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THEY SAID IT

An ignorant man, who is not fool enough to meddle with his clock, is however sufficiently confident to think he can safely take to pieces, and put together at his pleasure, a moral machine of another guise, importance and complexity, composed of far other wheels, and springs, and balances, and counteracting and co-operating powers. Men little think how immorally they act in rashly meddling with what they do not understand. Their delusive good intention is no sort of excuse for their presumption. They who truly mean well must be fearful of acting ill.

Edmund Burke, *An Appeal from the Old to the New Whigs*, August 1791.

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LONG LIVE THE BOND MARKET GODS.

It won't be long until the pundit community moves the political conversation beyond what Barack Obama and John McCain say they will do if elected to the more interesting subject of what each is likely to be able to do. We would like to blaze a trail into this territory this week by offering a few thoughts on the subject.

We will begin by noting that our biggest concern about the new president is not that he will fail to solve the problems facing the nation, but that he will make them worse by trying to solve them. This is not intended to be a "cute" or "clever" observation. We are deadly serious when we say this.

Our advice to you gentle reader, based on our many years of observing and studying contemporary American government, is, when thinking about the next four years, prepare yourself not by focusing on what you hope the next President will do right but on what he, in tandem with the U.S. Congress, might do wrong. Why? Because, judging from their past actions and their self-proclaimed intentions while on the campaign trail, both Barack and John are deeply wedded to governmental meddling in the kinds of problems where the odds are high that their efforts will do more harm than good.

Neither man, for example, appears to be even remotely amenable to the notion that the collective actions of the country's citizens and business enterprises may provide better long-term solutions to the nation's problems than the president and Congress can cook up between them. Or to be more specific, both, it is clear, would enthusiastically "do something" about the "energy crisis," the "banking crisis," the "housing crisis," the "pending Social Security and Medicare crises," and the growing "federal deficit crisis," even if told by credible sources that that "something" runs the very real risk of making things worse. Which, if past is indeed prologue, it almost certainly would.

We have explained on numerous occasion why we believe that government action on any or all of these and many other issues would likely be poorly devised and destructive, so we won't go into it again this week, except to repeat a quote that has appeared before in these pages from Gustave LeBon's classic little book *The Crowd*, which says all there is to know and all one needs to know on the subject.

The very fact that crowds possess in common ordinary qualities explains why they can never accomplish acts demanding a high degree of intelligence. The decisions affecting matters of general interest come to by an assembly of men of distinction, but specialists in different walks of life, are not sensibly superior to the decisions that would be adopted by a gathering of imbeciles. The truth is, they can only bring to bear in common on the work in hand those mediocre qualities which are the birthright of every average individual. In crowds it is stupidity and not mother-wit that is accumulated. It is not all the world, as is so often repeated, that has more wit than Voltaire, but assuredly Voltaire that has more wit than all the world, if by "all the world," crowds be understood.

The belief that the federal government has a solution to each and every problem facing the nation, or facing even a modest number of its citizens, as well as an obligation to pursue this solution aggressively, is an enormously dangerous conceit on the part of Barack and John, as well as it was on the part of most of the country's presidents during the previous half-century and surely will be on most of those yet to come. Indeed, it is likely that future historians will identify this conceit as the principal cause of the eventual decline and fall of the United States.

But intensive and perilous meddling by the winner of the upcoming presidential contest is not a certainty. To borrow a phrase from Barack himself, there is the audacity of hope, of hope that what we have been calling in these pages for many years now, "blessed gridlock" will tie the hands of these intrepid problem solvers, hope that their intellectual recklessness and

ignorance will be kept in reasonable check by the realities of the marketplace, hope that what our old friend Ed Yardeni is fond of describing as "muddling through" will emerge as the fall-back solution in the face of failed efforts on the part of the White House and Congress to concoct and agree on their own "solutions."

More specifically, there is the audacity of hope that the "energy crisis" will be ameliorated by ordinary citizens finding ways to use less energy because of higher costs and by energy firms finding alternative sources because of the rewards that await such discoveries; that the nation's major financial institutions will regain public trust by demonstrating that they have learned the efficacy of prudence; that the baby boomers will react to the reality that federal retirement programs won't meet their needs by delaying their retirement plans, by saving more in the years prior to retirement, and by working during their retirement. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

This may be an unrealistic hope on our part. But stranger things have happened. And in defense of this hope we will close this little essay with a few passages from Bob Woodward's 1994 book *The Agenda*, in which he described, among other things, the mugging that Bill Clinton received at the hands of reality in January 1993, a few weeks before assuming the office of the Presidency. Our guess, or at least our audacious hope, is that Barack and John's elaborate plans for grand new government palliatives will experience similar encounters with the real world. In any case, these little snippets from the past are worth considering as you ponder the future.

The opening scene is a gathering of the Clinton economic team at the Governor's Mansion in Little Rock on the morning of January 7, 1993. Robert Rubin, whom Woodward describes as the "master of ceremonies" of the meeting, opens the discussion with some dire predictions about the coming explosion in the budget deficit. Laura Tyson, who was soon to become the chairwoman of the Council of Economic Advisors, follows with some highly gloomy remarks about prospects for economic growth.

Then comes her deputy, Princeton economics professor Alan Blinder, who takes the floor and, figuratively speaking of course, introduces Bill to those individuals whom the above cited Yardeni used to call the “bond vigilantes.” Woodward describes the scene as follows:

Blinder’s forte was the large issues of taxes, spending, and budgets, so-called macroeconomics, that were traditionally the focus of the CEA chairman ... Why were they hearing that the federal deficits needed to be reduced? Blinder asked. Why was that goal important? Lowering the deficits would help the national economy, he said. It was not just to clear the decks or because the founding fathers were Puritans ... The worst-case scenario, Blinder continued, “is a recession no worse than George Bush enjoyed” ... Clinton had promised to “grow the economy” and create more and better jobs. The irony was palpable. Blinder realized he was presenting Clinton with a political loser...

Clinton recognized that it was the exact argument that Greenspan had made to him the previous month: Deficit reduction could mean lower long-term interest rates.

“But after ten years of fiscal shenanigans,” Blinder quickly pointed out, referring to the unrealized promises of Reagan and Bush to cut the deficit, “the bond market will not likely respond.”

At the president-elect’s end of the table, Clinton’s face turned red with anger and disbelief. “You mean to tell me that the success of the program and my reelection hinges on the Federal Reserve and a bunch of f...ing bond traders?” he responded in a half-whisper.

Nods from his end of the table. Not a dissent.

Clinton, it seemed to Blinder, perceived at this moment how much of his fate was passing into the hands of the unelected Alan Greenspan and the bond market.

Stephanopoulos also saw that it was a crucial moment in Clinton’s growing realization. It was no longer a political campaign. They faced new economic realities and had to start all over again. Their first audience would have to be the Fed and the bond market...

Clinton asked about job creation. Would they get the 8 million new jobs he had promised?

The contraction caused by deficit reduction could cost several million of those jobs, Blinder said. Only lower interest rates could offset the loss.

Clinton wanted to connect deficit reduction directly to job creation, but Blinder and Tyson repeated that it wasn’t the correct link. Deficit reduction might lead to more jobs down the road, but in the near future, it would have exactly the opposite impact.

The next scene is the Roosevelt Room on Friday, February 12, 1993. The goal of cutting \$140 billion from the deficit for 1997 is being questioned all over again. Someone is defending the \$140 billion as important for the bond market. The newest addition to the group is Howard Paster, 48, who had been chosen as Clinton’s chief lobbyist with Congress...

“How many votes does the f...ing bond market have?” Paster asked. “We’ve got to win votes on the Hill, not Wall Street. If it looks like Jimmy Carter’s water projects all over again, we’re dead”...

“Okay,” Tyson said, “I am going to say this because it’s my role in this room ... I can’t prove to you that there is anything magical about the \$140 billion. There is a point where the bond market will take your program

seriously. I don't know where that point is. Maybe it's at \$135 billion or \$140 billion or wherever. I can't tell you."....

Clinton looked taken aback. The hawks pounced. Bentsen, Panetta, and Rivlin said the plan was going to be debated heavily in Congress; it would be a political debate of some intensity. Congress did not like pain, and the president's position would certainly be trimmed back, they reiterated. Bentsen had not disclosed the sensitive fact that the \$140 billion was Greenspan's recommendation....

The next scene is the White House in the summer of 1993, soon after Bill's stimulus plan had gone down in flames in Congress and George Stephanopoulos has been demoted from communications director to Bill's gopher.

Stephanopoulos had spent 31 years of his life oblivious to the bond market, and now he was tracking it like some Wall Street wizard. Its movement, he knew, was interconnected with daily White House business. How was the bond market? Clinton and others asked frequently during the day. It had become a barometer of their political fortunes.

Stephanopoulos had watched Clinton chafe and occasionally explode at the notion that his administration was at the mercy of this traditionally Republican market. Clinton realized that in the perverse world of Wall Street, the bond traders were betting on a weak economy as much as on deficit reduction, since either a recession or deficit reduction increased the chances of lower interest rates. Several times in private, Clinton had remarked bitterly on the irony that getting economic growth just didn't matter any more. Once in the noose of the bond market, Stephanopoulos felt, they couldn't struggle free. If they gave up on deficit reduction and interest rates shot up, they would be seen as failing. The only spur was coming from the low interest rates and refinancing of

loans, which provided consumers with more money to spend. To choke off that source of stimulation might bring on a recession....

Clinton was having more and more private outbursts about his people, particularly Bentsen and Panetta. The president, Stephanopoulos felt, had come to see that in picking these Washington hands fixated on a deficit reduction agenda, he had in effect also chosen his economic policy. Clinton raged about his "Wall Street" advisers, who, he said in moments of ire, didn't care about his campaign promises or share his vision....

The next scene is later in the summer of 1993. Bill's poll numbers are down, and the situation is gloomy.

Tyson was growing tired of the constant refrain about the bond market. In reality, she realized, the "bond market" was an abstraction, a nonexistent entity. There were thousands of traders, buyers and sellers of bonds worldwide, who never did the same thing, never acted in concert. If they did, after all, there would be no market: Bond sellers would find no buyers, or buyers would find no sellers.

Yet to many, particularly Bentsen, she realized, the bond market had become the new God....

Long live the bond market God. Once again, He may be the nation's only defense against fools, audacious as it seems.

POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, REDUX.

It's August. Congress has left town for the rest of the summer, embarrassingly, if not entertainingly. The presidential campaigns are gearing up, but are mostly engaged in the business of preparing for the conventions. As we write, most tracking polls show the race for the White House to be a statistical dead heat. And that is unlikely to change any time before Labor Day.

Conventional wisdom has it that Barack Obama will win the presidency, and his fellow Democrats will expand their majorities in both houses of Congress, giving him at least the appearance of mandate for “change.” Of course, no one can know any of this for certain. Congressional Republicans have been making some headway by focusing on and exposing the deficiencies in their opponent’s energy policies. Obama’s coronation, once a foregone conclusion, has been put on hold, as he and his campaign stumble over their own egos and flirt with the possibility of repeating the quadrennial Democratic election dance and thus snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

But even if he does win, there’s no telling what policies he will embrace, given his recent bouts of militant irresolution and unremitting flip-flopping. Moreover, while he runs to the center, his fellow Democrats continue to hunker down on the fringes of the political left, suggesting that even the most radical leftist ever nominated by one of the major parties may find that he is considered a treacherous reactionary by his fellow partisans on Capitol Hill.

All of which is to say that the political world is on hold and will be for some months, as we wait for the constitutional mechanisms to allow at least a hint of what is come to be discerned through the static. Until then, it’s all guesswork.

One thing we don’t need to guess about, however, is that whatever happens in November, by January, there will be a new President, one entirely independent from and uninvolved with the current administration (Obaman-ite charges of “McSame,” notwithstanding). This mean policies *will* change, and not least of all foreign policies.

By now, we all know the basic lay of the land: Obama is the anti-war dove, who favors negotiation and diplomacy over guns and bombs; and McCain is a pro-surge hawk, who not only served in the military, but comes from a proud military family and has been one of the most vocal and consistent advocates for muscular, national defense policies. But what does any of this mean in practice?

Again, no one really knows; it’s all just guesswork. Only this time, the problem isn’t necessarily a function of the political calendar. At this point in an election cycle, we should know the candidates’ respective positions on national security issues and what those positions mean for the nation in terms of practical foreign policy. The fact that we don’t can be attributed almost entirely to the intellectual laziness of a majority of the nation’s political elites (elected officials, journalists, columnists, analysts, academics) and to the correlated artlessness of their analysis of post-9/11 national security trends and policy developments.

Not that this should surprise anyone. This sad state of affairs was, after all, foreseen some six decades ago by one of the greatest literary prognosticators of the last century.

In 1946, George Orwell published one of the most important yet least appreciated essays of the post-War period, an essay that reverberates loudly and clearly still today. Written between the respective publications of *Animal Farm* and *1984*, Orwell’s treatise, “Politics and the English Language,” described and bemoaned the degradation of the written word and the manipulation of the English language to distort meaning and to mislead readers, gently, though completely. Students and fans of Orwell will recognize this complaint as the precursor to or the non-fictionalized version of the “Newspeak” that typified official communication in the latter of his two best-known novels. They may also recognize that which passes for “informed” political discourse today.

As one might expect, given the title of his essay, Orwell’s specific objection was the way in which political writing was used not simply to manipulate, but to hide, to justify, and even to alter perception. To wit:

Political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary

bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*.

As destructive – both to the political discourse and to good writing – is the use of political clichés, words that have no meaning or which have been so abused and overused by the unthinking political class that they have been rendered meaningless. Such words, Orwell argued, are mere filler, words and phrases that “are strictly meaningless, in the sense that they not only do not point to any discoverable object, but are hardly ever expected to do so by the reader.” He continued:

The word *Fascism* has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies “something not desirable.” The words *democracy*, *socialism*, *freedom*, *patriotic*, *realistic*, *justice* have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like *democracy*, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

Here, we have a near perfect description of the indolence and the dishonesty that characterizes the current political debate. We also have a near perfect explanation of why sorting out potential future scenarios is nearly impossible. Orwell notes that “fascism,” for example, has been stripped of all meaning and has become a mere catch-all insult. While that remains true for the word today, it is

just as true – perhaps even more so – for another, far more relevant and fashionable word, namely “neoconservative.”

Neoconservative as it is used in today’s political discourse is a meaningless word, if ever there was one. George Bush is neocon. Dick Cheney is a neocon. Donald Rumsfeld is a neocon. The war in Iraq was planned, or rather plotted, by the neocons. The neocons did this. The neocons did that. The neocons did everything. And nothing. Neocon. Neocon. Neocon. The word is everywhere, yet means nothing – nothing, that is except “something not desirable.”

This wasn’t always the case, of course. There was a time when the word meant something, something specific. Neoconservatism was the term coined by Irving Kristol to describe himself and a handful of similar intellectuals who migrated from the political left to the right in large part out of revulsion from and opposition to Communism, its excesses, and its fellow travelers in the West.

Now, there is no question that neoconservatism has always been controversial and has generated its fair share of critics. Methodologically, neoconservatism reflects its leftist origins, generally trusting in the power of government to direct and to alter behavior. Philosophically, the movement (or at least many of its early advocates) was influenced heavily by classicist Leo Strauss. And ethnically, neoconservatives have, by and large, been Jewish and, to a lesser extent, urban Catholics. And each of these characteristics has produced a certain amount of anger, resentment, and intellectual opposition among factions on the right.

But none of that could ever compare to the enmity directed at neoconservatives today – or at least at those who now bear the label of neoconservatives – by the media and a political set that simply have no real conception of the term and its meaning.

One of the problems with all of this is that it creates enormous confusion. Bush, a global interventionist, is a neocon. His policy of preemptive action against potential global “bad actors” must then be neoconservative. His policy of defending human

rights and spreading American ideals and principles must therefore be neoconservative. His emphasis on liberty and the necessity of universal democratic governance must be neoconservative. Right?

But what, then, are we to make of Barack Obama's foreign policy. Like Bush, Obama promises to spread democracy – at the end of the proverbial bayonet, where necessary. Like Bush, he declares his fealty to human rights and to the common “human” desires for liberty and justice. Like Bush, he promises to intervene – unilaterally, if need be – to defend these “global” values and to promote democratic governance. Does that mean Obama too is a neoconservative? And if so, how did *National Journal's* “most liberal Senator” wind up as a “conservative?”

And what about John McCain? It is clear that McCain supports President Bush's policy of intervention in Iraq and in Afghanistan. And it is also clear that he supports a muscular and, where necessary, preemptive national security policy. But he has not been quite as outspoken about his desire to spread universal values and to foster democracy. Does he still qualify as a neoconservative? Is he more or less conservative than Bush? Is he more or less conservative than Obama? Is he more or less “neo?” Will his policies be more like Bush's than Obama's would, despite the fact that Bush and Obama share common rhetoric? And where does Iran fit in? If McCain supports the President on Iran, while Obama does not, how does that affect what we've already determined?

That's a lot of questions. And none of them are answerable using the phraseology of the current political discourse. If Dick Cheney can be a neoconservative, then anyone can. And if Bush's foreign policy is “conservative” in any use of the word (including neoconservative) then almost any foreign policy can be conservative, depending, we suppose, on who does the labeling. What any of that means for the future of American foreign policy, of course, is anyone's guess.

Sadly, that's not the half of the problem with the muddled nature of the political discussion and with the lazy and mechanical usage of the term

“neoconservative.” In addition to being the label affixed to a school of thought within conservatism, *neoconservatism* has also always constituted a kind of ethnic slur as well.

Given the ethnic makeup of the original “neoconservatives” and of those who professed some sort of intellectual indebtedness to Leo Strauss, the movement has, since its inception, been pigeonholed as a “Jewish” movement. And this, in turn, has made “neoconservatism” a target for those who might otherwise dislike, fear, or mistrust Jews.

Orwell writes that meaningless political words (such as fascism) “are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different.” This is unquestionably the case with “neoconservatism.” For many on the fringes of the right *and the left*, neoconservative has long been a code word for “Jews” and specifically for Jews who are not necessarily loyal to the United States. The “neocons,” it seems, have “dual loyalty,” and are concerned principally with Israel and secondarily with directing American foreign policy to bolster Israel.

The war in Iraq was, unfortunately, a godsend for those who had always seen “neoconservatism” as a Jewish conspiracy. The war was planned with the help of nefarious Straussians, many with Jewish surnames. It was, in some ways, considered contrary to American interests. And it was, in other ways, perfectly aligned with Israeli interests. The “conspiracy” was too obvious to miss. And likewise, therefore, was the influence of the neocons.

In the post-9/11 build-up to Iraq, the term neocon, heretofore an arcane and little-used description of a minor conservative faction, suddenly was everywhere, and so was the implication that a nefarious cabal of Jewish intellectuals was directing American policy. In August, 2002, *Washington Post* reporter Thomas Ricks broke a blockbuster story that, at the time, seemed to hold the potential to threaten the very future of U.S.-Saudi relations. The story focused on an ominous RAND Corporation briefing given to the

Defense Policy Board Advisory Council that asserted that “Saudi Arabia supports our enemies and attacks our allies,” and that the Saudi regime is “the kernel of evil, the prime mover, the most dangerous opponent.” Ricks attributed the ominous anti-Saudi sentiments to “neocons,” within and outside of the administration. He wrote:

The briefing . . . represents a point of view that has growing currency within the Bush Administration – especially on the staff of Vice President Cheney and in the Pentagon’s civilian leadership – and among *neoconservative* [emphasis added] writers and thinkers closely allied with administration policymakers . . . The anti-Saudi views expressed in the briefing appear especially popular among *neoconservative* [emphasis added] foreign policy thinkers, which is a relatively small but influential group within the Bush administration. In recent weeks, two *neoconservative* [emphasis added] magazines have run articles similar in tone to the Pentagon briefing. The July 15 issue of *The Weekly Standard*, which is edited by William Kristol, a former chief of staff to Quayle, predicted ‘The Coming Saudi Showdown.’ The current issue of *Commentary*, which is published by the American Jewish Committee, contains an article titled, ‘Our Enemies, the Saudis.’

By spring of the following year, the neocon conspiracy had, essentially, become conventional wisdom. *The New York Times*, for example, discovered Leo Strauss and also discovered his overlap with neoconservatism and thus his purported influence on the Bush foreign policy apparatus. Not surprisingly, the *Times* too focused on the Jewish nature of the conspiracy:

Paul D. Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense, has been identified as a disciple of Strauss; William Kristol, founding editor of *The Weekly Standard*, a must-read in the White House, considers himself a Straussian; Gary Schmitt, executive director of the Project for the New

American Century, an influential foreign policy group started by Mr. Kristol, is firmly in the Strauss camp. One is reminded of Asa Leventhal, the hero of Saul Bellow’s novel “The Victim,” who asks his oppressor, a mysterious figure named Kirby Allbee, “Wait a minute, what’s your idea of who runs things?” For those who believe in the power of ideas, it wouldn’t be too much of a stretch to answer: the intellectual heirs of Leo Strauss . . .

The Bush administration is rife with Straussians. In addition to Mr. Wolfowitz, there is his associate Richard N. Perle, chairman of the Defense Policy Board and the managing partner in Trireme Partners, a venture-capital company heavily invested in manufacturers of technology for homeland security and defense. Mr. Perle and Mr. Wolfowitz are both disciples of the late Albert Wohlstetter, a Straussian professor of mathematics and military strategist who put forward the idea of “graduated deterrence” – limited, small-scale wars fought with “smart” precision-guided bombs. William Kristol, a former student of Harvey Mansfield’s at Harvard, and these days editor of *The Weekly Standard*, is a highly influential voice in this crowd.

If one follows the progression, then, the word neoconservative evolved rather swiftly from intellectual category to anti-Semitic pejorative to foreign policy conspiracy to lazy shorthand to useless jargon. Today, it is the near universal description of the Bush foreign policy. And it is almost entirely worthless with respect to understanding foreign affairs or attempting to divine future developments.

Moreover, the entire foreign policy debate is likely to remain muddled or even become more muddled as the campaign wears on and as events continue apace in the Middle East. Orwell’s final complaint

about the corruption of the English language and its abuse by politically driven fraudsters is that the laziness and banality of political writing tends to breed more laziness and banality. Specifically, “if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation even among people who should and do know better.”

A recent case in point can be seen in the rather rapid descent into anger and madness of erstwhile respected liberal journalist and author Joe Klein. Klein, for the record, is himself Jewish. But apparently that hasn't stopped him from recently determining that all of this country's foreign policy problems can be laid at the feet of “Jewish neoconservatives.” Klein, apparently unhappy with the course of American foreign policy, wrote recently that:

The notion that we could just waltz in and inject democracy into an extremely complicated, devout and ancient culture smacked – still smacks – of neocolonialist legerdemain. The fact that a great many Jewish neoconservatives – people like Joe Lieberman and the crowd over at *Commentary* – plumped for this war, and now for an even more foolish assault on Iran, raised the question of divided loyalties: using U.S. military power, U.S. lives and money, to make the world safe for Israel.

We'd like to say that this is nuts, but that description would imply that Klein's obsession with Jews and Jewish conspiracies is somehow unusual or abnormal. But it's not. Sadly, it is perfectly usual and perfectly normal, a perfect summation of the present level of discourse on foreign policy.

Now, we should note in closing that not all of those who have used the terms neoconservative or Straussian are as lazy and incoherent as Joe Klein and the rest

of the mainstream political elites. Indeed, our good friend Claes Ryn has written rather eloquently and rather informatively on the subject. His description of and response to Straussianism (e.g. “Leo Strauss and History: the Philosopher as Conspirator”) is both fascinating and edifying. But his critique is methodological, not political or religious or even ethnic. In other words, his critique is creative and insightful, precisely the type of writing that Orwell was encouraging and that he feared so desperately might be lost due to indolence and lack of imagination.

Unfortunately, most discussions of the topic are not creative and are not examples of what Orwell would call good writing. They are, in fact, the opposite. And in the end, this damages not just the English language and the art of writing, but the political debate as well. The foreign policy picture is muddled, to say the least. Jews are, once again, the alleged perpetrators of dark and nefarious conspiracies. And there is very little opportunity for writers, thinkers, and analysts to develop a world view.

Last week, the columnist David Brooks lamented the sad state of global affairs and declared that the world desperately needs another Dean Acheson. Maybe so. But right now, we'd settle for a George Kennan, a.k.a. “X,” someone who could cut through the nonsense and the jargon to explain foreign policy developments and design a policy or a world view for addressing those developments. We won't hold our breath, though.

In the sixty-two years since Orwell wrote his lament for good writing, political writers have grown even less creative, less assertive, and thus less honest. And still we don't know whether Barack Obama or John McCain will be the fitting heir to the Bush foreign policy.

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