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THEY SAID IT

A long period of calamity or decay must have checked the industry, and diminished the wealth, of the people; and their profuse luxury must have been the result of that indolent despair, which enjoys the present hour, and declines the thoughts of futurity. The uncertain condition of their property discouraged the subjects of Theodosius from engaging in those useful and laborious undertakings which require an immediate expense, and promise a slow and distant advantage. The frequent examples of ruin and desolation tempted them not to spare the remains of a patrimony, which might, every hour, become the prey of the rapacious Goth. And the mad prodigality which prevails in the confusion of a shipwreck, or a siege, may serve to explain the progress of luxury amidst the misfortunes and terrors of a sinking nation.

Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776.

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A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLES.

If one is looking for a singular chain of events that marks the emergence of the English-speaking world order, the Battle of Gravelines in August 1588 and the subsequent destruction of the Spanish Armada off the coast of Ireland the following month is likely as good a place to start as any. Yes, the Spanish rebounded well from their defeat, and the British Empire did not grow as precipitously for several decades. But at Gravelines, the Brits, under the direction of Lord Howard of Effingham and Sir Francis Drake, established the superiority of Queen Elizabeth's naval forces and began the drive toward near-complete global domination that would last better than four centuries.

Now you may think, perhaps, that our timeline here is a little off. After all, if you add 400 years to 1588, you arrive at 1988, which is long after the fall of the British Empire. And we did say "better than" four centuries, didn't we? So what gives?

Well, our math is perfectly legitimate, we assure you. You see, our interest here is not in the British Empire specifically, but in the Anglosphere and its particular institutions and unique and unparalleled domination of the foundations of growth, liberty, and prosperity in the modern world. The British Empire itself collapsed – or began collapsing – roughly a century ago. But its core values and institutions have been upheld and indeed expanded in the interim by one of the outgrowths of that empire, one that will, rest assured, be treated by history as part and parcel of the original endeavor.

It is no coincidence, as we have written more than once in these pages, that those nations on this small, blue marble that we call Earth best suited for liberty and prosperity are those that were either colonized by the Brits, and which therefore developed British political institutions, or those that were post-colonized by the Americans and which therefore developed Americanized British political institutions. From the UK to the US; from Canada to Australia and South Africa; from India to Hong Kong and Singapore; from Japan to South Korea, the most successful or potentially most successful countries on every continent are those that have developed their own democratic-capitalistic systems with Anglo-American overtones.

We are, of course, not the only one to have noticed the near-perfect symmetry between the British and American “domination” of the globe. In his successor volume to Churchill’s legendary *The History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, the historian Andrew Roberts put it this way:

Just as we do not today differentiate between the Roman Republic and the imperial period of the Julio-Claudians when we think of the Roman Empire, so in the future no-one will bother to make a distinction between the British Empire-led and the American Republic-led periods of English-speaking dominance between the late-eighteenth and the twenty-first centuries. It will be recognized that in the majestic sweep of history they had so much in common—and enough that separated them from everyone else—that they ought to be regarded as a single historical entity, which only scholars and pedants will try to describe separately.

One may argue about the specific day-to-day, year-to-year, decade-to-decade course of events in the progression of the four-plus centuries of English-speaking dominance. And certainly there are periods

and occasions during that time that are hardly worth celebrating and that, indeed, are a source of embarrassment and even shame.

But as a whole, the period of Anglo-American hegemony unquestionably represents the pinnacle of global civilization. And to those who argue against this notion, we would note that the previously eternal practice of slavery was largely destroyed under the direction of the Royal British Navy and, later, by the American Union Army. The similarly timeless practices of discrimination based on sex and class were largely committed to the proverbial dust-bin of history with the advent of British and American universal suffrage. Moreover, due largely to American agricultural advances, man’s everlasting plague of hunger has been overcome to the point where the nutrition-related disease that most vexes the modern, industrialized world is obesity. Of course, this modern world is far from Utopia, but under the guidance of uniquely British traditions, the historical Hellenic-Christian ideals of individual exceptionalism and liberty have largely been realized in much of the globe and have been actively advocated and encouraged in the rest.

Until now.

Of course, historical eras don’t last forever, and if you are looking for the end of this one, it strikes us that August or September 2011 may well be it. Naturally, it is hard to say for certain. And, in any case, “empires” and “eras” don’t die overnight. But just as the destruction of the Armada served as a reasonable approximation of the beginning of the Anglosphere’s dominance, so, we fear, shall the imminent defeat of Colonel Moammar Gadhafi in Libya and the equally imminent post-Mubarak Islamification of Egypt serve as reasonable approximations of the end of the Anglo-American period.

Why do we say this? Well, for starters, we can think of no other instance in history in which the dominant military force sought no concessions or prizes whatsoever in the aftermath of a successful war effort. Yet that is precisely what is about to happen in Libya.

Let us be honest. Were it not for American participation, NATO would not have been successful in aiding the Libyan rebels. And were it not for NATO, the rebels would have had no chance of taking Tripoli and, presumably, ousting Gadhafi and ending his forty-year reign of terror. All of which is to say that U.S. involvement was the critical variable here. And yet America's return on its investment in time, effort, fortune, and risk is certain to be almost nothing.

Much the same can be said of post-revolutionary Egypt. The "post" portion of that term, of course, likely would never have come about had the United States not pressured its longtime ally to give up power and yield to what the world was told was "the will of the people." But the United States did pressure said ally. And he did yield. And the results are all but certain to be equally as fruitless as and far more destructive than the results of the American aid in Libya. That is, in both cases the United States will fail to benefit from its efforts.

The first reason for this is that the United States has neither the will nor the resources to stick around and ask for anything in return. The second is that even if the first condition were met, the United States, under current leadership, is not ideologically disposed to demand the only thing that could truly be regarded as a long term benefit to it; namely some modest movement toward the adoption of those Western notions of civilized behavior that have been proven time and again to promote the material conditions necessary to the maintenance of a peaceful society.

And why is this? Because the Obama administration specifically and the Western Left more generally regard the very notion that any one culture could be better than another as outrageous. And certainly the idea that the culture of America, of England, and of Christianity could offer any advantages to any other cultures anywhere in the world is tantamount to blasphemy. In fact, the President of the United States himself put it this way not long ago, with not even a hint of embarrassment: "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe

in British exceptionalism, and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." For our part, we put it thusly nearly a year ago:

Obama's political predilections – his rejection of the "special relationship" with Britain, his world apology tour, his own obsession with America's wrongs and not its rights – are all far more easily explained by the fact that he is a liberal in the great tradition of the post-60s liberals. He is one of them, no more, no less . . . We [have] called Obama the first "post-Western" president in America, noting that he had always been "associated, both personally and intellectually, with the strains of American leftism that have always tended to see the United States and its Western progenitors as forces for evil rather than good in the world, the pseudo-intellectual types whom the late Ambassador Kirkpatrick famously described as the 'blame America first' crowd.

As such, the United States shall not derive any benefit to its own national interest in exchange for its efforts because its national interests are considered by its political elite to be morally flawed. At the end of World War II, American victory translated into Japanese democracy. On the Korean peninsula, American-provided stability also translated into democracy. Likewise in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. But Libya? Egypt? Don't count on it. That would be "imperialistic," after all. And we can't have that.

Unfortunately, there is also the pesky little problem of money. For, you see, the United States is, quite simply, broke. There is no sense in pretending otherwise. Moreover, there is no sense in pretending that even if the nation's politicians all got together and decided to take Warren Buffett's advice and confiscate every dime from every last "rich" person in the country, it would make any difference at all. There simply are not enough rich people running around from whom

enough wealth can be confiscated to make the nation whole again, even if such a thing were politically or morally practical, which obviously, it is not. For what it's worth, Burke put it this way:

In a fair distribution among a vast multitude none can have much. That class of dependent pensioners called the rich is so extremely small, that, if all their throats were cut, and a distribution made of all they consume in a year, it would not give a bit of bread and cheese for one night's supper to those who labor, and who in reality feed both the pensioners and themselves.

But the throats of the rich ought not to be cut, nor their magazines plundered; because, in their persons, they are trustees for those who labor, and their hoards are the banking houses of these latter. Whether they mean it or not, they do, in effect, execute their trust, -- some with more, some with less fidelity and judgment. But on the whole, the duty is performed, and everything returns, deducting some very trifling commission and discount, to the place from whence it arose. A perfect equality will, indeed, be produced, -- that is to say, equal want, equal wretchedness, equal beggary, and, on the part of the partitioners, a woeful, helpless, and desperate disappointment. Such is the event of all compulsory equalizations. They pull down what is above; they never raise what is below; and they depress high and low together beneath the level of what was originally the lowest.

To make matters worse, even if there were enough wealth to make the country whole again, it wouldn't matter. Our "betters" would just do it all over again, in a matter of a decade or so, just as they've done before. Kipling knew their kind well:

As it will be in the future, it was at the birth
of Man
There are only four things certain since Social
Progress began.

That the Dog returns to his Vomit and the
Sow returns to her Mire,
And the burnt Fool's bandaged finger goes
wabbling back to the Fire;

What this means is that with troops in Afghanistan and Iraq already, and with a "blame America first" president in the White House, the United States lacks both the resources and the will to advance its interests in places like Libya, Egypt, and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, which is about to become the Arab version of Somalia.

It remains to be seen if this inability to advance the fundamental beliefs and interests of the Anglo-American world is akin to Rome's abandonment of its 400 year occupation of Britain in 410 A.D. for the same reasons. It also remains to be seen if China will be able to take advantage of America's cultural and economic exhaustion to advance its own cultural and economic interests globally. After all, China has both the money and the will; the latter being driven by a shortage of natural resources, a resurgence of nationalism, and no concern whatsoever in the niceties of bourgeois morality.

We will, of course, continue to address this question in these pages. In the meantime, we will offer the following thoughts on the subject from a piece written by Mark Steyn in last January's *The New Criterion*.

Today the people who have America's bonds are not the people one would wish to have one's soul. As Madhav Nalapat has suggested, Beijing believes a half-millennium Western interregnum is about to come to an end, and the world will return to Chinese dominance. I think they're wrong on the latter, but right on the former. Within a decade, the United States will be spending more of the federal budget on its interest payments than on its military.

According to the CBO's 2010 long-term budget outlook, by 2020 the U.S. government will be paying between 15 and 20 percent of its revenues in debt

interest—whereas defense spending will be down to between 14 and 16 percent. America will be spending more on debt interest than China, Britain, France, Russia, Japan, Germany, Saudi Arabia, India, Italy, South Korea, Brazil, Canada, Australia, Spain, Turkey, and Israel spend on their militaries combined. The superpower will have advanced from a nation of aircraft carriers to a nation of debt carriers.

What does that mean? In 2009, the United States spent about \$665 billion on its military, the Chinese about \$99 billion. If Beijing continues to buy American debt at the rate it has in recent years, then within a half-decade or so U.S. interest payments on that debt will be covering the entire cost of the Chinese military. This year, the Pentagon issued an alarming report to Congress on Beijing's massive military build-up, including new missiles, upgraded bombers, and an aircraft-carrier R&D program intended to challenge American dominance in the Pacific. What the report didn't mention is who's paying for it. Answer: Mr. and Mrs. America.

Within the next five years, the People's Liberation Army, which is the largest employer on the planet, bigger even than the U.S. Department of Community-Organizer Grant Applications, will be entirely funded by U.S. taxpayers. When they take Taiwan, suburban families in Connecticut and small businesses in Idaho will have paid for it. The existential questions for America loom now, not decades hence. What we face is not merely the decline and fall of a powerful nation but the collapse of the highly specific cultural tradition that built the modern world.

Now, we would love to sit here and tell that this can all be fixed and that all it will take is for the Republicans to nominate a real sh*tkicker next summer to go out and beat Obama and set things right with the world. But we can't tell you that. And it's just not true.

Obama did not get the United States into this mess, just as the degenerate Emperor Commodus didn't precipitate the fall of the Roman Empire all by his lonesome. Men such as these are nothing more than the festering sores that signal a disease within the body.

One man (or woman) can make a great deal of difference; it's true. But America's exhaustion is both the liability and the responsibility of the political class as a whole. Obama overstates the case routinely, because he lacks the character to take any responsibility for his role in exacerbating the nation's woes, but the fact is that George Bush did indeed do his part in spending the nation into debt. And the GOP, for all its yammering about cutting budgets and saving the nation, has still done very little that demonstrates any genuine seriousness about cutting budgets to the point where the debt can be handled in a way that allows for the maintenance of national interests abroad. And that doesn't even address the matter of entitlements.

Longtime readers will undoubtedly know that we share Steyn's doubts about whether the Chinese will be up to the task of filling the void left by the decline of the Anglo-American empire. In fact, we would maintain that the likelihood of this being the "Chinese Century" is about as great as the odds of it being the "French Century," which is to say nil.

The question for us is whether the American political class can get its act together before the world devolves into chaos and old night, to borrow a phrase from Milton. Or, if it can't, whether the American people can fashion a competent new political class in the midst of the inevitable crisis.

We're skeptical on first count, but considerably less so on the second. Time will tell, as the saying goes.

ELVIS PRESLEY, ALGORE, AND THE ANCIEN RÉGIMES.

We'll spare you an explanation of why this is the case – mostly because we'd like to spare you the peek inside our . . . umm . . . “creative process” – but lately we've found ourselves rather fascinated by some of the old, de-classified FBI files and particularly the old files on Elvis Presley. It may sound strange today, but ol' Elvis was once quite a critical topic of study for the FBI and a particular favorite of Bureau Director J. Edgar Hoover. It turns out that those people really didn't like the crazy rock-n'-rollers and especially didn't like Elvis, who incited such anger and revulsion in them that they actually viewed him as a bona fide national security threat. We are not making this up. Perhaps the most famous and the most amusing evidence of this hatred for and fear of Elvis can be seen in a letter to Hoover from a source who was reputed to be a former Army Intelligence officer. Among other things, the letter accused The King of being a “definite danger to the security of the United States.” It continued:

Indications of the harm Presley did . . . were two high school girls . . . whose abdomen and thigh had Presley's autograph . . . It is known by psychologists, psychiatrists and priests that teenaged girls from the age of eleven, and boys in their adolescence are easily aroused to sexual indulgence and perversion by certain types of motions and hysteria, – the type that was exhibited at the Presley show. There is also gossip of the Presley Fan Clubs that degenerate into sex orgies . . . From eye-witness reports about Presley, I would judge that he may possibly be a drug addict and a sexual pervert.

Our reaction to some of the Presley documents had two components. First, we were frankly amazed at the anger, the paranoia, and the radical hatred that the King generated among the establishment class of his day. We knew, of course, that there was considerable objection to rock-n'-roll, based both on assumptions about its sexual connotations and its presumed racial

heritage. And we knew that Elvis in particular drew a heightened amount of attention for his “dancing.” But the stuff in the FBI files reveals something deeper, something darker, something far more outraged and hate-filled than we expected, particularly given that Elvis's purported crimes against humanity were relatively tame by comparison to those that followed only a few years later and wouldn't even register on the outrage-scale by today's standards.

A big part of this, of course, is that Presley paved the way for those who followed. He broke down barriers, pushed against the standards, expanded the bounds of what was “acceptable,” and made it possible for others to go further – *much* further – than he had. And this, of course, is why he was so detested. He was the vanguard, and not just to those who would come after him. Those who sought to protect the existing order understood that he was the vanguard as well, and they hated him not just for everything that he did, but for everything that his successors would do as well. They sensed – whether intellectually or merely viscerally – that his encroachment on the civic norms would, if allowed to stand, lay the foundation for the destruction old order. To any outside observer, therefore, their reaction to Elvis seems absurdly excessive, histrionic even. After all, the guy was just wiggling his hips. But to them, their reaction was not only essential but appropriate regardless of its form. To do otherwise would be simply to accept the obliteration of what they saw as their way of life.

The second part of our reaction was that this all sounds horrifyingly familiar. Consider, if you will, the following, which comes from a *New York Times* piece dated just over two years ago. And as you read, note the similarity in the “threat,” the urgency in the plea, and the obsession of the supplicant:

The changing global climate will pose profound strategic challenges to the United States in coming decades, raising the prospect of military intervention to deal with the effects of violent storms, drought, mass migration and pandemics, military and intelligence analysts say. Such climate-induced crises could topple governments, feed terrorist movements

or destabilize entire regions, say the analysts, experts at the Pentagon and intelligence agencies who for the first time are taking a serious look at the national security implications of climate change.

Recent war games and intelligence studies conclude that over the next 20 to 30 years, vulnerable regions, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South and Southeast Asia, will face the prospect of food shortages, water crises and catastrophic flooding driven by climate change that could demand an American humanitarian relief or military response . . . Lawmakers leading the debate before Congress are only now beginning to make the national security argument for approving the legislation.

Senator John Kerry, the Massachusetts Democrat who is the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and a leading advocate for the climate legislation, said he hoped to sway Senate skeptics by pressing that issue to pass a meaningful bill.

Oh dear.

Want a little anger? A little hatred? A little resentment to go along with the “national security” paranoia? Well . . . OK. In a recent meltdown at the Aspen Institute, former Vice President Al Gore declared that the media manipulation model used by tobacco companies:

was transported whole cloth into the climate debate. And some of the exact same people — I can go down a list of their names — are involved in this. And so what do they do? They pay pseudo-scientists to pretend to be scientists to put out the message: ‘This climate thing, it’s nonsense. Man-made CO2 doesn’t trap heat. It may be volcanoes.’ Bullshit! ‘It may be sun spots.’ Bullshit! ‘It’s not getting warmer.’ Bullshit!”

Heavens. Someone get that man a massage!

We could go on with Al Gore almost indefinitely, we’re afraid. Just last week, for example, the poor dear compared global warming “skeptics” to the racists of the pre-Civil Rights generation. Would this latter group include his pappy, we wonder?

In any case, we want to get off the topic of Al Gore and move on because climate change and its skeptics aren’t really even the subject of the most hateful angry rants these days, although there is considerable overlap between those who are and the skeptics. We hardly need to tell you, we suppose, that those who are really and truly hated these days are the members of the Tea Party. According to the Vice President of the United States, they are terrorists. According to the former Chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, they can all “go to hell!” According to the mainstream press, the political class in Washington, and establishment-types everywhere, the Tea Party is a threat to civil order; a racist entity bound and determined to destroy Barack Obama regardless of the cost to the country; anti-Americans who wallow in selfishness and hatred and who would rather destroy the political system than see a black president succeed.

Of course, what we know is that the Tea Party is merely the vanguard.

The truth of the matter is that what the Tea Party has done, what it has asked of this nation’s elected officials is anything but radical: a little common sense, some discipline, and a reasonable amount of restraint when it comes to spending other people’s money. But the ruling class doesn’t see it the same way. To them, the Tea Party represents an attack on all that they hold dear, everything that they value, their entire way of life. The Tea Party is a threat to the government featherbed, frankly, and they want no part of it. Indeed, they want to kill it in the cradle and prevent it providing an example to others who may come after it and who may wish to push the proverbial envelope even further by, say, demanding that the federal government be constrained again by its Constitutional authority. How dare they?! How radical!

Remember Anita Bryant? She was the singer, turned orange juice spokes-model, turned anti-gay activist. In the late 1970s, she too railed against a seemingly minor crack in the old order – a Dade County, Florida law that would prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation – and wound up becoming a symbolic figure in the gay rights debate. The same year as she took on the Dade County law, she criticized and was criticized in return by activists in several gay pride parades throughout the country, not the least of which was in Miami. She took a relatively minor attack on the status quo and turned it into an incredibly big deal, precisely because she saw it as an advance attack on the entire old order.

Now consider the following, from WAOW News (an ABC television affiliate) in North Central Wisconsin:

Labor Day parade organizers confirm that no Republicans will be allowed to participate in this year's Labor Day Parade.

Council president Randy Radtke says they choose not to invite elected officials who have "openly attacked worker's rights" or did nothing when state public workers lost most of their right to collectively bargain.

A minor attack on the status quo. Turned into an incredibly big deal. Precisely because it is seen as an advance attack on the old order. Plus parades!

We don't want to get too carried away with parallels here, because they are not precise. But it is clear, we think, that the reason that the establishment – in Washington, in Madison, in Austin, and the nation's newsrooms – are so upset with the Tea Party and with various conservative insurgency officials is because they represent a real threat to the existing order, not necessarily because of what they themselves may be able to accomplish, but because they will, like Elvis Presley or those who sought to eliminate discrimination against gays in Florida, set the stage for others who will come after them.

We have, of course, been calling the Democrats the "new reactionaries" for better than a decade now. And this display of reactionary paranoia and rage merely confirms our hypothesis. In an essay on liberalism last December, the intellectual and author Walter Russell Meade concurred as well:

In America today, while "liberals" and "progressives" still are sometimes out there on the barricades for some truly liberal and important values, most of what passes for liberal and progressive politics is a conservative reaction against economic and social changes that the left doesn't like. The people who call themselves liberal in the United States today are fighting desperate rearguard actions to save policies and institutions that are old and established, that once served a noble purpose, but that now need fundamental reform (and perhaps in some cases abolition) lest they thwart the very purposes for which they were once made.

That "liberals" are not so liberal these days is hardly surprising. They "won" the entire last century. And they have the government to prove it. And they'll be damned if they're going to let anyone take any slice of that government away from them, no matter how small or how seemingly insignificant. They know what the end game is, and they will do everything they can to prevent it.

"Rage, rage against the dying of the light," Dylan Thomas urged. J. Edgar Hoover did. Al Gore does. And so does the rest of the liberal establishment. They will *not* go gentle into that good night.

We don't care, really, if they go gentle or not. Just so long as they go.

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