But I can take an educated guess or two.

For starters, we know that this is almost exclusively a Democratic phenomenon. I'm sure there are at least a handful of Republicans who, after being objectively labeled "loser" by the voters, continued to hang around making a nuisance of themselves. But GOP losers tend overwhelmingly to disappear after their defeats. Bob Dole? Gone. Jack Kemp? Gone. Dan Quayle? Gone. Indeed, of all the recent Republican losers, off hand I can only think of three who didn't disappear completely, and unlike their Democratic counterparts, none of the three retained any position of authority in the party.

First, there is Pat Buchanan, who was not only rejected by his party's primary voters twice, but was eventually rejected by the party itself, which no longer counts him as a member in good standing. Then there is John McCain, who has stayed in the limelight and who may well run again, but who more often than not speaks against his party rather than for it. And finally, there is George H.W. Bush, who did, in fact, disappear for eight years, only to reemerge when his son began his campaign for the presidency.

Given the peculiarly Democratic nature of this condition, I am inclined to believe that this phenomenon, like so many other idiosyncrasies of today's Democratic Party, stems in part from the fact that the party's elites are so unaccustomed to being out of power that they have not yet come to understand that they and their ideas can be rejected by the voters. In their hubris, these Democratic elites cannot imagine that the electorate could possibly choose their opponents over them. John Kerry summed this attitude up nicely this fall, when he whined, "I can't believe I'm losing to this idiot."

When Republicans lose elections, it is because they lost, period. The voters preferred a different vision, or a different set of priorities, or just liked the other guy better. But when the Democrats lose, there is invariably some sort of problem with the outcome. In some cases, the voters were duped by disingenuous Republicans, who managed to convince them to vote against their self-interest, perhaps through the use of religious mind tricks. In others, they were "disenfranchised" by intentionally confusing butterfly

ballots, or highly refined voter intimidation techniques, or self-loathing black election officials who conspired with exit pollsters and the makers of electronic voting machines to steal votes from heavily urban districts. Whatever the excuse, there is always a reason to believe that somehow things didn't work out as they were cosmically ordained, and therefore that there is no reason for the loser to accept defeat. I'm not a loser, they reason, the voters just screwed up, and if I hang around long enough, they'll realize their mistake.

Another part of the problem, I imagine, is that the success of the Republican revolution has made it virtually impossible for the preening losers to be pushed off the proverbial stage, because it has made the development of new Democratic Party leaders virtually impossible. For today's Democrats, the traditional leadership problems faced by the party that does not hold the White House have been exacerbated by the fact that they do not hold the majority in either house of Congress (and the high-profile leadership slots that go along with the majority) nor the governorships of any of the nation's four largest and therefore most influential states (California, New York, Florida, and Texas).

John Kerry filled the role of unofficial party leader for about six months, but outside of that brief window that exists only every four years, the Democrats have almost no leadership positions available to them, and therefore have almost no opportunities to develop the kind of leaders who might encourage the losers, if nothing else, to take a lower profile.

That does not mean that such leaders cannot or will not eventually emerge. The party will have to develop its farm team eventually. I expect that over the next couple of years, some of the younger Democratic politicians, such as Senator Barack Obama and Congressman Harold Ford will emerge as politically savvy, highly respected, and influential spokesmen for and leaders of the party. Already, both Obama and Ford are burgeoning media stars, and two years hence, Ford will have an excellent opportunity to raise his profile considerably, joining Obama as the only two black U.S. Senators and thereby becoming

the first black Senator elected from a Confederate state since Reconstruction. Outside of Washington, Ford's fellow Tennessean, Governor Phil Bredesen is already attracting considerable positive attention and is drawing positive comparisons to another Southern New Democrat who went on to lead the national Democratic Party.

And that brings us to the junior Senator from New York, who through her association with her husband, is the closest thing the Democrats have to a national-level winner. She will almost certainly increase her control over the party and its message as the 2008 presidential campaign grows closer. As I discussed last week, Hillary is already laying the groundwork to put her personal stamp on the future of the party. Some observers are even speculating that she is, at the present, enjoying the spectacle of a party in flames because it presents her with the opportunity to rescue it from the ashes a few years hence.

The real question for the present is how much damage the losers can do to the party between now and then. Some, if not most of them, will fade away sooner rather than later, gracefully no doubt, but surely enough. Others, though, will hang around long enough to damage their party well into the next couple of election cycles. Howard Dean, who will be elected to serve a four-year term as party chairman, is, in my estimation, most certainly one of these.

I suspect that this is part of the reason why Jonathan Chait called the decision to name him chairman "suicidal." It is also the reason why, when all is said and done, Dean may prove to be the biggest loser of them all, and thus the most deserving of John Podhoretz's pejorative. Loser.

## THOUGHTS ON POST ELECTION IRAQ.

Well, the election is over and, by any measure, it was a success. President Bush's vision of a democratic Middle East took a giant step forward. A large majority of Iraqis voted and then celebrated in the streets. The "enemies of freedom," as Bush is wont to call them, suffered a setback. So where do we go from here?

Popular opinion among the "experts" seems to be that the principal requirement for a successful democracy in Iraq is that the newly elected Shiite representatives agree to a constitution that gives the Sunni minority a meaningful role in the government. Since no one seems to dispute that this is a *sine qua non* for success, and everyone seems to want the new government to succeed, I think this is highly likely to happen.

The more important question, in my opinion, is whether a large majority of Iraqis will be willing to subjugate their various tribal, religious and political allegiances to a democratically elected government. No matter how technically well crafted the new constitution is, it won't work unless Iraqis from all sectors of society honor it, in both word and deed.

In the political science textbooks this comes under the heading of "social contract." Much has been written on this subject over the past 2,400 years or so, but for purposes of this discussion it is enough to say that Socrates had it right when he explained to Crito that each citizen must obey the laws of the nation, whether he agrees with them or not, if all citizens are to enjoy the fruits of an organized society.

There are significant reasons to be skeptical about whether the Iraqis are ready for this kind of democratic unity. Among these are deep religious schisms; ancient ethnic and tribal hatreds; long-standing cultural biases in favor of violence as a means of settling disputes; religious antagonism toward secular law, female emancipation, and the importance of the individual; and the presence of numerous groups of well-funded terrorists dedicated to destroying the fledgling government.

In fact, despite recent public pronouncements from the leaders of the nation's most powerful factions that they intend to respect each other's concerns and cooperate on drafting a new constitution, it is clear that many areas of fundamental disagreement still exist, any one of which could spin out of control and cause a serious setback in the process or even derail it entirely.

On the other hand, there are a great many reasons to believe that the Iraqi people may overcome these oft-noted roadblocks to the formation of a pluralistic government.

One of these is the fact that they have been through hell together for the past 35 years, an experience that just may have formed a bond among Iraqis from all walks of life that is strong enough to help them overcome their differences. Additionally, the on-going insurgency provides them with a common enemy and a daily reminder of the terrible consequences of religious fanaticism and totalitarian aspirations.

Another advantage the Iraqi people have in their quest for a free and democratic government is that their nation has enormous economic potential. This increases the incentives for alliance forming between and among rivals for power, since it is possible that the leaders of all factions will become wealthy and politically important if they cooperate with each other, and probable that none will if civil war erupts.

An additional advantage is that the Iraqis have the United States as a full partner in this enterprise, which is no small thing. This provides them with substantial, start-up financial support, protection from a vicious insurgency that would surely triumph in the absence of the U.S. military, and the counsel and guidance of a cadre of well-informed and genuinely well-intentioned experts on how to go about drafting and implementing a new constitution, as well as training an army and police force to back it up.

And perhaps one of the most important things that the Iraqis have going for them is that the President of the United States at this particular moment in history

happens to be a man of vision and stubborn courage. Although none of the “experts” that I have heard or read have mentioned this, I believe it is quite possible that this circumstance may well turn out to be the deciding factor in the fate of the Iraqi people, for the time may come that the only thing that stands between them and the abyss is a U.S. president who refuses, in the face of demands by such as Ted Kennedy and John Kerry, to abandon them to the forces of darkness.

In closing, I would note that neither George Bush nor any other American will determine the ultimate fate of Iraq. That will be done by someone else, someone with the strength of character to assert his beliefs and vision over those of other would-be leaders; a man with charisma, courage, and an iron will.

He may be a religious figure, a warrior, or a politician. He may be all three. He may be pro American. He may hate America and Americans. He may be a decent individual or a pathological killer like Saddam Hussein. He may inspire and unite all Iraqis under a common vision. Or he may assert the authority of one faction over all the others. He may establish his political base in the new government, or he may attack the new system and destroy it. The one sure thing is that he will be an assertive figure, for only such a man will bring some degree of order to that troubled country, whether this be a democratic order or a totalitarian one.

In the past, I have used the word “tyrant” to describe this future leader of Iraq, as in the phrase “our tyrant instead of theirs.” Perhaps “strongman” would have been a better choice of words. In any case, Iraq will not get from where it is today to wherever it is going without such an individual appearing on the scene. And if Iraq is ever to have a democratic government, that government will have to be the kind of democratic government that can tolerate an exceptionally strong leader with a great deal of executive power, or it won’t work in the kind of tumultuous atmosphere that is likely to be prevalent in Iraq for the next several decades.

In any case, the die is cast. In a month or so, the United States will hand the keys to the country over to the new Parliament, and the world will watch in anticipation to see if democracy can set down roots in the blood-stained soil of Arab politics. The United States will surely continue to help the Iraqi people find a path to a better future. But the election was a critical turning point in the relationship between the two countries. The Iraqis have had a small taste of freedom and no Iraqi leader of any faction will long survive if he is, or is seen as, an American factotum.

Certainly, the United States could reassert its total military control over Iraq if that nation were it to sink into civil war. But as a practical matter, I believe that it is highly unlikely that President Bush would ever get a second shot at establishing a democratic government in Iraq via the expenditure of American blood and treasure.

As such, much is riding on the shoulders of the members of this new Iraqi Parliament, these provincial chieftains who know little about the concept of democracy, even less about the Judeo-Christian concepts that underlie it, and almost certainly nothing of the Thomist theology that forms the basis for President Bush’s insistence that all men have a God given right to freedom.

Among other things, their success or failure will determine whether the United States will involve itself again in the expensive business of nation building, at least in the foreseeable future; whether the global economy will have sufficient oil in the next several decades to keep it from collapsing into economic warfare, or worse; whether thoughts of democracy and freedom will seep across the borders of Iraq into other nations of the region, forcing their rulers to agree to more open societies; and whether militant Islam will survive as a deadly, reactionary force in the world, or slowly lose power as its hiding places and sources of income dry up in the face of advances of democracy and freedom across the Middle East.