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THEY SAID IT

So Jupiter, not wanting man's life to be wholly gloomy and grim, has bestowed far more passion than reason – you could reckon the ratio as twenty-four to one. Moreover, he confined reason to a cramped corner of the head and left all the rest of the body to the passions. Then he set up two raging tyrants in opposition to reason's solitary power: anger holds sway in the breast and so controls the heart, the very source of life, and lust whose empire spreads far and wide, right down to the genitals. How far reason can prevail against the combined forces of these two the common life of man makes quite clear. She does the only thing she can, and shouts herself hoarse repeating formulas of virtue, while the other two bid her go hang herself and are increasingly noisy and offensive until at last their ruler is exhausted, gives up and surrenders.

The Praise of Folly, Desiderius Erasmus, 1511.

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POLITICAL TABLE TALK.

Well, it looks as though the White House has finally become concerned enough about the upcoming, mid-term elections to put Karl-the-miracle-man to work on the project full time. We view this as a welcome move, not because we think that the Republicans are in any real danger of losing control of either the House or the Senate, but because it just might mean – might being the operative word here – that the Bush crowd has figured out that it needs to have a high level White House operative actively involved in shaping the upcoming political debates if it hopes to have President Bush's views represented.

Currently, the Democrats make no secret of the fact that they want to turn the mid-term elections into a referendum on the White House, believing that they can use President Bush's low approval ratings to their advantage. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid's tacit call last week for diplomatic recognition of Iran was an initial attempt toward implementing this strategy, as was Democratic Chairman Howard Dean's statement that border security would be the top immigration priority for the Party. In both cases, these Democratic leaders were highly critical of the Bush administration and were attempting to make a case that their Party could and would do a better job than the Republicans of handling these very important, high profile issues.

Congressional Republicans are desperate to keep the mid-term contests centered on local issues and to keep as much distance as possible between their most vulnerable candidates and President Bush. As part of this strategy, Congressional Republicans routinely shrink from defending the White House and many have even joined the Democrats in snipping at President Bush whenever possible, which, in the long run, makes things

worse, for them, for the party, and most importantly, for the nation. Enter Karl Rove to take up for the boss man.

For our part, whether Rove is on the scene or not, we hope the Democrats succeed in making the Bush White House the focus of the mid-term elections. As far as we're concerned, if the Republicans can't hold their own on that turf, then they don't deserve to be the majority party. But more importantly, we believe that both the Republican Party and the nation itself would benefit from a serious, public debate over a whole range of important issues, both domestic and international, but most importantly about the war in Iraq. And we can think of no better opportunity to have such a debate than the upcoming mid-term elections.

The United States is at war with a dangerous enemy. This enemy has no interest in a negotiated peace. It wishes to kill as many Americans as possible by whatever means it can. Whether the Democrats or the Republicans or the American public like it or not, this war is going to go on for a very long time. And there is a strong likelihood that it will become more deadly in the future than at any time in the past.

It is imperative, in our opinion, that the American people understand this. And it is equally imperative that they employ the political process to arrive at a consensus approach for fighting this war. Whether we stay in Iraq, get out of Iraq, bomb Iran, negotiate with Iran, build democracies, or strengthen friendly tyrannies, we need to decide and get on with it, united, resolute, and with confidence. The alternative of incessant bickering is dangerous, costly, and likely to be deadly.

As it stands now, the Democrats whine about everything and anything, hanging miles of black crepe from sea to shining sea, desperately trying to convince Americans that the United States is in terrible, terrible trouble, that the war is lost, that the nation is on its last leg, that it's all because George Bush is stupid and evil, and that the country is doomed unless they are returned to power.

It is not clear whether this is official party strategy or if it just happens to have evolved. But there is no question that gloom, doom, hate, and despair have become the public face of today's Democratic Party. This can be seen from even a cursory glance at the websites of the most popular liberal bloggers and the opinion pieces of most of liberalism's leading columnists.

Examples abound. My recent favorite is an article by liberal columnist James Carroll entitled "America's Descent Into Anger and Despair," which appeared in the *Boston Globe* last Tuesday. Carroll has become so unstable lately that he seems to have been overcome with anguish and despondency simply by reading in an article by Seymour Hersh that some unnamed "Iranian official" believes that U.S. military threats against Iran are nothing more than a manifestation of "Americans' anger and despair." We won't quote Carroll's reaction to this at length, but the following paragraph will give you the idea.

The phrase leapt out of the news report, demanding to be taken seriously. I hadn't considered it before, but anger and despair so precisely define the broad American mood that those emotions may be the only things that President Bush and his circle have in common with the surrounding legions of his antagonists. We are in anger and despair because every nightmare of which we were warned has come to pass. Bush's team is in anger and despair because their grand and -- to them -- selfless ambitions have been thwarted at every turn. Indeed, anger and despair can seem universally inevitable responses to what America has done and what it faces now.

The thing that leapt out at us from reading Carroll's over-the-top response to a tidbit of Iranian propaganda is that this guy shouldn't be left alone in a room with his shoelaces and belt. As we note in the second piece today, there is no question that a great many Americans are, indeed, worried about the state of the world. This is only reasonable, since

the world is an increasingly dangerous and unnerving place. That said, we doubt seriously that most people are anywhere near as unhappy or as desperate as the pollsters and pundits would have us believe. Indeed, it isn't ordinary Americans or even "President Bush and his circle" who are descending into anger and despair. It is James Carroll and his ilk. We've been watching politics for a long time and we have never seen a party so immersed in bile and gloom as the Democratic Party is today. Not even during the days when Jimmy Carter was performing daily renditions of Garbo playing the death scene from *Camille* has Democratic despair mongering been so intense.

There are many reasons for this. For starters, pessimism and anger are natural elements in the kind of liberalism that has become a staple of the Democratic Party since the late 1960s. This was when the uniquely American, Christianity-based, "happy warrior" brand of Democratic politics, as exemplified by Hubert Humphrey, was replaced by an angry, anti-Christian, Gramscian variety, as epitomized by the Chicago Seven. This type of liberalism is based on the premise that the existing society is deeply corrupt and that citizens must be made aware of this circumstance. It aims at radically changing society rather than improving it, which virtually guarantees disappointment after disappointment when theory meets with practicality in the real world. And this naturally generates anger and frustration.

A second explanation for the pervasive gloom that hangs over the Democratic Party like Joe Btfsplk's cloud involves the relentless decline in the Party's fortunes ever since Bill Clinton came to the White House. Bill did well for himself during those years, but he decimated the party in the process. Not only did Democrats lose control of both houses of Congress and numerous state houses on his watch but they also were left with Al Gore as their standard bearer.

But another, more immediate explanation for the Democratic Party's obsessive and pervasive rage is the enormous and steadily growing influence of the radical, left-wing blogger community. The most

popular conservative blogs generally concentrate on adding little known facts, historical background, and unique perspectives to the debates over the various issues at hand. The competition among these blogs seems to be over intellectual clout and ideological purity. Some of the liberal blogs take the same approach, but the truly popular ones tend to be little more than bulletin boards for hate filled rants and crackpot, leftwing, conspiracy theories.

This pathology among the left-wing bloggers has become so obvious that the *Washington Post* last week featured a front-page article entitled "The Left, Online and Outraged," by David Finkel, which opened with the following paragraphs.

In the angry life of Maryscott O'Connor, the rage begins as soon as she opens her eyes and realizes that her president is still George W. Bush. The sun has yet to rise and her family is asleep, but no matter; as soon as the realization kicks in, O'Connor, 37, is out of bed and heading toward her computer.

Out there, awaiting her building fury: the Angry Left, where O'Connor's reputation is as one of the angriest of all. "One long, sustained scream" is how she describes the writing she does for various Web logs, as she wonders what she should scream about this day.

She smokes a cigarette. Should it be about Bush, whom she considers "malevolent," a "sociopath" and "the Antichrist"? She smokes another cigarette. Should it be about Vice President Cheney, whom she thinks of as "Satan," or about Karl Rove, "the devil"? Should it be about the "evil" Republican Party, or the "weaselly, capitulating, self-aggrandizing, self-serving" Democrats, or the Catholic Church, for which she says "I have a special place in my heart . . . a burning, sizzling, putrescent place where the guilty suffer the tortures of the damned"?

Lest anyone think she is writing into the wind, the *Post* notes the following:

To what, effect, though? Do the hundreds of thousands of daily visitors to Daily Kos, who sign their comments with phrases such as “Anger is energy,” accomplish anything other than talking among themselves? The founder of Daily Kos, Markos Moulitsas, may have a wide enough reputation at this point to consult regularly with Democrats on Capitol Hill, but what about the heart and soul of Daily Kos, the other visitors, whose presence extends no further than what they read and write on the site?

How about the 125,000 or so daily visitors to Eschaton? Or the thousands who visit Rude Pundit, the Smirking Chimp or My Left Wing, which is O’Connor’s Web site? Put another way, can one person sitting alone in a living room, typing her fingertips numb on a keyboard, make a difference? “Rage, rage against the Lying of the Right” is the subtitle of O’Connor’s Web site.

The *Post* doesn’t answer the question, but the answer is obvious. Not only *can* they make a difference, they *are* making of difference. The Maryscott O’Connor’s and the Markos Moulitsas’ of the world are strangling what’s left of the rational, patriotic, “happy warrior,” contingent of the Democratic Party.

They and their followers are becoming to the Democratic Party today what the labor movement was 50 years ago. And they’re using this power to slowly spread their hate-filled, gloomy radicalism to the party mainstream. You can see their growing influence in the columns of old-line liberals like James Carroll and in the increasingly angry speeches of Al Gore, John Kerry, and Howard Dean. You can see it referenced in various “political analysis” pieces addressing the issue of how Hillary is trying to court the political center of America without antagonizing the all-important angry left wing of her party.

On the one hand these people are energizing the Democratic Party’s base in a manner that hasn’t been seen since the days of FDR. On the other hand, a traditional, patriotic American can be forgiven for wondering whether this will, in the long run, prove to be good for either the Democratic Party or the nation. The situation brings to mind the following quote from Coleridge’s *Table Talk*, which can be found also in Russell Kirk’s classic tome, *The Conservative Mind*. Coleridge is offering his concern about the long-term impact of Lord Grey’s efforts to garner public support for the Reform Act of 1832.

Necker, you remember, asked the people to come and help him against the aristocracy. The people came fast enough at his bidding; but, somehow or other, they would not go away when they had done their work. I hope Lord Grey will not see himself or his friends in the woeful case of the conjuror, who, with infinite zeal and pains, called up the devils to do something for him. They came at the word, thronging about him, grinning, and howling, and dancing, and whisking their long tails in diabolic glee; but when they asked him what he wanted of them the poor wretch, frightened out of his wits, could only stammer forth, -- “I pray you, my friends, be gone down again!” At which the devils, with one voice, replied – “Yes! Yes! We’ll go down! We’ll go down! But we’ll take you with us to swim or to drown!”

With this in mind, here are two predictions you’ll not read elsewhere. The first is that the radical, angry, left wing of the Democratic Party, as represented by the blogs mentioned above and their loyal readers, will destroy Hillary Clinton in the early primaries just to demonstrate to the other candidates that they are the party’s new kingmakers. Prediction two is that Al Gore and John Kerry will vie with each other to be the darling of these new Erinyes. They will compete to convince the lovely Maryscott that they are not “weaselly, capitulating, self-aggrandizing, self-serving” Democrats,” but splenetic furies worthy of her endorsement.

For their part, Congressional Republicans are acting as though they believe all this nonsense. They cower in their offices, hoping against hope that the public will decide that even if they are callow, feckless, and undeserving of respect, the Democrats are no better. This is a loser's strategy deserving of contempt. They've been fighting a weak Democratic Party for so long, they have no stomach for a battle. They joined up for the benefits not for the fight.

The White House response to this insanity has been to lower the drawbridge each day and send President Bush sallying forth like Sir Lancelot to deliver the *message de jour* to some friendly audience somewhere that everything is all right. But he's basically a one-trick pony, which becomes uninteresting after a while unless something goes wrong with the trick, which is the only thing that keeps the mainstream press even remotely interested in what he has to say.

This situation needs to change and in my opinion the best way to accomplish this is to do exactly what the Democrats want to do, which is to turn the upcoming election into a debate over national policy. Hopefully, this would force both the Democrats and the Congressional Republicans to take concrete, public positions on the issues of the day, including the war in Iraq and the war against Islamic terrorists.

As we said earlier, a dangerous enemy is threatening the United States and it is absolutely imperative that political leaders of this nation get together and hammer out a national consensus as to how this threat should be met. Then they need to unite behind this consensus and get on with the job. They are unlikely to do this voluntarily. But they might slop into it as they battle for control of Congress. One can only pray that that is what Karl Rove is hoping to accomplish. If so, we wish him luck.

DESPAIR AND REALITY.

It would seem that in the spirit of the Easter season, the American public and its political leaders have decided to follow the example set for them by one of Jesus' disciples during the very first Easter week some 2000 years ago. The problem in this case is that the disciple whose example they've chosen to follow is Judas Iscariot, who, as any schoolboy knows, sinned most grievously not when he betrayed Jesus, but when, upon witnessing the consequences of his betrayal, he despaired. Like the accursed Judas, Americans and their elected representatives – Republicans in particular – appear to have given up hope that their current dismal circumstance can be remedied. Or at least that's the way the story goes.

Poll after poll after poll purport to show that Americans are unhappy with the world and are convinced that their leaders are simply incapable of making things better. President Bush's approval numbers are the lowest not just of his presidency but of any presidency in the last quarter century, with only a third of Americans favoring the job he is doing. The numbers for Congress are even worse, with only about a quarter of Americans approving of their legislators' collective performance.

As recently as a couple of weeks ago, nearly two-thirds of Americans stated their belief that the country is moving in the "wrong direction," while only one in four professed to be pleased with the direction of the nation. This public depression not only crosses party lines but applies to nearly all issues, with the government's handling of Iraq, the broader war on terror, the economy, immigration, and a host of other issues all receiving poor marks.

The disposition of their elected representatives is not much better. Democrats are – as they have been for more than five years now – doing their best Chicken Little impression, insisting that the sky is falling, that the end of days is near, that the economy is worse now than at any time since the Great Depression, that the war in Iraq is perhaps the greatest "strategic mistake" in the history of the nation, that President Bush is personally responsible for the surge in gasoline prices,

and that Bush and his cronies in the pharmaceutical industry are doing nothing to protect us from the imminent plague of bird flu. Sadly, these are only slight exaggerations of the Democratic Party's actual, official positions.

For its part, the Republican Party, or at least its Congressional contingent, is so confused and so certain of impending doom that it seems to have forgotten that it is, in fact, the majority party, and, moreover, that it controls *all* of the levers of power in Washington, at least for the time being. Bill Frist has conceded operative control of the Senate to his Democratic counterpart Harry Reid, a political patsy whose ineffectiveness and impotence would be remarkable were both not wildly surpassed by Frist's.

House Speaker and onetime wrestling coach Dennis Hastert has been pinned and paralyzed by the emergence of an aggressive know-nothing, xenophobic, protectionist faction within his own conference that is convinced that a cabal of Mexicans laborers and Arab shipping magnates are somehow conspiring to destroy the United States by ensuring that its produce is harvested and shipped abroad quickly, efficiently, and cheaply. And everyone in both houses is running as fast as they can from President Bush, afraid that some of his bad Mojo might rub off on them, apparently unaware that his approval numbers, pathetic though they may be, are still considerably higher than theirs.

Clearly, there is a system-wide sense that things are going poorly in the country and in the world right now. The question is "why?"

Some analysts argue, not unreasonably, that Iraq has cast such a long and dark shadow over everything in the country; that the failure to achieve tangible peace and to detail a specific exit strategy has affected all other aspects of the political culture, essentially sending the nation into an Iraq-induced depression. Others, most especially President Bush's political enemies, have argued that things really are as bad as they seem, that Bush is "worst president in

history," and that the Republican Party's corruption and inattention to important matters has effectively destroyed the societal gains made during the go-go '90s. Still others argue that the fault lies with President Bush in the sense that he has failed grasp the niceties of modern politics and thus failed to run an effective modern presidency.

Most notable among this latter group is former Clinton advisor and political strategist Dick Morris, who last week found similarities between Bush and every "bad" president in recent memory, comparing him in succession to his father, Nixon, and Jimmy Carter. Regarding this last comparison, Morris wrote:

Bush has truly become the Republican equivalent of President Jimmy Carter, out of control, dropping in popularity, unable to resume command. He barely skated through 2004 using the issue of terrorism. But his very success in preventing further attacks has eroded the strength of the issue and has undermined its political importance. Tax cuts, the *cause célèbre* of his 2000 campaign, have long since been passed and yielded their economic growth. But they're long gone as a key issue.

Yet Bush, like his father, fails to invent issues to give his presidency a new lease on life. Is he too tired or lazy to do so? Does he not believe in government doing very much in the first place? Or is he so preoccupied with Iraq - as Carter was with the hostage crisis - that he can't divert his attention to new issues?

The instinctive reaction to this piece might be to dismiss it out of hand. After all, in one sentence Morris calls Bush a Republican Jimmy Carter and in the next invalidates the comparison by noting that Bush actually won a second term. But while Morris may, indeed, need work on his analogies, the basic sentiment of his column is important and at the very least should be given serious attention.

For starters, although he was Bill Clinton's chief political advisor from the 1970s on, Morris is no liberal and, indeed, has been genuinely sympathetic to Bush throughout his presidency and since September 11 in particular. His comments are therefore not the usual partisan attack. More to the point, Morris is quite likely the preeminent political strategist of his generation. Certainly he is the most successful. His insights are generally keen and his political methodology is nearly universally triumphant. Bill rode Morris's genius to two terms, and it appears that Hillary will at least try to employ the same techniques in her run in '08. The guy clearly knows what he is talking about when the topic is political strategy. And if he's figured out the problem with the Bush presidency, smart people would do well to pay him heed.

Of course, there is a problem with Morris's analysis. While he clearly diagnoses the difficulties Bush is having and offers reasonable solutions, he remains a strategist by nature, and his ideas reflect a strategist's temperament and conditioning. His suggestions to Bush are therefore heavy on style and light on substance. Indeed, Morris effectively argues that what today's electorate craves is mere style and that Bush's principal political problem is his inability to elevate style above all else in the conduct of his presidency.

A look at the list of suggestions Morris offers the President to help pull him and his party out their stupor is instructive. His "menu" includes the following:

Really focus on energy issues: Come out for massive investment in ethanol production, delivery and vehicles, and more: retrofitting all gas stations for ethanol and hydrogen; a new push for nuclear power; heavy investment in clean coal technology, burying the carbon dioxide. Truly lead the nation away from petroleum.

Admit that global warming is happening, and launch major new programs to curb it: Many are the same measures as can solve our

energy dependence. But add in mandatory upgrading of power plants to cut emissions and major investment in solar and bio-mass energy.

Build a wall, but let guest workers in: Right-wingers want a wall on our southern border; they'd accept a guest-worker program if we could regulate our own borders. Latinos would accept a wall if there were a chance for immigrants to do legal work and a path to citizenship. Give both what they want, and lead the country into a grand compromise.

Put the drug fight front and center: Demand drug testing in schools with parental consent, and tax incentives for workplace drug testing. Link cocaine to terrorism, and build a national consensus for tough measures to cut demand.

What you'll notice about these issues is that most of them share several common characteristics. First, they are, by and large, bipartisan or *nonpartisan*, to be more precise. Why quibble about tax policy or the nature of the fight against Islamism or entitlement reform, when you can pick a policy with no natural political constituency or definitive ideological bent and then position yourself as the supra-partisan, anti-ideologue merely trying to improve the well being of the nation?

Second, all the problems are largely intractable. But as with all such issues, if one declares war, defines the terms of victory, and then directs the energy of a massive federal bureaucracy at achieving that victory, no one will be the wiser until the midterms are over and possibly until the next president has taken office.

Third, and most important, all are busy work. Morris isn't suggesting that Bush actually do something with his presidency or spend his political capital to advance the causes in which he believes. He's telling him to look busy, to *look* like his doing something with his presidency.

The only initiative on the list that is the least bit controversial or politically problematic is that of “global warming.” But here, the true genius of Morris’s modern presidential style is truly at work. Were Bush to embrace global warming, he could claim the moral high ground for himself, admit to seeing the error of his ways, and reach across the aisle to make amends with some of his most aggressive critics, including moonbat extraordinaire Al Gore. All the while, he would still be able to enjoy not actually having to do anything.

This is an issue concerning which neither the cause nor the likely effects can be stated with any degree of certainty; one in which all of the rending of garments and gnashing of teeth is based on widely varying, highly subjective, and greatly fluctuating computer models; and most importantly, one in which there is no proposed solution that offers any likely remedy. As such, Bush could afford to drag his feet, or he could move quickly to enact measures that would have no real, global impact. Whichever he chose, it would make no difference. The real repercussions of his administration’s policy – be they the ecological devastation wrought by climate change or the economic devastation wrought by “the solution” to climate change – would not be felt until long after he had finished his second term and quite possibly not until George P. Bush has finished his second (circa 2040, I’d guess). Brilliant, to say the least.

Now, if all of this sounds familiar, there’s a reason. This is precisely the blueprint Morris drew up for Bill Clinton and precisely the course Bill took. And it worked, if by working one means that it ensured Bill’s popularity, despite the man’s own, Herculean efforts at self-destruction.

Why? Because, as an insightful strategist, Morris understood that the American public doesn’t want a president who bothers them with grand, sweeping plans for problem solving, or radical and fundamental reform, or a patriotic expansion of American values. It wants fudging on the margins and the appearance of bureaucratic competence. It wants a government

that promises a solution to every problem, but doesn’t screw up the status quo trying to deliver on these promises. It wants a president who is a mile wide but only an inch deep, a man who promises to be everything to everyone, even if this makes him shockingly superficial. It wants a man like Bill Clinton, which is precisely why the guy who helped create Bill, is now offering George Bush the same sage advice.

There was a time, about two years from the end of his second term, that Clinton would reportedly complain to aides that history had been unfair to him; that he had been denied the opportunities for greatness that had been provided other great leaders, such as Roosevelt, Churchill, Kennedy, and Reagan. He was wrong. History had, in fact, been inordinately good to him. History didn’t deny Clinton opportunities for greatness; it facilitated his desire to avoid seriousness and to maintain popularity, to elevate style over substance. The 1990s have been described as a “hiatus from history” for a reason, namely because the end of the Cold War and the expansions in technology-induced productivity and global capitalism brought good times that transcended politics. And this allowed Bill Clinton to “look busy” without really ever having to do anything.

When reality first encroached on this hiatus in the form of the first terrorist attempt to blow up the World Trade Center and two successful attacks on American embassies in Africa, Clinton was able to follow the above-noted Morris blueprint. He talked a good game for a while, made a handful superficial gestures (lobbing a few cruise missiles at aspirin factories and empty tents), and ultimately punted the issue to his successor.

During the ‘90s, very few of us realized just how adept Bill was at governing. We knew he was a great politician, but we didn’t understand how well he had figured out how to keep the public happy and not make a mess, to stay out of the way while at the same time giving the appearance of being intimately involved in everything. His approach was soothing.

What the public does not find soothing today, by contrast, is the fact that 3,000 Americans were killed by terrorists just under five years ago; that in response to those attacks, the President launched two wars against radical anti-American regimes, and that both wars were sanctioned by the United States Congress and by the “will of the people”; that a third, even more radically anti-American regime is nearing completion of a nuclear bomb; that the mastermind of the terrorist attacks and the war against the West remains at large and occasionally pops his head up to threaten more wanton destruction; that all of this coupled with the meteoric rise of China and India has sent oil prices over \$70/barrel; that the tech bubble burst and preceded a recession; that a hurricane hit the city of New Orleans head on and caused precisely the type of damage about which climatologists and city planners had been warning for years; *etc., etc., ad infinitum.*

None of this is to make excuses for George Bush. He has, as we have argued countless times in these pages, been one of the most ineffective and indolent communicators in modern American politics. In essence, he was dealt a bad hand and, at times, played it very poorly.

But if Dick Morris believes that the President is Carteresque in that he is “preoccupied” with foreign entanglements, there is a reason why this is so. And if the American public is on the verge of despair, there is a reason for this as well. And perhaps the two are related. After the break of the 1990s, history has re-intruded on our lives, and this is disconcerting, to put it mildly. Clinton was reassuring, calming, and confident. Bush, by contrast, is peevisish, harried, and ominous, warning of “long hard slogs” and “tough summers.”

Perhaps Bush could improve his standing and the country’s mood by polishing his style or re-energizing his public and political personas. But it’s hard to imagine that there’s much else he could do. In a historical sense, times are good. The economy is humming along. Employment is up. Inflation remains reasonably constrained despite commodity pressures. American casualties on both fronts of our war on terror are decreasing. But that’s not enough. The American public wants things to be better. It wants things to be the way they were and for their president to tell them sincerely that everything is okay. But everything is not okay. Times are good, but not perfect, which is the nature of man’s existence.

It doesn’t help matters, of course, that both political parties seem to be shrieking that things can and should go back to the way they were, that Bush is the problem and that someone else is the solution. The Democrats are feeding off the despair, while the Republicans are despairing of their own accord.

Maybe Bush should save himself by finding some busy work to make himself look cheerful and relevant. But that approach wouldn’t solve the nation’s problems any more than it did when Bill tried it. It would just put a bright, smiling Band-Aid over them and hope that they would not bleed through until after January 20, 2009. We suppose that Dick Morris is right and that he could, in fact, salvage his presidency that way. But it’s hard to see how that would do the rest of us any good.

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