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THEY SAID IT

The whig tendency in America has always been suspicious of government (as the source of most abuses of human rights, as inefficient, as a breeding ground of corruption). The Whig party, transformed into the new Republican party after 1856, became the party that abolished slavery, and is alive and well today in the Tea Party movement. It is the party of the individual — not the atomized individual, the individual alone, but the civic individual in free cooperation with other individuals.

Michael Novak, "God Bless the Tea Party," *National Review Online*, November 8, 2010.

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MIDTERM IMPLICATIONS: 2012 AND BEYOND.

As expected, the American people dealt Barack Obama and his policies a severe blow last Tuesday. And, as expected, Barack Obama insisted that the problems that led to that blow weren't his, but belonged to the American people, who apparently can't understand what he is saying. "Communication," Obama insisted was the source of his and his party's woes. Not policy. Not arrogance. Not disdain for the stupid, great unwashed masses. But communication. He didn't speak slowly enough for all of us to understand, we guess. And. He'll. Try. To. Be. More. Considerate. Next. Time.

As for those of us in the real world, last week's results were both dramatic and unexceptional at the same time. Although the repudiation of the Obama administration was significant, even historic, the voting patterns and political preferences exposed by the results were perfectly in keeping with long-term trends and the division of this country into two separate and very distinct spheres. They also suggested that those on the left and in the mainstream press who expect a primary challenge for Obama are possibly correct on that point, but most certainly wrong about the direction from which such a challenge might come.

Let us explain.

First, let us note for the record, that this past Tuesday all but certainly put the proverbial final nail in the coffin of what was once the "Roosevelt Coalition," the alliance that made the Democratic Party the nation's majority party for most of the last century and provided the political support for the expanse and consolidation of the soft-left welfare state.

This coalition, you may recall, was comprised of rural Midwesterners and Southerners, labor unions, working-class whites, intellectuals, and minorities. And while some of these factions, including union members, intellectuals, and minorities, remain firmly and reliably in the Democratic camp, other, more populous groups, including Midwesterners, Southerners, and working-class whites, have, since 1968, been moving in the direction of the GOP. This movement hasn't always been unabated and it certainly hasn't been relentless or consistent and enduring. But all of that may well have changed with the election last Tuesday. Consider, if you will, the following two summaries of the election results, the first written by *RealClearPolitics*' Chief Political Correspondent David Paul Kuhn:

Republicans won whites in Tuesday's national House vote by a 22-percentage point margin (60 to 38 percent) according to exit polls. In 2006, Republicans won whites by a mere 4 points. Whites shifted at three-fold the rate of Hispanics between the two midterms, while the black vote remained steady. Democrats fared even worse than in 1994, when Republicans won whites by 16 points (58 to 42 percent) and with them, a landslide

Those lost are not simply "soccer moms" or "NASCAR dads." Only 35 percent of white men voted for Democrats compared to 40 percent of white women. That marks a 9-point Democratic loss with both blocs since 2006. Democrats performed especially poorly with white women compared to past House elections-- 6 points worse than in 1994. In post-war congressional elections, 2010 signifies Democrats' worst showing with white women and the floor of Democrats' standing with white men.

Democrats also performed slightly worse with white independents than in any House contest since at least the Reagan era. Same story with college and non-college educated whites, as well as white seniors. The losses threaded the suburbs, small towns and rural areas. This was not a wave isolated to any swing vote trope or slice of whites.

This was broad white flight. And it crossed a symbolic threshold. Among whites, for the first time in post-war congressional elections, Republicans hit the 60-point level of support and Democrats fell below the 40-point mark.

The second comes from the *National Journal*'s Ronald Brownstein:

Democrats emerged from their pasting on Tuesday with a hole directly in the center of their electoral coalition.

The hole can be measured demographically, and it can be mapped geographically. Either way, it leaves President Obama in a precarious position as he tries to recover from Tuesday's debacle—the biggest midterm House loss for either party since 1938—before he faces the voters again in 2012.

The bigger problem is that in many states between the coasts, the Democrats' coalition isn't big enough on its own to provide a majority; to win, Democrats must run competitively among the rest of the white electorate, the college-educated white men, and noncollege white men and women. And on Tuesday, too few Democrats could meet that test. According to exit polls, Republican Senate candidates this week won at least 58 percent of noncollege whites in Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Republicans won all of those contests.

The House results paint a similar picture. Earlier this year . . . National Journal divided House districts into quadrants based on whether the share of whites in them with college degrees exceeded the national average of 30.4 percent and whether the minority share of the population exceeded 30 percent, the figure a previous NJ analysis had found politically revealing. Even amid Tuesday's gale, Democrats have lost only four of the 83 House seats they now hold that are high in both diversity and white education levels (with two more races to be called). At the other end of the spectrum, Republicans have already captured 35 of the 66 Democratic seats that are low in both diversity and white education levels, with two more undecided. In all, 47 House Democratic losses so far have come in districts in which the level of white college attainment lags the national average; just 16 came in districts that exceed that average. Talk about blue-collar blues.

These demographic patterns carry powerful geographical implications. After Tuesday, Democrats, incredibly, hold a majority of the congressional delegation in only three states—Iowa, New Mexico, and Vermont—that don't directly touch an ocean. Republicans similarly routed Democrats in gubernatorial races across the Midwest and the border states, from Ohio and Tennessee to Wisconsin and Iowa.

Of course, these results have led some – dare we say many? – on the political left and the mainstream media to congratulate themselves for their insight and moral superiority. After all, the Republicans won by appealing to ignorant, hillbilly rednecks and their suburban counterparts, the under-educated working stiffs; or to put this in another way: the people who do the work in the country. And what further proof could be needed to demonstrate the right's intrinsic and unabashed racism?

This is garbage, naturally, but that won't stop the left from claiming moral victory. Still, the fact remains that this white and working class flight from the Democratic party is not about race as much as it is about the Party's abandonment of all that these voters – blue-collar, Midwestern, Southern, Appalachian – hold dear. Many of these same voters, it is worth noting, took a flier on Obama in 2008, caring not a whit about his race but hoping simply that he would deliver on the promises he made to transcend partisanship and heal the divisions splitting the nation.

As the incomparable polling analyst Jay Cost has noted, the Republican coalition – assembled by Bush and consolidated in this midterm – is broader and more populous than the Democratic coalition. But it is also less stable, which is to say that many of the Republican voters can be persuaded to cross party lines and vote for a Democrat who appears to embrace their values or who, at the very least, does so better than the other guy. This is precisely what happened in 2008, when enough Republican voters expressed their disdain for their party as it had evolved and expressed as well their hope for Obama.

But their hope was every bit as futile and misguided as their disdain was appropriate and understandable.

In any case, these voters are, as far as Obama is concerned, gone. And they are not coming back. Fool them once, shame on Obama, fool them twice and . . . well, they won't be fooled twice. They've had enough of being told that they're bitter clingers, that they are stupid, that they are unwilling to accept science and fact, and that they dislike Obama's policies because he hasn't explained them well enough for their simple minds to understand.

The implications of all of this are manifold and, obviously, complicated. But two important inferences stand out. The first is that the current Republican majority is not a fluke or a temporary distortion, but foundational given the nation's cultural, economic, and demographic profile. The second is that there may

well be a primary challenger to Obama, but, as we said earlier, not for the reasons or from the direction that the pundits and experts generally believe.

With regard to the first conclusion, as we noted above, the results of last Tuesday's blowout can be interpreted as confirming that, under *normal circumstances*, the Republican coalition is broader, more geographically diverse, and far more populous than the Democratic coalition. For all the nonsense about "the emerging Democratic majority" and the "hope and change" landslides of 2006 and 2008, the country remains, essentially, a center-right nation. As the aforementioned Ronald Brownstein put it:

After the first red-blue map entered our consciousness following the 2000 presidential race, I wrote that it was possible to drive east for three days from San Francisco without crossing a county that voted Democratic; it is now possible to do the same thing with House districts. Still strong (if somewhat diminished) on the coasts, but routed in the heartland, Democrats look like a bridge with two pillars, but no span in between.

What this means, then, is that as long as the Republicans can manage to run reasonably conservative and reasonably sane candidates for Congressional seats, they should manage to hold their majority, at least for the foreseeable future. Where the Republicans lost last Tuesday, they did so because they nominated political neophytes who were unpolished and easily caricatured.

Now, please note that this is not to say that the Tea Party critics are right and that the Tea Party's "nutty" candidates cost the Republicans the Senate. Rather, it is to say that the speed with which the opposition to the ruling class erupted may have thrust some otherwise unlikely nominees into general election races, allowing the entrenched Democratic powers to paint them as unacceptable and out-of-the-mainstream. This was both unfair and predictable.

But it is not likely to be repeated, as the anti-establishment sentiments among GOP voters and potential candidates set deeper roots and attract more attractive and less easily vilified nominees – candidates like Ron Johnson, who upset three-term incumbent Russ Feingold in Wisconsin. If and when this happens – and we believe it's a matter of when, not if – then the GOP's coalition will firm up considerably, making its majority more stable, despite its inherent volatility.

As for the second implication, that Obama is now a politically expired force and is thus at risk for a primary challenge, we think that's probably right, though we think that the names being tossed about as potential challengers are irrational, to put it mildly.

This makes some sense, we suppose, since the left-wing of the Democratic party is especially upset by the results and blames Obama -- not for taking the country too far too fast, mind you, but for not taking it far enough fast enough. Any normal person might understand that this is craziness, but we are not talking about normal people here. We are talking about the left-leaning media, particularly the left's "netroots" new-media types, who embraced Obama wholeheartedly but have been dismayed by the encumbrances imposed on him by political reality.

If you read some of the leftish columnists, analysts, and bloggers, the names most often tossed around as potential primary challengers are Howard Dean, the newly unemployed Russ Feingold, and, of course, Hillary Clinton. Some, like the Boston Phoenix's Steven Stark, have gone even further out on the left-wing, tapping the past and future Governor Moonbeam (Jerry Brown) of California as a realistic potential opponent for Obama. Given the fact that, with possible exception of the Secretary of State, all of the names mentioned are of far-left candidates, we have to conclude that these people learned nothing from the election.

Yes, it's true that the far left was dispirited, but apathy among leftie voters didn't cost the Democrats control of Congress. The loss of blue-collar, Midwestern, Southern, and independent white voters did.

What this suggests, therefore, is that in order for a potential primary challenger to provide the Democrats with a better shot at retaining the presidency than Obama would, he or she would have to connect well with the lost voters from the Roosevelt coalition; he or she would have to be a moderate with ties to the Midwest or the South and to the people who inhabit the critical border states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana.

As we noted in a piece published last February, the voters whom the Democrats have lost and with whom they will need to reconnect if they are to retain the presidency in 2012 have traditionally been called “Jacksonians” or, in narrower contexts, the Scots-Irish. The Jacksonian-Scots-Irish voters put Bill Clinton in the White House twice and very nearly put Hillary Clinton there as well, giving her the overwhelming majority of their primary votes and delegates and providing the backbone of her primary campaign, in which she won more votes cumulatively than did her opponent and eventual vanquisher, Barack Obama.

All of this tells us that any serious challenge to Obama from within his party would have to come from one of three sources: Hillary, retiring Indiana Senator Evan Bayh, or Virginia’s Scots-Irish hero and Senator Jim Webb. We’ll rule out Hillary, for the time being at least, because she has said she won’t run and because she has probably damaged herself with the Jacksonians through her association with the Obama administration.

That leaves Bayh and Webb. And, as we indicated in our piece on Webb last February, if we had to bet, we’d bet on him. The guy is a Marine, a war hero, a celebrated author, a former Reagan-administration official, a former Republican, attractive and articulate, and a man with an enormous ego. To us, that sounds like precisely the type of candidate who would challenge a sitting, squishy-left president.

As we put it last February, “Mark our words: If Jim Webb shows any public signs of affinity for or sympathy with the Tea Parties, then he is setting

himself up to run for president in opposition to Barack Obama.” We still believe that and still believe that watching Webb is a worthwhile pursuit.

The irony is that if Webb, or someone like him, were to challenge Obama, he or she would likely damage Obama beyond repair, yet leave him as the nominee. Incumbents who face primary challenges (e.g. Johnson, Ford, Carter) tend to hold on to the nomination but do poorly in the presidential race, or in Johnson’s case, to give up before doing poorly, preferring instead to get out while the gettin’s good.

Whatever happens, the Democrats have a problem. Their incumbent is damaged goods and, unlike the last Democratic president, is unlikely to be able to repair that damage, at least with the voters who will play a critical role in deciding the next president. At the same time, taking a leap of faith and trying to nominate another candidate would all but certainly fail and would leave their guy even more severely damaged.

About the only good news for the Democrats is that they will all but certainly still manage to carry the most populous states, New York and California, no matter whom they nominate. More to the point, they will still have the GOP nominee as their opponent. We’re not saying that the Republicans won’t nominate a stellar candidate, but the odds are against it. That, sadly, is often how the GOP plays the game and often how it loses.

And that brings us to...

THE END OF THE REPUBLICAN ERA, REDUX?

One of the saddest, yet most predictable responses to last week’s election results came not from the defeated Democrats, but from the victorious Republicans, or at least from a handful of them. These Republicans, as it turns out, were unsatisfied with the House blow-out and wanted more, specifically the Senate. And since they didn’t get the Senate and, in fact, underperformed by some accounts, these Republicans are looking for culprits to blame.

This is, to put it bluntly, pathetic – for several reasons. First, it’s just stupid; the Republicans may have underperformed expectations in the Senate, but those expectations were unreasonable in the first place. We predicted a Republican pickup of 8 seats and were, as it turns out, overly optimistic. Those who really and earnestly expected an actual takeover of the Senate were, in retrospect, completely out of their minds. The likelihood of such gains – given the number of seats the respective parties were defending – was miniscule. Indeed, the GOP pickups were only slightly more than half of what would have been necessary to take the majority but were, nevertheless, massive by historical standards. As *The Weekly Standard’s* Jeffrey Anderson put it:

In the midst of a resounding national rebuke at all levels of government, the Democrats have been taking some solace in having held the Senate. But to put the Republicans’ Senate gains this week into perspective, Republicans won an even higher percentage of Senate races than House races (they won 65 percent of the 37 Senate races, versus approximately 56 percent of the 435 House races). And, counting Lisa Murkowski as still being a Republican (a spokesman for her campaign says the Alaskan would caucus with the GOP if she beats Joe Miller in their still-undecided race), there have been only two elections since 1950 in which Republicans have gained more Senate seats than the six they gained in 2010.

The second reason that this whining is so pathetic is because it is manifestly self-serving and ultimately detrimental to the Republicans’ chances of success in the 112th Congress. Last week, in our paradoxical pre-election post-mortem for the soon-to-be victors, we warned that the establishment wing of the GOP would do everything in its power to screw up the party’s victory. Specifically, we wrote:

We fully expect that the powers that be in the Republican establishment will work long and hard to do the wrong thing and to further alienate both the public at large and the remaining few conservatives in Congress. There may be considerable new blood in the Republican Party this year, and it may mix well with that small percentage of old blood that remains dedicated to liberty. But the fact remains that the leaders of the party and the entrenched elites are still those who are more concerned with the exercise of power than with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Right one cue, the GOP establishment stepped up to the microphone last week to demand that it be given credit where no credit is due and to claim that the “new blood” in the party belonged to crazy people who had better get sane and fall in line if they know what is best for them. Indeed, the whining about “underperformance” cited above is how the establishment reacted to “victory.” Hey, you ignorant hillbillies, the Republican establishment screeched, if you had just listened to us, we’d have taken the Senate too. But you didn’t listen to us, you useless freaks. Or, as *Politico* put it:

With tea party-backed candidates going down in Delaware, Colorado and Nevada, depriving Republicans of what would have been a 50-50 Senate, a bloc of prominent senators and operatives said party purists like Sarah Palin and Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) had foolishly pushed nominees too conservative to win in politically competitive states.

“Candidates matter,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.). “It was a good night for Republicans but it could have been a better one. We left some on the table.”

Referring to the debate within the right about whether the party was better off losing the Delaware seat than winning with a moderate Republican like Rep. Mike Castle, who lost the GOP primary to Christine O'Donnell, Graham was even more blunt.

“If you think what happened in Delaware is ‘a win’ for the Republican Party then we don’t have a snowball’s chance to win the White House,” he said. “If you think Delaware was a wake-up call for Republicans than we have shot at doing well for a long time.”

Former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott put it plainly: “We did not nominate our strongest candidates.”

This is mind-numbingly short-sighted and self-absorbed. For starters, why in the world does anyone, anywhere, in any capacity give a frog’s water-tight backside what Trent Lott thinks? This is the guy who helped lose the Senate majority by supporting and then losing control of Vermont’s former squishy-left Senator Jim Jeffords, who defected from the Republican Party and made Tom Daschle the majority leader. This is also the guy who is, more than any single living politician, responsible for giving the left fodder to use against Republicans whom it thinks are racists. He was a big-spending, big-government nightmare as majority leader, and the Republican Party and the people of Mississippi are much better off now that he is retired.

More to the point, we guess, it strikes us that these people – Lindsey Graham, Trent Lott, former Bush speechwriter David Frum, and their ilk – have no idea whatsoever what went on in this country over the last two years. Yes, it’s true that the Tea Party candidates in a handful of Senate races performed poorly. But Tea Party candidates in other Senate races saved the nation from the ignominy of “Senator Charlie Crist” and a re-elected “Senator Arlen Specter.” The Tea Party is also, for the most part, the reason why the

opposition to Obama was so animated, so motivated, and so successful. It is highly doubtful, in our estimation, that the GOP would have had the support to take the House, much less the Senate, in the absence of the Tea Party. Does Lindsey Graham really think that the voters voted last week for more soft-centrist, “maverick,” go-along-to-get-along business as usual? If he does, then he is sadly mistaken. Last Tuesday’s election – and indeed the entire election cycle – was a repudiation of Graham and his type of “centrism” as much as it was of Obama and the Democrats. That Graham is incapable of seeing this is hardly surprising, though it is certainly telling.

The worst thing that could happen to the Republicans now is for the likes of Graham to get their way and for the party’s Congressional contingent to defer to him. You want to see a third-party in 2012, Republicans? If so, then line up behind Lindsey Graham. If not, then line up behind his fellow South Carolinian Senator Jim DeMint, who may have backed some unwinnable Tea Party candidates in a handful of races, but who also understood the political forces at play in the electorate long before and better than almost anyone else in his party.

The third and least intuitive but possibly most important reason that this obsession over the allegedly underperforming Republicans is so pathetic is because it is both pointless and distracting. As *Politico* noted in its coverage of Lindsey Graham’s temper tantrum, the disputes among the various factions of the GOP are “long-simmering.” These tensions are nothing new, in other words. They have merely been exacerbated by the growth in the party’s Congressional contingent.

As long as we can remember, the GOP coalition has been “on the verge of collapse,” with moderates and conservatives tearing each other apart. Strangely though, the “inevitable” collapse never comes. In bad times, the moderates rail on the conservatives for “driving out independents”; and in good times, the moderates rail on the conservatives for being crazy or selfish and thereby driving away the independents. This is the same old senseless finger-pointing dressed up in new, Tea Party clothes. The only thing that is

different this time is that the self-styled “moderates” have been rather uniformly rejected by the Republican base, and they appear to be the only ones unaware of this.

Our usual response to all of this trite, selfish foolishness would be to shrug and ignore it. But there are, as we’ve said, a handful of reasons why this infighting might be more significant than usual. One that we think escapes most analysts – specifically because the bitter members Republican establishment are making such drama queens of themselves – is the fact that the newly shrunken Democratic Party does not appear to have any of the same issues currently, which is to say that the Democratic minority is far more unified in purpose and ideology than was the Democratic majority.

What this means, then, is that while the Republicans are fighting with each other, acting out, and sucking all of the air out of the room, the Democrats are moving hard to the left, which could have serious future repercussions. As the *Wall Street Journal’s* James Taranto noted last week, the Blue Dog coalition, comprised of “conservative” Democrats, was nearly destroyed in last week’s election:

Of the 54 members listed on the Blue Dog website, only 23 have been re-elected, with another 2 leading still-uncalled races. Twenty-two lost their re-election bids, with another trailing, and the remaining 6 retired – all of them to be replaced by Republicans.

Most Democratic seats in districts won by John McCain or George Bush have switched hands and are now controlled by Republicans. All of this is to say that the “conservative” wing of the Democratic Party is now virtually nonexistent in Congress. And with greater ideological homogeneity, the Democratic caucus can now cause greater problems, specifically for the man who is the wounded yet still undeniable head of the party, Barack Obama.

Recall, for example, that according to the *Washington Post’s* Bob Woodward, Obama didn’t send the full contingent of troops requested by generals in Afghanistan because he didn’t want to make Congressional Democrats upset, knowing that without their support, he couldn’t prosecute the war at all, much less with any success. Lyndon Johnson’s biggest problem in prosecuting Vietnam was the fact that his own party abandoned him and the war effort. Obama has sought to avoid a similar fate, and has managed to do so. Until now.

Now, the left is in charge and has nothing to lose. There are no conservatives to protect, no swing-districts about which to worry, very few Blue Dogs whose complaints have to be addressed, or even heard. The likelihood of capitulation and defeat in Afghanistan has just gone up greatly, as the “progressive” wing of the party has consolidated its relative influence, even as the party’s influence as a whole has diminished.

It is worth noting as well, we think, that if the new Republican majority does, in fact, tear itself apart or, worse yet, give in to the party’s establishment, then the small, far-left Democratic minority could emerge as a majority in a three-way race (Democrats vs. moderate Republicans vs. conservatives). This is precisely the situation we warned about last week, in our pre-election newsletter, and it would expand the influence of the left-wing far beyond what we have seen of late, which would, in turn, mean more turmoil, bigger government, and greater spending.

Is that really what guys like David Frum, Lindsey Graham, John Cornyn, and the rest of the Republican establishment want?

On second thought . . . don’t answer that. We’re not really sure we want to know.

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