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THEY SAID IT

For my part, I looked on that sermon as the public declaration of a man much connected with literary caballers, and intriguing philosophers; with political theologians, and theological politicians, both at home and abroad. I know they set him [Dr. Richard Price] up as a sort of oracle; because, with the best intentions in the world, he naturally philippizes, and chants his prophetic song in exact unison with their designs....Supposing, however, that something like moderation were visible in this political sermon; yet politics and the pulpit are terms that have little agreement. No sound ought to be heard in the church but the healing voice of Christian charity. The cause of civil liberty and civil government gains as little as that of religion by this confusion of duties. Those who quit their proper character, to assume what does not belong to them, are, for the greater part, ignorant both of the character they leave, and of the character they assume. Wholly unacquainted with the world in which they are so fond of meddling, and inexperienced in all its affairs, on which they pronounce with so much confidence, they have nothing of politics but the passions they excite. Surely the church is a place where one day's truce ought to be allowed to the dissensions and animosities of mankind.

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

OBAMA AND RACE.

It's not often that we feel the need to do this, but we want to apologize. Nearly an entire decade ago, in October 1998 to be exact, we made a prediction, one that we have repeated a handful of times in the intervening years, which we now must concede was absolutely, one-hundred percent, unequivocally, dead wrong.

Like most prognosticators, we understand that wrong forecasts are part of the game, and, in most cases, we would just as soon let the proverbial sleeping dog lie, focusing instead on our successes rather than on our failures. But in this case, we feel we have no choice. After all, if the leading contender for the Democratic presidential nomination – indeed the odds-on favorite to win the presidency itself – insists that we have a “national conversation about race,” then we can hardly hide from our own past missteps regarding this issue.

The ironic thing is that the last time we broached the subject, just after the 2004 Democratic National Convention, we actually praised said candidate, Barack Obama, for his seemingly rational and beneficial views. Of course, we were contrasting him to Al Sharpton at the time, so it is hard to imagine that Obama would not have appeared praiseworthy. Still, we thought Obama did well in his own right, giving a speech that was “patriotic, unifying, and fraternal.”

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All of this fit nicely into the racial paradigm that we had been developing then for roughly six years, a paradigm that suggested that race would, slowly but surely lose its relevance in comparison to other, more important factors, namely economics and the eventual mainstreaming of black America and black Americans.

The initial inspiration for our speculation along these lines came from a black former member of Congress and New York preacher, Rev. Floyd Flake, who had made some waves in the black and Democratic communities by aggressively and defiantly supporting free enterprise initiatives. Though a Democrat, Flake had just addressed the annual summer meeting of the Republican National Committee and had, according to the *New York Times*, given a stirring defense of “capitalism, competition for public schools and individual responsibility,” prompting then-RNC Chairman Jim Nicholson to declare that Flake had given “one of the best articulations of Republican principles and values that we’ve had at this meeting.”

The end result of all of this, we speculated in 1998 and reaffirmed over the years, was that black America would, over time, cease to be much different from white America, or America in general. We argued that as more black Americans attended college, moved into the middle class, and became part of the social and economic mainstream, more would become part of the political mainstream as well. As evidence of this “mainstreaming,” we pointed to politicians like Flake, Obama, Harold Ford, Jr., and a handful of others in the Democratic Party, as well as J.C. Watts, Michael Steele, Ken Blackwell, Herman Cain, and Vernon Robinson in the Republican Party. We didn’t expect this mainstreaming to translate into an immediate change in partisan affiliation and voting patterns, but we did expect the eventual moderation of both rhetoric and suggested policy changes from black politicians. Moreover, we expected the political collapse of the kind of grievance-mongering championed by the likes of Sharpton and Jackson.

It is now clear that we were wrong. Dead wrong, in fact. At least that’s the conclusion that we have drawn from the speech Obama made on race and racism last week in Philadelphia.

Since that speech, we have read countless articles, columns, and comments on its eloquence, grace, bravery, and importance. Many, if not most observers thought that Obama’s willingness to address race and race-related issues in a manner that would frighten most other politicians was both brilliant and daring. Others were disappointed that Obama didn’t go far enough, in that he acknowledged some sources of resentment, particularly among whites, but proposed almost no cures for these resentments. Still others were miffed at the mostly positive reaction to the speech, insisting that Obama proved himself to be a conventional politician, using his forum to rationalize hatred and to deflect attention from his Pastor, Jeremiah Wright, essentially answering questions no one had asked.

Our opinion is that Obama’s speech was vitally important for two reasons; first for the moral equivalences it drew, and second, and most notably, for the extraordinary and surprising (to us at least) quantity of uninformed radicalism that apparently exists among the black population as a whole.

Now, we are hardly the only observers to have been struck by the moral equivalences postulated by Obama in defense of his association with Jeremiah Wright. Like a great many observers, we thought it was absurd to draw comparisons between a woman who raised her half-black grandson but nevertheless occasionally harbored concerns about young black men and a man who spews hatred of white America and of America in general, who believes (or at least has said that he believes) that AIDS and drugs were conspiracies perpetrated upon the black community by the white-dominated government, and who reveled in the death and destruction wrought on 9/11. Indeed, this comparison was more than just absurd. It was deceptive and invidious. Obama compared lies to truth and judged the two equal, simply because both gave “offense.”

Let’s start with Wright. We all know by now about Wright’s declaration that the attacks of 9/11 were “the chickens [of America’s foreign and domestic politics] coming home to roost.” We know as well about his hope that God would “damn” America. And we know

about his beliefs about AIDS and drugs. But what most observers have ignored is that this is just the start of it and, moreover, that Wright's hate can hardly be distilled down to a few "offensive" and incendiary statements. Hatred and bitterness are what this man is all about, and any attempt to put lipstick on this pig is both insulting and shameful.

Obama insisted that Wright's anger stems from the experiences of his youth, from the time when segregation and Jim Crow were the "law of the land." But this too is a lie. Wright did not grow up in the South. He did not grow up with Jim Crow, and segregation was anything but "the law of the land." It was the law of a few hateful and recalcitrant polities that, in fact, defied "the law of the land." But whatever the case, that was decades ago and even if those were the experiences of Wright's youth, so what? Does that somehow justify this "man of God's" delight in the death of innocents? Does it justify his adherence to an ideology and religious tradition that itself revels in hate?

Obama failed to get beyond a few statements of incendiary and hateful language to the core of Wright's bitterness, namely the religion he embraces. Obama claims innocence of Wright's most hateful statements, yet he spent 20 years in the company of a preacher who embraces "black liberation theology" and claims as his own mentor, James Cone, the leading "theologian" of black liberation theology and a man who has labeled "white" American Christianity the "anti-Christ" and insists that God himself is black and therefore works to undermine whites. To wit:

Black theology refuses to accept a God who is not identified totally with the goals of the black community. If God is not for us and against white people, then he is a murderer, and we had better kill him. The task of black theology is to kill Gods who do not belong to the black community . . . Black theology will accept only the love of God which participates in the destruction of the white enemy. What we need is the divine

love as expressed in Black Power, which is the power of black people to destroy their oppressors here and now by any means at their disposal. Unless God is participating in this holy activity, we must reject his love.

As if this were not enough, Wright is a liar, who not only misleads his congregation, but threatens their very lives in so doing. Among the most damaging of Wright's statements is his insistence that the government is responsible for the scourge of AIDS and for spreading it among black people as a form of genocide. This is not theology. This is not a remnant of Jim Crow. This is not an incendiary statement. This is lunacy, pure and simple. And it is lunacy that will all but surely cost lives. The inimitable Mark Steyn put it this way this weekend:

Wright believes that AIDS was created by the government of the United States — and not as a cure for the common cold that went tragically awry and had to be covered up by Karl Rove, but for the explicit purpose of killing millions of its own citizens. The government has never come clean about this, but the Reverend Wright knows the truth. "The government lied," he told his flock, "about inventing the HIV virus as a means of genocide against people of color. The government lied."

Does he really believe this? If so, he's crazy, and no sane person would sit through his gibberish, certainly not for 20 years. Or is he just saying it? In which case, he's profoundly wicked. If you understand that AIDS is spread by sexual promiscuity and drug use, you'll know that it's within your power to protect yourself from the disease. If you're told that it's just whitey's latest cunning plot to stick it to you, well, hey, it's out of your hands, nothing to do with you or your behavior.

In contrast to Wright, the black liberationist, Obama set his own grandmother, a woman who, by Obama's own admission, "helped raise . . . sacrificed again and again for me . . . [and] who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world," but who is, apparently just a "typical white person" and a woman "who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on the street." Words can hardly convey the deception and, frankly, slander at work here.

Granny is the equivalent of Wright, a hateful and bitter liar, because she once confessed her fear of black men? Seriously?

There are some, we suppose, who would call Obama's Granny's fears racist. There are some who would call them irrational. But there are others who would call them "profiling" and not in a pejorative sense. In other words, though it is true that Granny's fears are unfortunate, it hardly follows that she is to blame for this misfortune. Granny is no more a racist than, say, Jesse Jackson or black comedian Chris Rock, both of whom have expressed similar fears of young black men. She is merely aware of the facts, the facts as summarized by Heather MacDonald in a piece we previously cited last fall:

Los Angeles is representative. In the first seven months of 2007, blacks in Los Angeles were murdered at a rate ten times that of whites and Asians. Who's killing them? It's not whites and Asians. While a minor proportion of the assailants of blacks are Hispanic, the vast majority are black themselves. Nationally, blacks commit murder at about eight times the frequency of whites. In New York, any given violent crime is 13 times more likely to have been committed by a black person than by a white person, according to the reports of victims and witnesses. Though they are only 24 percent of the city's population, blacks committed 68.5 percent of all murders, rapes, robberies, and assaults in New York last

year. Whites, who make up 34.5 percent of New Yorkers, committed only 5.3 percent of violent crimes. These ratios are similar across the country. In Los Angeles, blacks committed 41 percent of all robberies in 2001, according to victims' descriptions, though they constitute only 11 percent of the city's population. Robbery victims identified whites, who make up 30 percent of the Los Angeles population, just 4 percent of the time.

This is truly unfortunate or, more accurately, catastrophic. But by shifting the blame to Granny and away from the perpetrators of crime who give young black men a reputation for violence, Obama is doing precisely what his mentor, Jeremiah Wright has done with AIDS, deflecting attention from the real causes of a tragedy that befalls black Americans disproportionately, blaming those who are undeserving of blame, and thus precluding any earnest discussion of the causes and possible solutions to the problem. Granny never said that she believes that all or most young black men are violent criminals; she merely acknowledged the truth, namely that the majority of violent crimes are committed by young black men. And for this she deserves to be called a racist and compared to Jeremiah Wright? That hardly seems fair. Or honest. Or even tolerable.

Barack Obama said last week that he wants a national discussion on race. Fair enough. But if his indictment of his grandmother is any indication of the tone and direction that such a discussion might take, then both the white and black communities would be far better off just saying "No."

Sadly, this is not the worst of it. The worst of it is that in creating this absurd moral equivalence between Wright and his grandmother, between hatred and bitterness on the one hand and, at worst, naiveté on the other, Obama purports to speak for all of black America. Moreover, thus far, there has been no legitimate assertion that he doesn't speak for all of black America.

During his speech, Obama said of Jeremiah Wright that “I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community.” The implications of this statement are mind-boggling, to say the least. Mark Steyn wrote that in uttering those words, Obama “attempted to close the gap between Wright and the rest of the country, arguing, in effect, that the guy is not just his crazy uncle but America’s, too.” But he did more than that. What he did was suggest that Wright’s hatefulness and bitterness are not merely justifiable, but *emblematic* of black America.

Many commentators have noted that white Americans were truly shocked to hear the type of things that were said by Jeremiah Wright and to learn that such ideas are not atypical among inner-city preachers and adherents of black liberation theology. Imagine the shock at discovering that the leading contender for the presidency believes that such sentiments are actually representative of back Americans in general or, as Steyn put it, that they “are now part of the established cultural discourse in African-American life and thus must command our respect.”

The investigative reporter Byron York was with the Obama campaign in Philadelphia when this speech was delivered. And his report of the audience’s reaction lends credence to Obama’s claim about Wright’s ordinariness.

“It was amazing,” Gregory Davis, a financial adviser and Obama supporter from Philadelphia, told me. “I think he addressed the issue, and if that does not address the issue, I don’t know what else can be said about it. That was just awesome oratory.”

I asked Davis what his personal reaction was when he saw video clips of sermons in which Rev. Wright said, “God damn America,” called the United States the “U.S. of KKK A,” and said that 9/11 was “America’s chickens . . . coming home to roost.” “As a member of a traditional Baptist, black church, I wasn’t

surprised,” Davis told me. “I wasn’t offended by anything the pastor said. A lot of things he said were absolutely correct . . . The way he said it may not have been the most appropriate way to say it, but as far as a typical black inner-city church, that’s how it’s said.”

Vernon Price, a ward leader in Philadelphia’s 22nd Precinct, told me Obama’s speech was “very courageous.” When I asked his reaction to Rev. Wright, Price said, “A lot of things that he said were true, whether people want to accept it, or believe it, or not. People believe in their hearts that a lot of what he said was true.”

Rev. Alyn Waller, of the Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church in Philadelphia, was effusive about Obama’s performance. “I thought it was masterful,” he told me. Waller explained that he knows Rev. Wright and the preaching tradition from which he comes. “I think much of what he had to say was on point in terms of America needs to challenge her foreign policy,” Waller told me.

Is this true? Are these men right? Are Wright’s language and temperament really typical? We’d like to believe that they are not. But to be completely honest with you, we have no idea. And of those who would have some idea, none has thus far spoken up to say otherwise.

Over the past couple of years, we have become increasingly aware that on a great many political matters, the opinions of black Americans as a group are well outside of the political mainstream. Opinion poll after opinion poll show that blacks generally reacted differently than the rest of the country (including other minority groups) to 9/11, to the wars waged in response to 9/11, to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, and to the prosecution of the so-called

“Jena Six.” The self-appointed leaders of the black community, people like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, served merely to aggravate this divergence from the mainstream, pushing resentment and theories of racial bias, as opposed to addressing the issues in a thoughtful, honest, and conciliatory way.

What we had hoped, or rather expected, was that as the likes of Jackson and Sharpton declined in relevance and were replaced by the likes of Obama, Ford, and Flake, this divergence from the rest of the nation would gradually disappear. Today, we are not so sure. And, if Obama is right about the representative nature of Jeremiah Wright and his beliefs, then we would actually have to declare ourselves dubious of such a political and social evolution.

The electoral implications of this are straightforward. If black America remains perpetually outside of the political mainstream, then it will become increasingly irrelevant. Republicans will increasingly regard the pursuit of black voters as pointless, and Democrats will increasingly take them for granted. Both sides will simply assume that the breakdown of Democrat-to-Republican votes among blacks will remain 9-to-1. And both will act accordingly.

The social and cultural implications, by contrast, will be anything but straightforward, and anything but irrelevant. We are hardly qualified or disposed to speculate about specifics in this forum, but we will say that under such conditions, the prospects for the reconciliation that Obama himself preaches are remarkably slim.

Four decades ago, Daniel Patrick Moynihan suggested, to howls and derision from the left, that the problems that were plaguing black America at the time resulted to a very large degree from the destruction of the black family, which in turn was related to the perverse incentives created by government largesse. In the intervening years, Moynihan’s “heresy” has morphed into the conventional wisdom, at least among conservatives. Still, there exists a faction on the political left that refuses to accept such a possibility or to accept that anything but white racism is the cause of all ills that have befallen black America.

As the writer Mark Goldblatt has argued, there is a “cognitive gap” that distorts this discussion and “continues to divide black America from the rest of the blurring palette of American ethnicities.” To pretend today that white racism is the reason that these problems still exist is not only wrong but will serve only to exacerbate the very real problems plaguing blacks. Or as Goldblatt put it, “The fact that many African Americans still ascribe their personal failures to institutional racism – which, if you define it as a concerted effort to deprive blacks of basic human and civil rights, no longer exists – represents a tragic error in judgment. But it’s a self-fulfilling, self-perpetuating judgment....”

We hardly think that this type of self-defeating, self-perpetuating negativity was what Obama set out to endorse, either when he got into politics or when he gave his speech last week. Indeed, Obama tried to reject the “profoundly distorted view of this country” that views “white racism as endemic.” Yet his refusal to fully refute and transcend Jeremiah Wright, and not just Wright’s incendiary language, suggests that he is incapable or unwilling to move the discussion beyond Goldblatt’s “cognitive gap.” Such are the unintended consequences of obsessions with race, guilt, and blame.

We hope we’re wrong about all of this, of course. And clearly we’ve been wrong about racial issues before. Time will tell.

THINGS ARE IN THE SADDLE AND RIDE MANKIND.

Sixteen years ago, Francis Fukuyama made quite a stir in the intellectual community with his assertion that mankind had arrived at “the end of history,” which he described as “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” The theory was badly flawed, but it was a brilliant presentation and prompted a fascinating and informative intellectual discussion that continues today among those individuals who think about such things.

We number ourselves among those who “think about such things,” but not among those whose views affect the conversation. We have no perch on the tree of knowledge where such discussions occur but like Burke’s cattle, “reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak,” we listen and chew. In any case, our observation concerning Fukuyama’s assertion is that “Western liberal democracy” has not only failed to achieve the kind of global status as the ideal form of government that Fukuyama thought it would, but is slowly becoming an historical artifact, much the same as monarchy did in the post-Enlightenment period.

As we have said numerous times in these pages, the fact is that liberal democracy is simply not up to the task of providing practical solutions to the kinds of problems that nations confront in this technologically complex, culturally integrated, economically globalized world. This should come as no surprise to anyone who has been paying attention. We first mentioned it in these pages in an article dated November 29, 1995 about a now, long-forgotten budget fight. We put it this way.

Throughout the period it has become increasingly clear that this is not really a battle between “conservatism” and “liberalism,” in the sense that these terms were understood only a few decades ago. This is a fight about something quite new in American politics. It involves a new post-cold-war political paradigm that is

not yet fully formed, but is, to paraphrase Yeats, still a rough beast slouching toward Washington to be born.

Now we are not predicting here some sort of revolution, political Armageddon, world war, or catastrophic economic collapse. We are simply saying that Western liberal democracy is in the process of entering the dustbin of history, and that this is something that anyone who is trying to get a handle on what the future holds for this troubled world needs to consider.

This topic is, of course, too complex to cover in any depth in a brief article in this little newsletter of ours. In fact, as we mentioned earlier this year, we are in the process of writing a book on the subject. We have no illusions that any publisher will be interested in it, but if not, we will take it to Kinkos and make enough copies for friends and clients. Count on it. In the meantime, we will dance around the subject a little this week as a vehicle for making a few remarks about the upcoming election.

We will begin with two observations about democracy as a form of government. The first is that democracy is quite effective at resolving problems that lend themselves to compromise. As described by Locke in his commentary on the “social contract,” citizens participate in a variety of ways in the process of deciding the rules under which they will live together and thus, if they believe the procedure is being conducted fairly, accept the outcome, even if it is sometimes disagreeable to them, in exchange for the privilege of living in an orderly society.

Authoritarian governments have trouble with issues that beg a compromise. Supporters of such governments feel betrayed when the ruler makes concessions to the “other side” of a given issue. They expect the same kind of total support from their dictator that they give to him. Opponents view any concessions made to them by the authoritarian government not as a sign of friendship but of weakness. In the days of monarchy, many kings lost their heads while attempting the politically dangerous

task of implementing a simple compromise between two warring factions. Most decided that it was far more prudent to choose a side and to smite that side's enemies.

On the other hand, authoritarian governments are quite good at addressing issues where the "middle ground" either does not exist or is utterly unsatisfactory to both sides. Abortion is an example of such a problem. One side in this dispute believes that all forms of this procedure are murder and thus morally reprehensible. The other side believes that a woman has an absolute right to do what she wishes with her own body and any restrictions placed upon her, cultural or legal, are unacceptable. Authoritarian governments handle these types of issues with little problem. They simply state how it is and that's how it is. Liberal democracies struggle with these issues. Slavery was a case in point. There being no middle ground acceptable to either side, compromise was impossible. Civil war became the "solution."

Increasingly, in this modern world of ours, decisions involving whether to go to war fall into the category of uncompromisable issues that present problems for liberal democracies. Wars come in various types and intensities, but war is war. One is either at war or not at war. Wars require community-wide sacrifices of both blood and treasure. Authoritarian governments declare war and the citizenry, like it or not, has no choice but to fight in and to pay for the effort. In a democracy, citizens can arrive at compromises concerning the extent of the commitment to any given war. But there is no middle ground between war and peace.

President Roosevelt had a very difficult time convincing Americans to enter World War II, despite the fact that he was absolutely convinced that it was necessary. The attack on Pearl Harbor changed that. But there was no real compromise position available during either debate. There was no compromise available in Vietnam either. Americans had to decide whether to stay and fight or flee. They fled. A similar debate is taking place right now over the war in Iraq.

Needless to say, in today's world, decisions involving whether to go to war in far off lands are increasingly complex. One can argue that a combination of the global nature of the American economy and the enormous damage that even small and backward nations can cause with weapons of mass destruction require that the United States be ready and willing to go to war at any time to protect its citizens and its world-wide economic interests. On the other hand, America's enormous military strength provides grounds for arguing in favor of adopting a highly defensive posture, avoiding war until it is absolutely necessary. In any case, there is no middle ground when the issue of whether to go to war arises. And this uncompromisable situation is likely to place ever greater strains on the resources of America's liberal democracy as small, antagonistic nations gain the ability to do great harm and as large nations seek greater wealth and power at America's expense.

Our second observation about democracy is that it works well in societies that are culturally harmonious or in which the moral order of one cultural group is dominant and this dominance is recognized and accepted by the other groups in exchange for a guarantee of peace and tranquility among the whole.

America's founding fathers designed a democratic government for a people who were virtually unanimous in their respect for traditional Judeo-Christian values and beliefs and for all of the attendant cultural accoutrements of these beliefs. Had the population of the colonies been of a less homogeneous mix, the founders undoubtedly would have designed a different form of government. Indeed, those who argued at the time for raising George Washington to status of monarch may well have won the day on the basis of reason alone. As Tito demonstrated in post World War II Yugoslavia, authoritarians are generally better at maintaining order in culturally diverse states than democratically elected leaders.

Now, one need not be a sociologist or a demographer to observe that the United States is becoming increasingly diverse. Moreover, it foolishly seems

determined to seek parity of esteem for each minority group, a goal which the British historian Jonathan C.D. Clark has convincingly asserted will eventually destroy the kind of social order that alone can guarantee liberty to all minority groups.

Most observers understand that this growing diversity and the on-going efforts to deal with it place strains on liberal democracy by increasing the number of factors and factions that must be considered when negotiating compromises that are necessary to keep society orderly. They also understand that this diversity adds a higher degree of animosity to the debates over such issues.

But few people seem to recognize that the most important strain that diversity places on liberal democracy is that it weakens a society's collective willingness to share sacrifices on behalf of the entirety. For example, as we say in the accompanying article, if a majority of African Americans truly believe that white America invented AIDS and promotes the use of narcotics in the black community as a deliberate means of harming the black community, then what incentive do blacks have to sacrifice anything on behalf of the patria? And if white Americans generally believe that black Americans consider them to be the source of all evil, then why would white Americans make financial or social sacrifices on behalf of blacks?

And why, pray tell, would anyone from any group sacrifice blood or treasure to fight a war in a far off land to protect the interests of a nation that is made up of antagonistic factions, each occupied with pursuing its own short term interests at home at the expense of other factions? It is instructive when considering this to remember that Democrats originally opposed the war in Iraq because they said it was unwinnable. Now that "the surge" appears to be changing the calculus of victory, they argue that United States must throw in the towel because the effort is too expensive. In effect, the issue of the war itself, along with the broader issue of national security, has become nothing more than a political football. Needless to say, this is a prescription for either disaster or for a more authoritative form of government. As we have indicated above, we expect the latter.

The result is, not surprisingly, that liberal democracy is slowly morphing into something quite different, not yet defined but definitely more authoritative than can reasonably be described as "liberal democracy." The most obvious element in this trend has been the slow but steady increase in the authority and power of the executive branch of government. One need only look at an organizational chart for the new Department of Homeland Security to gain some insight into how this phenomenon is proceeding.

Our expectation is that this process will go on for quite some time at a steady but determined pace until someday, some sort of crisis will prompt the emergence and rapid acceptance by "the people" of an individual who will demand an unprecedented and, not incidentally, unconstitutional degree of authority as a means of addressing the problem at hand. The public will readily accept this development in the interests of expediency, and, of course, once granted, this authority will never be relinquished.

This individual will not necessarily be a military figure, although he or she will have to have the strong backing of the military. Burke described this process beautifully while watching the social chaos that engulfed France in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. He described it as follows in 1790, just 14 years before Napoleon took advantage of an alleged assassination plot against him, had himself declared Emperor, and began the great war that devastated the entire European continent.

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.

Another manner in which the federal establishment is dealing with the growing difficulty of managing a liberal democracy in a modern environment is to

borrow heavily on the future in order to keep the various antagonistic factions of the nation materially happy at the present. From the great Atlantic Ocean to the wide Pacific shore, the federal government attempts to give each citizen that which he or she desires and to beg little or no sacrifice of them on behalf of the nation itself. No citizen is today obliged to fight for the country, and many are not required to pay any taxes at all, the great burden of financing the Leviathan having been shifted to an extremely small minority of individuals who actually produce something of value. The result is the formation of staggering cankers of debt that will eventually require the kind of remedies that are outside the capability of liberal democracy to handle.

When viewed from this perspective, the on-going election takes on some interesting hues. Each of the candidates works 16 hour days, seven days a week, explaining to voters what he or she will do as president and why he or she is the best qualified to assume the reins of leadership. Voters listen carefully and discuss the candidates among themselves, figuratively fingering their worry beads, recognizing that the quality of their lives may well depend heavily upon the choice they will collectively make next November.

What few seem to realize is that these discussions are of little if any substantive value. The candidates talk of reforming the health care system, the tax system, and the immigration system, and put forth their various plans for getting out of Iraq or winning the war there. But the fact of the matter is that the next president will be reacting to events not creating them. To borrow a phrase from Emerson, "things are the saddle and ride mankind."

George Herbert Walker Bush and Bill Clinton are likely to be regarded by future historians as the last U.S. presidents in very long time who enjoyed a period when the United States had some direct control over its own fate; that is to say, who had a real opportunity to develop and implement a plan to use America's status as the world's sole remaining super power proactively to affect the course of human history.

Sadly, neither man was up to the task. President Bush was bewildered by the very concept of "the vision thing." And Bill was too occupied with enjoying the sensate pleasures of his brief encounter with power and fame to be bothered by taking advantage of the rare chance to establish a foundation for addressing the problems that a wise and prudent man would have known were lurking in the future.

The result is that Americans will not be electing a captain of a cruise ship, charged with sailing only on smooth waters and providing a wide variety of amenities to the passengers sitting on deck chairs, reading books, and enjoying drinks decorated with tiny, brightly colored umbrellas.

They will instead be choosing a captain to navigate treacherous and troubled waters. Today's words, intentions, and grandiose plans will be of little use to him or her after taking office, and are of almost no direct use whatsoever to citizens who are trying to decide which one of the three is most likely to assure them a safe and comfortable cruise into the future.

In short, the next president is unlikely to set the agenda for the next four years. Others will do it for him or her. These will include murderous Muslims, foolish bankers, confused Federal Reserve Governors, conceited legislators, muddle-headed Chinese dictators, power-hungry Russian autocrats, you name it. It remains to be seen what time of day these various antagonists will stick their oars into the troubled waters, but, in our opinion, never has a political advertisement more accurately highlighted the single most important criterion that Americans should consider when voting next November than the "phone ringing at three o'clock in the morning" commercial.

Wisdom, courage, experience, vision, prudence, will be crucial for success. And yes, if this nation is to survive as a liberal democracy, its future presidents must be fiercely dedicated to the task of fighting the cancerous growth of authoritarianism described above, rather than greedily taking advantage of the historical trends to seek power.

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