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THEY SAID IT

It is now a given, as prophesied by [Russell] Kirk forty years ago, that the academy has become wholly hostile to serious thought. The university's role would seem to be of a singular nature now: to be purposely antagonistic to any notion of the better, the higher, the more humane. Worse, the university is now at almost constant war with any individual therein who dares to question the prevailing orthodoxy. The humanities, in countless departments, have been degraded by the nihilists, deconstructionists, and others, while science and its handmaiden, technology, have filled the vacuum, to our utter loss and even shame. There is, under the existing institutional ground rules, simply no means to reform the university; and if humane learning is ever to recover its lost integrity it will surely begin with scholars who are prepared to defend first principles and place their love of learning above every other academic temptation.

--Timothy S. Goeglein, press secretary to Senator Dan Coats of Indiana, as part of a book review in *The University Bookman*, Winter 1996.

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THE GENESIS OF DEMOCRATIC PARTY LUNACY.

Three years ago, just after I'd rejoined Mark here at The Political Forum, I wrote an article entitled "The Democrats' Descent into Madness," in which I noted that Democrats were becoming consumed by their obsession with George W. Bush and their frustration with the loss of the power they had held virtually uninterrupted for the better part of the 20th century. The Democratic Party was, I said, on the verge of ceasing to be a responsible, reasonable political party and was descending irreversibly into insanity and permanent minority status.

Over the next several months, both Mark and I returned to the subject of the Democrats' "descent" more than once, and eventually it became the foundation of our belief, expressed early in the presidential election season, that the Democrats would be unable to unseat President Bush, despite his vulnerabilities and in spite of near unanimous "expert" predictions to the contrary. We conceded that Bush was a weak incumbent, but we argued that his weaknesses were mild in comparison to those of his opponents, who suffered both from delusions of grandeur and delusions concerning the wants and needs of the American electorate.

Recently, this long-time theme of ours concerning the madness of Democrats has become a common notion among political commentators on the right. Indeed, conservative columnist Michelle Malkin published a best-selling book last fall fittingly titled *Unhinged*, which depicts the wild, irrational, and sordid responses from Democrats to her and to others on the right who dare to question the left's accepted orthodoxy.

Other columnists, namely the renowned Mark Steyn and even the nominally liberal Mickey Kaus, have addressed the same theme more times than anyone can probably count. And just last week, *National Review Online* Editor-at-Large and syndicated columnist Jonah Goldberg wrote a column in which he described the Democratic Party as "one sorry mess of a party." This echoed an article that appeared the week before by the normally staid and decorous Peggy Noonan, who declared that "in the case of the Democrats . . . the lunatics seem increasingly to be taking over the long-term health-care facility."

Building on this theme, Noonan explained the Democratic Party's slide into madness by noting that "great parties die this way, or show that they are dying." If she is correct that the Democratic Party is in fact dying, this would be one of the most significant political stories of the last century or so. Yet no one, to my knowledge, has yet offered much insight into the origin of this extraordinary phenomenon.

I have tried, on occasion, to address this issue, offering explanations dealing with the frustration of watching political power slowly but surely ebb away and the trauma that many Democratic big shots appear to suffer when they are personally rejected by the voters. But upon further reflection, it appears to me that the heart of the Party's dilemma is much bigger than the bruised egos of a few failed politicians and party leaders.

Indeed, the problem seems to have little or nothing to do with the politicians themselves but to be emanating directly from the party's most active base, i.e., the relatively young, urban, coastal populations who have made hatred of all things "conservative" a

defining feature of their lives. This extremely vocal and highly motivated crowd of left-wing activists has seized the party's financial and ideological reins and has forced many of its leaders to lurch leftward while simultaneously pushing many of its few remaining moderates to look elsewhere for rational representation.

What prompted Ms. Noonan to speculate about the Democratic Party "dying" was the reaction of this crowd to the failure of the Senate Democrats to sustain a filibuster of now-Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito. Though a filibuster would have been extremely damaging to the party, particularly in an election year, and though there was no conceivable legitimate reason to deny Alito his spot on the bench, the above-mentioned base wanted a filibuster. And when the proposed filibuster failed, it reacted with typical rage. Noonan wrote:

Conservatives are always writing about the strains and stresses within the Republican Party, and they are real. But the Democratic Party seems to be near imploding, and for that most humiliating of reasons: its meaninglessness. Republicans are at least arguing over their meaning.

The venom is bubbling on websites like [The Daily] Kos, where Tuesday afternoon, after the Alito vote, various leftists wrote in such comments as "F--- our democratic leaders," "Vichy Democrats" and "F-- - [Louisiana Democrat] Mary Landrieu, I hope she drowns." The old union lunch-pail Democrats are dead, the intellects of the Kennedy and Johnson era retired or gone, and this – *I hope she drowns* – seems, increasingly, to be the authentic voice of the Democratic base.

What Ms. Noonan may or may not realize is that these comments were pretty tame, considering that the "authentic voice" from which they came is none other than the web site of one Markos Moulitsas Zuniga, who first came to national attention two years

ago when he callously dismissed the brutal torture and murder of four private contractors who were delivering food in Fallujah, Iraq as follows: “I feel nothing over the death of mercenaries [sic], they aren’t in Iraq because of orders, or because they are there trying to help the people make Iraq a better place. They are there to wage war for profit. Screw them.”

“Kos,” by the way, is a bright, well educated, 35-year-old, who was born in Chicago, served in the U.S. Army, received two bachelors degrees from Northern Illinois University and a J.D. from Boston University School of Law, and subsequently moved to San Francisco to work in the tech industry, where he is today. More importantly, he has become a major player in the anti-war, left wing of the Democratic Party and a spokesman of sorts for those in the Party who have made hatred of all things “conservative” the defining feature of their lives, as described above.

The question that begs an answer is, “Why are these people so angry, these generation X-ers, who are arguably one of the most privileged generations to have ever been born in America and are further blessed by having grown up in a period of unrivaled prosperity and opportunity?” As Noonan notes, every party has its crazies, but these crazies are particularly, well, crazy, and comprise a significant chunk of the Democratic Party’s emerging post-Cold War base. Moreover, the usual, pat answers about having to deal with losing political power have little application to this crowd, since the overwhelming majority of them came of age after the Reagan Revolution. Given all of this, the answer to the question, as best I can tell, is that they are a textbook example of liberalism reaping what it has sown, the fruition of decades of liberal social engineering confronted by circumstances with which it is ill equipped to deal.

A large – but in my opinion generally uninteresting and over-analyzed – part of the equation is that the young, angry left in the Democratic Party is not simply irreligious, as preceding generations of liberals were, but openly hostile to religion, disdaining not merely organized worship, but the very belief in God. And to borrow a line attributed (perhaps apocryphally) to the

great G.K. Chesterton, “when people stop believing in God, they don’t believe in nothing – they believe in anything.”

In practice, this means that a great many of these individuals on the far left, taking a cue from the radical feminists, have made the personal political and have come to “believe in” their political ideology, which they embrace in lieu of religion and with the same fervor with which true believers embrace their faith. In turn, this means that anyone who questions the tenets of their ideology is, in the eyes of the believers, not merely a political dissenter, but the equivalent of a heretic who has blasphemed their religion. And as we’ve seen over the last couple of weeks, such challenges to deeply held religious beliefs are not always met with grace and forgiveness.

The other, more interesting part of what I think is going on here is the culmination of three-plus decades of an educational collapse. The Gen-X left is the product of an educational system that encourages students to react with their environment through emoting and feeling while downplaying the importance of critical thinking. In the post-modern education system that has emerged in this country since the 1960s, students are taught that feelings and group and social consciousness are paramount, while reason and rationality are secondary thought processes. What one feels is, generally speaking, more important than what one thinks.

Now, this transformation of the education system did not happen by accident. Indeed, it is part of a concerted, active effort on the left to politicize education and to co-opt the institutions of society. I noted this politicization effort last spring in a piece about radicalism on campus and addressed the issue thusly:

Early last century, Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, about whom I’ve written almost a dozen times previously in these pages, argued that the ultimate triumph of socialism would result only from the creation of social hegemony, which, in turn,

could be created only through “the long march through the institutions,” or, in other words, through control of the culture and cultural institutions. Not surprisingly, chief among the institutions is “the schools,” or, more specifically, the universities.

The American left recognized many decades ago that Gramsci was on to something and that the best way to alter the nation’s culture was to capture the instruments of higher education. And they have been largely successful.

I noted as well that the left was hardly bashful about its efforts or the intended effect of those actions, quoting from Richard Rorty, professor of comparative literature at Stanford, icon of the modern intellectual left, and one-time philosopher-in-residence at the Clinton White House, who openly conceded both:

The power base of the Left in America is now in the universities, since the trade unions have largely been killed off. The universities have done a lot of good work by setting up, for example, African-American studies programs, Women’s Studies programs, and Gay and Lesbian Studies programs. *They have created power bases for these movements.* (emphasis added)

Lest you think the politicization of education is limited to higher education, there is also ample evidence that the effort to use the system to indoctrinate rather than educate extends to both secondary and elementary education as well. The stories of political correctness and “progressive” ideas seeping into primary-school curricula are numerous, too numerous, in fact, to recount in a piece such as this. But there is evidence beyond these anecdotes as well.

Last Sunday, for example, Frederick Hess, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, penned a piece for *The Washington Post*, in which he chronicled the efforts

of the education establishment to ensure the teaching of “progressive” principles by making a “progressive temperament” a precondition for teacher certification. Hess explained:

Stirred by professional opinion and accreditation pressures, teachers colleges have begun to regulate the dispositions and beliefs of those who would teach in our nation’s classrooms. At the University of Alabama, the College of Education explains that it is “committed to preparing individuals to promote social justice, to be change agents, and to recognize individual and institutionalized racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism.” To promote its agenda, part of the program’s self-proclaimed mission is to train teachers to “develop anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-sexist . . . alliances.”

The University of Alaska at Fairbanks School of Education declares on its Web site: “Teachers often profess ‘colorblindness’ . . . which is at worst patronizing and at best naïve, because race and culture profoundly affect what is known and how it is known.” Consequently, the program emphasizes “the interrelatedness of race, identity, and the curriculum, especially the role of white privilege.”

Professors at Washington State University’s College of Education evaluate candidates to ensure they exhibit “an understanding of the complexities of race, power, gender, class, sexual orientation, and privilege in American society.” The relevance of these skills to teaching algebra or the second grade is, at a minimum, debatable.

Brooklyn College’s School of Education announces: “We educate teacher candidates and other school personnel about issues

of social injustice such as institutionalized racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism; and invite them to develop strategies and practices that challenge [such] biases.”

The net impact of all of this is that students from kindergarten through graduate school have, for many years now, been bombarded both with “progressive” ideals and with their corollary, the idea that anything that varies from those ideals is, by definition, “regressive” and therefore unacceptable. The system itself preaches the primacy of “tolerance” as virtue, yet is aggressively intolerant of anything that fails to conform perfectly to the progressive/liberal orthodoxy and encourages its charges to be similarly intolerant.

A second, often ignored effect of the focus on advancing progressive ideals in education is that other, more traditional educational goals are forced to take a backseat to the ultimate end of shaping “tolerant” and “progressive” young minds. For starters, this means that the study of the foundations of Western Civilization in general and the United States in particular are more often than not given short shrift. Dead white men like Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas are never discussed. And dead white men like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson are discussed only in that they were slaveholders. “African-American studies, Women’s Studies, and Gay and Lesbian Studies” are taught, after all, at the expense of other, more traditional subject matter.

What we are left with, then, is a population of relatively young people – a group ranging in age from 5 to, say, 40 – large swaths of which have no formal spirituality and are therefore susceptible to ideological influences that in effect serve as a secular religion; that have been inculcated from a very early age with the values and ideals of progressivism, including a disdain for all things conservative; that have no knowledge of appreciation for either the marvels of Western Civilization or the true exceptionality of the American experiment; and that have little or no ability to think critically or to react with their environment except by emoting. What we are left with, in short, is the ideally

“molded” population in the progressive/liberal design and, more to the point, the new “authentic voice” of the Democratic base.

The problem for the liberals/Democrats in all of this is that, despite the best efforts of the educational establishment, things have not gone according to plan. Because of the ongoing and powerful influence of religion, the counter-education provided by loving and dedicated parents, and the overwhelmingly compelling narratives of the Western and American experiences, the values of progressivism have, against all odds, been rejected by a majority of Americans.

Against this backdrop, those who have been indoctrinated to believe that their progressive values are the only values that are tolerable have turned shrill and increasingly irrational. In their estimation, they should be winning, and the fact that they are not is distressing to say the least. That this distress should manifest itself in ways that outsiders view as “unhinged” is hardly surprising. What is surprising is that the Democratic Party is so weak that it has allowed itself and its agenda to be held hostage by this faction, a faction which movement partisans themselves formed and fashioned. The party is, as Peggy Noonan suggested, dying, strangled by its own creation.

THE TERRORISTS’ DILEMMA.

One of the things I noticed in the commentary that followed in the wake of the wide-spread violence which occurred in reaction to the Mohammed cartoon controversy is that a great many pundits and assorted experts on Islam seem to be counting on what one highly respected columnist described as “moderate, enlightened, free-thinking Muslims” to eventually step in and do something about the murderous element within their ranks.

I am deeply skeptical about this possibility. It is not that I doubt the existence of moderate, enlightened, free-thinking Muslims. People who know more about

this community than I insist that they are present, so I will take their word for it, in much the same way that I believe there are Scarlet Tanagers in the woods behind my house even though I have never actually seen one of the elusive little fellows.

My problem with this claim is that these Islamic *rara avises* would seem to be a decidedly unassertive lot, much like the aforementioned Tanagers, flitting around unobserved, except by those who seek them out, and highly unlikely to challenge the aggressive and noisy Blue Jays who live in their midst. As such, I sincerely doubt that these particular Muslims are likely to be very helpful in a fight against their much more aggressive coreligionists.

And this brings me to my own, competing contention as to the probable role of Muslims in the eventual defeat of the Islamists. I believe that if the West ever gets real help from the global Islamic community, it will come from Muslims of all political persuasions in all walks of life from nations all over the world. Moderate, enlightened, free-thinking Muslims will be part of the group, of course. But it will also include Muslims who are extremely immoderate; Muslims who hate the West, hate Jews, hate Christians; Muslims who are now and have been for many years helping to finance the terrorist operations of their murderous coreligionists. Help will come from everywhere, including autoworkers in Detroit, unemployed, uneducated, social outcasts in Paris, and fabulously wealthy members of the pseudo-royalty in Saudi Arabia.

The common denominator among these Muslim will not be moderation but a shared recognition that their individual “self interest rightly understood,” to borrow a phrase from Tocqueville, is being severely damaged by the actions of the murderous Islamists.

To get on the road to being helpful, each and every one of them will have to come to the realization that his life will be ruined unless something is done to stop the spread of militant Islam. It may be that a business will suffer, or that a nice life in the United States or Europe will be disrupted by prejudice or

by deportation. Or perhaps a bright future for a son or daughter will be threatened by radicalism. But each individual will have to come to the conclusion that every time the militants blow something up, cut off a head, or commit some high profile terrorist action somewhere in the world, his life gets³ more complicated, less enjoyable, or downright horrible because of the reactions it prompts from non-Muslim individuals and nations.

At the present, most Muslims living anywhere in the world can have it both ways. They can cheer, publicly or privately, when militant Muslims perform an act of terrorism. They can riot in the streets if someone draws a cartoon featuring what purports to be an image of Muhammad. And they can still enjoy the fruits of the world that the terrorists are trying to destroy. They can work in a plant in Detroit, run a grocery store in Los Angeles, drive a cab in New York, or collect welfare benefits in Paris and still be against the system that supports these activities. Is this a great world, or what?

But the time may come when they will have to make a choice. And a great many of them are likely to choose the side of the West, not because they are moderate, enlightened, free-thinking Muslims, but because their lives, their families, their dreams, their aspirations are threatened by the bloody war the militants have declared and by the West’s reaction to the war and to them as Muslims. They may hate the West. But many will choose to side with the West against the murderous element within their ranks strictly because of “self-interest rightly understood.”

When will this happen? Not soon. Maybe never. Then again, it could happen. In fact, within the answer to this question lies what I call the terrorists’ dilemma, which simply stated is this: the more successful the movement is, the less likely it is to survive. If the militant terrorists move slowly and limit their attacks to blowing up an embassy here, a tourist hotel there, a railroad station somewhere else, and killing a few people with suicide bombings in between, they could theoretically stay around for a long time, probably until a generation comes along

that is no longer interested in carrying on the fight, either because the price is too high or the goal is no longer attractive.

But if they escalate the war, and are successful in dramatically increasing the bloodshed, then the opposition will escalate its response accordingly. If for example, militant Islam were to succeed in launching an attack similar to or even more murderous than the 9/11 strikes, the United States would hit back and hit hard across the globe and within the American Muslim community. The American people would demand such a response and the politicians would give it to them. And life in the United States for Muslims would grow more difficult.

Certainly, some Muslims might jump up and down and dance in the streets, as is their wont, if more American blood were shed. But others, including

some who took delight in the action, might wish that it hadn't occurred because of its effect on them, their families, and their secular, day-to-day existence. And they might decide that discretion is the greater part of valor, and that it might be better to bring down the Great Satan in some way other than by flying planes into buildings or resorting to the use of weapons of mass destruction.

We'll see. But in the meantime, I think counting on the moderate, enlightened, free-thinking Muslims to help bring about peace with militant Islam is wishful thinking. With proper incentives, it is possible that help might come from a much larger group within the Muslim community, a group whose commitment to the cause of peace is based on rational choice rather than on a sense of moderation.

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