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THEY SAID IT

If I recollect rightly, Aristotle observes, that a democracy has many striking points of resemblance with a tyranny. Of this I am certain, that in a democracy, the majority of the citizens is capable of exercising the most cruel oppressions upon the minority, whenever strong divisions prevail in that kind of polity, as they often must; and that oppression of the minority will extend to far greater numbers, and will be carried on with much greater fury, than can almost ever be apprehended from the dominion of a single sceptre. In such a popular persecution, individual sufferers are in a much more deplorable condition than in any other. Under a cruel prince they have the balmy compassion of mankind to assuage the smart of their wounds; they have the plaudits of the people to animate their generous constancy under their sufferings: but those who are subjected to wrong under multitudes, are deprived of all external consolation. They seem deserted by mankind, overpowered by a conspiracy of their whole species.

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790.

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SOME CAUTIONARY THOUGHTS ON DEMOCRACY.

As regular readers know, I have no problem with the war in Afghanistan or the one in Iraq or with any of the domestic measures that President Bush has taken to fight terrorism at home. I believe that militant Islam is an evil ideology not unlike communism and fascism and that it must be met head on with resolve and strength. And I believe President Bush has performed this task reasonably well. Furthermore, I applaud the President's oft-stated intentions to promote freedom around the world. There is no more noble cause for people who enjoy the fruits of liberty than to assist those who want to escape tyranny.

But as I mentioned last week, I do have reservations about this initiative. I believe strongly that it must be carried out with prudence and with a firm understanding of the limitations inherent in such an enterprise. And with this in mind, I thought I would follow up on a promise I made last week to elaborate on my concerns regarding this issue. These observations are not intended as a criticism of President Bush's actions. My purpose is to provide a somewhat different perspective on the world than his. He is, after all, a politician, and his inclination is to emphasize the positive events that are occurring on his watch. So be it. But those of us who are involved in the investment business have an obligation to view events with a somewhat more jaundiced eye in hopes of identifying those troubles that politicians either do not see or choose to ignore.

This task is, I think, particularly important at the present time, when the President of the United States happens to be a very assertive individual with strongly held beliefs and a powerful sense of the importance of his mission, and when the opposition party has not a single member who has the wisdom, the public presence, or the inclination to engage the president in a meaningful debate over his policies.

I'll begin by noting a speech that President Bush gave in November 2003 to the "National Endowment for Democracy." It was a flowery and highly optimistic presentation about what he called the "spread of freedom" across the globe in the wake of the end of the Cold War. He declared that this movement represents "the calling our country," and he pledged that the United States under his leadership would respond aggressively and enthusiastically to this "calling;" and would do it with the certainty that comes with knowing that "the author of freedom is not indifferent to the fate of freedom."

Of course, the crowd loved it and applauded as he described a wide variety of circumstances and events that fueled his optimism and enthusiasm. And why not? His claim that demands for freedom echo across the globe from Europe, to Asia, to Latin America, to North Africa, and throughout the Middle East is an accurate one and one that deserves to be recognized and welcomed by the United States, which sacrificed so much blood and treasure in the effort to end the tyranny of communism in Russia and weakening its hold in China.

But at the same time, while he didn't say so, he was also describing a world that is in the midst of the kind of extraordinary turmoil and change that often is a precursor to highly troubled times. Indeed, when seen through my jaundiced old eyes, the President's words recalled T.S. Eliot's famous concern that the world is in the process of destroying its "ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp their mechanised caravans."

To an old conservative like myself, who believes that *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is the greatest, wisest, and most important political book ever written, the President's speech recalled the unbridled enthusiasm with which the French revolution was greeted throughout England and the cautionary warnings that Burke offered in the midst of these wild "celebrations of liberty."

Burke alone among the great minds of the day recognized that freedom is a highly dangerous and explosive commodity when detached from the social, cultural, and religious restraints that make it manageable and linked instead to zeal and a sense of overweening righteousness.

Less than a month after the fall of the Bastille, and in the midst of the aforementioned widespread joy over the new found freedom of the French, Burke wrote Lord Charlemont a letter cautioning that "men must have a certain fund of moderation to qualify them for freedom else it becomes noxious to themselves and a perfect nuisance to everybody else."

And then, early in the following year, in his famous letter to "the very young gentleman in Paris," Chames-Jean-François de Pont, Burke expanded upon this concern, writing the following now-famous lines:

The effect of liberty to individuals is, that they may do what they please: We ought to see what it will please them to do, before we risque congratulations, which may be soon turned into complaints. Prudence would dictate this in the case of separate insulated private men; but liberty, when men act in bodies, is power. Considerate people, before they declare themselves, will observe the use which is made of power; and particularly of so trying a thing as new power in new persons, of whose principles, tempers, and dispositions, they had little or no experience, and in situations where those who appear the most stirring in the scene may possibly not be the real movers.

And finally, as he witnessed the breakdown of order in France and that nation's descent into violence and mayhem, he recognized that the horrible consequences of placing this new found freedom in hands that were not ready to treat it wisely would be deadly and widespread. He put it this way:

In the weakness of one kind of authority, and in the fluctuation of all, the officers of an army will remain for some time mutinous and full of faction, until some popular general, who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command, shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself. Armies will obey him on his personal account.

Right on cue, after a decade marked by chaos and violence within France, the murderous Corsican, Napoleon Bonaparte, road into the void that was created by the destruction of the old order before a new one could be built, and ravished all of Europe.

And the world learned what Burke already knew, and what few people remember today, which is that freedom and democracy are not intrinsically good. To work the magic that President Bush seems to attribute to them, they must, as Burke noted, be resident in a civilized society whose citizens have a "certain fund of moderation." They must exist within an ethical and cultural milieu that is conducive to deliberation and moderation and which has respect for justice, honesty, fairness, firm ethical norms, and yes, human life.

As such, I believe that it is important that the United States consider what it is that people intend to do with their freedom before riding out like a knight-errant of old to help beleaguered citizens in nations all over the globe tear down their existing structures of order in pursuit of personal license.

I have often thought that the Founding Fathers would be appalled and amazed if they knew that an American president was proselytizing democracy to the entire world as a means of promoting peace and harmony among nations. For these men were all aware of the dangers inherent in turning the management of government over to the will of the majority. They

understood that even in a religious society, such as the one in which they lived, where people had a sincere desire to live in peace and harmony with each other, democracy required a great many checks and balances to keep it from degenerating into a tyranny of the majority or simple mob rule.

As such, they eventually settled on a form of democracy that they described as a "republic," in which the general will of the people was sifted through an elaborate maze of institutions and bureaucratic devices designed to restrict the power of the numerical majority, to protect against impulsive actions demanded by the mob, and to promote the influence of the most responsible citizens over those of the riffraff. The dangers of democracy were mitigated in a variety of ways. Among other things, voting was restricted to male property owners, the president was chosen indirectly through the vote of the electoral college, senators were appointed by the states, and each of the three branches of government was subject to oversight by the other two.

These men understood that the simple presence of democracy and freedom does not ensure a just and decent society, but are the reward that the citizens of a just and decent society can grant to themselves in measured doses depending upon the extent to which they adhere to and respect both justice and decency.

They understood that a violent and debased citizenry would be likely to elect violent and debased leaders. As such, they would not have been surprised by the result of the vote in Palestine last week. They also understood that an ignorant citizenry would be likely to fall prey to corrupt demagogues who would find it in their interests to keep the citizenry perpetually ignorant. As such they would not have been surprised by the ugly turns that freedom and democracy have taken in recent years in many of the nations of Latin America.

In closing these "cautionary thoughts on democracy," I would simply offer my belief that if the United States is going to achieve any success at all in its attempts to make the world a better place, it might be wise to do so by example rather than via an aggressive

crusade to convince the masses of the world that they have a God-given right to unchecked freedom and universal suffrage. In my opinion, little good can come of that.

Certainly, as I said at the beginning of this article, people who enjoy the fruits of liberty should assist those who want to escape tyranny. But this assistance should be provided with wisdom and prudence, and it might be helpful if it came from a source that is making an effort to clean up the corruption and moral decay that is threatening its own ability to enjoy democracy and freedom.

AL GORE, JOHN KERRY AND THE RAGE OF THE EGOS.

Over the past two weeks, the two Democrats making the loudest noises and generating the biggest headlines were the party's last two presidential nominees, Al Gore and John Kerry. First up was Gore, who used an appearance at D.C.'s Constitution Hall to deliver a "major address" and to hyperventilate about the "grave" threat to the Constitution posed by President Bush and his "unchecked executive" agenda. He followed up his speech with a trip to the aging-hippy heaven known as the Sundance Film festival, where he made more news by calling new Canadian Prime Minister-designate Stephen Harper, who is a moderate by nearly any measure, an "ultra conservative" in hock to "Big Energy."

Not to be outdone, Gore's successor in the role of America's Biggest Loser, Massachusetts' junior Senator John Kerry, flew off to the ski slopes of Davos, Switzerland, from whence he made it clear that he had learned nothing from his presidential run, that he still believed in hopeless causes, and that he therefore supported a filibuster of Supreme Court Justice-designate Samuel Alito. Kerry defied his own party's leadership, in the person of Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, to take a brave stand in support of a weaselly procedural maneuver that had no chance of success.

Under normal circumstances and in a normal political party, the pronouncements of a couple of has-been/never-were politicians, particularly politicians who are so obviously unhinged, would be rather inconsequential. But, as I've written at least a dozen times over the last two or three years, these are not normal circumstances, and today's Democrats do not constitute a normal party. That both Gore and Kerry would be considered in any way relevant to the political debate says a great deal about the Democratic Party today and about its current malaise. Moreover, it hints at more trouble to come for the Democrats in the run-up to the 2006 and 2008 elections.

Certainly, the fact that Gore and Kerry remain standard bearers for the Democratic Party, in spite of their respective losses, is indicative of the paucity of capable party leaders at the national level. But the problem goes much deeper than that. Gore and Kerry are not simply out in public making waves, they are out in public making waves by saying incredibly bizarre things in incredibly bizarre settings and doing themselves and their party considerable political damage.

It used to be that unsuccessful presidential candidates – from Bob Dole to George H.W. Bush to Michael Dukakis to Walter Mondale – tended more or less to disappear gracefully from the public square after their losses. But that's no longer the case. As columnist, author, and blogger James Lileks put it last week:

Bob Dole did not post [remarks] on bulletin boards that claimed Bill Clinton would soon use FEMA to herd everyone into U.N.-run camps where everyone would get Mark of the Beast bar codes on their necks. John Kerry, on the other hand, has posted at the Daily Kos, whose neck-vein-popping contributors seem to think Bush spends his nights getting hammered and ordering Halliburton to poison Iraqi water so he can get kickbacks from the Pepto-Bismol Crime Syndicate.

Given the newness of this phenomenon, one question springs immediately to mind: why would Gore and Kerry insist on clinging to their notoriety at any cost, even if it means looking absolutely ridiculous?

Just after Gore's speech in Washington, *OpinionJournal* editor James Taranto took a shot at answering this question by trying to explain why the former Vice President has been behaving so . . . um . . . peculiarly of late. And though Taranto didn't mention Kerry specifically in connection with his theory, I think the Senator also fits nicely into Taranto's framework, which focuses on the deleterious effects of "powerlessness." Taranto put it thusly:

We've heard a lot about the problems of congressional Republicans, in terms of both corruption and ideological drift away from the small-government philosophy that brought the party to power in 1994. There is much validity to these criticisms. Power corrupts.

Gore, however, exemplifies how powerlessness also corrupts: by producing paranoia, persecution fantasies and a generally irresponsible politics.

Taranto is right, of course. But he stops short of explaining what has changed over the last decade or so that would allow the corruption of powerlessness to become such a potent political phenomenon. He fails to explain, in other words, why powerlessness seems to have had such an intense effect on these two Democrats in particular, when other similar figures had been unaffected. I mean, you didn't see Michael Dukakis wandering the globe spewing forth about conspiracies to fix voting machines in Ohio or about how the political opposition had become the modern equivalent of the Nazi Brownshirts, or about how the man who defeated him was slowly but surely undermining the constitution and establishing a police state. You didn't see Walter Mondale or George H.W. Bush lose all their marbles. Nor Gerald Ford. Nor even, for the most part, Jimmy Carter. What, then, is it about these two men in particular, and what does it mean in the grander political scheme?

The problem for both Gore and Kerry is not powerlessness alone, but the fact that this powerlessness completely shatters the self-absorbed version of reality in which they have spent their entire lives. They were supposed to be powerful. Both men were groomed for power, almost from infancy, by their influential and well-connected families. (Albert Gore, Sr. was, of course, a U.S. Senator; and Kerry's mother, a Forbes, was a Boston Brahmin). And both men lived their lives with every step – including their military service – carefully calculated to enhance their political credentials.

In addition, there were a host of generational factors that served to amplify this unshakable sense of destiny. Both men were, after all, "chosen." As part of the 60's generation, they "changed the world" by fighting the system. And it was their destiny to change it again as leaders of the new-and-improved system. A combination of liberal self-righteousness, the belief in Baby Boomer exceptionalism, and the fact that Democrats held power for so long that it was taken for granted, created egos so assured of their own importance in the grand design that the idea of actually losing the election they believed themselves to be predestined to win – and to an English-bungling, nominally intelligent cowboy nonetheless – never entered their minds. And when they lost, it was simply too much for them grasp. So they didn't.

And while there is no doubt that this "shattered reality" syndrome affects Gore and Kerry acutely, they are hardly alone in their suffering and hardly alone in manifesting the idiocy that this suffering induces. Anyone who paid any attention to the recent confirmation hearings for Sam Alito knows this all too well.

All of the Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee – Joe Biden, Diane Feinstein, Dick Durbin, Pat Leahy, Chuck Schumer, and most importantly Ted Kennedy – are as unhappy with their lots as are Gore and Kerry and are similarly helpless. None of them signed on to be in the permanent minority. And certainly Kennedy didn't sign on to be reminded as he was in front of a national television audience that he

is no longer the chairman of the committee and that he can no longer demand that it bow to his will, no matter how big a tantrum he throws.

The irony here is that the Democrats' attempts to deal with their powerlessness have only made the problem worse. Back in 2001, for example, Kennedy, Chuck Schumer, and the rest of the Senate Democratic brain trust decided, on the recommendation of Ralph Neas and the political geniuses at People for the American Way, to do everything they could to maintain their grip on at least one branch of the government and therefore to deny President Bush the ability to appoint judges who might be considered "conservative." But because of their powerlessness to stop the President by ordinary means, they had to take extraordinary measures, which meant using the filibuster. And this, in turn, helped make judicial appointments a potent campaign tool for Republicans and helped enable the GOP pick off a number of Senate seats in both 2002 and 2004, including the one formerly held by the Democrats' Senate Leader, Tom Daschle.

It seems unlikely right now that the Democrats' run of bad luck in the Senate will continue this November, with most analysts expecting that they will cut the GOP majority by at least a couple of seats. But if there is any factor that could yet complicate Democrats' plans and turn the '06 election into a repeat of the previous two, it's their ongoing rage against powerlessness.

Without question, 2006 represents the Democratic Party's most realistic opportunity to recapture the Congressional majority taken from it a dozen years ago. But even with the Republicans in Congress plagued by scandal and ideological drift, Democrats seem determined to blow their opportunity by ignoring the real concerns of the American people and instead continuing to vent their anger in ridiculous and politically damaging ways. Whereas a sane party would want to slap a muzzle on the likes of Gore, Kerry, Kennedy, and Dean and distance itself from even loonier political operators like Cindy Sheehan, the base of the Democratic Party appears to want to embrace its nutters and, indeed, to increase their role and their prominence in the party.

Of course, for all the political damage that the Democrats' unchecked and unwarranted egoism may do this year, the real fireworks will take place in the run-up to the 2008 election. Between Hillary, Gore, Kerry, Biden, and Dean, it is possible that the Democratic primaries will feature as many as five candidates who all believe deep in their hearts, indeed, have always believed deep in their hearts, that they are destined to be President of the United States. You think Al Gore seems off his gourd now, just wait until Hillary gets a hold of him and suggests that he was a fine errand boy for eight years but is hardly presidential material and would actually be unqualified for his old gig in the post-Dick Cheney world.

I am more and more convinced, given the bloodletting that's likely to take place in this monumental battle of the egos, that there will be room for a lesser known and saner candidate to sneak in and snatch the nomination. I've never been particularly impressed by my former Governor, Virginia's own Mark Warner, but it's quite possible that the winner of the Democratic primaries won't have to be particularly impressive and that Warner, or, say, Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen, could get the nomination simply by virtue of being the only normal guy in the room.

In the meantime, Al Gore and John Kerry will almost certainly continue to huff and puff and insist on their relevance. I'd be tempted to say that someone should tell them they just don't matter, but the fact is the American voters have already told them just that. Their refusal to accept what the voters told them is more than just a little sad. But it's also great political theater.

END NOTES.

More Trouble in Latin America. In our estimation, one of the potentially most important, yet least reported stories of this past week was the arrest by Columbian authorities on Thursday of 19 suspects believed to be involved in a passport forgery ring. The *Associated Press* reported the following:

Colombia has dismantled a false passport ring with links to al-Qaida and Hamas militants, the acting attorney general said Thursday after authorities led dozens of simultaneous raids across five cities.

The gang allegedly supplied an unknown number of citizens from Pakistan, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and other countries with false passports and Colombian nationality without them ever stepping foot in the country, the attorney general's office said in a written statement. The counterfeited passports were then used to facilitate their entry into the United States and Europe.

This story would be disturbing enough in and of itself, but when added to other events in Latin America over the past several months, it is becoming clear that there is a very real and very serious problem growing rapidly right here in the Western hemisphere.

Consider what we know:

■ Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is a Castroite and avowed enemy of the United States who has become the darling of America-haters everywhere, including here at home.

■ Chavez, like all oil despots, is currently flush with cash. He has been using that cash not only to squash dissent in Venezuela and to aid fellow travelers throughout the region, but to destabilize neighboring countries, most notably Columbia.

■ Chavez has also been playing footsy with the Iranian Mullahs, siding with Iran in international disputes and recently signing several "contracts" with the Islamic Republic for a reported total value of over \$1 billion. According to the *Wall Street Journal's* Mary Anastasia O'Grady, one of these has Iranian engineers and construction companies building several residential and "manufacturing" complexes in Venezuela.

■ Hamas and Hezbollah have long been active in South America, particularly in Paraguay, where terrorists have been raising money and setting up training operations. As the AP noted, "Much of the focus in South America . . . has fallen on the large Muslim community in Paraguay along the porous border with Argentina and Brazil. Authorities believe as much as \$100 million a year flows out of the region, with large portions diverted to Islamic militants linked to Hezbollah and Hamas."

So while Democratic favorites like Cindy Sheehan and Harry Belefonte are serving as useful idiots, hobnobbing in Venezuela and calling George Bush a terrorist, it appears that there is a real threat building and that the left's new hero, Hugo Chavez, may be at the center of it. We don't really expect the President's critics to notice what's going on in Latin America. We just hope someone does.

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