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THEY SAID IT

I do not think . . . that it was by arms that our ancestors made the republic great from being small. Had that been the case, the republic of our day would have been by far more flourishing than that of their times, for the number of our allies and citizens is far greater; and, besides, we possess a far greater abundance of armor and of horses than they did. But it was other things than these that made them great, and we have none of them: industry at home, just government without, a mind free in deliberation, addicted neither to crime nor to lust. Instead of these, we have luxury and avarice, poverty in the state, opulence among citizens; we laud riches, we follow laziness; there is no difference made between the good and the bad; all the rewards of virtue are got possession of by intrigue. And no wonder, when every individual consults only for his own good, when ye are the slaves of pleasure at home, and, in public affairs, of money and favor, no wonder that an onslaught is made upon the unprotected republic.

Cato the Elder, as cited by St. Augustine in *The City of God*, 426 A.D.

NATION BUILDING.

One of the big stories last week among political pundits and talking heads was Barack's apparent shift to the right. The *Wall Street Journal* editorialists were so impressed by the magnitude of the putative Democratic nominee's ideological transmogrification that they said that he appears to be running for "Bush's third term."

Our favorite quote on this subject came from Barack himself, who described his sudden lack of enthusiasm for a precipitous withdrawal of troops from Iraq as part of his effort to "continue to refine" his views on the subject. It reminded us of one of history's most famous rhetorical feints, made by Emperor Hirohito during his radio address to the Japanese people immediately after the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "The war situation," he said, "has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage,"

Of course, Barack's shift on Iraq should come as no surprise to anyone. We said the following over a year ago in an article entitled "Iraq: No Exit."

The fact of the matter is that the United States military is likely to be in Iraq for a long time yet, regardless of who wins the election in November '08. Indeed, it is improbable that even Barack Obama, as president, would be able to effect a speedy withdrawal from that beleaguered nation. Our guess is that after having the requisite visits with the leaders of America's allies in the Middle East and having been fully briefed by his own military on the dire impact that the collapse of

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Summer Soldiers and Sunshine Patriots.

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a friendly government in Iraq would have on the security of the region, he would decide upon a “flexible timetable of withdrawal.” This timetable would acknowledge his pledge to “get out” but would have the practical effect of guaranteeing a U.S. military presence in Iraq for a very long time.

Now Barack’s newly evidenced ideological elasticity may raise questions among his critics on the left about his sincerity, but it is, in fact, a good thing. If it reflects an honest repositioning based on a reexamination of the facts, then it demonstrates that Barack is not as committed to left wing moon raking as he appeared to be in the early days of the campaign. And that’s good. If it is not sincere, it is still good, because it illustrates that he is beginning to realize how difficult, as a practical matter, it would be for him to do truly loony things when and if he is president.

In our opinion, even Barack’s new emphasis on patriotism is welcome, sincere or not. One thinks of Cardinal Newman’s observation that the first step toward having faith in God is to act as a person of faith, or as he put it “belief will follow action.” If this is so, there is reason to believe that a show of patriotism by Barack will eventually instill in him a greater love for the United States than he formerly appeared to possess. One can hope so, anyway.

On the other hand, it should be recognized that even if Barack were to move as far to the right as John McCain already is, he would still fall far short of being conservative enough to change the direction in which this nation is headed. An increasingly larger, more powerful, and more intrusive government is baked in, no matter who wins, as is a continuously growing burden of federal debt, higher taxes and “user fees,” a shifting of political power from elected officials to the permanent bureaucracy, and a growing and highly destructive conviction among Americans that the quality of their individual lives is dependent on the actions of the federal government.

The question that was left unanswered last week, and even unasked, during all of this discussion about Barack’s position on American troop levels in Iraq, is when, how, and for what purpose he would employ the U.S. military in situations yet to arise. He will keep the troops in Iraq because it would be foolish and dangerous to take them out. That’s a given. But what would he do on his own initiative as President? That is the question, as young Prince Hamlet would put it. Indeed, it would be nice if John McCain would let us in on his views of this subject also, although one suspects that neither man ever will, at least beyond the level of the superficial, largely because neither has probably thought much about it, at least beyond the level of the superficial.

Of course, both would almost certainly support President Bush’s policy of preemption, even though neither would describe it those terms. Despite the howls of indignation from the President’s critics when he announced this policy almost six years ago, there was never really anything all that controversial about it. All it really did was assert the obvious, namely that, in this day and age when new technologies have provided small groups of fanatics with the capability of killing tens of thousands of people, no nation can afford to withhold military action until it is actually attacked if it has reason to believe that an attack is likely. Bush put it this way.

Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us.

The rub, as they say, comes with the second part of the “Bush Doctrine,” which was announced at the same time, namely that America should actively promote democracy and free enterprise around the globe, even if this requires the use of military force, as

it did in Iraq. This novel policy is based on President Bush's contention that "free people" are less likely to become enemies of the United States than those who live under totalitarian rule. He put it this way.

The lessons of history are clear: market economies, not command-and-control economies with the heavy hand of government, are the best way to promote prosperity and reduce poverty. Policies that further strengthen market incentives and market institutions are relevant to all economies — industrialized countries, emerging markets, and the developing world."

The aim of this grand "strategy," Bush said, "is to help make the world not just safer but better." Its "clear" goals are "political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity." Finally, the entire package, Bush said, is based on "a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests."

This "union" ties the doctrine of preemption to the democracy initiative via the concept that America is "threatened less by conquering states" than by "failing ones." As such, the theory goes, it is in both America's idealistic and pragmatic interest to have as few "failed" states as possible, which in turn makes it incumbent on the United States to try to save those that are "failed" and try to prevent those that are likely to become so from becoming so, even if this involves military conflict.

Now, if pursued with prudence, humility, and a keen understanding and acceptance of the limitations inherent in such a project, this policy could be regarded as sensible and even noble, in keeping with both the state's obligation to ensure the safety of its citizens and with Judeo-Christian traditions of charity and love of one's fellow man.

On the other hand, it could very easily form the basis for one of the most dangerous notions to appear on the global political scene since Rousseau challenged

the concept of original sin. Why? Because it could set the stage for a series of wars that would not pass muster under traditional considerations of "just war" theory but would be rationalized instead with the claim that they are being fought for the benefit of all mankind.

A similar conceit was one of the guiding principals of the Roman Empire's policy of aggressive imperialism, which eventually led to overreach, which in turn contributed to that nation's downfall. St. Augustine described it in *The City of God* as "preferring to the arts of other nations those arts which peculiarly belong to the Romans, namely, the arts of ruling and commanding, and of subjugating and vanquishing nations." In making his point, he cited the proudly delivered passage from the speech by Anchises to his son Aeneas, when the latter visited the former in the Elysian Fields.

But, Rome, 'tis thine alone, with awful
sway,
To rule mankind, and make the world
obey,
Disposing peace and war by thy own
majestic way;
To tame the proud, the fetter'd slave to
free:
These are imperial arts, and worthy thee.

With all of this in mind, our support for the war in Iraq in the early days was based on President Bush's insistence that that nation posed a serious threat to the United States. We believe to this day that that was the original, primary purpose for the war, and that the "noble" notion that it was necessary in order to "spread democracy" across the Middle East was introduced later when it turned out that the evidence of that threat was not sufficient to provide politically ample justification for the military action. In an article dated April 7, 2003 entitled "Our Despot Instead of Theirs," we stated this belief on our part as follows:

We are optimistic that he [President Bush] will be able to install a leader in Iraq who is significantly less murderous than Saddam; and more importantly,

one who “despots” (to coin a verb) for us rather than against us. We are also reasonably optimistic that President Bush knows better than to try to accomplish much more than that, at least in the near term. Or to put this in another way, we are optimistic that he will not go overboard with the idea of building a “democratic” Iraq. If he does, we will quickly become pessimistic.

As it turns out, we were wrong to believe that Bush would not “go overboard” with the democracy bit. But, like many others, we have continued to support the war because we feel that the consequences of withdrawal are greater than the costs of forging ahead in hopes of establishing a government in Iraq that is reasonably friendly to the United States, even if not all that democratic in nature.

In any case, our opinion on this is immaterial. The question at hand is whether the next president, be it Barack or John, will share President’s Bush faith in the efficacy of “nation building” and pursue it as part of a grand policy designed to promote peace and ensure America’s safety. Our guess is that, if elected, either would. Why? Because the notion that America has a moral writ to meddle in the affairs of other nations on behalf of “the common good ” has become so ingrained in the American psyche that few politicians or pundits of note, whether liberal or conservative, would dispute it, especially in the face of a specific circumstance upon which the eyes of world are focused.

What we don’t know and, at this point, wouldn’t even venture to guess is whether the next president (whichever one it is) will pursue nation building with prudence, humility, and a keen understanding and acceptance of the inherent limitations of such a project, or become overzealous about the importance of his mission to, in the words of George Bush “make the world not just safer but better.”

As we said earlier, this is crucial for several reasons. The first is that a zealous approach to nation building would raise the danger of the Roman experience of

overreach. But more importantly, a zealous approach could, as we indicated earlier, involve the nation in wars fought over “values”; wars that offer no grounds for compromise; wars justified by the grandiose but specious, even heretical, claim that mankind’s lot can be improved by man himself via the spread of the progressive creed.

This concern is, of course, not a novel one on our part. In fact, it was explored in depth well over a half century ago by the controversial but brilliant German political philosopher and legal theorist Carl Schmitt, who presciently warned in the 1930s that the wars of the future would not be over property, political hegemony, or the definable, practical interests of the nations involved, but over cultural based “values.”

“Values,” Schmitt argued, are different from traditional moral beliefs, which are rooted in religious teachings. Values, he noted, arise from cultures of individual self-assertion and therefore must be asserted against competing ones. This, he said, was not a mere academic exercise but a deadly confrontation, “for any consideration of the enemy must vanish, must become a nonvalue, when the struggle against this enemy is concerned with the highest ‘value’. . . for the highest value no price is too high to be paid.”

To put some additional flesh on these concerns, we will close with a few quotes from Schmitt’s classic study, *The Concept of the Political*. This thoughtful book was first published in 1932, but has enjoyed a rebirth in interest in the academic community during the past decade or so.

The paragraphs we have selected address the issue of warfare in a world where moral considerations are trumped by high sounding rhetoric from leaders who hide from their individual moral responsibilities behind the cloak of organizational decision making and rhapsodize about “defending “humanity” while waging war in the name of “peace.”

That wars are waged in the name of humanity is not a contradiction . . . quite the contrary, it has an especially intensive political meaning. When a state fights its

political enemy in the name of humanity, it is not a war for the sake of humanity, but a war wherein a particular state seeks to usurp a universal concept against its military opponent. At the expense of its opponent, it tries to identify itself with humanity in the same way as one can misuse peace, justice, progress, and civilization in order to claim these as one's own and to deny the same to the enemy.

The concept of humanity is an especially useful ideological instrument of imperialist expansion, and in its ethical-humanitarian form it is a specific vehicle of economic imperialism. Here one is reminded of a somewhat modified expression of Proudhon's: whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat. To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term probably has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity; and a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity . . . If, in fact, the will to abolish war is so strong that it no longer shuns war, then it has become a political motive, i.e., it affirms, even if only as an extreme possibility, war and even the reason for war . . . Such a war is necessarily unusually intense and inhuman because, by transcending the limits of the political framework, it simultaneously degrades the enemy into moral and other categories and is forced to make of him a monster that must not only be defeated but also utterly destroyed. In other words, he is an enemy who no longer must be compelled to retreat into his borders only . . .

The Geneva League of Nations does not eliminate the possibility of wars, just as it does not abolish states. It introduced

new possibilities for wars, permits wars to take place, sanctions coalition wars, and by legitimizing and sanctioning certain wars it sweeps away many obstacles to war . . . A league of nations which is not universal can only be politically significant when it represents a potential or actual alliance, i.e. a coalition. The *jus belli* would not thereby be abolished but, more or less, totally or partially, transferred to the alliance.

An imperialism based on pure economic power will naturally attempt to sustain a worldwide condition which enables it to apply and manage, unmolested, its economic means . . . Pure economic imperialism will also apply a stronger, but still economic, and therefore (according to this terminology) nonpolitical, essentially peaceful means of force. A 1921 League of Nations resolution enumerates as examples: economic sanctions and severance of the food supply from the civilian population. Finally, it has sufficient technical means to bring about violent death. Modern means of annihilation have been produced by enormous investment of capital and intelligence, surely to be used if necessary.

For the application of such means, a new and essentially pacifist vocabulary has been created. War is condemned but executions, sanctions, punitive expeditions, pacifications, protection of treaties, international police, and measures to assure peace remain. The adversary is thus no longer called an enemy but a disturber of peace and is thereby designated to be an outlaw of humanity. A war waged to protect or expand economic power must, with the aid of propaganda, turn into a crusade...

SUMMER SOLDIERS AND SUNSHINE PATRIOTS.

Ever since 9/11, the political left in this country has been frantically waging a desperate war, not against an enemy of the United States, mind you, but to prove that it too loves America. Democrats, liberals, and other assorted leftists insist not merely that their love of country is just as deep and just as sincere as is anyone else's, but that the right has committed a grave offense against decency by implying otherwise and by exploiting the terrorist attack and subsequent war to paint political opponents as "unpatriotic."

In the seven years since 9/11, the denizens of the left have repeated this complaint endlessly, although actual, legitimate challenges to their patriotism have been notably few and far between. Indeed, despite all of the claims, cries, and bleats on the subject of love of country, nearly all incidents of actual questioning of any individual politician's patriotism have been directed *by* rather than *at* the left. Barack Obama stands alone among national Democrats as having his patriotism truly questioned, though even those challenges have been done rather weakly and furtively and more often than not have come from within the Democratic Party rather than outside it.

Nevertheless, Obama felt compelled last week to discuss the topic of patriotism, to address his patriotic fervor, and to describe his belief about the concept's place in this campaign. Specifically, he announced, "I will never question the patriotism of others in this campaign. And I will not stand idly by when I hear others question mine."

As we mention in this week's first piece, we're pleased that Obama felt capable of and comfortable expressing his patriotic dedication to this nation and his belief that the United States is "the greatest country on Earth." That said, we must further note that we found his declaration to be somewhat less than stirring. For the most part, it was rather ordinary, both the standard politicians' profession of love of country and the standard Obama combination of smooth delivery and reasonably well crafted rhetoric. But aside from the occasional factual error (which have become

characteristically standard Obama as well), most of the speech sounded like something that any other politician could have given, particularly during the week of the 4th of July, with one or two minor, though crucial, exceptions.

What we found most interesting was his desire to redefine the concept, subtly, though notably, as he has done more than once before. Recall that earlier in this campaign Obama described his refusal to wear an American-flag lapel pin as an act of super-patriotism, claiming his willingness to stand up to group-think actually constituted a higher form of devotion. Last week, he was at it again, insisting that one's love of country is measured not merely by his affection for and dedication to it, but also, and even principally by his willingness to criticize it and to point out its most glaring faults. Echoing earlier professions, Obama declared that true patriotism must consist not merely of loyalty to the nation's ideals, but of the "willingness to dissent on behalf of those ideals" as well. Indeed, he noted that "the dissent of ordinary Americans may prove to be one of the truest expression of patriotism."

Now, we should note that Obama is hardly the first liberal or even the first Democrat to make such an argument, to fall back on this "dissent is the highest form of patriotism" shtick. In fact, the last man to hold the title of "Democratic presidential nominee" was also quite fond of that exact phrase, which only makes sense, since he has spent virtually his entire adult life criticizing his country and insisting that its soldiers are brutal, murderous thugs who "raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside . . ."

The only problem, or at least the biggest problem, with John Kerry's insistence that "dissent is the highest form of patriotism" is that it sounded like a load of hogwash, and self-serving hogwash to boot, coming as it did from a man whose public life was dedicated almost exclusively to "dissent." So he had to give this

fondness for criticism a more respectable sounding and less self-interested source. And he found one, sort of. Mark Steyn explains:

John Kerry announced this week's John Kerry Iraq Policy of the Week the other day:

"Iraqi politicians should be told that they have until May 15 to deal with these intransigent issues and at last put together an effective unity government or we will immediately withdraw our military."

With a sulky pout perhaps? With hands on hips and a full flip of the hair?

Did he get that from Churchill? "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, at least until May 15, when I have a windsurfing engagement off Nantucket."

Actually, no. He got it from Thomas Jefferson. "This is not the first time in American history when patriotism has been distorted to deflect criticism and mislead the nation," warned Sen. Kerry, placing his courage in the broader historical context. "No wonder Thomas Jefferson himself said: 'Dissent is the greatest form of patriotism.'" "

Close enough. According to the Jefferson Library: "There are a number of quotes that we do not find in Thomas Jefferson's correspondence or other writings; in such cases, Jefferson should not be cited as the source. Among the most common of these spurious Jefferson quotes are: 'Dissent is the highest form of patriotism.'" . . .

It was the Aussie pundit Tim Blair who noted the Thomas Jeffefakery. American commentators were apparently too busy cooing that "Kerry may be reflecting a new boldness on the part of liberals to come out and say what they believe and to reclaim the moral high ground on patriotism" (CBS News) to complain that KERRY LIED!! SCHOLARLY ATTRIBUTION DIED!!! Instead, KERRY MISQUOTED!! MEDIA DOTED!!!

Indeed, America's hardboiled newsmen can't get enough of the Thomas Jefferbunk. The *Berkshire Eagle* used it as the headline for last year's Fourth of July editorial. Mitch Albom of the Detroit Free Press thundered:

"We need to stop slicing this country in half, and saying those who support this act or this politician are 'good' Americans, and the rest are not. Sometimes 'dissent is the highest form of patriotism.' I didn't make that up. Thomas Jefferson did."

Er, no. You made up that he made it up. But former Georgia state Rep. Mike Snow uses it, and Miranda Yaver of Berkeley wore it on a button to the big anti-war demo in Washington last year, and Ted Kennedy deployed it as the stirring finale to his anti-Bush speech:

"It is not unpatriotic to tell the truth to the American people about the war in Iraq. In this grave moment of our country, to use the words of Thomas Jefferson, 'Dissent is the highest form of patriotism.' . . . "

As far as I can tell, it was Nadine Strosser [sic], the ACLU's head honcho,

who cooked up the Jefferson fake. At any rate, she seems to be the only one who ever deployed it pre-9/11.

We should, we suppose, be grateful that Obama didn't fall for the Jefferson fraud, like his predecessor did, but that's hardly the end of or the moral of the story. Obama's endorsement of "dissent" does, indeed, have a long history on the left, Kerry's imbecility notwithstanding. As Jonah Goldberg noted last week, the insistence that the United States is a deeply flawed country that desperately and unquestionably needs to be "changed" by privileged patriots who happen to know better, dates back at least a century to the Progressive Era. Both Obama's affinity for dissent and his insistence that the country desires profound "change" at the hand of someone like himself, who is willing to "remake" the country, fit nicely with this longstanding sentiment and place him firmly within the culture and tradition of the American left.

Goldberg suggests that Obama's leftist definition of patriotism will alienate him from voters, particularly those who "don't want [the country] remade." We hope he is right, of course, but we're not so sure.

Political prognosticator and analyst Michael Barone notes that Obama and many of his supporters see this election as a test, a test of the American public's willingness to vote for a black candidate. Citing the previous pre-primary success of Colin Powell, Barone argues that this is patent nonsense and that if the election is a test, it is of Obama himself. We'd agree with Barone to a point, and have made similar arguments in these pages. At the same time, we'd argue that because the election is a test of Obama and his compatibility with the American electorate, it is also a test of the electorate's susceptibility to left-wing nostrums and the depth of leftist penetration into the core values and beliefs of the nation. And this notion of an American breakdown, its need for salvation, and the categorical patriotism of dissent constitute the crux of this test.

The fact of the matter is that the entire intellectual history of the left is founded on the idea that it is not man who is flawed, but his institutions; therefore,

properly directed dissent and destruction of those defective institutions is the principle purpose of the progressive and truly free man. As we noted in the June 2 edition of *Politics, Et Cetera*, "It was [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau," the intellectual godfather of the left, "who argued that humans were innately good, that the concept of original sin is bogus, that vice and error are not natural to mankind but introduced from without, caused mostly by bad institutions."

We have neither the time nor the space to recount this entire intellectual history in these pages. (That's why we're writing a book). But it should suffice to say that all of the great intellectual heroes of the left, those responsible for construction of the ideology to which Obama subscribes, have echoed Rousseau's antipathy to man's institutions and his belief in the perfectability of man absent those institutions. Men like Marx, Proudhon, Mill, and Nietzsche all played crucial roles in the development and the growth of this ideology.

In a recent essay, the author and publisher Roger Kimball offered a fairly concise history of what he calls "criticismism," which he described as "the ideology of being critical." As he notes, the starting point was Rousseau, but the proverbial torch was swiftly passed to a handful of others, chief among them, liberal icon John Stuart Mill:

In *On Liberty*, Mill presented himself as a prophet of individual liberty. He has often been regarded as such, especially by liberal academics, who of course have been instrumental in propagating the gospel according to Mill. And "gospel" is the *mot juste*. Like many radical reformers, Mill promised almost boundless freedom, but he arrived bearing an exacting new system of belief. In this sense, as Maurice Cowling argues, *On Liberty* has been "one of the most influential of modern political tracts," chiefly because "its purpose has been misunderstood." Contrary to common opinion, Cowling wrote, Mill's book was not so much a plea for individual freedom, as a means of ensuring that

Christianity would be superseded by that form of liberal, rationalising utilitarianism which went by the name of the Religion of Humanity. Mill's liberalism was a dogmatic, religious one, not the soothing night-comforter for which it is sometimes mistaken. Mill's object was not to free men, but to convert them, and convert them to a peculiarly exclusive, peculiarly in-sinuating moral doctrine. Mill wished to moralize all social activity . . . Mill, no less than Marx, Nietzsche, or Comte, claimed to replace Christianity by "something better." Atheists and agnostics, humanists and free-thinkers may properly give thanks to Mill.

This tension in Mill's work – between Mill the libertarian and Mill the moralistic utilitarian—helps to account for the vertiginous quality that suffuses the liberalism for which *On Liberty* was a kind of founding scripture. Mill's announced enemy can be summed up in words like "custom," "prejudice," "established morality." All his work goes to undermine these qualities – not because the positions they articulate are necessarily in error but simply because, being customary, accepted on trust, established by tradition, they have not been subjected to the acid-test of his version of the utilitarian calculus.

The tradition that Mill opposed celebrated custom, prejudice, and established morality precisely because they had prevailed and given good service through the vicissitudes of time and change; their longevity was an important token of their worthiness. Let us by all means acknowledge, as Edmund Burke acknowledged, that "a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation." Still, Burke was right to extol prejudice as that which

"renders a man's virtue his habit . . . Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature."

Mill overturned this traditional view. Indeed, he was instrumental in getting the public to associate "prejudice" indelibly with "bigotry." He epitomized what the German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer called the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice."

For Mill, established morality is suspect first of all just *because it is established*. His liberalism is essentially corrosive of existing societal arrangements, institutions, and morality. At bottom, Mill's philosophy is a kind of inversion of Alexander Pope's optimism: "Whatever is, is suspect" might have been Mill's motto. He constantly castigated such things as the "magical influence of custom" ("magical" being a negative epithet for Mill), the "despotism of custom [that] is everywhere the standing hindrance to human advancement," the "tyranny of opinion" that makes it so difficult for "the progressive principle" to flourish. According to Mill, the "greater part of the world has, properly speaking, no history because the sway of custom has been complete."

As Kimball notes, the line runs from Rousseau to Mill, and from Nietzsche to Richard Rorty, and constitutes the development of what Lionel Trilling called, "the adversarial culture of the intellectuals." But it also forms the basis of the idea that "dissent" is somehow the highest form of human activity and thus the highest form of patriotism.

In his speech last week, Barack Obama declared that it is time to move beyond "the patriotism debate" that "remains rooted in the culture wars of the

1960s.” Yet it is his conception of patriotism that can be traced most directly back to that decade and to its counter-culture. That phrase, in and of itself, explains what it was that the ‘60s represented and what its political advocates believed was important, namely advancing a new culture, distinct and in opposition to the existing one. And that is precisely the nature of the type of “dissent” that the left has consistently advocated and to which Obama still adheres. It is no mere coincidence, we should note, that the radicals who sought to establish the counter-culture, the counter-institutions, and the counter-morality of Rousseau, Mill, and Nietzsche during the heady days of the 1960s are firm and ardent Obama supporters. We all know about Obama’s relationship with Weathermen Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn. But his support among the radicals is far broader than just these two. As the author Daniel Flynn notes:

Progressives for Obama resembles a Who’s Who of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] luminaries. In addition to [Tom] Hayden, [Mark] Rudd, and [Carl] Davidson, the group includes Bob Pardun, SDS’s education secretary during the 1966–67 school year; Paul Buhle, a radical professor who has recently attempted to revive SDS; Mickey and Dick Flacks, red-diaper babies who helped craft 1962’s Port Huron Statement, a seminal New Left document; and SDS’s third president, Todd Gitlin.

Barack Obama gave his speech last week because he wants you – and all Americans – to know that he loves this country. We don’t doubt that. But his patriotism, *per se*, has never really been the question. It is his definition of what constitutes patriotism that matters. What does his “love” mean and what does it portend?

The Democratic Party has nominated “criticismist” patriots before. But Bill Clinton ran away from his radical past and John Kerry was defeated. Whether the nation has grown comfortable enough with the leftist definition of patriotism and, indeed, the entire leftist critique of society remains to be seen. But clearly this election is a test. We have to wonder if the nation will pass, and if it does not, how damaging that could be.

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