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THEY SAID IT

The wayfarer
Perceiving the pathway to truth
Was struck with astonishment.
It was thickly grown with weeds.
"Ha," he said,
"I see that none has passed here
In a long time."
Later he saw that each weed
Was a singular knife.
"Well," he mumbled at last,
"Doubtless there are other roads."

--*The Complete Poems of Stephen Crane.*

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THE MARCH TOWARD LIBERAL AUTHORITARIANISM.

In the summer of 1989, just a few months before the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, Francis Fukuyama published an article in *National Interest* entitled "The End of History," in which he argued that what he called "liberal democracy" was destined to become the government of choice among virtually all the nations of the world, given that all rival alternatives and ideologies, such as hereditary monarchy, fascism, and communism had been discredited in practice.

A few years later, Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington published an article in the Summer 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs* entitled "The Clash of Civilizations," in which he forecast that the end of the Cold War would move international politics out of its "Western phase," and its centerpiece would become the interaction between the West and non-Western civilizations and among non-Western civilizations. Simply stated, he said that the most important conflicts of the future would occur along the cultural fault lines between eight "civilization groups:" Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African.

Each of these articles was followed by a plethora of both complimentary and critical responses in all sorts of foreign policy journals and even in the popular press. Both were later expanded into books, which are today considered classics among the increasingly popular genre of academic attempts to gaze into the future.

Needless to say, I bought and read both books when they came out, and while time has not been particularly kind to all of the predictions they contain, I have found the historic background and fundamental analysis around which these predictions were formed to be useful as platforms from which to view on-going events and around which to mold some of my own attempts to look into the future.

As such, both came to my mind last week when I read an article in the *Washington Post* with the headline “Summit Collapse Leaves E.U. Adrift,” a subhead that read “France, Britain Blame Each Other for Failure To Agree on Budget,” and the following paragraphs.

After two days of rhetorical posturing in public and acrimonious haggling behind closed doors, leaders of the 25 European union nations failed to reach a budgetary compromise early Saturday and prepared to return home even more divided and uncertain about Europe’s future.

Emerging after a final attempt to bridge the gap collapsed, the leaders of the two main opposing sides, France and Britain, denounced each other in unusually angry terms. French President Jacques Chirac declared that “Europe is in a serious crisis” and put the blame squarely on Britain and other countries that blocked a proposed budget . . .

Behind the arguments was a deeper ideological conflict. The British and their allies in Eastern Europe and Denmark want the European Union to further reduce trade and employment barriers and adopt more free market principles.

France and some of its allies, meanwhile, reject what they characterize as the “Anglo-Saxon economic model” and want to preserve social values such as a shorter workweek, high

welfare benefits and restrictions to prevent low-paid workers from Eastern Europe from flooding the western member countries and undercutting the higher salaries there.

This article prompted me to think of Fukuyama’s book because I have always thought that one of the most obvious flaws in his basic theory was that there are a great many countries in the world, both big and small, that are very unlikely to be able to make the journey to the wonderful world of liberal democracy, with its attendant partiality for the rule of law, property rights, the importance of the individual, and capitalism. Of course, it would be grand if they all did, but as with Stephen Crane’s little poem about the pathway to truth, the road to liberal democracy from some of these nations has always seemed to me to be either impassable or non-existent.

Now I had never included the nations of Europe in this benighted category, since they are the birthplace of the ideas that underlie the liberal democracy that Fukuyama maintains may be the endpoint in mankind’s quest for an *ideal* form of government. So what would be more natural than for these nations to move away from the failed socialism that has hindered their social and economic development for so many decades and slowly return to their ancient ideological heritage, which once placed them among the most prosperous and intellectually exciting nations of the world?

Yet, as I read the aforementioned article, I reflected on the fact that it has become painfully obvious to anyone paying attention that contrary to this expectation, Europe has, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, been traveling in exactly the opposite direction from that which Fukuyama predicted. Rather than relying upon the collective wisdom and will of the *demoi* and building on the ancient foundations of European free enterprise, Europe has chosen to construct a brand new bureaucratic colossus, virtually unaccountable to the people of the nations of Europe and guided by the ideological and economic nonsense that derives from the feverish dreams of Karl Marx.

This doesn't mean that Fukuyama's predictions will necessarily be wrong in the long term, but the fact that Europe is having such a terrible time recognizing the superiority of liberal democracy over the obviously failed model of socialism cannot help but raise doubts about the speed with which the rest of the world is likely to race toward the fulfillment of Fukuyama's vision.

In any case, as I was ruminating on Fukuyama's theory while reading the above-mentioned *Washington Post* article, my thoughts turned to Huntington's thesis that the nations of the world would, in the post Cold War period, divide into what he called "civilization groups" and that one of these groups would be described as "Western."

Briefly stated, the idea behind this theory is that the wide differences in culture and religion that exist between the various nations and civilizations of the world will naturally prevent countries from mobilizing support and forming coalitions on the basis of ideology. Thus, when "clashes" occur over policy issues ranging from human rights to immigration to trade and commerce to the environment, governments will, he maintains, increasingly find themselves mobilizing support by appealing to nations with a common religion and civilization identity.

Needless to say, given the recent antagonism among Europeans toward the simple task of eliminating a dangerous tyrant from one relatively small member of the "Islamic civilization," it is not comforting to reflect on the possibility that the United States will find itself relying on Europe as its largest ally in the great clashes between "civilizations" that Huntington feels lie ahead. One would hope that, contrary to Huntington's view, the United States could find better and more reliable friends and allies from within other "civilization groups" by concentrating, for example, on a shared abhorrence for mass murderers rather than on religious and cultural similarities that existed in the distant past.

Now, my intention here is not to be critical of either Fukuyama's or Huntington's theories. It is, as I indicated earlier, to use their theses as platforms from

which to make some observations about current events, such as the on-going dust up in the European Union, and from which to make some predictions as to what might lie ahead.

So, in pursuit of this latter intention, I will close with some proposed modifications in both theses that might be worth considering, given the events of the past 10 to 15 years, including the problems that the Europeans are encountering at the present in their pursuit of a pathway to a form of government that works for them in the modern post-Cold War world.

I will begin with the suggestion that the real problem with Fukuyama's thesis may not be as I indicated above that some countries will be unable to make the journey to liberal democracy, but that the actual governmental model toward which all of the world's large nations are moving, including the United States, is not liberal democracy at all, but something that has no name as yet, and may never have one, but which might be called, for lack of a better term, liberal authoritarianism.

The "liberal" label refers to the fact that such governments will include some elements of all of the features of Fukuyama's liberal democracy, including democratic participation, individual freedom, free enterprise, private ownership of property, a menu of rights enforced by a uniform legal system, and a governmental goal of providing economic prosperity.

But the degree of importance which each of these various factors will command within the central framework of the government will vary widely from nation to nation, as will the amount of corruption that is extant at any given time.

Thus, nations like China and Russia, which have long histories of authoritarian rule and endemic, high level corruption, are likely to place significant limits on all of these characteristics, seeking a balance between the obvious benefits of "liberal democracy" and a kind of traditional, elitist authoritarianism that stops short of being so oppressive and corrupt that it totally destroys economic performance and foments revolution. China and Russia are, of course, each in its own way,

seeking to find this balance at the present time. And while Europeans would argue to the contrary, they are also in the midst of this same exercise.

Fukuyama would undoubtedly argue that this process is simply a stage in the march toward universal acceptance of liberal democracy that he describes in his book. I would agree with him, except that I think there is something else going on in the world today that is likely to redirect this march away from his *ideal* form of government to the aforesaid prototype of liberal authoritarianism.

This something else is the increasing complexity of managing the affairs of a large nation in the hugely complicated world of globalized commerce, intense competition for raw materials and jobs, astoundingly rapid changes in technology, the emancipation of the masses via the internet and other advances in means of telecommunications, and demographic changes of monumental proportion.

Like it or not, a world such as this both demands and provides justification for the formation of the kinds of mammoth bureaucracies within both the government and the private sector that are quietly but ever so surely diminishing the role that democratic participation can play in the grand scheme of things.

As I have noted in these pages numerous times, this is not a novel theory on my part but was set forth by Max Weber shortly after the end of World War I, when he predicted that rapid advances in science and technology would eventually usher in a new social class made up of bureaucrats, technocrats, and “experts” of all shapes and sizes, who would be uniquely equipped to handle the various and complex organizational tasks that he recognized would be necessary to make the brave new world of technology work.

Whereas Marx divided society into two classes, those who owned the capital and those who labored, Weber saw the emergence of this third class of white collar, technical and administrative personnel, who would, as a group, be vastly more powerful than either of the other two classes, and would, to borrow a phrase from

the *Oxford Companion To The Politics of the World* “create a monolithic power structure as oppressive as that of ancient Egypt.”

Relative to this current discussion, one of the most important consequences of the growth of this new and powerful bureaucratic class within both developed and developing nations all over the world has been to limit the number of issues upon which the *demos* will be able to exercise any serious influence via the traditional process of voting.

Thus, the irony in the increase in democratic participation around the world, even in such places as Russia, Ukraine, Lebanon, and Iraq is that the number of truly important issues that are likely to be decided by “the people” via this voting process is shrinking via a combination of bureaucratic necessity and the exploitation of this necessity by authoritarian officials. Weber put it this way.

The ruled, for their part, cannot dispense with or replace the bureaucratic apparatus of authority once it exists. For this bureaucracy rests upon expert training, a functional specialization of work, and an attitude set for habitual and virtuoso-like mastery of single yet methodically integrated functions. If the official stops working, or if his work is forcefully interrupted, chaos results, and it is difficult to improvise replacements from among the governed who are fit to master such chaos. This holds for public administration as well as for private economic management. More and more the material fate of the masses depends upon the steady and correct functioning of the increasingly bureaucratic organizations of private capitalism. The idea of eliminating these organizations becomes more and more utopian.

And this brings me to suggest that Huntington’s thesis about a “clash of civilizations” could also benefit from some modification based on what has happened during the last decade or so. One thought

might be that the major clashes he foresees will not be between civilizations over cultural and religious differences but between large nations competing on an economic battlefield that is complicated by the need to coordinate their economic activities among themselves while at the same time competing for scarce resources and workers.

Perhaps, to the degree that there are clashes based on cultural and religious differences, these will take place not between competing “civilizations,” but between these large “liberal authoritarian” regimes and groups of small but dangerous elements within civilizations such as that of Islam, whose traditional culture and religious beliefs prevent them from participating successfully in the complex world described above.

In that case, the “clashes” will be disturbing and disruptive, but not of the scale that the world witnessed during the 20th century, when large and powerful nations and civilizations did indeed clash on the battlefield of ideology.

DICK DURBIN AND THE DEMOCRATS’ JUDGMENT DEFICIT.

Last week, you may recall, I wrote that the Democrats’ plans for retaking Congress and reestablishing themselves as the nation’s majority party in 2006 were hopelessly unrealistic. You may also recall that I based that conclusion on the fact that the party was desperately out of touch with the majority of Americans on what could be termed “moral issues,” but that I also promised to revisit the 2006 midterms at a future date, focusing on less subjective and more conventional reasons to expect continued Republican electoral dominance.

Of course, when I wrote that, I didn’t figure that I’d have to address the issue quite so soon, but circumstances as they transpired last week have forced

my hand. Or to put it another way, the Democrats have made it virtually impossible to ignore the fact that moral judgment is not the only judgment they lack.

The nominal reason to address the Democrats’ lack of political judgment this week is, of course, the statement made on the floor of the Senate by that allegedly august body’s second-ranking Democrat, Dick Durbin of Illinois. On the off chance that you’ve been living in a cave or were otherwise blessed with the inability to hear or read Senator Durbin’s remarks, what he said was this:

If I read this to you and did not tell you that it was an FBI agent describing what Americans had done to prisoners in their control, you would most certainly believe this must have been done by Nazis, Soviets in their gulag, or some mad regime – Pol Pot or others – that had no concern for human beings. Sadly . . . this was the action of Americans in the treatment of their prisoners.

In the several days since, Durbin’s comments have been the subject of much discussion, most of it negative. His characterization of the actions of American soldiers has been called “beyond belief,” “reprehensible” and “historically ignorant.” But the adjective that I believe best describes Durbin’s comments is also the one that has been conspicuously absent from the discussion, that being “stupid.” And no, I don’t mean that they were stupid in the sense that they show that Durbin’s mind is unspeakably weak and that he is so obtuse as to be incapable of distinguishing between murdering tens of millions of innocent civilians and forcing suspected terrorists to listen to what Christina Aguilera and her fans think passes for music. What I mean is that Durbin’s comments were *politically* stupid.

Whether Durbin understands it or not, the name of the game in a nominal democracy is winning more votes than the other guy. And by comparing his nation’s leaders and soldiers to Nazis, Soviet thugs, and Pol Pot’s murderous Khmer Rouge, all he’s done is make that task much more difficult, if not for

himself, then certainly for other members of his party, particularly those who would like to represent (or continue representing) so-called “Red States.” As the inimitable Mark Steyn put it:

Judging from the way he’s dug himself in, Dick Durbin . . . genuinely believes Gitmo is analogous to Belsen, the gulags and the killing fields. But he crossed a line, from anti-Bush to anti-American, and most Americans have no interest in following him down that path. You can’t claim (as Democrats do, incessantly) to “support our troops” and then dump them in the same category as the Nazis and the Khmer Rouge. In the hermetically sealed echo chamber between the Dem leadership, the mainstream US media, Hollywood, Ivy League “intellectuals” and European sophisticates, the gulag cracks are utterly unexceptional. But, for a political party that keeps losing elections because it has less and less appeal outside a few coastal enclaves, Durbin’s remarks are devastating. The Democrats flopped in 2002 and 2004 because they were seen as incoherent on national security issues. Explicitly branding themselves as the “terrorists’ rights” party is unlikely to improve their chances for 2006.

What Durbin did, in essence, was to declare himself less concerned about the safety of Americans than he is about the comfort and well-being of suspected terrorists, all 520 of whom were captured on or near the battlefield in Afghanistan and most of whom, including the man who was trained to be the 20th hijacker, fully intended to murder as many Americans (a.k.a. “infidels”) as possible. Granted, Durbin probably does not really prefer the jihadis to Americans and may, in fact, consider such an interpretation to be a perversion of his actual intent. But in politics, impressions matter. And there can be no denial that through his idiotic statement, he gave the impression that his priorities are, to put it delicately, a little screwed up.

Now, if Durbin were some nobody-representative from nowheresville, or if his comments represented an isolated incident, it is quite possible that they would have been ignored. But he’s not a nobody. He’s the Minority Whip of the Democratic Party, which makes him the *number two* Democrat in the Senate and therefore a leader of his party, elected by his peers.

And as an elected leader of his party, he can be presumed to speak not just for himself but for other Democrats as well, particularly his fellow Senate Democrats. If he does not, in fact, speak for his fellow Democrats, then it is incumbent on them to censure him, remove him from his role as leader, or, at a bare minimum, tell the world they think he’s a kook. Recall that the Senate Republicans who disagreed with then-Majority Leader Trent Lott’s stupid statement about Strom Thurmond and his Dixiecrat run at the White House did just that. They took Lott on, found themselves a new leader, and, in so doing, minimized the political fallout from the incident. Thus far, Durbin’s Democratic colleagues have not followed suit, which in and of itself says quite a bit about the party, its leaders, and its cumulative political judgment.

The Durbin episode is only one example of important and high-profile Democrats making public spectacles of themselves. Others include comments by Congressman Charlie Rangel comparing the invasion of Iraq to the Holocaust; the ongoing effort to save the United Nations from the ravages of John Bolton; and the bizarre mock impeachment hearing held last week by House Judiciary Committee Ranking Member John Conyers, at which anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism were important themes.

One can only presume that some Democrats earnestly believe that when they do and say such things they are stirring up and energizing their base. And this is undoubtedly true. But the tradeoff is that they are also managing to alienate a good number of erstwhile middle of the road voters, who are, understandably, a little confused as to which side these guys – and, by extension, their party – are really on.

This strategy, if that's what you can call it, clearly stems from these and other Democrats' intense and frankly inexplicable, inanity-inducing hatred of President Bush, which means that it is, politically speaking, a double-dose of stupidity. The idea that the Democrats could coast back into political power by embracing anyone or anything "but Bush" should have been discredited by the last election, in which, you may recall, Anyone-But-Bush was beaten soundly.

But Democrats appear to hold out hope that their fortunes will turn around if they just keep up the Bush-focused attacks long enough, despite the fact that this "strategy" makes even less sense today than it did last year. I mean, as anyone with even a cursory understanding of the twenty-first amendment could tell the Democrats, George W. Bush is unlikely to be the Republican Party's presidential nominee next time around, and this makes him a poor foil in any future election strategies.

Of course, if you were to go looking for the root cause of this strange, politically sterile fixation, you'd likely find that Bush hatred, while genuine, serves merely as a mask for a more fundamental issue, namely that Democrats can't come up with a compelling alternative story line and are therefore forced to fall back to their default anti-Bush position on every issue. In other words, the Democrats' collective lack of political judgment is a direct outgrowth of their lack of political ideas.

Last week, I noted that Harry Reid, Nancy Pelosi, Howard Dean, and the others charged with the task of putting together a plan for the 2006 midterms have been pushing the idea that next year will be the year that the Democrats stage their own "revolution" and sweep the GOP out of power in both houses, just as the Republican revolutionaries did to them eleven years ago. The problem with this highly implausible forecast is that Democrats don't really have a whole lot to offer with regard to ideas. And whether they know it or not, ideas are the key to winning new voters.

The history books record that Newt Gingrich was the leader of the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress, and this is accurate, up to a point. Newt did, indeed, provide leadership at a crucial time. But neither Newt nor anyone else in the Republican leadership was entirely indispensable to the revolution. Ultimately, it was the conservative ideas and policy prescriptions that really mattered. I hate to have to borrow from Mark Steyn again, but he is America's greatest opinion journalists for a reason, and last month he put it thusly:

During the 1990s [the Republicans] had weak candidates – Bob Dole – but strong ideas. And it was the strong ideas that won them the House and Senate and state legislatures and governors' mansions . . . The Dems kept destroying the party's leaders – Newt Gingrich, and the fellow who briefly succeeded him – and it made no difference. Conservative values are the real star. It's like Cats: sure, it's a nice plus if you've got Elaine Paige or Bonnie Langford, but it'll still run for 20 years even if no one's heard of anyone in it.

Today's Democrats have no such "stars." They have no ideas, or at least none that might animate the electorate.

In the election cycle leading up to the 1994 midterm, you may remember, the Republicans took a handful of their best ideas, distilled them to their very essences, and turned them into a manifesto for their conservative revolution. In the now-famous "Contract with America," the House GOP minority promised a series of concrete steps to make government more responsive to the people and offered a list of proposed legislative initiatives to advance common-sense solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Newt, Dick Armey and the gang put together a very detailed, yet very clear description of their agenda and went about selling it to the public.

In the decade-plus since, Democrats have been unable to imitate that Republican success, in large part because they've been unable to articulate any ideas that might similarly capture the imagination of the electorate. Every election it seems that the Democrats believe they have a counter to the Gingrich-era Contract, but every election it seems that they fall short of actually finding a set of ideas that both they and the public at large can embrace.

This year's effort along those lines is no exception. Back in April, at the height of debate over judicial filibusters, Harry Reid unveiled his "Promise of America" agenda. He warned that if the Republicans employed the "nuclear option," he and his fellow Democrats would begin the 2006 campaign early, pushing this agenda that he and other leaders had decided would form the foundation of the party's campaign to recapture the majority next year. By and large, this agenda/contract serves merely to call attention to the lack of compelling ideas on the modern American left.

Unlike the detailed, aggressive, and generally popular reforms proposed by the GOP a decade ago, the new Democratic contract is long on banalities, short on actual new or forceful ideas, and promises to make even the most ardent left-wing activist overwhelmingly blasé. It is, in the end, little more than platitudinous blathering about a handful of secondary issues likely to stir enthusiasm among a handful of left-leaning policy wonks but few others. To wit:

1. Women's Health Care. "The Prevention First Act of 2005" will reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and abortions by increasing funding for family planning and ending health insurance discrimination against women.

2. Veterans' Benefits. "The Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2005" will assist disabled veterans who, under current law, must choose to either receive their retirement pay or disability compensation.

3. Fiscal Responsibility. Democrats will move to restore fiscal discipline to

government spending and extend the pay-as-you-go requirement.

4. Relief at the Pump. Democrats plan to halt the diversion of oil from the markets to the strategic petroleum reserve. By releasing oil from the reserve through a swap program, the plan will bring down prices at the pump.

5. Education. Democrats have a bill that will: strengthen head start and child care programs, improve elementary and secondary education, provide a roadmap for first generation and low-income college students, provide college tuition relief for students and their families, address the need for math, science and special education teachers, and make college affordable for all students.

6. Jobs. Democrats will work in support of legislation that guarantees overtime pay for workers and sets a fair minimum wage.

7. Energy Markets. Democrats work to prevent Enron-style market manipulation of electricity.

8. Corporate Taxation. Democrats make sure companies pay their fair share of taxes to the U.S. government instead of keeping profits overseas.

9. Standing with our troops. Democrats believe that putting America's security first means standing up for our troops and their families.

It is hardly surprising, given this proposed agenda, that a handful of Congressional Democrats would go looking for other issues to try to generate enthusiasm for themselves, their party, and their plans to retake Congress.

Of course, in the grand scheme of things, I suspect that constantly attacking the Commander-in-Chief while the nation is at war and likening American soldiers to Hitler's stormtroopers is going to prove a worse "idea" than merely promising to eliminate jobs by raising the minimum wage. Unfortunately, the latter is unlikely to get anyone on the evening news or the front-page of the paper, while the former most certainly is.

And while it's easy to see why some politicians might think that there is intrinsic value in raising one's name recognition and becoming Topic A of the water cooler conversation, color me skeptical. What some Democrats have yet to figure out is that politics is not quite like show business. There is, in fact, such a thing as "bad publicity," and my guess is that being forever labeled as the guy or the party that thinks American soldiers are perpetrating a new Holocaust probably qualifies.

My advice? Democrats should stick to Head Start, Pay-Go, "family planning," and the rest of the "promise for America" agenda. They are not likely to win over any new voters that way, but at least they'll be showing something akin to sound political judgment. In other words, they're also not likely to come off looking stupid, which would be a huge first step toward recovery.

END NOTES.

Hillary. Now More Than Ever. A few weeks back, we suggested that Democratic insiders were so eager to hand their party's 2008 presidential nomination to Hillary Clinton in large part because they hoped to make her the nominal head of the party and thereby distract attention from DNC Chairman Howard Dean, whose capacity for party-damaging inanity has proven boundless. The internals of a Fox/Opinion Dynamics poll released last week show clearly why a shift in focus away from Dean has become such a desperate priority for many in the party. As poll-guru/blogger Gerry Daly explains:

The next item that catches my eye as interesting are the trends of the favorability ratings of various prominent political figures. President Bush's net favorable rating, +10%, is virtually unchanged from this survey's last iteration in April, a point which suggests that the composition of the sample has not changed much from then. However, two prominent Democrats have seen theirs change markedly. Hillary Clinton's improved from +2% all the way to +15%; 5% more voters look at her favorably than before, and 8% fewer look at her unfavorably. In comparison, Howard Dean's has plummeted, falling from +1% to -18%.

There are some, including *American Spectator* founder R. Emmett Tyrrell, who insist that Dean's over-the-top ranting is an act and that he's actually much saner than he appears. If they're right, then it's a pretty convincing act. And if his latest outbursts are part of some ingenious plan to win over new voters, then the plan appears to need a little fine tuning. Look for the "Hillary in '08" talk to grow louder the longer Dean persists in implementing his diabolical plan.

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