

69,660 words

217 pages @ 320/page

The Uncertain Decade:

The young are looking into a decade that may end up more storied than the 60's. It has emerged very quickly on the back-end of the Clinton Bubble and is characterized by four major events: Sept. 11th terrorist attack, Election 2000, Dot.com/Internet, Economic decline in high-tech sector, dot.bomb, corporate malfeasance, etc.

In retrospect the 80's and 90's, during which the young grew up, were more Camelot than the Kennedy years. There was peace, power, prosperity. Two populist presidents dominated the political scene. The fractured skirmishes from the remnant of the political left elicited laughter and were seen as a form of entertainment rather than thoughtfulness. The only exception to that was the anti-Apartheid movement that was successful in helping overturn the dreaded practice in South Africa. America grew smug and arrogant; both the government and the people. In fact, it reached such proportions that it took both over ten years to figure out they were being attacked in a war. The 80's and 90's could be termed The Big Snooze.

It's impossible to predict what will or will not happen. A certain type of giddiness always breaks out in America even with the bombs going off. It is padded and privileged and thankfully so. However, the privilege of the American people requires that they do magnificent things rather than trivial things. They've never figured this out or, no one has taught them this. Be prepared to fight for your survival and be prepared to do the extraordinary. That's the message that should be sent to the young.

"Now, you have been initiated into the wicked world; now you must grow and develop toward a free and good life."

The Bush Administration is criticized for its cowboy rhetoric in rooting out Hussein. It may be obnoxious but it works. I don't think President Bush is addressing the rest of us with his rhetoric. I think he is addressing Hussein in language Hussein understands. The United Nations could never have gotten Iraq to welcome back inspectors. Iraq flipped the UN the bird whenever it could. So, now the ball is in Hussein's court. If he complies he's held onto his power and all the egotism he's capable of wants to stay in power. If he makes a mistake, Bush has UN sanction to go in and remove him. Is that not the very definition of leadership? Had Hussein done nothing Bush would have had his hands tied. Now, they are released.

That's not to say Bush will not made a terrible mistake along the way. We hope not. But, in his encounter with a tyrant he's proven much more resolute than his predecessor.

There may be legalistic reasons that sanction an attack on Iraq but experience tells us that there are untold consequences as well. And most of them are bad. The best thing the Bush Administration can do is put extreme pressure on Hussein and his administration, monitor his activities, make it clear what activities will bring on intervention and then let things take their course. Hussein may already have his bags packed. He may already be in Gstaad for all we know. The head we raise in victory may be that of a double. In an absurd world it is appropriate I suppose.

It boggles the mind, looking back now, that not more attention was paid to the [first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993](#). In fact, a curious pattern can be seen. The bombing of the PanAm flight occurred in the post-election of 1988 of the senior Bush. The first World Trade Center occurred in the first year of the Clinton Administration. The September 11th attack occurred in the first year of the George Bush Administration. One could come to the startling conclusion that something, some force was testing each new President, a tactic well-known from history. Khrushchev tested [John F. Kennedy in 1961](#) with such ferocity that Kennedy was visibly shaken.

The first attack of the World Trade Center was potentially so much more egregious than the attack in 2001. The bomb was set at the foundation so that the buildings would collapse one on top of the other, killing tens of thousands of people. Not only that but a cyanide bomb was supposed to have gone off to spread poison

over that section of New York. That would have killed many more.

We wouldn't go so far to say that Clinton shirked his duty but both he and the first Bush did not recognize that we were at war. If there is anything like the "arrogance of power," it's being so smug that it doesn't even recognize when its under attack!

We are at the beginning of something that puts us at an oblique angle of where we were just yesterday. The Clinton Years were bubbly without question. Even the interns had something of the bubbly about them. The one artifact to survive the bubble is a stained dress with some brilliant but murky DNA in it. And President Clinton will be judged fairly by history and relegated to the middling sphere of Presidents and the "bubble 90's" of our era will be irradiated into nothingness. That's not our concern. We want to try and understand the oblique angle we stand on today after the bubble has burst.

We are under attack. If the terrorist networks get swifter and tighter and more resilient like the AIDS virus, then the future doesn't look bright. If the networks are dependent on a small cadre of charismatic leaders and rogue states to protect them, then the problem will be handled fairly swiftly.

America should prepare to be tested. Her enemies will look for the most vulnerable points to harm her economy and morale.

It's difficult to get into a war-footing with no visible army. What is necessary is full exposure of these networks, how they operate, who sponsors them and the rest. Many of the [reports I've read](#) are on the frightening side.

The terrible thing that one sees when they are studying patterns is that since the acceleration of technology and capital during the 20th century, western liberal democratic cultures have been under attack. And they have been under attack by tyrannies who rally the masses around a "more perfect past and its glories." Fascism was certainly that way. Communism was that way. And now Fundamentalism. [Islam has had a great and glorious past](#). We don't want the predictable to become the inevitable.

[Previous Events...](#)

Listening to the good, heart-felt discussion about diversity and affirmative action it's apparent that the old progressive era is gone for good. An idea thirty years in the harness can not be sold as either an ideal or a solution. But, generally, the problem for all those who want strong, active domestic programs is two-fold. One is the condition of the current economy. And the second is the "war on terrorism." Now, politics may be able to slice and dice an issue and wrangle about what sort of war it is; whether it is a war, who's lying and who's got the hidden agenda, and who is naive, etc. Certainly, that belongs to the crude art of politics. However, it is experienced as a crisis as long as people have an image of the planes flying into the buildings and a knowledge that progress implies evil as well as good. We know that the weapons will get nastier, more efficient, more portable in the future. The question is, "will the U.S. be a target?" A question raised at this level activates that survival instinct that seems so lacking in a big, fat, comfortable or comfort-seeking culture like this one. And so the sort of ambience that created the progressive era of the 60's and 70's is quite gone and will not return for quite awhile. Neither Donohue nor Gore can save liberalism. Even the best liberal among us, the good Bill Moyers, can't do it. It's got to fold-in, go back to the very basics, build up very humbly and then meet the crisis that will test the nation in the next few decades.

Fears will paralyze the ability to build a future. We would like the fears expelled so we can walk with a good, sober-mindedness and not let the fears influence the great decisions ahead.

The question that can be addressed and will be, certainly for the 2004 election, is, "can the US create goodwill again?"

On that question we could muse about many things.

Posted June 20, 2003

Events As We See Them

The Democrats are in serious trouble and need a radical change to be effective in the first quarter of the 21st Century. They need to purge themselves of ethnic politics, feminism, a good deal of environmental assumptions. They need to develop a new thesis that strikes to the heart of a culture filled with middle-class property holders.

They have really been in trouble since President Clinton became one of the better Republican presidents in recent memory. Clinton sounded the death-knell to the Democrats by ending the welfare state, siding with business over labor on NAFTA, balancing the budget, and declaring that, "the era of big government is over." A huge institution, like a national political party, can not change overnight. Its habits of thinking are rubbed into the grain until its very identity is based on those habits.

They're in trouble for the foreseeable future because the baby-boomers are getting old and conservative. And we know as the old become conservative they turn out the vote. The elderly baby-boomers will be a formidable block in the coming decades and will easily thwart whatever the old liberal, Democrats come up with. Secondly, the young people don't want to be saddled with the ideas of the Vietnam era. It's 30 years past. When I was young and someone tried to argue passionately about ideas of another generation, they lost credibility. The young want to actively participate in something that they can shape. That's why the Internet is so important to them. They are the active agents and much of their legacy will emerge out of that. But the Democrats are still back in the Vietnam era, despite Clinton. The infrastructure of the Democratic Party is still back in those times. The academics never left it. So, the Democratic Party is being punished for staying pat and not moving forward, not changing, letting go, admitting wrong, taking up new vitality as is expected in most institutions.

Another possible trend is this. As the Hispanics gain more control in the Democratic Party, the African-Americans may switch their allegiance to the Republicans. Due to their history, the Republicans would have to artfully court the African-American vote and offer something substantial to them. That's a trend to look for in the next decade or so.

Modern, classic liberalism emerged from the New Deal of the early 30's. It received a jolt of adrenaline in the 60's with JFK and LBJ. It was continued through Nixon and through Carter. Reagan was a transformative figure because he convinced the majority of people that "govt. was the problem." He convinced people that the welfare state was an evil. And the welfare state became the liberals Vietnam. It was something that could be argued for, supported by ideas and idealism, but the argument blinded its supporters to the facts. This happened to the Republicans during Vietnam. Clinton was not a transformative figure. Clinton really merged into this antithetic flow that arose as a reaction to the 60's. The 80's and 90's picked up many of the seeds of the previous era but dumped out a great deal and created the need for a new thesis.

The Democrats are in trouble because that thesis hasn't been created yet! The first decade of the new century will search for that thesis without question. Every political party, no matter how pragmatic it appears, depends on a variety of ideological roots to make its arguments and formulate its policy. The Democrats are firmly rooted in an old left that requires politics to be divided between warring classes. This has been taught from grade school on up. It connects with the New Deal period, the era of depression, where the poor outnumbered the wealthy and the middle-class was sliding quickly downward. It connects with the New Left period of the 60's when race and gender were politicized in an attempt to capture large new constituencies. It has petered out in the last ten years and has no more life left to it. The root is wrung out. The root is dangling like a lit fuse. The root has burrowed down into a grave.

The Democrats always relied on the intellectuals for the above reasons. But the intellectuals made a fatal mistake in the adrenaline of the 60's. They felt confident that the 60's was the beginning of something that would not end for a long time and would result in the triumph of the intellectuals over, especially, the priest/minister class. They threw out the pursuit of truth for the pursuit of power and it resulted in one of the more bankrupt periods of intellectual life in the United States. They became, as a class, sorry lessons rather than powerful leaders who were going to transform the culture in their image.

The Democratic party can repair itself if and when the intelligent class humbles itself and pursues truth once again. It will have to purge itself of every vestige of Marxism. It will have to embrace the dynamics of American and western culture. It will have to look for a long time for those seeds of development that need nourishment as the Republicans decay in the first quarter of this century. More hopefully, it will begin to develop a core philosophy based on the strength of the American experience and not on its shadows.

What has to be renewed are the attributes that form the core of what it means to be a free, liberal democratic citizen in a nation that started as an anti-empire, anti-state, anti-authority enterprise and now finds itself the big stick in the world. This is the central question entering the 21st century and it simply does no good to

define those qualities through gender, race, religious faith, class and the rest of it. What qualities does the person have to be inside of and living out to uphold the promises of a free, liberal democratic culture? That has to be at the core of the political questions of the day.

It is an open-ended question. It begins with self-reflection and the ability to see all other traditions of freedom and liberalism in the last several thousand years. It admits that freedom is often a leap in the dark; it is open-ended. It is dangerous to the steady state theory of human culture whether of left or right.

The [Trent Lott affair](#) is a case of a politician who carefully prepares his head for political enemies still smarting after the mid-term election fiasco. He is gone. The segregationists have been held up as the backward, ugly people they were and are and everyone feels good about it. It's fun to see the Democrats try to rally around this episode and demonstrate that they, too, can play hardball. And the most absurd political condition arose since the Republicans wanted Lott to go away somewhere and the Democrats wanted him front and center, "Majority Leader of the Senate." Well, the man is gone and good-riddance. The lesson the political class has learned: Utter not one word about race. The discussion of race will now become a series of humorless platitudes.

The Republicans are in a tough spot here. The savvy ones realize that they will need to win over a larger percentage of black voters in the coming decades. In fact, were they to do so they would ensure power for themselves for quite awhile. But, then they have Trent Lott's in their midst. Of course, many Republicans would not only like to be segregated from African-Americans but from poor people, immigrants, urban intellectuals and a host of others. The truth of the matter is that we live in a hugely segregated society. The law doesn't permit artificial barriers to the basic freedoms of life. The segregation is purely income rather than race. The income-segregationists are the most powerful group in the land and always mix with their own kind, no matter what color they are.

Every powerful leader who took up the segregation cause was humbled and brought low by the grace of God. When nature contains so many contradictions this is often the case. And I suggest people read the [inaugural addresses of every President from US Grant up through the Plessy v Ferguson decision](#). Every address implores, even begs, the American people to integrate the freed slave into the larger society. It takes up a huge portion of the remarks.

Many of the policies that were initiated in the 60's to end segregation have worked, worked well, and it's a pleasure to live in a culture where any man or woman can dream and struggle for that dream. No one wants it any different.

In my lifetime the [civil rights struggle was as noble a fight as we have witnessed](#). It supplanted the worker struggle of the 20's and 30's as movements of necessity, albeit, with nearly impossible goals.

The problems now exist in a category that is as old as Ur; that is, [poverty of men, women, and children](#). Why is there black poverty? Why is there white poverty? Why is there brown poverty? These are the questions that the political system needs continually to assess. It was disastrous for the civil rights movement to argue that black poverty was a special type of poverty because, in all likelihood, all poverty is a special type. In the rural valleys I'm familiar with the whites, offspring of settlers, were devastated by the loss of jobs in the railroad, timber, and mining industries. Old families rot slowly away. The poverty is similar to the poverty I witnessed when living in west Berkeley: men make money from dope or are addicted to it and commit crimes to get it, the women have babies at fourteen and get on welfare. There is domestic violence, low or no education, and continual health problems. This is a condition of poverty and not race perse. It is condition that requires a national program that isn't in place at the moment and won't be until the terrorist threat has abated.

How to alleviate poverty without reinstituting the welfare state? That is the creative question thrown out to those who are serious about making a difference.

A change has to take place because in the 40 years we've witnessed social events, we've seen a surge and counter-surge of politics and programs that have bitten their own tail and are back, again, at square one. Things are a bit better but only because the economy performed well for most of that time. And, in fact, if an argument can be made that bringing the poor into the working and middle-class helps the whole economy, it is easier to push the program to those who actually vote in elections. And that argument has been persuasively made by all types of people. It will just be tougher to argue the case based on race alone. Where is the leadership that connects all poverty and designs sound policy to try and alleviate it? It's not Jesse

Jackson. It's not Ted Kennedy. It's not Bill Clinton.

It's very difficult to recommend to the Democratic party that it should end racial politics but if it's serious about the egregious poverty in the US, that cuts across all lines, it will certainly mute it. And it has a great problem on its hands if the more radical elements of the party are able to saddle it with the bogus "reparations" issue.

The issue of race is an impossible one. The fact that race is transformed into political myth by both the left and right should send a signal to all that it is an impossible issue to deal with. That it is an issue used by manipulators, hate-mongers, con men, and sick souls is a very telling thing. Every man and woman must dream and take up their self-interest and use the resources well and any artificial barrier dismantled. What political myth never articulates is the difficulty in attaining anything. That is part of the allure of the myth. And it creates mob rule or mass politics without fixing anything.

The best corollary for it is the union movement, another necessary movement. But, workers never make enough money and always have lousy bosses. It's at that point where the worker him or herself has to think about moving on and finding out the resources that permit it. No political myth will get them there. Likewise, there is no magical cure for the disadvantages African-Americans have in this society. The only solution is for African-Americans to start producing dynamic experiences, positive experiences, and offer a legacy to the young that is powerful. That is well under way and will continue through this century.

The political myth provided by a civil rights movement works only for a time. The unions, too, became very corrupt and lost their political credibility because of it and its influence dwindles to this day. The union movement was never going to take the average worker and make him an upper middle-class professional. And the civil rights movement can not take people beyond entrance into the middle-class. And since there will always be poor blacks there will always be the shout in the hallway that will continue until no one wants to listen anymore. The civil rights movement became an existential cry of despair that could not be transformed into practical policies most could agree with.

The Democrats argued that, well of course, you have racists over there in the other camp and until you do something about them there will be no real progress. That was the reason to politicize race and make it more than a redress of grievance; something intimately connected with the destiny of each American. But, the American is usually the first to throw off any such politicization and so the Democrats were pinned into a corner where they will, apparently, die on the vine, Trent Lott notwithstanding.

The great social movements always create permanent values. The civil rights movement is no different. The women's movement is no different. But then, it runs into the same problems as all other organizations. It must sustain itself, it must transmit itself, it must grow or perish so it finally disintegrates under the impossibility of going further or gets discredited through corruption, or the value it raised stares them in the face and says it's time to let go and move on.

It's amazing what freedom will do to people; how it will give them incentives they never thought possible. This is the genius of America and it worked in the race area. The only place it fails is poverty; that terrible demon that wracks the world from one end to the other. And as long as poverty is seen in terms of race it will not bring forth any bold proposals.

Previous Events:

Liberals and Nuders

It's not unusual that something born out of genius, like the American political system, runs down, even burns out, after a period of time. The genius is its ability to revive and reclaim lost virtues, lost energies while focusing on the present and future. I experienced this once in the late 70's, the post-Watergate, post-Vietnam era when even the President made a famous speech about the "[crisis of confidence](#)." The exhaustion of liberalism at that time left the field open for the conservatives who exemplified a lot more political vitality. But, it's beginning to burn out itself in the post-2000 election period.

It's very difficult to approach politics logically or theoretically. And to approach it like a crazed madman attacking some stick in the ground he takes for a devil is, finally, a losing battle. The best approach is that of a sober-headed person who studies the problems rather than the politics. We have spent almost a full century in understanding ourselves as sexual beings; we have spent very little in trying to understand

ourselves as political animals.

Ah, we wish to maintain a value that this other animal wants to destroy or replace.

The Democrats are lining up their candidates for the '04 election. The first stigma they try to shake off is the word liberal. That it has become a bad word the past several decades shouldn't be a shock. Liberalism depends on two elements missing today: An enlightened generation, and charismatic leaders. The three most charismatic were shot down in the [space of 5 years in the 1960's](#). No one, in the liberal camp, has come near to the Kennedy's or King. In a way, the old-time intellectual liberals were gunned down, too, by the radicals who stormed the barricades and took over an institution not prepared for them. The radicals destroyed every hope they could discover in the liberals in the belief that the culture needed a wild leap, an instant transformation, from one state to another. Most of the liberal hopes undermined the radical myth and so had to be deconstructed and vanquished from the campus. Simply because the radicals are now wandering dazed around campus, wondering why things didn't quite work out, doesn't mean the liberals will return. Nothing is leading the current generation out of its own stupidity and torpor. It doesn't feel the necessity. It will, predictably, abandon its bizarre distractions and want nothing but stability, security, and economic growth. The few who have any desire for enlightenment depend on the fabled 60's period that their teachers have told them about. The smart ones will see through the charade or will become disillusioned and move on. The civil rights movement and feminism were swallowed by neo-Marxism. The culture has picked up new, excellent habits in treating people with respect and encouraging them to express their potentials. The old movements, dare we say it, have become rather decrepit. But, we are not going to beat a dead horse. We will inspect the dead horse to see if there are any lessons in its death.

One chief cause is that the American intellectuals suckled at the dried up breasts of Europe. The great traditions of Europe died in the 20th century under the pressures of [communism](#) and [fascism](#). The European intellectuals saw the death of Europe and, with it, their ability to change anything. So, they turned against everything. Our naive, inexperienced intellectuals swallowed the disgust whole and it turned them into fools. The truth of the matter is that America is in the nascent stage of its development as a world power. It's not at the end of anything. It has much vitality and dream and hope left in it. The Euro-American intellectuals can't fathom the fact.

[Old-style liberalism](#) needed a hopeful, charismatic leader like JFK or FDR. It needed a belief that America had stalled, thwarted by its contradictions. It doesn't need the Clintons. It doesn't need the Gores. It needs for the academics to go back to the basics and establish a more realistic relation to the society they are in. To, at the very least, get enough confidence in their abilities to leave off the putrid teats of old Europe. We have gone through a profound and fascinating period of time where the radical idea has withered on the vine. The sky is clear again for all kinds of interesting thoughts.

All that remains is personal animus, disguising itself as political ideas. A progressive era will return in the 21st century but only after solid, new ideas have been cultivated. A good progressive era is a shot of adrenaline through the massive nation-state. It saves it. But then, the adrenaline is absorbed and passed out of the body. The semi-tragedy is that the progressives, themselves, never seem to get this. And after the adrenaline? Security, growth, stability. The center. Clinton.

Politics doesn't end, obviously, but it moves from the head to the belly.

* * * * *

The conservative argument that the "[media is liberal](#)" leaves us cold. They should be scolded like naive children and reminded that the media exists to critique power. And the people get the critique they deserve. If they are dumbed-down and ignorant they get the types of critique you can find in any 2nd rate advocacy rag. If they demand something from the critique, as many citizens do, they can actually approximate objectivity and get a greater sense of the dynamics in play.

Journalism is the guy who is riding in a car and suddenly hears a noise from under the hood. He's not going to ignore the noise to appease the car gods, the car-selling gods, the technological gods. He's going to pull over, open the hood, and check what the noise is and what impact the noise is having with the operation of the car. The conservatives want him to ignore the noise while singing the praises of the car manufacturers and engineers who built it; along with the processes that brought the car from a raw state to a finished state.

The problem for journalism is that, like politics, it's dependent on an angle of attack that wears out. The angle of attack is dependent on the intellectual life at any given time. When it wears out, the people tire of the critique and watch games or good-looking women or cartoons. Many of the journalist blogs remind me of

this. Many of them carry the weary thoughts of their professors on their backs. The furious abstractions thrown up against the walls of the government or down among the littered people does little good. If you are not going to explain the policy, explain why your political animus reproduces the sound of hyenas.

And if politics is only a mask for an eternal war let us see evidence that you understand the nature of this war and that you seek, as all peace-loving people do, to transcend the condition of war.

* * * * *

A quick look around forces us to come to the conclusion that the culture is divided between the frightened and the frightful.

We only know that in the absence of the structure of governance now in place we would war with each other in a desire to impose our own form of governance on anyone we could. So, we mark the system of governance as a good, imperfect as it is. It is healthier when the frightened and the frightful are kept at the edges, inside their lonely rooms seething against the corrupt world or plotting some minor crime that they believe will transform the world overnight.

* * * * *

Politics is often the expression of sickness rather than health.

One of the skills of the citizen is to prevent getting infected from the poison dumped into him or her by the politics of the day. Few escape wholly intact.

When people say that politics is "dirty" "underhanded," even, "sick," they are saying that it is neurotic. What is diagnosed as neurotic in the private individual is manifested in the light of day by political pressures. It appears a great deal is going on when in reality nothing is going on.

Learn from the neurotic at least that lesson.

What occurs in an organism when it "spins its own wheels" while effecting nothing? We believe its rooted life has been severed. And all the growth obtained above the rooted life decays and withers. This is, too, the fear of the neurotic as he watches this process occur in his own mind. He can ingenuously paint the brown, withered leaves green and he can offer up a bit of rubber tubing and call that a root and he will trick himself in believing that it is so; but all the while he will be smiling through hell. And, eventually, the truth will be known. It is as simple as calling a dead plant dead. "Let the dead bury the dead," which is the dare to all those who would enter a new life. Of course, the neurotics among our religious brothers and sisters accept the first image they secure in their mind and then go about trying to convert everyone else. The first image fades, breaks up, falls away into the pressures of failure and disillusionment until little is left but doubt or a strong belief in horned devils behind every pair of rather sad eyes. In the end, this type of neurotic political animal becomes a clone of some authority figure while spouting the blessings of freedom and spirit. And, at their worst, they become "ravening wolves in sheep's clothing." It's this type that emerges more frequently.

* * * * *

When the rooted life becomes severed, a man is unceremoniously thrown into hell. A man in hell will convince himself, after awhile, that, all in all, it's not so bad. And he will chirp, "with the power of naming things still intact I will exercise my freedom and call this place heaven or, at least, the door to heaven. I will name my way to heaven! That stink rising up? Sweet ambrosia. That slimy fiend crawling along the wall? A beautiful cocoon ready to open itself. That hideous, thrashing noise of hammer on anvil? Entertainment, my friend, entertainment!"

Criticism is one of the entertainment's for those in hell.

* * * * *

The era which nourished me is falling away. I see it all going away. I welcome most of the change as healthy and good; necessary to prepare for the difficult decades ahead.

The era of one's youth is collapsing; may it fall well and with some grace.

If we live another 25 or 30 years we may see another turning. What is new, now, will disintegrate like the suit

on some deadman, dead 30 years. We hope we see the turning. We know this era will play out some of the seeds implicated by the daily life we see around us.

Re-invigorate the categories of freedom, individuality, responsibility, thought, imagination, etc etc.

* * * * *

One of the best exercises to leap out of the soggy events of our own times, is to read excellent newspaper accounts of other periods of time. For instance, the headlines that lead from [Chancellor Adolph Hitler's infamous speech attacking the Versailles Treaty](#), as he pulled Germany out of the League of Nations, to the dropping of the atomic bomb just twelve years later, puts our present situation in a bit better perspective. Now, America is faced with an uncertain, even demoralizing threat but one that appears can be managed. There is not the sense of doom and panic that gripped the world during that twelve-year period. America, at that time, had very little control over world events. It was isolationist, licking the wounds of the Depression. Europe had been the center of world power for several centuries and when Hitler threatened Europe, he threatened every shred of order that existed at the time. We feel uncertain about our time but feel very confident that, eventually, we will control the situation.

Just three years after Hitler's speech came the [Spanish Civil War](#). Then a few short years later Hitler moves into Austria and threatens the Sudatenland. And, two years later war breaks out. Hussein, who likes to fashion himself a Hitler or, at least, a figure of world note, brutal and savage as he is, is more a pest and finally must be dealt with. A dangerous pest considering the weapons he wants to possess and the situation with oil. And as we read about the Battle of Africa in 1942, one of the prime objectives for the Nazi's were the middle-east oil fields.

World War II remains one of the seminal events in world history. The only comparable event, in our time, to match it for importance was the adventure into space. Many people who are mystified by the emergence of America as a world-power need to understand this episode, these 12 years. The other 12 years to study are the years between the [assassination of JFK in 1963](#) through the [fall of Saigon in 1975](#). These were very significant years because America struggled with itself over the position it had won through W.W.II. Are we going through a similar 12 year period? In other words, another very significant moment that will define an era? Perhaps.

* * * * *

Of course, the past has its wonderful absurdities as well. Take the farmer in Long Valley, NJ who, in 1936 tried to organize anti-nudist rallies. "Searles, using binoculars, spotted a plump woman, wearing only a floppy straw hat. The corpulent woman waddled within 100 yards of the ambush and then splashed into a creek. Then two fat, bald headed men hove into view, entirely unclothed. When they came within throwing range, Searles whooped, leaped up, and hurled sticks at them..." All this while the Civil War was raging in Spain. Searles was upset at the "nuders," for moral reasons but his crusade was kicked into high gear when two people hurt themselves, craning necks from a car and a ladder to spot the nuders along the creek. Let us hope poor Mr. Searles didn't make it to our era. where the nuders are public figures making millions of dollars.

Fortunately, nothing is inevitable. What we'd like to see, rather than dramatic events, are long-term plans to transform the energy system and a more ambitious plan to explore the stars.

[Affirmative Action](#)

I don't have a great problem with [affirmative action](#). The continual mainstreaming of African-Americans is a positive value that has been created in the past 30 years. I do have a problem with musty, creaky policies that seem to do more bad than good. I have a lot of problems with a political party that wants to support the old policy rather than come up with something new and imaginative. The problems and needs never change but neither does the necessity to continually transform policy as one era supplants another.

When affirmative action came into being in the early 70's it was viewed as a mild remedy for an impossible situation; that is, what to do about the repression of African-Americans throughout American history. The thought, at that time, was that what was needed was a stable, black middle-class, a professional class, that could provide the model for young blacks, as well as provide more complexity in the black family. Very few people objected. The objections began when colleges and universities started promoting a more radical view

of the African-American student. Apparently, the last thing the academics wanted was a large, bourgeois African-American population, more interested in taxes, schools, protection for children, and investment in small business than ["identity politics."](#) That's the perception. Whether it's true or not is anyone's guess, but perception plays a huge role in politics.

Some began to ask, "where is the effort to build a black middle-class?" in the midst of identity politics? The "identity" always had the tacit understanding that it was "anti" to those who they perceived had harmed them. How could anyone expect to take that attitude into the real world and work well and successfully with that same group?

So, after awhile, affirmative action became a pure political play. It began to resemble the [old spoils system that corrupted in the mid-19th century](#). Even more ominous, it began to look like a new caste system built on new political myths. If a person is fully defined by their race, then the die is cast. How can I escape such a fabrication? And why should I? I would only try to escape it if the fabrication had any power. And I would escape those who would want to impose that fabrication. So, while it may have power on campus, it doesn't have much power in middle-class homes, even in those brief moments when the kids are on campus.

It's a result of the identity politics of 30 years, even 35 years ago. It could only have made it this far in the hermetically-sealed campus. It was a kind of revenge of the intellectual class for not gaining the power they wanted.

We think every effort should be made to mainstream the African-American population and increase their odds at success. The effort was too heavily weighted on the public policy side and not enough on the development-of-the- individual side. Now, all the individual is equipped with, when he or she leaves campus, is a way to rationalize their first failures. At that moment, life begins to look like a vicious cycle and the poor misfortunate person does not leap up to the next level. This happens to all people, of course, but because of the politicalization of the African-American, they wear the hairshirt more often. And make no mistake about it. The hairshirt was manufactured by the new left who easily took over the civil rights movement when it couldn't survive in the real world and had to move back to the campus.

Tax payers don't want colleges and universities to radicalize anyone but, rather, to send them all off into the happy hunting grounds of the middle-class. In fact, if this were happening now I don't think there'd be a great grousing about it. And, in truth, it's very difficult to argue against a situation that needs a remedy.

My instincts tell me that if the universities would dismantle their ethnic studies programs, the middle-class would not be so upset about affirmative action. And, again, one of the great problems is that the goal was lost sight of. The goal was not to "diversify the campus." The campus is a place the vast majority of people pass through. It's a better place for diversity but that was not the goal of affirmative action. The goal was to produce a generation of decent, bourgeois black men and women, in good professions who would provide the stability the African-American group needs. That was the purpose and, like all good things, was side-tracked by the radicals who were hungry for the raw ingredients of political power.

It serves as a lesson to policy makers: When you make your policy have an exit strategy in place because the political fortunes will change.

One could beat the university to death I suppose but, for being the smart guys, they acted very dumb in the last 30 years. They promoted the idea of the "victim," and politicized race and gender, and tried to rationalize it through very suspect philosophies; philosophies that were being abandoned the moment they were taking hold on American campuses. It's one of the most disgraceful periods of time in academic history. Of all the peoples in this nation, the African-American needs to be taught to see him and herself as part of a large, real society that wants that person to develop their potentials to the utmost degree. To get to that point a person has to cross a threshold or two and it's not possible with the philosophy of victimization in place. At the first failure the victim has a perfect alibi. They need not do anything else.

Ending affirmative action isn't going to solve any problems. But there won't be any solutions forthcoming until you move these tired old radicals out of the road and let the air breathe again. They will not let go of the ideas that brought them to power; they resemble petty tyrannies rather than liberal, democratic institutions.

The experienced person asks this question, "If families can not solve the problem of inequality, how can huge nations?" Equality is not the key. The key is connecting people to the organizing principles of the culture and encouraging them to develop freely toward their goals. I am not equal to Bill Gates because he focused himself on his interests and reaped the reward. I am not equal to Michael Jordan because he focused on his marvelous talents and developed them and reaped his reward. The complex inequality that makes up this

society is the result of desire, opportunity, talent, sacrifice, imagination and a host of qualities that can't be guaranteed by public policy or wrenching private identities into political ones. The tragedy is that these qualities are worthless unless the person is connected to the organizing principles. And, tragic even yet, some parts of the educational system have taught alienation as a badge of honor. Some have even tried to develop a tribal culture with the tribes coming together occasionally to agree and disagree about policy. This fantasy could only take place on the dole, so to speak. When the dole dries up and the political fortunes change, the illusion collapses. To see how all of this has ruined a generation of educators, scholars, and some of the students is disheartening.

Back to the melting pot, I suppose.

The other thing people forget is that, no matter how you slice it, one group feels very "victimized," and that is the lower middle-class whites. And before long they will find representation in the political world and affirmative action will be seen as the worst form of elitism, concocted by white liberals who desperately need to exert power somewhere or else they, too, will view themselves as the dreaded victim. And that would be too humiliating to bear.

Let go of the past. Bury the stupid myths concocted out of a red-hot vacuum 35 years ago. By not doing this, the progressives look like the desperate Nazi army, turning back toward the Allies and fighting the Battle of the Bulge. They know it is one last stand.

IRAQ

In the infinite array of discussion, charge and counter-charge, one thing is overlooked. America is the only power that can afford to be prudent and wise.

The [UN report by Blix](#), signaling that no weapons of mass destruction could be found is a potential blow to the Bush Administration. They are going to have to bring out intelligence data that substantiates some of the claims about anthrax, botulism, and the other agents or, else, risk being branded an empire in the eyes of the rest of the world. They need to focus, laser-like, on the production of biological and chemical weapons.

Hussein can be contained but then the Bush Administration gives every indication that it is willing and able to, not simply take out Hussein, but to commit American resources for 10 years in that region. There has to be something more. Many raise the specter of oil but I don't think that's the case. It may be a factor but it's not enough to initiate this invasion. Revenge for the attempted assassination of the President's father might be among the true motives. It's something that would weigh-in but wouldn't be the central reason. The central reason to go into Iraq is to set up intelligence operations in that very strategic area and, eventually, restructure the middle-east. From Iraq, intelligence could keep tabs on Iran, Syria, Pakistan, and more importantly, terrorist groups in their recruitment and operational activities. Eventually, the plan would be to restructure the middle-east away from its medievalism and bring it into the West, much as Japan was after World War II. Is it a bad thing? It's a very risky thing that could only be contemplated in a country with too much power and time on its hands. It's something to look at in the aftermath of what is most probably an attack in several weeks.

And, it's doubtful that the American people fully understand that American troops and tax money are going to support Iraq for at least a decade.

The scenario that is brewing could only come out of an intelligence community convinced that unless the US restructures the middle-east, the terrorist threat will grow and pose a grave threat to the future of the United States. The strategy seems to be to force the action and get the networks and their sympathizers tied up with the American military in their own arena. That would be an effective way to keep them from American soil.

Immediately, one distrusts those who don't show any evidence of wrangling with a difficult question. The anti-war groups are full of empty slogans and ignorance. The attack-at-all -cost group is full of frustration at the hatred thrown against the country.

But, the undeniable fact is that the United States is the great power in the world. It can isolate Hussein, monitor him, contain him until he cracks, makes a fatal mistake, or finds himself in a fractured, rebellious government. Kudos go to President Bush for carrying the big stick and forcing the action. The United Nations did not impress Hussein. The military might of the United States, moving toward the Gulf, does

impress him. And now U-2's fly over Iraq and the UN inspectors are in the front door. The President exhibited leadership ability in going thus far.

But, when an issue of this complexity comes into being you need to put the good and bad on either side of an equation sign and see if they add up. The negative, seems, at this point to be overwhelming. The blood shed, the spontaneous outbreak of anti-Americanism, the threat to oil through an attack on [Ras Al Khafji](#), possibility of Iranian incursion to regain territory lost in the Iran/Iraq war of the 80's, the permission it gives to Hussein to defend himself and his govt. "by all means necessary," the absolute certainty that the American people will have to re-build Iraq for decades at the cost of billions and billions of dollars, a renewed spirit of American hatred by the Islamic terrorists that would last many years, fractured alliances in Europe, deep division in our own country, among other things that seem likely. And the positive? One, aging tyrant gone from the scene (perhaps) and his ability to develop WMD neutralized. That is, unless Hussein has an escape plan in place and will leave Iraq, along with a good portion of those biological agents.

It could be that the Bush Administration has convinced itself it's the necessary path, after September 11th. The old world has swung a trap door behind him, after he's deployed the troops, but the focus on Hussein is sufficient at this point. It was much more likely Hussein was going to do something crazy before September 11th, 2001. Now that the intense focus in thrown his way he's like a little puppy dog. And that focus will continue until he gives up the ghost one way or the other. America and the allies are not going back to a lacksadaisical attitude for a long-time; not as long as the ability to manufacture, transport, and deploy some of these weapons still exists. Hussein is counting on it and hopes that the military planners will call off an invasion after April. That may happen but the US and, perhaps, United Nations will deploy a [cordon sanitaire](#) around Iraq until the problem is resolved. It's the oldest maneuver in the book; [the siege](#).

Even the insular Bush Administration must understand how tragic, for all concerned, an attack is at this point in time. We understand the hatred of the world. We understand a good deal of it is orchestrated by tyrants, secular and religious, who use the ancient trick of deflecting attention from themselves by developing a common enemy. We understand these things. But, it doesn't remove the singular fact that we are the power in the world and are the only ones who are capable of acting prudently and wisely.

The American people, as well, need to look at themselves. What fear went through them on the report of a heightened terrorist alert! So, they go out and buy all the duct tape in the world and look like fools in the process.

I think, however, the blame game does no one any good. A real danger exists that in the 21st century, groups and, even, countries who have an animus against the US or wealthier nations or neighbors will acquire these demoralizing, highly disruptive weapons partly rationalized as, "the equalizers." This very dangerous scenario has a lot more chance of being played out than the Armageddon between the Americans and Soviets during the Cold War. So, the President and other powers have to act decisively and put the law down. There's no question, in my mind, that the terrorists have been testing the resolve of the US and west, generally, for a long time. It impressed them when [Reagan moved the troops from Beirut](#). It impressed them when the senior Bush and Clinton viewed the Pam Am attack and the first World Trade Center attacks as law-breaking rather than acts of war. In their own mind, they were at war. They were emboldened by all this.

Invasion, at this point, is not the answer. Isolating Hussein and mandating perpetual inspections and U2 flyovers is a good way to put the law down.

Vigilance is very necessary during these days. There are sound arguments for not invading Iraq at this time. They rely on the notion that we will not get rid of weapons of mass destruction and that we will suffer economically and more hatred will fuel more attacks and innocent blood will be on our hands. These are compelling arguments. A powerful nation like the United States has to take these arguments seriously.

There are sincere people who question the wisdom of the policy. There are some questions, though, that they need to confront: Is the situation in Iraq going to get better by doing nothing? At what point is it prudent to change the regime by military force? Is it when Hussein violates the UN mandate? Is it when it is discovered he is talking to terrorist groups and financial transactions are taking place? Is it when we wake one day and a dirty bomb has gone off in New York, paralyzing the city and shutting down the economy?

Is Hussein another Hitler type who has used the legitimacy of state to further a mad fantasy for power? And will his "appeasement" lead to the destruction of, perhaps, thousands and thousands of people? These are the difficult questions of our time. Simply spouting "peace" is not enough. Or, for that matter, shouting, "war."

The lack of an easy answer adds to how final and absolute the decision will be. If nothing else, it emphasizes why the President is so significant a figure and, why, ultimately, every vote counts.

We need to think about and address the question of, "what is the responsibility of the only remaining "super power?"

Is it American arrogance or the perception of how fractured and weak the rest of the world truly is? And that most especially includes western Europe. Surely, the old world understands the necessity of engagement and the dangers of isolationism.

President Bush's presidency is hanging in the balance. The Republican domination of government is hanging in the balance. He has been punished by a world community that didn't like his attitude from the beginning of his Presidency. Unless more evidence is mounted against Hussein, Bush will lose a great deal by invading. During Hitler's rise, reporters and observers were alarmed by the re-militarization of Germany. It was self-evident and out in the open. If President Bush is certain that the stores of biological weapons exist, then he will be justified in going in. But, if nothing is discovered? And is the President committed to the reconstruction of Iraq? Is the American people? I don't think so. The Bush Administration has been playing a high stakes game; betting that another horrific attack on US soil will be more damaging to the Administration than the untold difficulties of an invasion into Iraq.

We come back to the one fact: We are the power. Therefore, we can afford to be prudent and wise. If we act like inexperienced, frightened children then that power, eventually, will be taken from us. Each incident, each confrontation with a problem as complex as this one we are dealing with today, reveals whether we are children or citizens of a great power; a great and good power.

Presidential Elections and other Stories in the Meat Market

Some casual thoughts about the election a year and a half away:

- Every citizen should be able to account for every penny of the resource.
- Can government respond to crisis?
- Is consensus possible?
- For every ladder on which a candidate is climbing, there are half a dozen puppet masters at the top.

When thinking about the President you can't depend so much on the broad, general policies since that is formulated elsewhere than the character of the President. What is necessary to discover is the quality of attributes necessary to run a govt. Among these are the ability to see impending problems, listen and synthesize points of view, inspire leadership, and bring the best out of people.

We always raise the simplest questions: What is the state of the nation? Some say that the American era is over and that we have crossed the threshold between problems and the resiliency needed in the body politic to solve problems. There must be a ratio between the available stress applied on the resources of a nation and the ability of the nation to renew itself, to renovate its institutions and so forth.

If it were easy it would have been done long ago.

Some indicators to reveal whether it is in a decline:

- Are the major decisions for the nation made within its boundaries?
- Is the Constitution still adhered to?
- Can one go over the document paragraph by paragraph and recognize the nation as something born from its spirit?
- Is the nation a slug-a-bug?
- Has it slowed because of economic decline?

- Are enough people getting the right education and adventuresome enough to deepen the resources of the nation?
- Are people, journalists, politicians and so on, identifying the major problems and attempting to solve these problems?

No one likes the size of the nation because the demands to understand it exhausts people. And exhausted people do not want to learn or to think or to be bothered one way or another.

The federal government, in my lifetime, will never become the sugar daddy again.

After awhile it becomes obvious that the politicians and their advisors are aiming their messages at a fairly low to middling area, much like TV and other popular arts. Those who are vain enough to think they are intelligent must discover for themselves the purposes and the substance of the politicking.

On one side of the equation is a huge bureaucracy; an enormous fund of resources, a great variety of powers and responsibilities, all duly constituted and upheld by the will of the people. On the other side of the equation are the men and women who want control, temporary control, of those powers and responsibilities.

History says that it occurs in the face of overwhelming evidence that the word and the deed are two completely different things. The word is simply a cheap counter in a game played by skilled technicians. The deed is always watered down by compromise and the counter-deed that arises in political reality.

It occurs to the casual observer that government, at least in the U.S., has been in a state of disgrace for thirty years. The experience of the younger generation in the 60's was not a benign one. Their fathers and mothers had experienced government as a positive good, as a beneficent force in the throes of an economic catastrophe. But the boomer generation has experienced government as a maleficent beast that brought us Vietnam, Watergate, complex tax laws, competition for capital that drove many out of the housing market, corruption and malfeasance, secret police and secret excursions into other countries, assassination of foreign leaders, stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, social engineering, among other impressionable acts. It's no wonder that the private sector has been favored and carried the vitality for the past thirty years, while government has been a sick dog. And now, of course, false intelligence reports and Homeland Security.

We live in such an era and it defines us.

Things are due for a change but how will they change?

They will change when the people recognize that their success is an addiction and not a goal. That at the moment they become successful, they must discover the new path, the next horizon that will allow for more success and more progress. That it doesn't matter how big and sparkling things are if the soul is shriveled and bleak. And when the masks are all taken down there is nothing but the shriveled and bleak. In this sense neither the public nor private sector can do anything; only the individual citizen.

But since we do look at the inhuman, objective landscape in things let us make a few notes.

And we do not claim the soul is shriveled and bleak. How can we know such a thing? It sounds silly to say, how do we define these things? All we can say is in our experience we know the difference between truth and lies, between health and illness, between good and evil. Our impressions are not precise but they do lodge deep in us. We make no argument at all. We simply exercise our freedoms at the level they seek.

The overriding question for the election of 2004 is, "What is America's role in the world?"

One thing to watch for: The entrance of Hillary Clinton into the race with her husband right behind her. "Vote for one and get two..." It will resemble that paragon of political sophistication, Alabama, when George Wallace could not run for Governor and had his wife run instead. She won the election, opened up the new bridges, while George ran the show. For America to fall for it would be a real mark of decline. Of course, the road may be marked later this year, if the Terminator becomes governor of the largest, most powerful state

of the union.

Posted August 4, 2003

[Presidential Elections and other Stories in the Meat Market](#)

On this day, invariably, there's a spate of Kennedy memory. In the first years after the assassination enormous feelings came up; it's almost embarrassing to admit such a thing. The power of the event was comparable to the assassination of Caesar. And one has to remember that just 40 years after the death of Caesar came the birth of Christ. Those two events signal more change than all the change in gadgetry that we believe is blinding change in our own time.

Looking back at Kennedy, despite his weaknesses, I think he was a great leader lost at a crucial moment in time. It was such a huge, public event for one thing. The actual killing is on film which makes it even more incredible and unreal but then, realer than real. The violence and horror of it is worse as the years go by.

Kennedy often spoke the inspired truth, especially as he appealed to the young to keep to their better selves; nourish the good in themselves. He was a great leader because he had the opportunity to live out both the highest ideals and yet, as well, the realpolitik. He was not a profound thinker but he had a creative and innovative mind; something lacking in this period of time among the political class.

Of course, a nation shouldn't become fixated to a moment in time.

In youth I discovered high idealism and was astonished to see how some of Kennedy's phrases matched exactly with that feeling of idealism. That America is where dreams live and die hard. That our power must be tempered with beauty and poetry. That was Kennedy.

It's amazing how far one's thought can range. There was a period of time in my youth where nothing would have pleased me more than to see the wholesale change in this country; profound change of far-ranging consequences. The sad fact is that thought does not progress through politics. Description and rhetoric are not growth. Understanding leads to a precipice or a solid wall that can be very depressing.

The two distinct memories I have of that day, besides hearing the news of his death on a little transistor radio, was running down the driveway around 4 o'clock to get the paper and look at the headline with its huge, black letters and photographs. I also remember fantasies I had at night in which I "saved" Kennedy by finding out about the plot and getting to Dallas just in the nick of time. I forget how long this fantasy lasted. It was simply the most painful thing to me that Kennedy was dead.

One's own grief, if isolated, was quick and short. I can not remember, but there were moments during that week-end when I was not thinking about the death of Kennedy. I would walk away from a TV set and return to a more normal state of mind. The night Oswald was shot I had shut the whole thing down. I didn't want it anymore. I did not experience mature grief and didn't really know what it was because I didn't know what death was. That was the year I wanted to read *The Grapes of Wrath* for a book report but the teacher told me that it was over my head; which humiliated and infuriated me.

When I think about it, the actual death of Kennedy passed quickly in my consciousness. Within a few weeks the shock was gone. When his picture appeared on a magazine or name appeared in the paper there would be a clutch at the heart, almost a fear. I can remember feeling irritated when the whole process of grief seemed to linger on and on. By '64-'65 conspiracy theories had developed.

Over the years, I've grown to love the memory of the man.

Kennedy had advantages. There's no reason to be jealous of advantage unless it treats you like dirt.

The one great advantage Kennedy had was that he was born near power. This closeness to power gave him these brilliant political instincts that knew how to use people. He was not "alienated" from power so he could afford to be a realist. And once in power he could become idealistic. But the attitude, the overreaching vision out of the realistic instinct, was extraordinary and healthy; a boon for society.

One tires quickly of power, thinking on it. I saw its corruption in an instant of time and became too obsessed

about it. Power is corrupt; complex power provides the veils to protect corruption.

Is American politics corrupt? Yes. How exactly is hard to say. There is little real vision of "national interest" which transcends self or group interest.

It's best to understand politics or power as forms rather than as separate elements working in separate ways to produce something.

Understand it as forms that are perceiving and expanding toward the future.

Posted November 22, 2003

[Presidential Elections and other Stories in the Meat Market](#)

Politics is the least of our problems. Politics is eternal and fought between three types; those who have nothing, those who have everything, and those who have enough and don't want to lose anything that they have. Just about every variation has been sounded in the struggle between these types. It was that way in ancient China, in ancient Rome, in Louis IX France, in Bismarck Germany, in 21st Century America. The political animal sizes where he or she is at any given moment and gives loyalty to the voice that articulates that place in public.

And our goofy political culture is run by shallow, ignorant types like O'Reilly, Limbaugh, and the guy who did the dumb skits on Saturday Night Live. It doesn't count. It's an absurdity. What Jefferson and John Adams feared the most, has happened. The American people, swimming in luxury, have abandoned the political culture and are busy playing with themselves. And Jefferson predicted that when that happened, "the people will be devoured by the wolves..." And in those days, the wolves he referred to were the framers and founders of the government. Somewhere between the passivity of the people and the drug-induced rage exhibited by the California recall, exists some golden mean for the political culture.

What can we really say to people who no longer read? If we were ambitious or evil we could send codes of manipulation to the elite class that they could use to enforce their rule but we are neither ambitious or evil. Unlike the academics of our generation we have pursued truth rather than power.

In a unique political culture like the one in America, only the dreams count. And we don't mean those fantasies of power that many confuse with vision. We look at the astonishing transformation of dream into reality through technology and realize one of the great problems of political culture is the bankruptcy of the spirit; the evisceration of dreams. We once dreamed of flight. And now it is so. We once dreamed of leaving the Earth. Now it is so. We once dreamed of long, healthy life and it is so for many people. The eternal aspiration for perfect justice is as natural as the desire for food or God's grace. It is built into us and can be the driving spirit behind new dreams.

The political culture is much more wounded by the dominance of the corporation than it admits to itself. As Enron showed, the corporation is not a liberal, democratic institution but a autocratic one where five or six people can sabotage it. And yet the corporation has the ability to impose its value at every step, through every means. And so the people begin to feel that the liberal, democratic culture is their enemy because it is opposed to any sort of tyranny, including corporate tyranny. It certainly isn't that corporations must change or do anything but what they are charged to do. Increase their margins, create jobs, reward their stockholders. It's that the concept of a liberal, democratic culture, more vital than the corporation and its control of media, comes into the center.

That is, perhaps, the resuscitation of a dream rather than a new one.

Posted September 21, 2003

Heaven forbid that the experts would run our political system. In fact, we trust the instinct of the American people and understand their quarrels as well, at least, as they do. They understand that to be effective they have to keep the feet of politicians to the fire. But, a recall is disconcerting because it admits the failure of the people to do that very thing and, as a result, they get a puppet government for three years. A puppet government set up to ensure the re-election of President Bush in 2004. The favors given to the state of

California will come with many strings.

"Well, then, know-it-all, what is the answer?"

There's no question that the citizen is knarled on by the expert. Most people want to consult experts but not have them swoop down in official government cars to tell them what to do.

The people, for one thing, need to spend at least as much time thinking about problems, politics, and the system that rushes through them as they do to football and sex. The more abdication there is among the exhalted people, the greater is the need for experts to run things.

The American people have been described as apolitical. In reality, they are terrified of government and the complexity that greets them when they begin to try and understand it. This is at the core of one of the central problems of the democratic spirit in this day and age and why there is so much despair; why there is such a feeling of an ending. The crucible of the democratic spirit is that it believes it is always at the beginning. But, that beginning must be real, must be an actual beginning and not simply the rhetoric of the political class who have been taught to say such a thing.

The genius of the system is that nothing is absolute, nothing is fixed and permanent. All is transitory and in flux, including our ideas of the world and how to solve problems. In our personal lives we may not accept the impermanence of life but politically, it is necessary to do and to look at the crucial problems that grip the heart and mind of people.

And the extra burden for the American citizen is the necessity to look globally as an agent of his nation's place in history. We are now in history. We started as an anti-history, anti-empire sort of enterprise and now are smack dab in the middle of it and will be taken down by the old, ruthless, evil, conniving world if we don't get a bit prudent and wise. What does it mean for the government, as a state, to act wisely among other states? What are the authentic goals a state can have? What is the risk in acting? What is the risk in not acting?

The American is born with several assumptions. The first is that he knows everything and what he doesn't know is not worth knowing, even a bit dangerous. The many look like the proverbial hollow man: Stuff him with a little religion, a little politics, a little energy, a little desire for money, then place him on the great undulating plasma of the country and watch him go! The many, in this case, control the marketplace and the vote.

Democracy is not mass rule or mobocracy; it is the finest liberation of energy possible in the human being. It is the desire to liberate others out of the sheer joy of doing so. It is mutual aid. It is the overcoming of every barrier. It is a practice that we take seriously. We reject every communal repression that is trundled out in the guise of being "democratic..."

The more manipulative TV becomes, the more important newspapers and good magazines become. The frightening thing is just how much TV "teaches" the passive viewer that he is nothing but a satchel of opinion and prejudices dancing feebly around frightening images, complex events, and so forth.

The wise citizen is he or she who studies the systems that play through them.

Wise citizen, that studies the most significant objects of your era!

Posted October 17, 2003

[Presidential Elections and other Stories in the Meat Market](#)

What would the perfect President do? That is an impossible question since a President is always in relation to Congress, to other nations, to the public so a "perfect President" is merely the reflection of my own sense of, if not perfection, then reality. So the "perfect President" would do exactly what I would do if I was in the position to enact perfection.

Eventually, our sense of political reality is shaped by the party affiliation, by the candidates, by the press, by intellectuals of one stripe or another, and our experience in the economy. Our many experiences in the economy, one should add.

We jauntily accept the imperfection of the President as a man, especially now that the public sector is in a low state of esteem.

A more difficult task is in determining the [nature of the state of the union](#). How does anyone determine whether the state of the union is good or bad? Or, whether the state of the union is healthy or ill? Or, any combination of those.

If I'm living in a hut along the freeway, the state of the union doesn't look too good. If I live in a glass house among the trees it looks mighty fine. But even in these conditions one should be able to leap out of their specific state of being and be able to grasp the state of things, top to bottom.

I count six or seven generations of persons since the Constitutional Convention of 1787. That is the history of six or seven generations of persons; my daughter, myself, my mother and father, my grandparents, my paternal great grandparents who come here from Norway, the maternal generation before them who fought in the civil war, the generation of the Jackson era and frontier expansion, the generation at the beginning of the 19th century and the one previous to it.

1975- daughter

1950- myself

1920- parents

1890- grandparents

1860- great grandparents

1830- great, great grandparents

1800- great, great, great grandparents

1775- great, great, great, great grandparents

I have personally experienced four of these generations. The fifth one I know pretty well through photographs, the 6th one I knew because of their involvement in the civil war.

Certainly, a good deal of history passes through each generation.

The last one hundred years of American history is very palpable.

However, it is clear that the first four generations had more in common with the ancient world or medieval Europe than it has with modern America.

The last several generations have been caught in the "media age." We have little perspective of it. It is our womb and marks us off from the progenitors. However, it is an aspect of the three dominant agents that have taken us from bucolic America; that is, science, technology, and capital.

One can make a claim that appears outlandish at first: Four or five generations ago a change occurred where the machines got the upperhand and the people started to lag behind in spirit. It may be a wild, literary claim but sometimes it's painfully clear that our time will be remembered, not for any sterilizing human quality but for the technology it produces.

I am sure there are Washington's, Monroe's, Jefferson's, and Hamilton's walking around today but they have no choice in expressing themselves the way those gentlemen did six or seven generations ago. And that is the consequence of institutions that have crusted over and become mere machinery for the status quo.

Kennedy, JFK or RFK, may have been one of those exalted types since they had the desire to be, the talents and the opportunities but they are the last that I can see. Everything since has been pretty fallow, pretty shoddy, pretty low. And not the least reason for this is that the center of the culture has shifted from one of citizen responsibility to one of personal pleasure. And as long as personal pleasure is the center of existence you will produce a leadership class full of entertainers. Entertainers will contain the supreme values that the people surrender to. That is, the freedom from constraint. And we look at President Clinton's peccadillo's and President Bush's struggle with booze, along with the recent election of the groper as governor of

California.

This is the dangerous period that the U.S. is experiencing. It's as if we are attempting to drown out the sense of reality for the illusions of Hollywood or the sports field or the slick political operator. It will not, ultimately, happen. We are in the same position as the drug addict or sex fetisher; eventually, the game becomes deadly serious and one either fights for their survival or perishes.

It is the smart, secular portion of the citizenry that needs to wake up and move off the pleasure center and put some fiber back into their political lives.

Posted January 12, 2004

[Presidential Elections and other Stories in the Meat Market](#)

We will get nostalgic for another progressive era one of these days. A large one, like the infamous 60's, is many decades away and will sneak up with hardly a clue. Some kind of unpredictable convergence has to happen to make the times ripe for change.

In our time all the progressives can do is strip themselves bare of assumptions they carry from the infamous time and rediscover the society they want to change. I've also recommended beggar bowls and ash on the forehead to silently slip through the towns and cities of the fair land. But, it's just as well that the progressive types lick their wounds and start all over again.

Progressives depend on good ideas that are developed over decades. The infamous 60's had a two-pronged aspect to it. It destroyed the liberal, enlightenment foundation that had been the hallmark of other progressive movements. This foundation went back into European humanism, American transcendentalism, as well as American idealism. It championed the "little guy," the "underdog," and used a fundamental tactic of change; the "social arts." In other words, volunteerism, creative use of the tax code, welfare, training, and so forth. This was not a radical idea so much as one that connected the bottom with the top and moved the bottom toward the middle with incremental policies.

This brand of liberalism was smashed to bits by the radical 60's that wanted a romantic transformation of society, "all at once," through the tactic of politicizing every aspect of life. One would be forced to choose the road of progress or the road of reaction. This tactic doesn't work well in the U.S. because it is a fluid, dynamic culture where people's loyalties flip-flop and the self is rushed along in a wild growth that knows no bounds. In fact, the alert Americans begin to understand that they have a perfect right to throw off the Manichean beliefs of either the left or the right. And at that moment progressive movements are doomed unless they prove to be as fluid and dynamic as the culture itself.

They rarely are because they need a persistent world view and an unaltered picture of the "enemy," or the structure of power and this is incompatible with a democratic society.

Time moves on. The young become middle-aged. The media empties whatever propaganda it can on behalf of the generations belief, but it's thread-bare and the new-young rejoice when they throw it off.

In truth, though, the progressive era is usually the type of adrenaline that a nation-state the size of the U.S., can afford once or twice in a century. The rest of the time it returns to the steady-state and then decays until another era of adrenaline is necessary.

A good mind; honest and truth-seeking would try and assess the nature of the culture without a single desire to change it.

No true ideas have arisen in the American scene to deal with the complexity of problems. Ideas, that is, that would rally intelligent support and ignite their own brand of imagination. Such would be the necessary foundation for a new progressive era. And they will have to come from America itself and not Europe. That is the task of the American thinking class, still mired in one shining moment that came and went thirty years ago.

Posted November 3, 2003

A coup is occurring as I write this. It was initiated by the national Republican party who found, as they found

Ronald Reagan 40 years ago, an innocuous celebrity to do their bidding. This is not about Arnold or the state of California. This is about the 2004 election and the opportunity for Bush to take the most populous state in the nation. It's about national interests coming in and raping the richest state. It is about the unbridled greed of Republicans who voted en masse for a disaster, without one iota of conscience about what this will do in the future.

The Democrats had better get it together before it's too late and we have, essentially, one party running everything.

The coup has pointed to possible scenarios for a future dictatorship. For one thing, it is very evident that "branding" in the marketing sense is extremely important. If a personality is inside the mind of a critical mass of people, the chances of that personality winning them over is increased ten-fold. That's one reason generals make good candidates after successful wars. And the means to branding occur in the media. And who controls the media, controls the nature of the branding. At the point a personality is discovered all kinds of behind-the-scenes operatives sit around figuring out how they can use this personality for their own advantage. Once that is settled, they hire PR types to get the personality to say his platitudes with panache.

In this case, one can say the process destroys the heart of the democratic soul because it requires little knowledge from the people. In fact, they must remain ignorant if the show is going to go on. The people are mere cogs in a machine designed and operated by others. Where is the heart of democracy in such a set-up? And if Jesse Ventura and Arnold are the heart of democracy, then I would say we are in the decadent phase of our life as a democracy.

And so what is emerging in America is the very worst scenario: A huge, critical mass of ignorant, media-drunk people and savvy, nihilistic types willing and able to manipulate them for power. Therefore, the end of the liberal, democratic culture and the beginning of something that will implode within a century or two.

The spirit of a culture is the first to die. Later, come the consequences such as the ending of the Constitution and Federalist system.

What happened between the election of November 2002 and this summer? Money. Celebrity. Media. Viral marketing. These are the ingredients that went into the overthrow of a legitimate election. And if people are not worried about it, they are simply agents of their own demise.

Posted October 7, 2003

A brief impression of the major candidates for California governor as they present themselves in debate:

Arnold: Goofy, platitudinal cartoon character who reminds me of one of the angry super-heroes in comic books I used to read as a pre-teen-ager.

McClintock: Competent but should be running for the Governor of Louisiana or New Hampshire.

Camejo: A Berkeley guy who, like the Berkeley crowd, hasn't grown up in 35 years and still thinks that by taxing corporations you will solve all the problems. Don't corporations move from one place to another when they are taxed?

Ariana: Fiery redhead who has carefully plotted out her attacks and actually began to resemble an [ancient witch from Samos](#) during the debates. We don't, by the way, hold that against her.

Bustamante: A smug, inner-circle guy who is the Spanish-speaking replica of Gray Davis.

And will any of these people solve the problems of the state of California? There's not an authentic leader among them who could take a critical mass of citizens and get them to go in the direction he or she would want them to go. And with the people, go the legislators, and, eventually, the bureaucracy.

This is a good tune up for the Presidential election next year. It's never about issues, it's never about command of the issues. These are all done by other people. The candidate must appear that they have thought through some of these things and must be able to defend a statistic when another candidate throws out a contradictory statistic. The only question we need to ask from people running for executive office is, "[Will you provide leadership?](#)" Reagan had leadership with half the brain of Jimmy Carter. FDR provided

leadership while handicapped. Lincoln provided leadership while laughed at for his appearance. Martin Luther King provided leadership despite racism in and out of government.

The will to power is commonplace. The egotism to seek high office is rampant among many. The authentic leader is very, very rare. And without leadership you can not solve problems.

California, again, is pointing to the future; the future of a waiting catastrophe as years of neglect, dumbing-down, mass culture, corruption, come home to roost.

Posted September 25, 2003

There is a democracy in that the people are free to make a life; then there is a series of governing structures that mediate conflict and are an expression of the democracy at any given time. It's the interface between the freedom of the democratic person and the structure of power that is the fascinating one, especially in a robust democracy like America. Well, it slides between the side-show and Town Hall Meeting and it's always good to try and identify where it is at any given moment. In California we witness the side-show with the Woman with Huge Breasts, The Sex Orgyist Cum Gubernator, Snakes and Their Charmers, Man With Forked Tongue, Old Bellicose Radical, and a host of others under the Big Tent wanting to run the show.

Television, which is directly linked to vaudeville, is responsible for this without a doubt. The Vaudevillian nature of TV has turned everything into a joke taken seriously only by the mass manipulators behind it all. I would call them the Nihilists who emerged in the 60's and 70's when the culture burnt itself to a crisp. That was a period of time when authority absolutely collapsed due to Vietnam and Watergate and other indiscretions of the public sector. Anyone with a grudge, with resentment, with a claim against the society rose up and gained some credibility. The anti-hero emerged and was played out by the darling of the boomers, Bill Clinton, who found himself serviced by an intern while furtively looking around for the gardener; maybe Chauncy was spying on him. All of this occurring in the same office where Kennedy had dealt with the Cuban Missile Crisis, FDR with the Depression and World War II, LBJ had signed the Civil Rights Act with Martin Luther King looking over his shoulder, among other high-marks in that office.

The one fatal flaw for Boomers is that they took themselves out of the political picture very early and never returned. They were victims of the period of time they claim as their own. And what it did was eviscerate the public discourse and sign it over to the thieves, the grotesqueries, the nuts, the conmen and conwomen who know an easy mark when they see one.

The Nihilists were upstaged in the 80's by the Scairdy Cats such as the TV preachers. And, no doubt, those two types have dominated political culture and the larger society in the past 40 years. The Nihilists are gleeful because we live in an unprecedented world that can be taken by the worst in human nature; the Scairdy Cats are afraid because the values they thought so permanent are not.

The only way this will change is if you change the nature of the democratic citizen. It starts there. If you don't have good people and good citizens how in the world can you expect a good democracy? And good citizens begin with understanding that which confronts them.

Posted September 4, 2003

[The California Recall](#) resembles the ancient practice of mobs stoning one leader and raising up a popular guy to run the show. A whole century of Roman Emperors have been labeled [The Barracks Emperors](#) because of the non-procedural way they were brought to power. "Oh yes, Conan will save us from the evil magicians!" This is what politics has descended to because the people have allowed the celebrity and entertainment class to take over. The mass society and a liberal, democratic political culture are two different animals. And we live in a mass society. You could blame the educational system for not teaching the people how to develop their experience and knowledge, make it real, and thus laugh at the entertainment world rather than pour into it their hopes. We are now beginning to see the bad seed from the 60's and 70's era bear its fruit. The entertainment class began to assert itself at that time and has successfully entered the core of political culture. It is a classic case of the "revenge of the masses" as described by Gasset.

Isn't anyone concerned that the recall was instigated by a rich guy (Issa) so another rich guy (Arnold) could be put at the head of the most powerful state, with a third rich guy (Buffett) at his side, raising property taxes and, generally, opening California up to be raped by every powerful interest in the United States?

Who, in their right mind believes that creating this circus, creating new divisions, creating new chaos, will result in a better state? Only those who, by habit, change reality by changing the channel.

And it looks more and more likely that the race is between Arnold and Bustamante, who will have some problems of his own. He appears the biggest opportunist around and the remnant of state government still loyal to Gray Davis will do everything they can to sabotage him.

Nothing has changed much since the re-election of Davis in November of last year. He's not popular, he's not good. But, by applying pressure directly on him and his party to become better, California could remain intact and not subject to the exploitation surely to come if Conan gets elected.

Anyone who thinks California will be better after all of this is in love with chaos. People, that is, who have descended into irreality.

Posted August 18, 2003

Bits and Pieces before the Crowds Roar

The latest debate was not conclusive. Both men are tired of it and want to move on. One indelible impression however: Kerry looked and sounded like the president, Bush looked and acted like the candidate. In the final analysis that may be the fatal blow for President Bush.

However impressed the people are with looks, countenance, demeanor and the like they must always remember they are hiring a President; a big boss if ever there was one. And you don't necessarily want your boss to be your friend. Bush seems like an amiable guy and a good guy in some ways who has overcome some personal problems. But, where it counts he is woefully lacking and not fit to be the big boss. Obviously, each citizen has to reach their own conclusion about it. And it looks like it's evenly divided again. Is there any reason to worry about the divisions often referred to as the "cultural wars," or the conflict between the "reds and the blues?" No. After all, no one is shooting at the other party at this point. That's when you have to worry. Up to that point it's all human nature thrown against the impossible. One of the great redeeming features of this country is that power is diffused; power is shared. Local regions still maintain a great deal of autonomy. Therefore there isn't a sense of loss, for the most part, when my side loses in an election of this sort.

Praise to the architects of this system!

It makes a difference, without question, who wins and what the stakes are. But, in the long run truth wins out; the facts win out, the good drives out the bad; the bad reseeds in some new environment and springs up in front of the startled citizens and the whole thing fights again.

Personally, I think this nation would be lesser if southern Baptist fundamentalists were to gain the type of power they always seek. I don't see any other conclusion to reach but that they want the United States to become a kind of Iran. I always felt that in a free society the citizens are a lot better when they admit their limitation and weakness and go fill themselves in that part of the culture that is stronger where they are weaker. More secular education and secular forms of problem-solving for the Bible toting crowd; and more spiritual development for the secular crowd. For instance. Only truly free people, confident and joyful at the prospect of living in the future would hail such a view.

October 14, 2004

The central question to be asked is this: Who is accountable? Is it the president or the Senator? The President of the United States must be held accountable for the decisions he has made, no one else. And that decision included a rash attack in Iraq that proved to be unnecessary and, in fact, diversionary from the real problem. So, his decision has bogged the United States down in an area that will be very difficult to extricate from. And if the President is not held accountable, then who can be held accountable? It seems ridiculous to address a question like that at this late date.

President Bush was better prepared this debate, no question. But he appeared to be the attack dog chasing after the postman.

One can appreciate the way President Bush is trying to save his presidency. It almost inspires a feeling of pity as he sees his lead disintegrate. He attacked Senator Kerry effectively in some comments, missed by miles in others. The stem-cell research question, for instance, made the president look like a yahoo. It marks him down as one who would have defended the prosecution of Scopes in the 1920's.

He tries to convince the people that the ouster of Saddam Hussein was worth it, is still worth it, and will be worth it as more billions and lives are spent in the pursuit. He was counseled to be this way.

As we said before, the man is not stupid. He's empty but not stupid. And he has an instinct for survival.

But, if the President is not held accountable for his actions, who is? And what kind of democracy exists if the commander-in-chief can not be dismissed because he made some very fundamental errors? That is the central question. The attacks on Kerry are meaningless. President Bush wants the power but is in denial of the facts.

The apologists and spinners are the worst. If this is the highest attainment of American democracy, then the fair-minded say, "take it down and make a new one."

October 8, 2004

Some impressions of the debate last night between Vice-President Cheney and Senator Edwards:

We now know, for certain, who runs the country. The comparison between the President and Vice-President is striking and more revealing than between the candidates.

No matter how smart you are and how you grasp the facts, the public rejects the kind of mean, snarly demeanor of the Vice-President.

Senator Edwards, a totally unknown quality coming into the debates, withstood some withering attacks, was unflappable, poised, and always personable.

So, we have the most unpresidential person in modern history in office, unqualified, with a vice-president who is very smart, capable, knowledgeable but whose demeanor makes it impossible for him to be a leader of free people. People trapped in a corporation, yes, he probably scares the wit out of them. But, in a free society you'd better be personable and connect. He doesn't. It is one of the most awful teams in history. But, they have a real shot at winning, no question.

To be fair, the vice-president did score some points and as a debater came out even if not a bit ahead. But it's quite obvious now that people look at these debates for character, for demeanor, for confidence, and for connection to the people. And in those areas Cheney lost big-time.

Frankly, the Democrats have a problem with Iraq that the Bush team has exploited very well. However, it has happened before in American history that the people gave thought to ousting a sitting president during a war. That was Lincoln during the Civil War who was challenged in 1864 by the popular General McClellan. Historians note that in the summer of that year there was a real chance Lincoln was going to be defeated. Post-Gettysburg, the tone of the nation was surly and very tired of the whole thing. The Democrats were going to call for a cessation of hostilities. What turned the tide was the belief that won over Lincoln that "total war" had to be waged against the south in the form of Sherman's March to the Sea.

I hesitate to put George Bush's name next to Lincoln's but here we are. The problem for George Bush has been exemplified by the two debates. Cheney showed passion, knowledge, and that he understood the conflict. The President did not. And as we've stated before and put it down as an axiom, "if the commander-in-chief doesn't know, no one else does." And it's one reason Iraq has been such a botch despite intelligent, conscientious people in the White House.

October 6, 2004

So, the choice is clear at this point. And since the candidates graciously bowed out of the attempt to judge each others character we will do it for them. On one hand, a commander-in-chief-type who knows the facts, who can look at that many-sided thing called reality, can speak and show confidence and on the other, a little twerp who knows little and believes less. And the fact the little twerp has been president for four years matters little as showed last night. Three years of a "war on terrorism" have not sharpened this man, deepened this man, chastened this man or otherwise initiated that tough human condition, growth and development.

All it points out is what everyone knew in the beginning: He commands nothing and after the debate will not even command basic respect due a president. When he flashed one of his grimaces or smirks or unidentified expression it said to me, "Kerry, my dad knows a lot of real important and powerful guys and you are in trouble."

Not that President Bush did not score some debating points. He did and kept to the basic theme his handlers wanted him to focus on, "you can't send mixed messages as a commander-in-chief." Senator Kerry handled that very deftly but should have pointed something out. He is not commander-in-chief. He is a Senator. It is President Bush who shouldn't send mixed messages as he did a few weeks ago when he claimed the war on terror would never be completely won.

The debate last night resembled the one between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan in 1980. And Reagan carved up the sitting president and shifted the whole feeling of the election. But even in that debate Carter did not appear a sniveling, angry little boy. He just seemed a bit stiff and officious.

As one columnist has put it, "the race is on."

I think the pervasive impression from last night that the Bush people had better be concerned about is simple, "this man is not a President of the United States." I have never seen or felt someone so unpresidential as I did last night. And only those frightened and poor townspeople who look at the naked emperor in the street and comment on what fine clothes he has on will be fooled. And, unfortunately, their name is legion.

October 1, 2004

Bits and Pieces after the Crowds Roar

"The United States have adventured upon a great and noble experiment, which is believed to have been hazarded in the absence of all previous precedent-that of total separation of Church and State...The conscience is left free from all restraint and each is permitted to worship his Maker after his own judgement. The offices of the Government are open alike to all... The body may be oppressed and manacled and yet survive; but if the mind of man be fettered, its energies and faculties perish, and what remains is of the earth, earthly. Mind should be free as the light or as the air."

---John Tyler, *President of the United States, in a letter July 10, 1843*

Every religion has its ravening wolf. It is one of the most perilous animals to appear in the guise of religious faith; and they appear in all religions, at all times. The framers of the great Constitution could see this and separated the necessary madness of faith from the cold, calculating methodology of governance. One takes over the other at great peril.

Are we in this peril now? It's hard to say. Conflict exists as long as it is advantageous to both sides of the conflict so the trumpeted "cultural wars," are really nothing more than the organization of cults to do battle in politics and beyond. Have the great religions declined? That's too monstrous a question to address. What are religions building? What are religions destroying? Faith can reduce the paralysis of fear, no question. But, once fear is out of the way a person is just as apt to destroy as create. This can be determined by the governors of the cult or, spontaneously, by the people in the cult. And there is no doubt in my mind that the "wars" between red and blue are essentially the battle of cults, not "cultures." A culture is one that produces magnanimous people, tolerant people, open people; open to new ideas, new experiences, new people, always checking against abuse, growing and evolving, pushing the envelope of self, laughing merrily, but quick to size up the threats to his generous spirit. A nation divided into cults, political, religious, cultural would produce very narrow people, with violence right below the surface, ignorant, selfish for the goods they have attained, fearful of other people, without resource, slipping inside the cult when things get threatening.

A good culture takes from the cults it produces and leaves all of its arrogance in the dust. A culture feeds on itself as in a fine restaurant, not as starving cannibals. The starving cannibals eventually come face to face with their own ignorance and either give up the practice or perish.

If an obscure president, in an obscure period of time, a harsher time for most, can give eloquence to his thoughts quoted above, what about the people who follow? What ravening wolf has devoured their eloquence?

December 19, 2004

[Back to Sunoasis Opinions](#)

The brilliant framers of the Constitution gave over to the American people as perfect a myth as a people deserve. It is not popular mythology in the sense of Bush folkism or anything of that nature. No, this is a profound founding myth that animates a great deal of American thought and action. Good thought and action we might add. When America falls deep and back into itself, into its primal self, look out. It will become the rogue that the Earth fears. Thank goodness for "checks and balances."

The mythology was so bold and stark. "Create the world anew; new history, new beginnings, new forms, make it new." This was the profound moment that a group of very smart, knowledgeable types grasped in the latter stages of the 18th century. "Make it new but know all that has taken place previously!" That is the second part of the profound myth. They knew that the urge to make things new again was or could be a barbaric one; a kind of revenge against the past so that the resources of the past are mute. And the poor unfortunate group caught in the vortex of nothing then are fragments of what has happened previously. Finally, a breakage of the dark clouds occurs and they are dismissed from history with contempt. They knew this. They understand this as well as any generation in American history.

Make it new but know all that has happened previously. And that includes not simply ones own history but the history of everything else. On the one hand we face the future as new people, as one's who have never lived before. And on the back end of that fully open to all that has happened before. One implicates the other. One shapes the other.

And it is very interesting that both the left and right don't get this. That both the left and right are in thrall to the destruction of this myth and can't stand it.

And that is why when one sees everything dominated by either one of the wings he shakes his head and goes, "it is too late now. The old habits have won out."

December 10, 2004

There are three basic flaws in the American character that need to be rectified for us to maintain a liberal democracy. One of these is "instant gratification," a second is a distrust and resentment of intelligence, and a third is the "big easy."

Modern capitalism and its driver, advertising, has turned the American people from farmers into instant gratifiers. Not only must one have it now, "it" must successfully consume everything in the past to bring the gratified power and success. Or, at least, the sense that one is fully powerful in relation to all of history. This is a trick of course and has nothing to do with reality. And it converts the American people from builders into consumers; i.e.. people manipulated along every step of life.

It is more than modern capitalism though; it is technology. The pressure of a modern technological society has re-barbarized things around the world. Modern technology does two things that replicates the conditions of the "dark ages." It makes life utterly chaotic and beyond the reach of understanding for most people. And yet it prevents any real, authentic change from coming into being, except more technology, more gadgets, more gizmo's, more of everything but those qualities needed to make a decent society and culture. It's been said before. In my own youth there was a turning away from technology for these very reasons and a re-investment back into the "senses." But all this did was generate huge amounts of addiction and stupidity. The best way to deal with the barbarization is a re-investment back into knowledge and contemplation.

The problem for a liberal democracy is this: Where is the orientation that permits a free citizen to know where things stand at any given time? How far up does he look? How wide does he look? How deeply does he look? The majority of free citizens are reduced to look as far as their bank account, their personal position, their household. One of the key factors for this fact is that intelligence is never taught to take on the big ticket items and think through them. It is taught to trust armies of experts to do this for him or her and to pay attention to his or her little universe. Therefore, one can make the casual observation that most of the time, most of the people are ignorant of the world they operate in. It is a necessity. How could anything work if

people were orientating themselves to the larger forms of life?

For anything to be built there must be the "deferral of gratification," for the purpose of putting the nose to the grindstone and building something that is seeded in nothing, at times, but hope. Modern society and its economy has forced this "instant gratification" on the people as assuredly as an imperial army forces its will on a captured people. It is impossible to gain the values of "deferral of gratification," unless one tries mightily and hard for it. What is given are the values of instant gratification. Those are the values the modern-treads ride on. Popular culture is the sign and symbol of this. On the dark side are addictions and on the lighter side are the prancing about of good-looking people who believe that they are immortal. We laugh but this attitude is intractable and goes deep into the political culture. Witness where the political culture and entertainment culture commingle. The Entertainer is the prototype for the modern politician. The next Hitler will do a song and dance for the people. Hussein wrote novels for the entertainment of his people. It indicates a world fully disconnected from the past but not connected to the future. A world fully imbued in an illusion many centuries old and leading one to the pessimistic view that we live in the dark ages and not some enlightened era.

Fine, the man says, let us outline and depict this dark age and put out seeds for the future.

The second flaw is a total distrust, anger, and resentment over intelligence. The people are so paranoid of intelligence gaining control over everything that they have successfully taught intelligence to back down to a very basic level. It would be better if the people were given a mark to take their intelligence to and then motivate them to that mark.

Intelligence is always related to the two most despised types in modern society: the Intellectuals and the Scientists. "Ah," the people say, "look at what these two have done! Totalitarianism and nukes! They can't be trusted." And there is some sympathy for that point of view. The awful fact remains that the more unintelligent the people are the more apt they are of being manipulated and controlled. At that point they lose their potentials and join the armies of the defeated and the damned. Not too appealing an army in the middle of the liberal democracy.

The third attribute is simply a result of the success of the modern society. Everything is too easy. If things are too easy then what prevents the mind and spirit from descending into a kind of laziness that corrodes a liberal democracy? It must devise difficult aspirations it can attain to.

January 6, 2005

One of the more fascinating things to study is the nature of the radical. Forty years ago the radical emerged from the liberal left, on and off campus, and was the catalyst for many changes. The body politic did not accept the radical ideas so much as they were filtered and absorbed slowly and over time. One thinks of environmentalism or women's rights; two radical ideas that have now been absorbed into the mainstream. As that happens however, the other side strengthens itself and begins to stamp out the fires the radicals have started. And at the end of the process there is a full and complete exhaustion among the political types. This cycle has fully played itself out so now how can we characterize things?

For one, the radicals are now in the right wing. They are the catalyst who stirs the space between the polarities to create the electrical energy in the body politic. They must be isolated and filtered by the larger society. What is their main message? "Faith is the ultimate test of infallible nature. God knows, you do not." But the framers were very clear not to trust any group that said that they knew God better than anyone else, therefore they should rule. The issues are merely a pretext to gain and hold onto power. They are the ravaging wolves.

The radicals as we have known them in the past are old and meaningless these days. They try and pump the charges up but it is useless to do. All the energy is on the right wing at this point. The old radicals will be turned, eventually, into one of these filtering aspects that is the next necessary phase of development. On top of this natural process is the reality that the terrorist threat is going to be around for a long-time. There are too many madmen, too much dangerous material, too many agendas not to worry about terrorism. It may and will be used as an excuse to maintain power but the argument against there being a threat of terrorism had better be very persuasive.

Until this threat is gone no new movement or idea can sweep through and take the nation in a different direction. That is the perfect opportunity then, for those who want a different direction to think, imagine, write, respond, and believe that the future will be there. Soon enough, the society will do to the right what they did to the left. Isolate it, take whatever vitality it has and use it, unhook from the source of the vitality,

and move on. The liberal democrats will have to put out some fires of their own. And perhaps, in 25 years or so, a new radicalism will emerge from that side to stir the pot again.

And what is the "radical?" Long ago I was told that a radical "got to the root cause of things and tried to change them there." Therefore, the root cause of crime was poverty so you focus on poverty rather than crime. Crime is simply victims attacking victims and the system itself is the victimizer. And, of course, this is working furiously in the right-wing radicals who have reduced life to their interpretation of God or Christ; an interpretation so barren, so devoid of spirit that it can only come from utter fright. Christ was the great liberator; freeing men and women of their fright. In any case, the good citizen needs to reject these forms of radicalism and return to a much more real version of what-we-are-in.

One thing these radicals can not stand and that is the constructive principles that are built out from freedom to ensure more freedom. Not only do they decry these forms, like science, but they seek to destroy them. And at that point the person of a liberal democracy must say, "do we live in a modern world or not? Are we not orientated to what is around us in the form of structure?"

The right-wing radical is the active agent today and the one the society must be very wary of. And that pattern discussed before will kick in; divesting the radical of any unique value, taking whatever vitality he brings to society, and then cutting them loose. Something profoundly healthy in American culture does this and it must do it with the right-wing radicals.

November 21, 2004

The fortunate family is one that has moved through all the tortured and fabulous history in America; that has lived in its different regions. That is the family rich in lore and experience; it possesses a kind of wisdom of the land. And in those families there is a mixture of red and blue. And a citizen born into one of those families fights two tendencies in the larger population. One of them is the strictly ideological where thought or a series of thoughts are fixated on problems and their supposed solutions. And where the thought is a belief itself and motivates whole eras in a variety of ways. The other is strictly limited by faith or inexperience and results in the type of voters appearing in the rural areas. Voters that, on the one hand, are pitiful but on the other are irresponsible. And they lock everything out to make sure no one can tell them these things. And they hold grudges for decades.

The red in America must struggle with this and free themselves. If they think they've been attacked and made fun of in the past, they haven't seen anything yet. It will serve little purpose but to harden the blue as they attempt to shift the weight of power from the middle to the coasts.

* * * *

The first thing I thought about when I heard the Bush voters explaining themselves were the Christian generations after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, around 300A.D. Many priests and other officials of the church fanned out throughout the Empire to convert non-believers. They were successful up to a point. But in very isolated pockets they were driven away by angry people who wanted to hold onto their old beliefs. I truly recommend my Christian brothers and sisters to read a full history of the Christian religion. And they must ask themselves very pointedly whether they represent a real decline of a great religion. What they should worry about is it that, unlike Christianity of the past that produced great thinkers, great leaders, great artists, greatness all up and down the line, it is producing very low levels of intelligence, and high levels of intolerance, bigotry, and fanaticism. And these qualities were shunned even during the ancient world. But because the fundamentalists have been able to close themselves off, isolate and keep away, shut off, and only let what they want into their domain, they are more representative of the Neolithic peoples who lived in isolated mountain valleys.

For anyone who loves the religion it is not a happy time.

This long article [traces the history of Roman religion and the slow acceptance of Christianity](#) until it was the dominant belief. Within two hundred years the barbarians had ended Rome as it knew itself and started the medieval period.

It's very interesting to me that 50 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the Roman Emperor was conscious of the religion enough to send a party to Galilee to try and find Jesus' family or followers. "They found some poor smallholders, including the great-nephew of Jesus, interrogated them and then released them without charge."

* * * *

Is fundamentalism at war with the modern world? If so, it's the third wave of attack. The first was fascism and the second was communism. It is a direct attack on technology, science, capital, the complexity of the modern world, it's urbanization, it's universal education, it's equity between the genders and so on.

* * * *

Out in my area, the bluest of the blue, there is a lot of anger and "soul-searching." What is needed is a wholesale reappraisal of the Democratic party. The "left" has to transform itself somehow in ways that are imaginative and almost impossible to conceive of. The old issues, concepts, language are simply thread-bare and that side, in my estimation, hasn't changed. They are like the rural idiots. Nothing new or profound has moved through them in the last thirty years. One lesson does emerge: You can get so fixed in ideas that they make you ignorant. Both extremes are very skeptical, if not hateful, towards the "modern world." But, the "modern world" is going to move merrily on. It's the left, the putative "smart ones," that need to gain a new perspective on the "modern world." And that means a reassessment of bureaucracy, science, technology, capital, justice, equity, among other things.

November 8, 2004

The election cycle interests us in a variety of ways. We still hold out for the great promise of a liberal, democratic society. "Liberal," not in the political sense of left-wing but liberal in that tolerance is at the center and core of it. And after forty years of some experience in it we come to some conclusions. For instance, the politics of the past four decades has worked at pulling down the citizen in a wicked display of self-destruction. The left attacked the pursuit of truth and committed the egregious sin of politicization and the right went after science, common sense, even common decency in some ways. They both latched their fangs on the educational system and the media. Since they were both highly successful in their vampirism, they are held responsible for the mess: A dumbed-down, idiot culture that is frighteningly near its end as a democracy.

In some ways it appears the culture or huge chunks of it simply abdicated any responsibility for upholding a liberal, democratic culture and returned everything to the prime materia which is where the madmen stir. In other ways it seems to muddle through with just enough earnestness to make it to the next cycle before falling in exhaustion and throwing the baton out to the next group. It suffered through many years of an inner cannibalism that could only be ascribed to people who don't know themselves very well, don't know others well, don't know their own history, literature, thought, systems or anything else. In its stead we have a frightening display of practically illiterate, superstitious, fanatical, addicted, addled people carrying this huge beast on their back. A beast that the rest of the world is suspicious of and will war against one of these days. If the demise of the Soviet Union proved anything it's that a people can not hide behind the bigness and power of its own country. It has to continually do those things that made the country great and then some.

What we have produced is a soft, lazy, decadent culture not equipped to transmit anything to the future; building nothing, thinking nothing, dreaming nothing. A culture blinking idly at the television screen or listening to the rants of the very people who have gotten us in this mess. The left started it; the right has finished it. As we remarked earlier, we are at the end of a tired era.

President Bush is the most inferior president in my memory. President Clinton is not far behind that. President Reagan was not a Lincoln or Roosevelt. We have produced this mediocrity primarily because the culture was so eviscerated by the Vietnam and Watergate period of time. It never recovered. Something started at that time, Lord knows what, and now we are here eyeball deep in self-hatred and the hatred of the rest of the world. We lost the future. We lost our ability to sacrifice and to build. We lost our ability to think. We lost a good deal of common sense. We lost some ground of reality. We lost common decency. The very idea of progress came to a grinding halt, and not without its reasons. But once progress was thrown off what came into the vacuum but very suspect philosophies of pleasure, "get-it-all-now," a suburban kind of Eden not worth spit, tired re-treaded spirituality from the East? A people, then, fantasizing their own perfection and believing it to be ipso facto so. Therefore, no new dreams, no new aspirations, no authentic creative movements, nothing but vanity and emptiness able to hire PR types to sell people fake dramas; a disgrace.

That is a dilemma that will not be solved by the presidential election.

It may start to be solved when the people stop hiding behind power; whether it is the powerful ideas of men and women or CIA's, or elected officials, or vast sums of money. Come out and see yourselves as you are! Stop being the playthings for strong forces in this world. Put a premium on language, on knowledge, on creative imagination, on experience, and quit acting like peasants who happened upon a hidden treasure chest.

In fact, the few brave ones will try and get outside the framework of the "conservatives" and "liberals" as they articulate themselves in public, through candidates and minions. The machinery of politics is dead without new dreams. New aspirations and dreams do not emerge in old politics. We are walking a tightrope into the 21st century.

The Bush Administration made a classic mistake of being secretive and suspicious. It's appropriate behavior in the tyranny of corporate life no doubt. But, in a free society like this you need to be as open and as trusting as you can. Once a citizen can doubt the sincerity of the president venturing into Iraq, no argument can win him back. And Iraq was falsely sold even though one assumes the inner circle had its own reasons for the deed; mainly to create a staging area in a very strategic region and re-structure the whole of the middle-east in an effort that will take decades. But it was sold as, "getting rid of WMD and "democracy for Iraq." So the fair-minded, sober-minded citizen has to ask some very pointed questions about the leadership qualities of those in power.

October 24, 2004

The modern political animal is made from a gory process. Innocent, naive consciousness is thrown against the steel thighs of power and the splatter determines a good deal of what that political animal will do and think in his life.

Before him is power and its arrangements and rationalizations and nothing he thinks or does can penetrate it. It is other than himself and, yet, all he possesses is himself. One can say that until the political animal is splattered on the walls of power he knows nothing, an empty image he cultivated in front of TV and movies.

It can alternately become a vast womb of safe keeping's or a vast conspiracy determined to rub out the political animal and all he believes in. It is rarely something comprehensible and therefore under the relative powers of the animal. It can't be owned by the political animal; he may only react when the time is appropriate. And in the entrails of the splatter are the secrets of his reaction.

Since the process is violent and traumatic to the individual he rarely becomes a rational animal. Stunned by the power of the irrational he is terrified that he will end up in prison or an insane asylum if he can't do anything about it. So, he throws his irrationality onto a group either in support of something or in opposition. The group is prepared for him and has learned the sublime ways and means of power much more deftly than the simple, wounded political animal.

The trauma of experiencing the absolute hugeness of governmental power drives many of the citizens daft. They end up the parodies of a democratic person and resemble the very worst of the ancient mobs. And when the self is finally convinced that it is true; power is real and the self has little of it, then the political animal comes into being in the modern way. The self is belittled, reduced, made mute while either great love or great hatred is levied against the monstrous power that looms over everything.

"Your love is my hatred; your hatred is what I most love." And so the thing fights with itself until another era is wrung out, preparing for a renewal so hidden by the darkness of the cannibalism.

Of course, in a sense the system was designed this way for several reasons. Conflict is as natural as breathing. To say you will end conflict in a free society is saying you will end the necessity to breathe one day. And that day will make even American politics superfluous. Once I step forward with an idea, new ideas will be born full of hatred for my idea. The framers knew this from personal experience and from their knowledge-base in political philosophy. Build, then, an infrastructure that allows the natural conflicts to occur without destroying the freedoms that justify the whole thing to begin with. So, the hot emotions are tempered by the due process and due diligence built into the system.

And here is a moral point: Does one trust any idea or party or leader or want-to-be-leader who seeks to weaken that infrastructure and so empty America back into the predictable cycles of history? Can the wounded political animal, now braying like donkeys and elephants, now strutting, now roaring in egotism,

now wailing for some lost paradise, now made mute in exhaustion; can this pitiful animal do what is necessary to ensure that the infrastructure is still strong and able to sustain even the foulest of the animals?

If they are all fighting in the hogwash at the center of the barnyard, who makes sure the fences are strong? One says proudly, "all the tax money that flows into the coffers!" But then, what about the drama, purely psychological, that sustains or destroys the foundations for a liberal, democratic culture? For instance, when the citizens can not see themselves in those they despise? William James set forward two major criteria that must be in place to sustain a democratic culture:

Opponents must have mutual respect.

No one can violate the law.

He may have thought of this in a more genteel, Victorian period of time but we, at least, get to see the fruits of the breakdown of this creed.

Thinking people must go one step further and examine the implications of this.

July 9, 2004

In politics, truth-seeking is a dangerous game. The easiest one played and the one played all the time is propoganda. It is the lasting legacy of both the left and right of our era that they produced such perfect representations in the art of propoganda.

And propoganda is full of bluff, full of an egotism that believes, from the start, that it knows the truth. It is never on a path of knowing but always fixated on a belief that it possesses the truth. And we know that presents the most dangerous scenario all down history. American genius undermines a lot of the danger since one piece of propoganda can knock out another.

Propaganda is much more a matter of faith than truth is. So, for instance, when Rush Limbaugh was clowning it up in the 80's one either had faith in him or did not. This is very familiar to anyone who has listened to talk radio. The most informed, balanced, fair-minded talk show host is yanked after a few years and replaced by the loud-mouthed, sloppy character who hangs up on people who disagree with him.

And it makes sense that propoganda would be the art of choice in a culture dominated by entertainment values, rather than civic values of a liberal, democratic culture. The essence of entertainment value is polarity; it must generate conflict as all sophomore literature and drama students are taught. The essence of a civic culture is to find transcendence and commonality and apply the art of thinking in pursuing that course. We, in a cruel way, exist in a kind of political dark age where the few truth-seeking monks huddle together while the world rages in its stubborn inanities, outside.

Truth says we must be humble and discover things through due diligence. Propaganda is the devil on the shoulder scorning the truth and urging that all can be reduced to your own hatreds.

Truth for the propagandist is a simple phrase learned after the first few battles with reality. Ah, I will take the simple phrase and make it into a splendid construction of my own power!

And, always, along the path of truth-seeking there is a spur that moves into a shining city where propoganda will take one to wealth and power.

America does not have a problem with repression. It is not an old culture mired down in traditions and customs that cut off potential. That belongs to the world outside of it. America has a problem with nihilism and hatred since the nihilistic and hateful are not repressed either. And this is a very tricky thing to maneuver through when young. It is when nihilism and hatred gain the upperhand and form their own credibility that a culture gets in trouble.

And a lot of American politics is a kind of shined up hatred adroitly used by political consultants to get that small percentage of votes necessary to win elections. They employ legions of propogandists to do the dirty work.

When politics descends to this level it is impossible to ask of it, then, "solve the problems!" It can't solve its

own dilemma, how can it solve anything in the real world?

We live through a time reminiscent of the post-Civil War era, through TR. The Civil War and Reconstruction had exhausted American political life and the emphasis was shifted to private capital, the infamous Gilded Age. The infamous 60's of our era exhausted the political life of America in like fashion and has given us another sort of Gilded Age, just now bubbling up into an interesting conundrum. Beginning with Teddy Roosevelt, America experienced two decades of vital leadership. It became a much more activist government beginning with the Roosevelt reforms against trusts. Following W.W.I, the people again turned toward the private sector and partied to the very end of the Roaring 20's. Does this point to something useful for us today?

There's no question that the next two decades of American politics will be more interesting than the last two; primarily because of the "war on terrorism," and the gigantic shifts happening in the geo-political realm, post-cold war.

June 23, 2004

David Brooks of the New York Times had an interesting article yesterday. He sees Iraq in terms of a basic pattern in American life; one that does seem true enough. The great American optimism initiates something that proves more difficult than first thought and so the reality begins. That appears to be true of nearly every American I have known, as well as huge public events. We aren't particularly good at a Machiavellian calculation, especially when some great cause is at hand.

For grand cultural experiences like the gold rush or settling of the west, this is a very positive attribute. If the people knew the truth before hand they would simply sit on their hands and let nature grow wild over lost opportunity. And there is certainly a strain in American experience that wants that nature to grow wild over the opportunity since the opportunity appears foul after awhile.

It is this way however and will only change through painful experiences like Iraq.

We are not a frontier nation any longer. We are the center of world power, at the center of world history and our time will pass too. And this should begin to produce the types of prudence and wisdom that Americans seems incapable of handling; are even hostile to.

In the same edition of the NY Times, on the editorial page was a quick analysis of why the right-wing is much more powerful than the left-wing in America. The left can be clobbered any number of ways and good riddance to them. However, one should distinguish between the left as it emerged from the 60's and classical liberalism that the radicals despised. Until there is a return to that classical liberalism, there will be no chance for gaining the loyalty of the middle-class. And that is the whole key. In the 60's and 70's the middle-class had loyalty to the public sector; the children of the depression and world war. But Vietnam, Watergate, high-interest rates, oil shortages, and other factors brought an end to that loyalty. Reagan and the Republicans convinced the middle-class their loyalty should shift to the private sector and it has to this day.

It will not return for a long-time I don't believe. But, then, events move at the speed of light. Those who pine for a 60's type period of reform don't appreciate how rare they are. They happen once or twice in a century and, in the long analysis, are very healthy for a liberal, democratic nation-state. What the next one looks like is anyone's guess. And what precipitates it is totally locked up in the darkness before us.

May 19, 2004

Experience teaches that the history one lives through has certain stages of development. The baby-boom generation has lived through three such cycles, once they emerged from childhood. The first of these included Vietnam, space adventure, civil rights, assassinations, cold war, counter-culture, mass culture and were experienced as vast emotions, first. Then, analysis tried to sort a few things out. Then the events were converted to memory. And from memory came depictions of the events either in books or movies or TV. That era was succeeded by one that began with the oil crisis and hostages in the middle-east. It went up through the Reagan years and included the computer revolution, Shuttle disaster, Gorbachev and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the boom yuppie years, Iran-Contra and S&L scandals, up through the first Gulf War and the election of 1992. Emotions, analysis, memory, depiction. And now we are in a third era that was initiated

by the first bombing of the Twin Towers in 1993, the Clinton years, Internet, Oklahoma bombing, end of cold war, Yugoslavia, terrorist attacks in 2001, controversial election in 2000, another shuttle loss, economy down-turn. It's not quite memory but the more it is analyzed, the more it does become memory.

Of course these events happen whether we want them to or not. They pass through us as public events and we have a relation to them. It fixes us to a particular time and place. After all, we don't live in a depression or through a world war, a revolution or civil war. We live through this, whatever it may be.

And, there are two other contexts to think about. One exists as nature; now the background, now the foreground. And nature tells us our views of time are out of whack. The mountain is a million years old and will exist for a million more. That is more than 54, for instance. And if we connect beyond this to the natural universe the perspectives get mind-expanding; it's a secular sort of mysticism. Or, a mysticism made more real by our adventure into space and how we know now, the immensity. "Oh, fine fellow, you talk of 40 years but here we have a billion years. How do you size that up?"

Certainly, the last context is the person him or herself. The stages of development, the expectations, frustrations, willfulness, desires, catastrophe's, imaginings, thoughts, and feelings that we have to deal with all of this context.

A Short and Sweet Summary of the Happy Political Animal:

It was told to me from someone who worked under Kennedy that an electric charge went through the whole of the public sector when JFK took office. And Kennedy had a remarkable vision because he wanted to energize the public sector on behalf of the people but he also wanted to energize the people themselves to take as much responsibility as they could for the world they lived in. Whether that spirit died on November 22, 1963 is an academic question. Vietnam and the "Great Society" followed. Then you had what could be termed a bar-b-que of the ideals. The public sector was burnt beyond recognition because of the loss in Vietnam and resignation of Nixon. Once the establishment lost its credibility all hell broke loose, especially in the universities where the classic liberalism of JFK was zapped in favor of a more radical blend of Maoist and Frankfurt Schoolism. The tale of that time ended in the late 70's when an awkward Jimmy Carter made strange gestures on national TV trying to rally the people. Watching that as a young man I shook my head. "The poor man doesn't know how awful things really are."

Something, then, went on between the election of Kennedy in 1960 and the end of Carter in 1980. It was the startling events of that time; the consciousness of the nuclear dilemma, the voyage to the moon, the assassinations of great liberal leaders, the agony over Vietnam, the disgrace of Watergate, the oil crisis, civil rights, women's rights, environmental awareness, the decline of the robust 60's economy in the mid-late 70's. This country was not governable in that space of time and it's the prime reason that Reagan came riding into town on his white horse.

Reagan had vision too, like Kennedy, but it was far more connected to the American past that always distrusts big government and always favors the private sector. Reagan's significance is that he convinced the majority of people to change their loyalty from the public to private sector. And it was a remarkable shift that didn't start appearing as cultural energy until the '84 election. Then there was just a burst of economic activity, spurred on by the high-tech boom. Reagan very successfully transformed the country and put the 60's and 70's behind us.

In the 90's Clinton got up on the stage. He was the first baby-boom President and many had a lot of expectations. However, Clinton soon realized that he could not buck the trend against big government and so adopted Republican polices to win huge support among the people. This proved that Clinton was more a political animal than a conscientious person and it proved out at the end of his administration.

Clinton rode the 90's bubble to the top of the polls. It felt much of what the decks of the Titanic must have felt like; people laughing and drinking, making love in the well-appointed state rooms, eating the fine foods and believing that, at this moment, life could not be better.

And now a good political animal, only concerned about the state of a nation, feels like he is falling in the abyss of some cold night, thinking he was crossing the bridge to the future. And he is doing cartwheels to the blackness below, looking up to see the captain above him looking down. He is a boy! And he looks bored. And he is yelling down, "Iceberg? I see no iceberg. It's a wonderful night for a party!"

March 25, 2004

I've been jotting down notes about election years since 1984. The notes were casual and were written by a guy who is a political animal but believes that politics is only one facet of life that determines whether it is good, bad, ugly, or indifferent.

There's no question that the election of 1980 was a very crucial one and it still casts shadows today. Ronald Reagan successfully shifted the people's views from the public to the private sector, listening to the tax-payer revolt more closely than other revolts happening at that time. As a result of this shift old-time liberalism died, conservatism gained a great deal of vitality, government became a mock-hero that everyone derided, and the country became fractured in both alarming and interesting ways.

Anyone with political instinct can see that the majority of people who vote don't want more government programs, higher taxes, welfare statism and the rest of it. And this will dominate the political scene until the next great economic crisis where the government saves the day.

The interesting thing is that now more than at any other time since the Vietnam days, the status of American foreign policy is being debated. And it is a profound philosophical debate on the very nature of "what America has become..." And in some ways it measures the distance between democratic conscience and the ability to grasp the reality of world power. That is where a decisive split occurs and it will take one, full political season to shake it all out.

Looking over those casual notes can be a diversion from all the clap-trap in the Iowa caucus. Does anyone remember when Pat Robertson got more votes than George Bush the elder in the Iowa caucus of 1988?

In 1984, Walter Mondale made two fatal mistakes. He told the people he was going to raise taxes. That indicated that the mainstream democrats had lost connection with the people who were busily deconstructing government or demanding that it take place. He also went fishing for two weeks after a fairly successful convention in San Francisco. The end of the convention is the moment of lift for a candidate. Why go fishing? There was a picture of Mondale in a lake, fishing by himself. He looked like a guy who had retired from life and had no business or reason to be in the White House. And when he came back from the fishing trip, Geraldine Ferraro had to explain her taxes. This humiliation took place in a public forum and was not a pretty picture even though she defended herself very well. Mondale's great moment came in the first debate with President Reagan when he caught Reagan asleep or in an acute senior moment. And Reagan's handlers made sure he got his sleep and took his pills before the second debate. The truth of the matter is that 1984 was the beginning of an excellent run that lasted up to 2000-2001. And it was a robust period that had been predicted by futurists who looked at the huge baby-boom generation moving through their most productive cycle. And if someone sits down and looks at the financial markets they go off the charts during that period of time. The amount of capital moving through the period was rather astounding, even frightening.

The domestic issue was always the budget deficit created in large part by Reagan himself as he ramped up the defense budget. The foreign policy issue was the dramatic change in the cold war and precarious status of the Soviet Union. A change we've hardly started to understand.

The election of 1992 was one of the more exciting with such odd-ball characters as Jerry Brown, Ross Perot, and the Admiral showing up. Clinton nearly came to blows with Brown when the ex-governor suggested there was impropriety with his wife, her law firm and a development called Whitewater. In the long view it's quite obvious that Bill Clinton had a peculiarly American disease among the ambitious class. He felt he knew better and more than anyone else. And that attitude landed him in disgrace. In fifty years the name Bill Clinton will be associated with the stained dress. "Mommy, what's the stained dress?" The Clinton Years, rather than decisive and epoch-making, were a vast disappointment to anyone who saw a bit of the promise. It was all slickness and air.

In 1996 Clinton had no problem with Senator Dole. But, it left one indelible mark. The heroic war veteran stomping around the stage like a mad prophet, "if you elect this man President he'll be bogged down in legal problems for four years!"

The campaign of 2000 was one of the worst on record. It rivaled 1988 for stupidity and obvious pandering to special voting niches. But, turned out to be one of the most important in recent times. And now we get the fun task, the proper task in a democracy, to evaluate those four years of Bush, the younger. And in this evaluation he is not protected by dad or family or cronies in Texas. In this evaluation he is a reality cast against a backdrop of profound memories of what has transpired. Two questions arise, "Does he know what he's doing in Iraq?" And, "Can he lead America into a future where we are the prudent and wise nation because we are the only one's who can afford to be prudent and wise?"

Bits and Pieces before the Crowds Roar

On the eve of What? It is a huge question mark for several reasons. No one knows what to do in Iraq. I do believe Senator Kerry will get more countries aboard but whether that has any effect on the insurgency is problematical at best. I do believe that the terrorist threat does not require wholesale take-overs of rogue states, therefore depleting our resources. Twenty guys with biological weapons could wreak havoc. And at this point the temptation is too great to produce these weapons as an "equalizer" against the "super-power." As, at the very least, an agent of blackmail and coercion. "Toughness," as defined by the Bush people is not what is needed. "Competence" is the operative word. And some of the ingredients of that word are intelligent use of our own resources as well as the resources of others. It would mean a full understanding of the enemy and why they are there. It would mean the full cooperation between nations and international organizations.

I don't know if anyone has noticed, but the economy is not booming. There are fundamental problems that can't be fixed by tax cuts. Job growth is sluggish, according to the Conference Board. The economy is not at a full-stop but it is not full of confidence either.

The odd electorate has an odd habit of buying the large spate of political books without necessarily reading them. This was explained by the chairman of Barnes and Noble, Len Riggio. "Informal polls taken by our store managers indicate that some 70 percent of our customers say they have no intention of reading these books; 15 percent say they will; and 15 percent are undecided."

There is every reason to believe that tomorrow will not bring home a clear-cut winner. There are going to be significant challenges to the vote count. It may even be worse than Florida. Hang on.

The one thing that would prevent that would be for the electorate to have a gut-check as the curtain is pulled and say, "the man I saw in those debates is not a POTUS."

November 1, 2004

The bin Laden tapes reveal several things. The crazed bin Laden knows nothing about freedom, is in a rather desperate state, and is egotistical enough to believe he can sway a close election. As we predicted the terrorists would try to decide the outcome of the election in a variety of ways. The decision of the American people should hinge on the leadership capabilities of George W. Bush and nothing else. We think he has failed. Other people think differently. Let the votes be counted.

Which brings us to a second point. The election is going to be very close, like 2000, and [the media is going to focus on voting machines, undercounts, and the rest of it](#). As I recommended in [Sunosis](#), if bloggers and "grass roots journalists" want to leap to the head of the class they will fan out through the rural counties of Iowa, Wisconsin, Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania and a few others. They will check records and make reports, followed up by larger media. Political officials of both parties, lawyers for non-governmental agencies, credentialed media, and other interested spectators should join in to make sure this count is accurate, fair, and without taint.

I saw an interesting survey by top historians on their take of Iraq. Historians are fact-finders and, the best of them, truth-seekers. Most good citizens are truth-seekers. There is a large difference between truth-seeking and decision-making. I'm not sure too many in politics or out would have done differently than President Bush. He stands accountable for the mistakes that have been made.

The military historians like Malcolm Muir Jr. of VMI, are impressed with the military victory over the Baathist regime but chagrined not more attention was paid to the aftermath. Andrew Wiest of University of Southern Mississippi makes the astute observation that, "...what was a quick military victory collapsed into a

torturous insurgency." Joseph Nye, whose book I am currently reading, says that history will judge it as "a serious blunder." Nye is very much a proponent of "soft power," and he feels a lot of it has been squandered by the president. Andrew Bacevich of Boston University makes the point that "...war retains only limited utility. The hazards entailed in opting for the sword remained considerable..." Only one historian, Victor Hanson of the Hoover Institution, sees this in terms of a possible success. He seems to lament the fact we can't, in this postmodern age, wage all out war because we don't accept evil as real.

There's no question this is a watershed period of time; a turning point. A great deal of thought will be divided along political lines as they were in Vietnam.

Whoever wins Tuesday one fact will remain: This is a divided country. It's not dangerously so but it means that the winner will be hog-tied for years. My gut feeling is that four years more of President Bush means a greater degree of social tension and upheaval; a greater chasm in the body politic. He is an insulated President, afraid of those who disagree with him. That is the surest sign of immaturity and lack of experience. Senator Kerry would bring needed change, especially in Iraq, but at home as well. He would get to the center quicker than Clinton did I believe.

October 30, 2004

It was very telling that the conservative and excellent weekly magazine, The Economist, [came out with an endorsement of John Kerry](#). It was not a strong endorsement but this sentence is the killer. "In the end we felt he (Bush) has been too incompetent to deserve re-election." Whether that does the trick is rather hard to say. It's doubtful but it is significant that The Economist is read by the "influentials," who are usually up to their eye-balls in business and government.

President Bush got whip-sawed by the terrorist attack. On the one hand it demands much more involvement than he was capable of or wanted. That was the fatal blow if indeed the ax comes swinging down on Tuesday. I'm not at all convinced it will but it won't change the fact that you can't have a "hands-off" commander-in-chief during a "war." And he has called it a war without defining exactly what he means by it. There is no doubt in my mind that if President Bush had been a CEO rather than a POTUS, he would have been fired by the board of directors. The type of leadership in this period of time demands agility, intelligence, an active hand of the commander-in-chief, and so forth. Not secrecy, not distrust of press and critics. The terrorist attack also energized all kinds of agendas in his administration that came to the fore because of his weak leadership. One was the question of impropriety of the Halliburton contracts. It's not that there was impropriety; it's that the appearance of such a thing undermines the effort. A competent leader would have seen this and prevented it. There's no question that Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld, along with Cheney had their minds wrapped around the middle-east long before George W. Bush got the bright idea he should run for office. The terrorist attack, rather than energizing new, innovative thinking, energized their obsession with Hussein. And they attacked without looking at the dynamics, with scarcely any thought to the aftermath.

And now [this report that perhaps as many as 100,000 civilians have died in Iraq](#), mostly due to allied bombing. This is Vietnam all over again and simply can't be rationalized away.

October 28, 2004

Senator Kerry has one and only one chance of defeating President Bush. Or, at least, gaining some momentum lost in the past month or so. He must stand up, full of brazen balls and tell the American people this: "President Bush has been defeated by bin Laden. We must throw the loser out and put in someone who will defeat bin Laden, that lone nut running around Pakistan." And that is the truth of the matter for anyone who cares for the truth. In the light of the intelligence report that paints a grim picture in Iraq we can say, "President Bush has been defeated and disgraced. Why can't the American people wake up?"

Well, it is up to the candidate running against him to wake the people up. And his message should be clear: In the war against terrorism, the terrorists have won the first stage. It is not the last stage but it is the first one.

September 16, 2004

Everytime I see a picture of one of the fallen soldiers in Iraq I feel anger. And when I settle down and analyze it a bit I think, well of course. Where are the kids of those who support this effort? Where are their asses? And their spoiled, ugly American children who view themselves as a class apart, as an old Tory class familiar to history. Where are they? If President and Laura Bush are so adamant that this is a good war, why aren't their kids fighting or, at least, helping where help is needed? Where are the Cheney kids? Where are the boys and girls of all those Republican politicians who view this as a "good war?"

The answer is that those now in power have given up on democracy long ago. When my progenitors were in southern England, they spent several centuries doing small things. And when the King got a bug up his rear or was pestered by his neurotic wife, he would point to my progenitor and his like and say, "go over here and fight for me. Kill and be killed my good man." And, naturally, one of those progenitor's fled the scene around 1640 and holed up with Roger Williams in the Providence Plantation.

There is one caveat to that of course. Back in the old days the Kings actually fought on the battlefield. The princes and noblemen fought on the battlefield. It was required of them. They had no credibility if they didn't. So, things were different back then. Now we have a phony social order commanded by people who have as little investment in liberal democratic values as the very people they are fighting.

If you are not willing to fight and die for your cause then no one else should.

President Bush looks to be in decent shape. There's nothing stopping him going to Iraq and doing a patrol or two in southern Iraq. Cheney would not pass the physical but at the very least he could be a clerk/typist.

I would think that anyone, whether they are for or against the war, would be angered by the lack of commitment by those who have the power to wage it.

In fact, when we look at that grand vista of elites, those who gain the most from being in America; the athletes, the actors, actresses, stockbrokers, politicians, et al, where are they? One man, one brave and decent football player is all I see. It is the most sickening display of how far we've fallen from the democratic tree. We have produced something out of ourselves that is as old as Ur. The one redeeming quality is that every four years we can get rid of the miscreant class and stick in a new one. The new eventually spoils and stinks and must be thrown out as well but at the cutting edge between the one and the other some bit of vitality is possible.

Twenty years of this political class is enough. They are spoiled; look at their kids. They are spoiled and they stink.

Anger.

Sometimes good fierce anger is just enough to clean the air and, even, turn an election around.

September 3, 2004

Senator Kerry has lost a lot of steam of late because of the way he handled the attack ads and the fact he has not spent money in August. That was an item we noticed a few months ago. The Kerry camp was going to stop spending money on ads in August and ramp it up in September. It's hardly a lost cause.

There's no doubt he should have gotten on top of the attack ads and fought them as soon as they came out. It's very difficult to know what happened thirty years ago. If there is complete fraud involved that's one thing but if there is mere differences of opinion then the hoopla is foolish. And, one of the members of the attack group admitted in an article yesterday that he and some of the others were inspired by "Tour of Duty," based on Kerry's war diaries. "Thirty years ago, every man in United States military uniform was a war criminal, and in 2004 a lone hero emerges and his name is John Kerry. That's not right. That's just not right." So says retired Navy Captain George Elliot.

What we have here is a clash of ego's and not truth-seeking. Captain Elliot was Kerry's immediate superior and gave Kerry excellent marks in fitness reports. It's an odd connection but there is the same kind of murk in all of this as there is in trying to discover the connection between the anti-Kerry ads and the Republican Party. And in murk, always bet on the opposite of the Republican Party.

Was Kerry politically conscious at the time? Did he understand his path and calculate both his war

achievements and war opposition because he wanted to cover all bases? Seeing how he came from a political family my guess is yes, that was in his mind. It was no doubt in Bush's mind to skip the whole war thing as being deleterious to his prospects as a man. And the Republican's of that day were very pro-war. So, we have a fun-loving coward on the one hand and an ambitious conniver on the other. That is, if we are to judge their actions of thirty years ago.

We still see hope in the ambitious conniver since the fun-loving coward has had a chance to show his stuff. That stuff could only come from someone who has given nary a thought to the world and its reality. And we are not part of the show that calls him stupid. He ain't stupid but he is empty.

The cynical days can be dictators. And when one steps away and becomes idealistic or visionary the dictator seeks him out to be taken off during the night and shot. And the cause of the cynicism is the pain of carrying around a consciousness that is assaulted every hour, demanding to leap now this way, now that way, reduced by humiliation, shame, ignorance, until we seek refuge; and when safe we then design a secret plot against the terrible world. If only a dark opinion, at least that. Something.

August 27, 2004

Senator Kerry looks pretty confident of late. It is quite evident that he has given some thought to the crucial questions in Iraq and knows what he talks about. That doesn't guarantee success but it does put him ahead of the current president for that elusive plum called "leadership quality."

Maybe it was because Senator Kerry actually took fire in battle and had to lead men against other men who were trying to kill them. Maybe it was because Senator Kerry actually had convictions at a young age and acted them out.

Our poor, inept president is as much a leader as John Wayne was; a mythical, fantasy-laden one for a people who have no or little sense of reality. And there are people today who still believe John Wayne won all those wars.

It is shameful the way the American people have slipped out of reality and into some mass culture induced purple haze. And it has happened to the extent that, soon, they will clamor for their favorite cartoon character to run for President. And he would probably or she or it have a pretty good shot at the job.

The chief requirement of a liberal, democratic people is growth and development. The American people, in large measure, have become an oppressive people; ignorant but with power. And they will pull down and kill off anything that tells them the truth. They have been delicately shaped by the mass, gross culture and will learn too late the requirements of not only a liberal, democratic culture but a vast world power as well.

Well, we get the venom out and spit into the good Earth and move on.

After all, we love the people; they are us and we have passed through their current stage of development and know there is so much more.

They were sold out by the professors first; then the priests and ministers came in and finished the job. Now it's the feeble, rickety politicians who are up to their eyeballs in corruption. Washington D.C. has become a kind of Vietnam all over; a machine everyone knows is bad and corrupt but no one knows what to do about it. And this will knock out another generation of citizens and we will inch closer to the day when the critical mass of people are beyond saving themselves.

And that day will be a bad day.

It is not developing new aspirations for itself.

It is not humble to the task of building a culture when it is in the zenith of its power.

It favors the masturbating actress over the poet.

It believes it can hide behind money and machines and atom bombs and CIA's and large government

buildings.

It has no respect for others or for itself.

May 6, 2004

People overrate the influence and power of television. TV has become meaningless blather that is only made real when the cameras focus on one detail. When all the cameras are focused together on one detail, as they did on the Towers in 2001, or the infamous "scream" by Dean, then it is a powerful medium.

The single most powerful medium is the leadership of the President of the United States. In the past twenty years or so we have had, as a people, a very lackadaisical relation to that leadership. We have discounted it at every opportunity; sometimes out of a democratic spirit, sometimes to prove we are skeptical enough not to have a tyranny, but mostly because we were preoccupied with our own pleasures and pursuits.

The President has the power to connect to a problem and connect the people to the problem so that all share in the responsibility to solve it. The problem with President Bush is that he is not connected to what is happening in Iraq and he hasn't connected the American people to what is going on in Iraq.

[Newsweek has a story trying to compare Vietnam and Iraq.](#) There are some striking similarities. One is that both started with the wrong assumption: the attack in Tonkin Gulf and the presence of WMD in Iraq. The WMD is a huge blunder because an honest citizen can question any information, any statement coming from the White House. The second similarity is that the U.S. is fighting thousands of miles from home, on the homeland of others; others of a different religion, race, history, culture, language. This may, in the end, be the telling thing. Third is the assumptions that no one questions: in Vietnam it was the domino theory which had all the southeast Asia and, eventually, the Pacific Rim going communist. In Iraq it is that terrorism has a final aim of destroying the U.S. In both cases America has asserted itself as a humanitarian force. And that last point has weight when the leadership is in place to make the point. There is nothing humanitarian about war.

War must be fought only when there is no other option. It is failed leadership that goes to war before all the options have been sounded.

The debate now is framed between "out at all costs" types who aren't concerned about anything but their pride in being right. And between the cowards like FOX TV who will not question anything of the policy and are like the frightened townspeople who dare not say the emperor has no clothes. In other words, the debate is poisoned.

President Bush could have been a leader had he told the truth about the intentions of being in Iraq. That is, if he knows the truth himself. After all, it could very well be that he, himself, was given the WMD and "democracy in Iraq" as the chief reasons for going into Iraq while the real reasons remained with his chief, inner staff. A President so removed from the reality of "why we are in Iraq" is not a war-time president and in all likelihood a likeable figurehead as he was portrayed from the beginning.

One of the clear evidences of this is when he decided to land on the carrier to pronounce the end of the war. He obviously never consulted anyone about the aftermath and what it may entail. It's amazing with all the sources of information available and all the expert testament to how difficult the aftermath was going to be, he never had a clue. Wonder why he didn't have a clue?

A war-time President must absorb the conflict, understand the principles involved, be aware of the consequences of both action and inaction, have a thorough mission plan, and know when to attack and when to pull back. Lincoln had this in spades, so did FDR. LBJ wanted to be that type of President but could never come up with any real reason to be in Vietnam except for a "domino theory" that he didn't really believe in. And Vietnam taught a chief lesson: If the commander-in-chief doesn't know, no one else does. And so the war effort disintegrates.

President Bush is not a war President because his style of leadership only works when everything is going well. He has not taken the leadership role in the war in Iraq, has not connected the people to the situation in Iraq, and so the effort is getting very mired with terrible consequences to follow. The prestige of the United States has suffered a blow and will take years to recover.

The moment President Bush landed on the carrier one knew that he was purely a figurehead and had not paid an iota of interest to the majority of analysis that said the war would be easy, the peace would be hell.

It's past the point of arguing about the initial action in Iraq. The deed has been done. Politics dictate that the arguments go on forever but that is not the crucial point. The central point now is, who is the leader to take us out of the mess?

And the leader must take on these facts: America is fighting on someone else's homeland, an enemy who has great patience, and a more ferocious belief in its rightness. These are the correlations with Vietnam that make sense. There are stark differences.

One other very difficult similarity: Neither Vietnam nor Iraq attacked the United States. Neither posed a threat directly to the United States. They were invaded on the assumption that they would be a threat if either the communists or terrorists won out.

April 17, 2004

To win in November Senator Kerry will have to convince the people that he is linked to the so-called Reagan Revolution. Ronald Reagan still casts a huge shadow on the political landscape and Bush Sr., Clinton, and Bush Jr. have all tagged along, playing in the shadow of Reagan. It does not please us perhaps but it is the fact.

Al Gore would have won in 2000 had he continued the chain but as soon as he delinked by connecting with the old left he was doomed. However controversial the election turned out, it was Gore's election to lose and he did so by breaking the Reagan chain.

Kerry's recent proposal for corporate tax cuts is one link in the chain. His avowal to fight terrorism is another.

The problem is precisely that the people don't want an activist government. They would prefer Howdy Doody to Lincoln or FDR at this point. And that instinct is always underrated by the Democrats who have yet to shake the burden of overusing the public sector, at the expense of the middle-class. It's certainly more complicated than that but the gut speaks loud in American politics.

The people do not want big government and only call on it when times are bad. But, in the grain of it they would rather suffer in hell than rely on government. The liberals underestimate this at enormous risk to their future. Neither do the people want a culture of victimization; that has ended. Don't squeal you are a victim; go out and prove that you aren't. That's the prevailing attitude and it did change when Reagan took office in 1981.

There is one caveat to that humble assessment. The current President has stated that we are in a war. He has defined it as a war and a war is one of the crisis moments that calls on a strong federal government. So, the central question is, "who would make the best war President?"

Note: Rumsfeld is not as entertaining, charming, or favored as he was just six months ago. And the people are going to look at Rice, Cheney, Rumsfeld, et al as the chief instigators of the war in Iraq. Can the Democrats come up with anything better? I'm sure they are working on it, at least in theory.

March 28, 2004

We are the first to admit that President Bush had a very difficult command decision to make with regard to Iraq. Some evidence has filtered in that the decision was made at the very beginning of his administration but we can hardly state that as fact. What we know is the President made the decision. And his decisions make history for this period of time at any rate.

We watched his [interview on Meet The Press](#). And one remarkable feature stood out among everything else. His leadership qualities hinged on an instinctive, reflexive response by the nation after 9/11. He was given

the mantle of leader; he has not earned it.

He so appears to be someone controlled by others it's rather scary. He has become a figurehead. Why do we come to this conclusion? Because the President showed no evidence of thinking through his decision. A great leader has always seen the other side and come down on the side of what his best judgement dictates. Therefore, his arguments are filled with substance. President Bush argued his case as one with scant interest in the details, in the thinnest veneer of wrangling with the tough problems involved, and thinking through the implications of a [long-stay in Iraq](#).

It is becoming apparent that Iraq was a kind of White Whale for some in the Bush Administration. There was always a grave threat posed *if* Hussein could manufacture and hand-off the wrathful weapons to terrorist groups. Of course, this threat is posed by North Korea, Iran, Pakistan, India, France, and Germany to name a few. In fact, who is to say how the configuration of the world will evolve in the 21st century that will make one-time allies, deadly enemies?

To be generous one could say that the globe, after September 11th, was in a state of panic and what had been a shadowy nightmare scenario suddenly seemed very real; therefore, in a state of panic, the globe, including the United States, overreacted. And Iraq is, then, a case of the flush of panic overcoming any sound sense and thinking through required of not simply an invasion but the occupation and rebuilding.

President Bush can't be faulted for the [false intelligence](#). But, he stands accountable anyway. And when one combines the false intelligence reports with his lack of credibility; his utter lack of belief in himself that such a policy is worth pursuing, then one begins to worry a bit. He appears to believe in the war on terrorism and in his pursuit of Al-Queda. He seems far less certain about Iraq. And that tells me that the idea of invasion was planted elsewhere than midnight, lonely vigils in the Oval Office.

We've seen two other shallow Presidents who did demonstrate some remarkable traits as leaders. One was Reagan and the other was Clinton. Reagan had a genuine belief in what he was doing and a vision that was transformative, at least in political terms. Clinton was a thinking President and knew the way things work. President Bush is playing a board game in his private room, in the big house. And when a Hussein is captured or Al-Qaida are killed he goes, "Krr-boom" and throws the little toy up in the air in triumph.

That's not to say there weren't reasons to go into Iraq, especially if there was a universal belief that it possessed the weapons. But, a war demands true leadership. It will fail without it. And this is the problem now when looking at President Bush. Does he have the leadership qualities that will take America into the next crucial four or five years?

We think some of the fears sounded at the beginning of his Presidency are legitimate. "He's not a hands-on guy," they said. He makes decisions based on a "moral compass" and leaves the details to others. By doing so he has opened himself to the belief that he is easily duped and/ or controlled by those around him. Every hard-boiled realpolitic type, like Rumsfeld, knows a mark when they see it. They know the man is a boy and why he is a boy. Many Kings were treated this way by their chief advisors. [We have the Boy-King](#), off-spring of the elder Bush, who, one must say had more life experience and practical experience than the son.

It doesn't bode well, either, when the American presidency starts to look like an inherited office. After the Bushes, the Clinton's may pop up again, reversing roles as though they are in training at [Esalen](#). This is the very thing the framers wanted to avoid. And we know the people still clamor for some ruling class that gives them context. It's the fear that America democracy is falling back into old, ancient habits that is so disturbing.

American political genius is about breaking habits. FDR, for instance, and his use of public spending to stimulate the economy. Or, JFK's spirited call to bring [youth to public service](#). Even Reagan's [repudiation of "big government"](#) was a unique change of habit that proved stimulating.

It will need to go through a thorough shake-up one of these days; hopefully, just before the people lose it all to their inability to create out of themselves a unique political culture.

We have yet to understand, as a people, the difference between the past from which America was born and the present in which she finds herself. It's a different critter. It's lost its ability to comprehend itself through experience. Now it relies on myth, created by popular culture. This is a prescription for having a sentimental and violent nation.

February 28, 2004

In politics we are at the end of a tired era. The old graybeards who are rooted in the 60's and still cling to its assumptions, are gathering as much hatred about George Bush as the terrorists do. And make no mistake about it; it is hatred. That is the final signal, the final puff of smoke from any group. And it's certainly not the case of loving Bush. Bush should not be loved, he should be defeated.

New politics don't come out of old hatreds.

The hatred is not so much about Bush as it is how thwarted their ambitions for power became during the 80's and 90's. They had a sense of entitlement, as if their ideas should be the ruling passion of the democracy. The hatred they generate is similar to the passionate hatreds the right wing spewed in the 50's and 60's. The kind that was directed against Kennedy, for instance, or Adlai Stevenson.

The problem for the left-liberal democrats is that the right-wing was based on the grass roots of the country. The left-liberal is rooted in doctrines that come sailing over from Europe and are grafted onto an American experience that is quite different. Americans do not like "class war" whether it pits poor against rich; white against black; men against women; gay against straight, etc. And "class war" is at the bottom of the left, the root of it and it has never escaped that root.

The fall of a political era is measured by the level of hatred it creates. It means that there are no animating ideas that fire up the political imagination. The "fire" is as weird as Dean's tirade after Iowa. It is a Ghostdance before the Camera because one thing the left has learned. The political theater of the street is passe; it is the theater of the mind that races through TV screens that is the prize.

The fact that the political culture is dominated by fat comedians on the left and right says everything about the condition.

Now one can see clearly how devastating that 60's and 70's period was. The young at that time are now middle-age and becoming powerful. Their leaders are anti-heroes who live in fantasy worlds; and that includes both Clinton and Bush. No leader emerges because the era they grew up in was destructive to anything that had authority. Therefore, the clown, the anti-hero, the pro wrestler, the pornographer, the sex diva are raised up as the virtuous and good. The Actor becomes the Saint who can say nothing wrong and, in fact, whose words are amplified ten-ways by the nature of the media and the way it is absorbed into the body politic.

The best politics will emerge in contradistinction to what is emerging in the baby-boom generation. Make book on it.

Re: Dean. For the folly of his "scream," he will probably lose his chance at the Presidency. But it points up a greater theme. The Media is an American priesthood who must always remind the Kings and Princes that it can destroy them at any moment. "Play nice with us, we play nice with you..." Why Dean? Perhaps it was because of his success on the Internet that will, one day, challenge mass media for power.

Bits and Pieces before the Crowds Roar

So, where are your solutions?

That's finally all one can ask of the successful candidate and his party. One of the excellent stages of growth for the citizen is that moment when it's no longer necessary to be utterly right. A good citizen wants the decision-makers to be right and to make things work well. There is no pride in being right or shame in being wrong. Just be fair and truth-seeking and call it like is. So we weigh the balance of things. What is the cost of the war in Iraq next to its benefit? What is the cost of the Patriot Act next to its benefit? We do this before elections and after to make sure the inevitable wool isn't pulled over our eyes and we exclaim in the darkness, "I can see now!"

I ask this of the red people who voted in President Bush and are now running things. "Where are your solutions to problems that will, eventually, overwhelm and destroy this society?" Where are they? "What is your solution to the problem of global warming and scarcer and scarcer resources until, even, the infamous SUV owner will have to pay heed? Where is your solution to the growing divide in this county that will eventually pull it apart? Where is your solution to the enervation of vision that stops this nation in its tracks and keeps it on a very destructive path? Where is your solution to the problem of growing isolation of

America in the community of nations; in this, the most dangerous period of time in human history? Where? Where is it? It's your country. It's your government. What are you doing?"

We are not in this together. The people voted against intelligence; they voted for a dummy mythology. The President is required now to dance with snakes in the backwoods of Tennessee. And we are not happy about it. "It's your society. Your problems. You deal with it as it begins to unravel. As it begins to collapse and be taken down by so many forces that you can not see." The truth is, you have no solutions. You have nothing but force.

December 2, 2004

"So, now that your side has lost what are you going to do for the next four years?" My beautiful Muse asked me that shortly after the election, a week ago. "Muse, I'm going to play and try to make a little bit of money." Since that conversation I've gone around and read a variety of publications, political in nature. The progressives are fighin' mad and the leaders of that group see an opportunity to rally the troops. There is something resonant and correct about this. But as you read through their analysis and fears of the 2nd Bush Administration they sound like anything other than reborn citizens. One of the persistent themes in their writing is the "culture wars" between the red and the blue. And they are upset because precisely what should happen is happening; that is, local churches are taking over from the welfare state the care of people. The welfare state was the liberals Vietnam and they have never let it go. If the culture war is between local control or statism I'll go with the reds, thank you. And out in the blue land we know that the churches can be liberal as well as conservative. The welfare state was one of the most dehumanizing instruments ever concocted.

It's quite clear that the welfare state will only be reinstated when the society as a whole suffers a catastrophic failure in the economy. It will happen, no one can predict when. But until something like the Great Depression occurs, no political party will be able to resurrect belief in it. It is one of the albatrosses carrying the left out into the depths of the sea.

Religion is not the issue. The real issue is the failure on the part of those who are pure blue or pure red to shuck off the barriers that keep them from knowing their own country. And it usually comes down to inexperience, ignorance, intolerance, and a few other qualities that America was set up to fight. It literally doesn't matter if you are a graduate of Harvard or worship snakes in the hills of Tennessee. If you haven't made an effort to know this culture in a much broader horizon than what you were born with, then you have failed as an American. You have failed to make America a unique and promising land.

The fortunate American has passed through many faces, many experiences, many beliefs, many communities, many landscapes. And not by watching TV but by doing a lot of things in the flesh and bone of it.

"It is their country for awhile," I told her. "They will wreak havoc and will need to be subdued. They will be responsible for everything that goes wrong. They will lead us to the brink of a catastrophe. And then a new era of American politics will be born. And then I will think again on these matters."

November 17, 2004

One of the more interesting things to speculate on is what will happen to the Clinton's. It's becoming clear that they see an opening for themselves: A country dealing with the "red vs. blue" division, most of whom will be fed up with George W. Bush in 2008 if not sooner.

It's quite clear that Bill Clinton wants the White House again. He needs, for one thing, to redeem the taint on his first presidency. By being "behind the scenes," he will be able to reclaim some of his legacy, as long as his wife performs well in office. This, of course, is speculation; and what purer or more fun game exists than speculation?

It's quite clear what their strategy will be. Bill Clinton is going to woo the Red People and Hillary will cultivate the Blue Base. Bill Clinton is one democrat who can connect with the Red Men, if not Red Women. John Edwards couldn't, not at the level needed.

I always felt Clinton was great at the Hegelian synthesis that took up the thesis (60's), antithesis (Reagan) and formed a synthesis that was not, in the long run, sustainable. But it's interesting that the thesis and antithesis are ever-present, even in the early 21st century. Hillary Clinton could not do it. She mellows with age but raises too many hackles still. But Bill Clinton can do it and can move as decisively for his wife as his wife did for him as First Lady.

Personally, I don't trust the Clinton's. From a literary point of view they are a fascinating American story. They are ravenous political animals; almost a full, ferocious beast when you stick them together. And, after all the affairs and foolishness, they are still together. That tells one everything they need to know about what their intentions are in the coming years. Perhaps they are a modern version of the Macbeths. After all, we don't poison our rivals anymore. We lie about them. We find out what people are frightened of and make our opponent frightful to the people. And the Republicans are much more adroit at it than the Democrats. The Democrats have yet to find the right poison. So the next four years promises to be excellent, to be exciting, to be convulsive, to be shock and awe in a way we can't predict.

Could America live with a woman President? Yes. It's bound to happen even though the novelty would wear off quickly. And it's far more likely that the first woman POTUS would be a Margaret Thatcher or Golda Meir type. That is, one who gains the confidence of both the military and business.

I would never underestimate the Clinton's however.

November 10, 2004

The closest analogy I can find to the recent election is the O.J. Simpson trial of 1995. Months and months of meticulous, laborious evidence was brought in front of the jury to make one case or the other. Deliberative and impassioned arguments were made. The jurors were put into the jury room and told to come up with a decision. And rather than look at the evidence which showed a great likelihood of guilt, they decided to go with an irrational judgement that made no sense, showed no justice, showed no real knowledge of the case, showed nothing but contempt for the whole system.

That is the only conclusion I come to. The people have contempt for the liberal democracy. It means nothing to them. Deliberation, thoughtfulness, criteria for evaluating a candidate, history, systems thinking, critical thinking, and all the attributes that go into making up a liberal, democratic culture are held in contempt by the majority of people. And if that doesn't frighten people I don't know what will. That's the surest sign that the culture is in a state of steep decline; it doesn't really believe in itself. It fears.

* * * *

Laughter and the positive embodiment of what is best and true about ourselves; that is the great political act today. The politics says, "we will grind on for decades with meaningless policies that will be built and undone by degrees. Expect no miracles. Expect no wisdom. Expect nothing." Oh, but we expect beyond expectation! And fear nothing and fear no one and fear no group and fear no belief.

Let us fashion a joyous hammer to come down on those who rule today when they blunder, when they evade, when they lie, when they cheat, when they kill, when they steal.

American culture feels as if it's in a massive lock-down of some sort. I'm not sure if it's the fundamentalist element or the irrational politics or just plain fear but it is locked down, without resource, and totally savage. The whole idea behind a liberal, democratic republic is for the people to "be larger" than the state. The state is merely a reflection of the people but that only works when the people strive to be better than they are, better than they have been. It completely fails when they descend into the irrational or superstitious. At that point the manipulators will gladly take the stage and lead things into a hell-world.

Profound fear and a terrible loss of potential; this is what one senses today. And all the money, the power, the scams, the personalities can't make it right.

Those of us who truly love this nation and all its people and all its promise must reflect on the damage that has been done.

November 6, 2004

It is as much an egregious sin to hide behind the stupidity of the people as it is to hide behind power itself.

The dumbest and most sinful are the commentators who know better but will play to the people to get ratings. Corruption up and down the system; and probably a worst corruption than what happens in politics or the corporate state. Certainly along the same lines.

America has become the laughingstock of the world. How do people in "Red America" feel about that? How do they resolve that? We are not envied, we are not praised, we are not feared. We are laughed at. And it is because of the craven, cowering people and the "leaders" who manipulate their base fears to gain power. The Republicans are the proverbial ostrich with their heads in the sand expecting everyone to praise their ass in the air.

I have noticed the parasites are out in force on TV and other venues. They have not a clue of what horrible consequences await this country in the 21st century. Not only do I not have respect for them, I have no loyalty to them. They are a parasite class. And anyone who praises parasites, whether they are "commentators" or "politicians," can not be called an American.

The only remedy for the Kerry voters is simple: Be as crazy and irrational as the conservatives have been in their long trek toward power. You have to assert your beliefs at a level that can't be argued. You have to totally ignore any opposition to your will to power. You have to be so imbued with your sense of rightness in organization and idea that a giant shift occurs in the body politic which, apparently, is impressed with that sort of thing. And now watch the conservatives become "rational" and defend everything and be very defensive. If it weren't tragic it would be funny. Don't let the conservative get away with parasitism. Ask them why they haven't put their fanny on the line for this country.

Do the Bible-folk understand this line, "where there is no vision the people perish?" I dare them to tell me what this means to them and what George W. Bush has to do with it.

November 5, 2004

Most of the post-election analysis centers around the "great divide" between the reds and the blues. I think what one sees is how powerful identity is and how much loyalty people have with an identity that gives them meaning. And since we are a putatively free nation, that identity can be constructed a variety of ways. The disturbing and critical thing is how many of these identities are based on historic conflicts that lead to acrimony if not war; primarily racial, ethnic, class, and religious. As we've stated before the wonderful framers of the government allowed for this as long as the infrastructure that held it all together was strong. The best-willed political types try and get people over these factious identities and into common ground. That is the struggle and art of politics. If it's simply a war of identities then what is left?

Certainly, the left, liberal, progressive area has disintegrated over the past few decades. It was successful in the 60's and 70's because (a) people en masse turned against Vietnam, (b) people admired and supported the Civil Rights struggle, (c) young, idealistic generation became politically active, (d) great, charismatic leaders arose, (e) economic good times gave room for experimentation, goodwill, sense of renewal. All of this went away very quickly. My crusty old journalism professors used to warn us in 1971 or so, "you haven't seen the backlash yet..." Well, old dudes, here we are and we have seen it. And it ain't purdy.

The liberal progressives have a more difficult time in fabricating an identity that holds together. Whereas the Christian right does not. One reason for this is that in urban areas there is much more mobility, much more change; whereas in the rural areas there is stagnation. Now, why the poor rural folk can't get government to stimulate their local economies and instead give everything up to the urban rich is beyond me. That's one for the social psychologists I suppose.

The left progressives have a lot to blame themselves. They do not reach out to understand the very society they want to change. Politically, that is disastrous. A literary mind can be elitist; the political mind can not. They need a creative deconstruction of their concepts and the language used to put those concepts together, as well as change the angle of attack they have toward chronic problems.

They became too self-satisfied if not self-righteous. And one reason for that is their relative isolation. Despite the fact they are usually mobile, educated, intelligent, well-read they are insulated from, obviously, the "red

zone." They are more apt to stay out of the "red zone," now more than ever. And frankly, the "red zone," fears and despises them more than the other way around. And speaking of "more," I don't think Michael Moore did Senator Kerry any good with his film. In true American fashion he did quite well for himself. But, I will bet anything that a few of the swing voters in swing states had the bejesus scared out of them by Mr. Moore. Just a passing thought.

A literary mind can afford to scorn and peel away the stupidity of the people and show them the big, ugly mirror with "red zoners" at the center racing around buying up duct tape and thinking the gays are going to set up some gay-kingdom with the Christians becoming sex-slaves or something.

However, the political mind must possess "mutual respect," must deal equally with all pluralities, must believe that the poorest is as filled with potential as the wealthiest. The key to modern leadership and power is the ability to "empower" others. When the left progressives learn this lesson and apply that to the poor, rural "red states", they will gain.

Obviously there's a difference between an urban person dealing with the complexity of city life and city problems, depending on rational thinking to deal with these things, and expecting the nation as a whole to respond to its own problems in the same way. And people in the interior of the beast dealing with complexity by faith. And they do same thing by expecting the nation as a whole to respond to its problems in like fashion. The two great shadows in this are that "facts" can be faked and manipulated and "faith" can be faked and manipulated. In the city, experts must be brought in to deal with the multiplicity of problems. That's part of the rational process we've seen for a century or more. Max Weber wrote books about this. And what do the experts possess but techniques to solve problems? It is the political leader who must assert what the outcome is going to be. What is the "vision?" What is the final result going to be from the admixture of all these experts? The president, the mayor, the supervisor, the governor, etc are the ones that must articulate the final result. And then the people decide if things have come together to solve a problem. So, there is "faith" in the system of experts; there is much more trust in it because there is nothing else in the urban civilization.

It is better if it is independent of any belief system; other than the organizing principles in the founding document.

The faith types have faith and trust in their neighbors. And faith can be used to deal with very large problems; alcohol abuse, drug abuse, sexual abuse, frustration, lowered expectations, poverty, and so many other ills. And faith can deal with these problems at times. And perhaps it's true that in our society, the expert has tried to get down into those personal levels and the faith types have tried to reclaim the complex society. And both are overstepping their bounds.

There are many open-ended questions raised by the two recent elections, the terrorist attack, the "war on terrorism," and the future of the United States. Smart, conscientious people had better start driving their minds through these questions.

November 4, 2004

[Back to Sunoasis Opinions](#)

This was an election won by people who fear. It was won by a people who have no vision, no hope. It was won by desperate people. It was won by people who are not moved by the facts. It was won by people who do not read anything written after the New Testament. And even after reading the New Testament they don't get this orphic phrase from the Master, "beware of those who come in my name dressed in sheeps clothing but who are within as ravening wolves." What else is a "ravening wolf" but the will to power? There is little difference between an Ayatollah spewing a decree to a captured people and masses of illiterate people imposing the rule on the pretext of "moral issues." Backwardness won out in this election and we will pay a steep price for it.

President Bush has squandered whatever respect he gained after September 11th. If he were running a corporation and made a serious blunder and cost the company important partnerships, and brought disgrace to the company, and put that company at risk would he be rewarded with a new four-year contract? I don't think so. The people who gave President Bush this victory were the same ones who bought up all the duct tape when the same administration said a terrorist attack was immanent several years ago. Do you think they

were testing the stupidity and fear of the people at the time? I think so.

The worst are the so-called intelligent ones who know better and realize that power is now about the ability to control the backwardness of the people. This is blatantly shown in the way President Bush bought off the Hispanic vote and will show up later on in vast new numbers of illegal immigrants as the economy softens and jobs are lost in great numbers.

The Republicans evidence no knowledge of what is going on; they were created purely out of political revenge instigated by the infamous 60's and 70's. Such politics are doomed to failure and to a reaction many times its weight as the facts are ignored and as mistakes go on without accountability.

We have a long, four years ahead of us.

November 4, 2004

The heart kept hope but the gut knew the truth; Senator Kerry could not win unless he built more fire under his campaign. He did a good job against the incumbent, during a war. The margin of victory was slim at best.

Can President Bush conduct a "war on terrorism," with only half a nation? Perhaps he can. He will find the answer to that unless he does some reaching out.

The Democrats need to organize for 2008, starting right now. It has to pinpoint the five or six micro-regions that determine these elections and focus on them until themes emerge in the next four years.

The Democrats need to find a charismatic leader. Senator Clinton is not that person, although some in the Democratic party think otherwise. They are almost obsessed with her running in 2008 but it would be a wrong move. In 2008 it is likely that a "war on terrorism" will still be going on. That's not certain but probable. The person nominated at that time must gain the confidence of the people in leading the military and conducting an on-going war of this type. It could be that bin Laden is out of the picture by that time. It may be that Arafat will have departed to his great reward and the situation between Israel and Palestine become worse.

It could be that the war on terrorism will have shifted to southeast Asia, North Korea or some other location.

The most distressing fact to come out in this election was that "moral issues" dominated every other consideration. Gay marriage, abortion, and other "moral issues," impacts a very small segment of the population. The competence or incompetence of the POTUS impacts billions of people and a large portion of the future. That "moral issues," of this nature dominate can only mean that people are frightened, not thinking, sunk down in lonely, frustrated lives, and easily led by the nose to the "moral" trough. People, that is, who will give up \$5 or \$100 to the charlatan on stage making weird noises so that the crippled man can walk.

November 3, 2004

Iraq is a disaster for some of the same reasons Vietnam was a disaster. Number one, we did not respect our adversaries. This is a prime example of being cloistered in a huge, emwombing nation-state that has become narcissistic to the core. Everything is about us. The focus is on us. We are perfect, angelic, appointed people and the rest of the world are savages. In Vietnam we were essentially outfought and outthought. In Iraq we are being outthought. And the terrorists are winning. And the American people are in denial about it.

So, the old general is sitting there and the old general has some wisdom. And what does the old general say but this: "It doesn't matter how much firepower you have, how sophisticated your equipment, how well-trained the troops are it comes down to one thing, one thing only. Winning the hearts and minds of the people." And the old general speaks wisdom when he says this.

When your bombs and armaments kill 100,000 civilians are you going to win hearts and minds?

Hearts and mind were starting to be won in Mosul because there was an attempt to fix the infrastructure. Repairing the basic necessities of life in a poor country is a way to gain hearts and minds. But, that depends on money and the cash is running out. No money, no hearts and minds. And one of the prime reasons the

Bush Administration is pushing the "let the people invest their social security," is to prime pump the economy and raise more money for Iraq.

All a terrible disaster.

And then it dawned on me. We are being run by Enron-types. It's the same win at all costs gang; the macho, aggressive types who want to build monuments to themselves and end up destroying everything. That is what the passive, fearful, ignorant, sad people put in place in dear old America.

What kind of leader lands on a carrier to declare the war has ended, when it hadn't even started?

One truly hopes that a persistent presence by troops in Iraq will bring the terrorists to their knees. But, as the old general said it's the "heart and minds" of the people who must be won. Who must be convinced that an army made up a people of a different race, different religion, different language, different culture is acting on their behalf. An army discredited by the prison abuse and by any number of violations of local codes of conduct.

The situation in Iraq is similar to the relation between police and poor neighborhoods. The cops fear for their lives, walk on eggshells, are suspicious of everyone and the poor resent, even hate the cops. At no time do the cops win the "hearts and minds" of the people.

We need to support our troops. They have been put into a terrible ordeal. We need to support the Constitution. We need to fight any group that wishes harm to us. But, above all else, we need to know what we are doing. And we do not. And we will fail. And it will be a spectacular fall.

We will survive. We are a great people and have passed through many tests. The past forty years have seen America pass through severe, massive tests. The Vietnam War, Watergate, the fight for Civil Rights, the fight for a clean environment, the cold war with the Soviet Union, and now this. And we are at the beginning of this. And will pass through some hellish times.

December 22, 2004

We are political animals and need it as much as we need food and sex, God for that matter. Sometimes freedom is a surrender to necessity and other times a struggle against it. Sometimes the mind is that little air pocket in a vast sinking ship where the few stick their heads and survive, hoping against hope.

I was impressed with a speech Robert Reich gave before the election. He said the reason why so many men are devotees of Fox and Limbaugh and so forth is because in the last 25 years their wages have gone down. And there's no greater recipe for trouble, political or otherwise, as when one is hopelessly caught in a downward spiral of wages. And what these males have seen over the years is, first a turning away by the Democratic Party who began to characterize them as rednecks, racists, homophobic, jingoists, animal killers and everything else that is odious. And then a turn to minorities and women as the new bulwark of constituents. And so these men in the red states watched their wages decline and began see women and people of color wearing expensive suits, driving excellent cars, carrying briefcases, with an expression on their faces of, "don't bother me unless you can make me money or make me happy." This was a shock to them and they embraced the radical Republicans.

One of the first things Democrats have to do is discover how the wages of men in the red states can increase. The Republican's won't do that. They figure this group is locked up with them. I see that happening in the next four years. The Clinton's may be a key factor in that, I'm not sure.

The problem for the Democrats is a fundamental one. The Republican's have a faith-based agenda that is emotionally satisfying. Many of the Republican politicians are excellent "secular humanist fun-seekers" but know a good support group when they see one. The Democrats have always relied on the intellectual, academic group to develop sophisticated ideas about inequalities, environmental problems, and the like. But, as we've mentioned before, that support group was dependent on some variation of the [Marxist theme](#) that everything in life was reducible to immutable classes, defined, measured, predicted, controlled. And the central class division to understand was between those who own and those who labor. Now, those ideas have been modified over time and exerted tremendous influence. But we are going through an epochal change in the mind of western society. It's the old cultural shift that was prominent twenty years ago between the ["Newtonian universe."](#) of predictability and the ["Einsteinium universe"](#) of chaos, time travel and the rest of it.

The old ideas are being abandoned; the classifications emptied out. And so the Democrats can do little but fall into old, tired definitions, animosities, and ideas. Until a new structure of thinking about the world is in place, the Democrats are going to have a hard time of it. They will be, essentially, trying to put out the fires started by the wild, radical Republicans.

Perhaps in our lifetime we will see an idea catch fire and roar through culture in ways we can hardly predict at this point. Perhaps. But, by that time we may contact life on other planets and ideas will seem superfluous. "Are they comin' to get us?" It may serve earthlings right to get conquered by some greater force in the universe. I don't wish it to happen on my watch. But then, isn't the conservative wave a kind of conquering from beyond the pale of anything reasonable and good and in the grain of America? Yes, it is. Indeed it is.

January 29, 2005

[Back to Sunoasis Opinions](#)

The young, literary crowd as best as I can reckon it, have opted out of politics and they have our blessings. We know now that the snake charmer and his wife in the cabin on the Smokey Mountains has much more play in politics than the mere literary imagination. Thus, America. Well, it's not all that bad. And the responsibilities of living in a liberal, democratic nation require some thoughtfulness, some relation to what goes on.

I've been reading both the Paradox of American Power by Joseph Nye Jr. and The Unconscious Civilization by John Saul, two very excellent books that argue from different perspectives. One would say that Nye's perspective is a bit more realistic, a bit more grounded in the world-as-it-is. Saul's main thesis is an attack against the "corporatist state," and its ability to corrode liberal democratic values.

I fully agree with him. I've seen it and experienced it and know that "corporatist values" are a resurrection of old aristocratic values that were supposed to have been subdued in our democratic era. His further thesis is that the political state is the only entity able to corral and subdue the beast. Again, I agree with it.

He underestimates how powerful is the drive for personal happiness among free people. That is usually underestimated by academic, literary types being miserable and stopped up in themselves for all the thinking they do about the world. I recommend both volumes to anyone serious about engaging the world, in its reality, today in the beginning of the 21st century.

What the young rightly see is that the fear of terrorism overrules all other considerations and our nice, philosophical discourse on liberal democracy, even in the form of chastising the beast, means very little. It may even get you lynched or ostracized.

But a brave, intelligent, free people would plunge directly into the center of the fear of terrorism and discover, not simply its roots but all its darkness, all its permutations. "We will make allies even of those who hate us so..."

I question whether the American people are brave, intelligent, or even free now. And my people have been here for over three hundred and fifty years and lived in every region north of the Mason/Dixon line.

As individuals there are plenty of brave, intelligent, and free Americans. But as a group they are in deep fear, backwardness, and slavery of a sort that will take another century to disentangle. And that makes me a bit pessimistic but I always hold out hope....I am a true American in that sense.

January 27, 2005

[Back to Sunoasis Opinions](#)

Sights and sounds at the beginning of the 2nd administration: At the risk of being a perpetual nay-sayer bobbing in an ocean of complacency, let us inspect some of the speech today. Among the rhetorical flourishes of the President, one can perceive a kind of future. In his speech he practically declared a jihad on

behalf of American style democracy. This would translate into a lot of military action all around the globe. And comes at a time when American foreign policy is despised and, in fact, in danger of being defeated in Iraq. The type of "idealism" President Bush talked about is precisely the type of idealism that can lead to disaster. It is the sort of idealism that says, "we'll install democracy in Iraq, kill 100,000 innocent people, get bogged down by insurgents, rush into an election, bug out as soon as it is politically possible, and then wash our hands of the whole mess. It's up to you now Iraqi's..."

The elections coming up are meaningful. The hope the President expressed for Iraq is meaningful. But, the fact that the insurgency has not been subdued and likely won't for a good while is meaningful as well. And it instructs people all around the globe that there is a real limitation to military power.

And, of course, the "vote" is only one component of a democratic society. Iraq had a "vote" under Hussein. It was a meaningless vote because it didn't come with any of the core freedoms necessary for a democracy. Watching the inaugural I had to question my own vote. Some votes count more than others. Not all the votes are equal. If I pay the President \$50,000 I can sit in on a dinner with he and his charming wife. This is more in the tradition of benign despotism when dignitaries brought gifts to the despot, to influence and be heard. In that context, what is my vote? I don't see any of my special interests giving up that kind of money for that sort of influence.

We are not going to go so far to say that human habit has gravitated to the more natural state of despotism. It tends to want to accumulate more and more power. It tends to give up more of its freedom to gain security and comfort. All of these tendencies are alive and well in America. Again, for all the rhetorical flourishes of the President, for all his somber idealism, who among his group has volunteered for that tough assignment in Iraq?

That does answer one question that I have thought about for quite some time. In the past a "social order" was believed to have been ordained by God and few people argued against it. The nobleman was never to be the peasant and vice versa. With the coming of democracy this was thrown over. Or was it? The only conclusion I come to is that the present social order is a phony one because those who benefit from it won't fight for it. They won't fight for it because they know it is phony. Their singular hope is that the sleepy, distracted people will not notice they aren't wearing clothes.

What would a "social order" look like in a free democracy? An interesting question that is rarely connected to the reality of anything but regardless. We believe that a social order built on the love of money will dig its own grave and leave it at that.

The other thing, of course, is that to have a free democracy you need a free and critical press. And the press, in this country, is solidly in bed with the administration. It's a disgrace, pure and simple. There is a kind of de facto tyranny when the press and the people give up the critical mode and prance around the naked emperor convincing each other that he's wearing a splendid coat.

And everything the Bush Administration has done has tried to squelch criticism. It even pays off "commentators" to tell its good news.

To get a sense of what a democracy should look like go read the [Funeral Speech of Pericles](#). It's in Thucydides and other sources. The Greeks had slaves but they also put their rears on the line in the field of battle. Even Socrates fought at the battle of Marathon.

No, we are not a democracy but a Republic, based on the Roman model as outlined by Cicero. We must understand not simply how the Republic was built but why it "declined and fell..." That is an academic exercise but it is also a part of the moral courage necessary in America, now that it has attained the stature she has.

One thing that marked the [decline of the Roman Empire](#) was its control in the hands of fewer and fewer families. Another was the corrupt spoils system that only permitted a fraction of the population to exercise their ambitions. A third was the fatigue the burden of Empire carried to the people. And a fourth was the mark the Empire became for anyone and everyone who wanted to make a little history, including the barbarians who swept through the Empire in the 400's.

January 20, 2005

[Back to Sunoasis Opinions](#)

The "liberals" and thinking types who are now in a distinct minority should turn their attention away from "issues" and focus on "problems." Certainly, in the guts of the political arena all people fight for what they believe. A big fight will happen over the privatization of social security; eventually it will be rejected, I think, because of the memory of the dot.bomb/market bubble of a few years ago. So, certainly, there are troops that need to be deployed on the "issues" front.

The biggest front or the one where thought can actually do something and shape something is in framing the nature of problems. Perceiving the complexity of problems. Introducing a few solutions. And keeping the feet of the leaders to the fire when it comes to their fixes in these areas.

Some of the problems are physical like a shortage of vital resources; cheap oil for instance. Some are of a morale type such as the lack of vision/aspiration that I sense in the American people. Some problems have been identified and all types of groups are trying to get a grasp on them. One is the emergence of China; friend or foe? Another is the on-going "global economy." Another, certainly, is global terrorism, especially as it links up with crime and drug interests.

It's time to start re-thinking the future. What hath our technology wrought? It appears to me that the pressure now is to decentralize large agglomerations of people. That can only happen in the privileged affluent West perhaps but it would be a concept to wrangle with.

The American people are too diverse and multitudinous to make simple judgments about them. To generalize would be a transparent attempt to get something out of them or shame them in ways they can't imagine. Within the one splendid region I live in are countless good and bad types, all with their singular tales of how they came to be good or bad; how they manifested the best in themselves or encouraged the bad in themselves. It's often not a simple tale of morality but one of opportunity. And travel tales, work tales, love tales, money tales, tales of danger and illicit joys. An endless, hopeless string of them just in a simple region like my own.

If I were to conjure a future historian he might have a different opinion. He might, it's hard to say. Let us conjure this creature with all the smoke and mirrors at our disposal. Yes, he appears to us. A large, no a huge man with a shocking lack of interest in our own time. "Oh, we study you in fourth grade. We watch the moon landing, the terrorist attack, a baseball game, and Madonna masturbating on stage and go to the next era which is very interesting...and when we play the representative music of your time the students grimace and cup their hands over their ears."

Ah, just as I thought! However, I did ask him for something profound about our own time and what happens. "Well, it's quite simple my good fellow. And, by the way, writing and literature do not disappear but are transformed in ways you can hardly imagine. Your great and brave citizenry broke down into two camps. One were the nihilists who understood better than most that mask was all; that the performance was the thing. And so the nihilist and criminal type learned how to perform and rode up the ladder in ruthless fashion until they had complete control over everything. That was one camp. And the other camp was filled with good, liberal democratic types who became absolutely stoned-frightened at what they saw coming about. And these good people, the back-bone if you will, opted out of it and let it go. And those, my friend, should be the saddest words you hear. They opted out and focused mainly on their own little worlds, wishing for death, wanting everything to be turned under. And so it was. And so it happened."

February 25, 2005

When I was a young guy, in the mid-70's, I lived in the splendid, odd city of Berkeley, California. When I arrived I wrote in my little spiral notebook, "this city is a burned out refugee camp." And it appeared that way, at least at the core of the city. It was the post-60's period of time. Nixon had resigned. Saigon had recently fallen. Disco music was replacing the classic rock era. I was happily dazed and confused about everything.

It was in this environment I began to run into a very strange phenomena; the presence of cults and their recruiters. Cults of every type; religious, political, social, purely weird, and so forth. It was a cavalcade of cults and their followers, usually drugged-out, half-insane characters who did have mythical minds as youth

does. At first I was amused and dismissed it all as fallout from the 60's period of time. Then I became alarmed because I was reading up on the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and noticed some similarities. For one, there was a fanatical aversion to anything rational. For another, complete ignorance that covered itself up with claims of superior knowledge or some kind of channeled intelligence. There was a third; a total lack of self-esteem that had attacked the people before their conversion.

I viewed it as a sociologist would in his first trip to the field. But then I realized that this was not happening in Europe in its decline but in America. Was it signaling a decline? Perhaps it was; obviously Berkeley is not America but there was something very sinister about it all. It was at that time when I turned back to the original sources of American political culture. The framers of the Constitution, [the enlightenment philosophers of Europe](#), the ancient philosophers, [the transcendentalists](#), [the pragmatists](#), and on up into our own era.

What is America?

It was a central question in those days. I took the cults to be a challenge to liberal, democratic culture. They could survive, America could survive as long as the cults did not get power. And only a few of them wanted genuine political power. The prospect of cults gaining political power horrified me and threw me back into the core of the cultural values. I did learn a few things during this time.

For one, a liberal and democratic culture will not survive the types of ignorance being generated by a specialized, dumbed-down, addicted society. For another, it will not survive the vicious cycle of corrupt power alienating more and more people until they part ways in disgust and time wipes the empty buildings away.

It was, then, up to the citizens to get out of the shell of ignorance and become open-ended enough to learn new things. It was up to the citizen to put away dope, alcohol, sex even, sports, and study to understand that which governs.

And, most especially, it was up to the citizens to ensure that there was a critical press and that no cult that wants power gets power.

The [framers of the Constitution](#) saw exactly what we need to see today. The wedding between church and state is a sinister one. It may begin in good intentions but ends in an iron-clasp around the potentials of people, puts a damper on progress, discredits both faith and civil governance, and is not to be trusted. And in my lifetime at no time has the church and state been in bed snuggler than at the present moment.

The [rise of the Evangelicals](#) has sparked the fear I had years ago in Berkeley just as the terrorist attack took me back to the years of thinking about nuclear war. Bad years but which did lead to some interesting areas of contemplation.

February 10, 2005

The free and democratic people have a wonderful way of tearing down a monolithic structure of thought. We experienced that once when the new left gained enormous stature in the wake of Vietnam, Watergate, civil rights, environmental concerns, women's rights and the rest of it. It was across the board but initiated the complex and inevitable "backlash."

Of all the movements of that time the one for civil rights was the most noble; the one most necessary. But even that petered out after awhile. The laws were passed, and the movement eased back into academia where it died on the vine.

The backlash against the 60's gained a lot of momentum in the late 70's. There was the Bakke case that challenged affirmative action, the rise of the fundamentalists, the challenge against the government itself with the tax payer revolt, the presence of Ronald Reagan beginning to appear. This is all history now, as much a part of the history as the fabled 60's and 70's.

In the long run the left was cut to ribbons by internal contradictions and the fact that in a democracy you must represent the real concerns of the people. This is a central lesson. And that chapter is now written and done.

We now are confronted by a very monolithic right-wing that the genius of the American democracy must begin to pulverize and pull down if it is to create a new liberal democracy. It's very difficult to know where to start.

Perhaps laughter and scorn initiate a new age.

The left was burned by its own reductionism. Reduced to the primitive, original sins, life is impossible. To build anything is impossible. Whether that sin is secular or religious life can not emerge from it. In that case there is no growth, development, building, construction but only destruction. The only thing built is a base of power for the destructive force. The left is instructive this way, a lesson. It probably outlines some of the pattern that will finally throw off this right-wing burden.

February 5, 2005

The state of the union strikes me as useful only for the media who then talk endlessly about what is in store the next four years.

I left a quarter of the way through, bored and restless. When the President introduced the soldier's mother and father, and the Iraqi woman whose father had been killed by Hussein, it was very emotional, very moving.

Yet, there are many Iraq's. There are many places where freedom is chained up and will be for a long time. If America's only effort to free people is in Iraq it will be empty; a transparent effort to gain oil and a staging area in a strategic area. What about central Africa, east Africa, even south Africa? North Africa? Are Libya and Algeria free nations? The problem with the President's idealism is that now America must be the liberator of last resort and be depleted by the effort or be the hypocrite that brayed about freeing one people but not another.

Iraq is an emotional issue because it is so good to see people awakening from a deep slumber. And with the economy picking up the President looked very confident; not quite Reaganesque but certainly along the same lines.

The citizen always needs to orientate where he or she is, where the country is, what the pervasive concerns are. That is an excellent act of freedom without which we are molecules in the lab of the mad scientist testing us with extreme heat or extreme cold.

In our time the first turning came with the assassination of Kennedy. That ended the euphoric post-World War II period and initiated a very troubling period. "Troubling" is a loaded word perhaps but it isn't necessarily bad to have a troubling period. It means it is profound, cuts deep, moves us no matter how we try to escape, pins us down, laughs at us, and becomes so much a part of us that when it is released, when a new turning occurs, it's hard to adjust. The election of Reagan in 1980 did mark that turning; the key came when the economy lurched forward, the markets took off, the computer revolution took off, the cold war simmered down; yuppies, money, arbitrageurs, Trump, entrepreneurs, Gates, all were the signs of the time.

It was less troubling, more facile, and will be buried in time no doubt. A third turning occurred in the election of 2000 that showed deep divisions in the nation, and an election that didn't seem legitimate. And then the terrorist attack as the defining moment for this new period of time.

The divisions between red and blue are not as severe as people believe, certainly not dangerous to the security of the United States. And before we know it sociologists will be out in force making reds and blues look at each other in the eyes and say, "I love you." Or have a blue stand and fall back into the arms of a red. The divisions are not critical but they could be down the road. And the idea of the United States under attack by crazed warriors is not utterly new but the damage they could potentially do is brand new.

This period has just started. The Internet plays prominently, much as TV did in the 50's.

February 2, 2005

Only those with faith in the structure of governance can tolerate criticism toward power. The relation to power in a putatively Christian-centered culture is one of the prime relations. The evangelicals carry with them two extraordinary insights that appeal to personal faith but don't work in practical life. One is that we

are near the end-time, therefore, it doesn't matter what happens. Applied to an individual consciousness that may be a soothing way to view things. "Our stay is brief so we should endure." However, if you apply that to the working of practical affairs it is a great danger. At some point the rational has to kick in and say, "well, we don't know what happens exactly and we must plan as though the Earth orbits the sun for many years to come."

The most apocalyptic moment in this country came in the early-to-mid 70's when it appeared all tires had sheared off the vehicle and it was careering to the cliffs below. It is very difficult to communicate to people how dark and "end-time" that period was.

Among the things we attribute that to was a combination of drug-taking and the collapse of authority that happened after Vietnam and Watergate and with the uprushing popular movements in civil rights, environmentalism, etc. There was a rise in cults and "new ageism," and of "dropping out," or "alienation." It will be an interesting time to study for future historians.

Now there is another apocalyptic feeling initiated by two things: The rise of evangelicalism and the terrorist attack. The other extraordinary insight of the evangelicals is that Christ asserted the primacy of God over both the Church and State. This is a correct assumption and why the first Christians separated themselves from the state as much as they could.

And there is nothing quite as powerful as good works done anonymously in the dark corners of the world.

The danger is the way in which this simple theocracy is applied by the evangelicals. They have rationalized the ancient order of King-rule and, in fact, the theocracies one sees in the Middle-East. "God rules all, my faith has put me in direct contact with God, therefore I will rule."

The frightening thing is how the religious right have tried to wipe away the careful reasoning of the framers of the Constitution. The separation of church and state required a new type of citizen who could partition his faith from his responsibilities as a citizen. He would be fulfilled as a thinking person and as a person of faith. The stark division between these things would end and the "house would no longer be divided against itself."

But, by pitting one against the other the whole thing unravels. The sublime beauty of America is destroyed. And it consigns itself to a historic role that is predictable. Power-mad believers against power-mad secularists or systems thinkers or scientists.

If God is to rule, whose God? Why not have representatives of every God ruling things? And why is your interpretation of God more real or substantial than mine? And are these beliefs unassailable? Why should I permit you to tell me that your belief requires me to do things that I don't want to do?

The problem is the apparent collapse of modern philosophy but we will have to sort that out for another time.

March 29, 2005

The attention should not be on journalists but, of late, they have been front and center. For one thing the government is dissolving the shield law protection that allows journalists access to sources without having to reveal who they are. Journalists are being shot at and killed in combat. Journalists are being vilified by nuts from the right-wing. And make no mistake about it, they are nuts in every sense of the word. Right-wing blogging nuts represent one of the most anti-American strains imaginable. They are the proverbial ass-lickers and will try to kill anyone who tries to dislodge their tongues.

The greater problem is the intense fear moving through the American public like a tsunami. It has trapped the spirit of the American people and shut it down in ways I haven't seen in thirty years of being aware of things. Certainly, in the 80's there was a reaction to the earlier period of time, a period of turmoil. People turned against it and headed in another direction under the wing of Ronald Reagan. But, this is different. This is something that, in and of itself, is a crisis.

What one sees is a lack of confidence in freedom, a lack of confidence in a system of checks and balances. What one sees is a lack of confidence in a society filled with sight and sound that may not be our own. Fright. And so, from the American people comes nothing new or vital. No new ideas, no new creative effusion, no new forms of freedom, no ideas, nothing, nada.

That is the sad condition of this time. An emptiness filled with fear will not succeed to the future.

And so we look for that ax that Kafka mentions to break open the frozen seas within us.

For that ax we would give something of value.

"Liberalism" is no longer the problem. The people have successfully buried the old liberalism and any new idea will have to come from original thinking and imagination. The problem is the strength of the right-wing and its willingness to hide behind "stability of society," or "patriotism" or any number of abstract notions thrown up and out of their frightful emotions, on behalf of hatred. The problem is the "congress" between government and religion. It will all play itself out to the bitter end I suppose and end with horrific scandals and a decimated population of under-achieving, frightful people.

The fright of much of the American people is symbolized by the small but meaningful scandals in the Bush Administration; foisting paid mouthpieces on the public as "journalists." They are saying in no uncertain terms, "we fear the truth, we fear reality, we fear the people, we fear the implications of living in a free nation."

They are frightened of a war that has not been defined yet for the American people. And there's no doubt in my mind that the threat is real and must be dealt with.

March 9, 2005

After watching Newt Gingrich being interviewed by editors in New Hampshire, we place a large bet that Mr. Gingrich is running for president in 2008. He was in pretty friendly environs and came off looking well. He's going to position himself as the "intellectual politician," who will raise the ceiling of political discourse and be a mediating type of guy. That will be one of his tactics.

He believes his opponents will be the Clinton's. He didn't say that but he knows the Democrats are clueless and without ideas. But, the Clinton's are an anomaly who have a special appeal to boomers and all kinds of micro-cultures in this country.

American politics works when the thinking group understands the dialectics of the "political forces" at play, now, for nearly 40 years. And then radically cuts through the synthesis to the core of pragmatic American values. The Hegelian or Marxist dialectic is for ideologues and extremists. America is greatest when it is pragmatic and demands that ideas, even, work for a living.

A brief summation of the political landscape:

1960-1980 (Kennedy through Carter)

- The forward momentum of dissident groups (African-Americans, women, gays, environmentalists, anti-war)
- Latching their grievances to a strong welfare state
- Creating the thesis for media and academia

1980-2000 (Reagan through Clinton)

- The creation of an antithesis by three dominant groups: Fundamentalists, Anti-Tax revolt, remnants of Buckley-type conservatism, neo-conservative intellectuals.
- End of Cold War
- Creation of computer/hi-tech era

2000-2005 (George W. Bush)

- Division between red and blue
- Terrorist attack and wars in Middle-East

Obviously, this is not a complete list but it does outline why there is a difference between the coasts (generally created by the "thesis") and the interior (generally created by the "antithesis"). The fundamentalists reacted to a two-pronged phenomena from that 60's era. One was the counter-culture and the other was feminism. While there was sincerity in the fear of many people about these things there was also very deft manipulation by clever types which, I suppose, is an expression of the very art of politics. At the same time the middle-class was hit by this over-burdened government, centered in the welfare state that tried to help everyone and remedy past abuse. The 80's and 90's swept through and absorbed the previous time and created it's own thesis. Pockets of the previous period still exist here and there.

Some points leap out:

- Women gained independence because of the expanding economy rather than "feminism" per se which was tied back into "socialism." So, split loyalty by women who, reflecting on their independence and success, had to support the basic underpinnings of a capitalist society. So, "feminism" in the academic sense of the word floundered.
- The end of the Cold War justified Reaganism on a certain level. But, the end of the Cold War also released new types of energy because the dreaded enemy didn't exist anymore. So, much more opportunity for a new type of liberalism to emerge.
- The computer revolution justified the free-capital, entrepreneurship of the time but also released new type of energy that can't be predicted. For the younger generation the internet is like rock music was to the boomers; their first defining moment in the new world.

The problem in America is that it must remain a creative, forward-looking, alert nation while fending off the fear imposed by the war on terrorism and threat of terrorism. When it stops in its tracks it collapses on itself and is a terrible beast. Get the people sacrificing for a future that is worth sacrificing for; instill a bit of "deferral of gratification," in them. Politics, obviously, can't impose these values. In fact, the opposite occurs. The people impose their values on politics which is why we see the comic book characters dancing illusions in front of the bedazzled people.

April 24, 2005

It's strange to go through an experience taught by the abstractions of political thought but, there, in the flesh and mind spotted where we are, exactly, on the map of time.

"Politics always moves in a pendulum from one extreme, back into a still point, and then on out into the other extreme." The few political thinking classes and journalism classes taught this fact. I applied it when I got out of school and realized the assumed liberalism of the 70's was the far-end of the pendulum and it was likely a swing-back would start to occur. It began in the late 70's and then built momentum through the first term of Ronald Reagan. It became a veritable tsunami by the end of the 80's and has continued to this day, into the fifth year of the new century without, apparently, abating.

Watching a few programs on TV over the week-end; panels of neo-conservative editors and out and out conservative editors, Republican strategists and the like. The two main themes were, "what will the Democrats do in 2008?" and, "what is the proper relation to foreign policy?" The Republicans have little to fear from the Democratic party at this point. The Republicans are filled with that nasty swill, triumphalism, while the Democrats are bankrupt. That is usually the moment a shift occurs, however slowly and inconspicuously. Politics operates just as the business cycle operates. There are troughs and peaks and sliding up and down to each and the moment a trough is reached a path is discovered back to the peak and at the peak the slope gets rather slippery.

How long it will take for this reversal to take place is anyone's guess. The unexpected crisis is usually the catalyst. If President Bush is fully discredited by the "war on terrorism," it may signal that shift. If the oil prices set off spiraling inflation that might do it. The Democrats have to be rather prudent at this stage, admit their bankruptcy, go back to square one, and design policies that will do at least two things. Support the cities and bring young males in the red states back into the belief that they have a future. They have to be very positive about it, pro-active, and get rid of the final gasps from the radical 60's group.

The Republicans have nothing to fear from the Democrats. They should fear the Clinton's. Both of them are ravished political animals and want the White House with burning passion; almost feel they are entitled to it.

They will be a formidable partnership because the only Democrat who can reach the red states, especially the males, is Bill Clinton. Irony upon irony sets upon the Clinton's. That is why, from a literary point of view, they are a fascinating story. The Republican elite's, the ivy-league, privileged editors, talking heads, and "think tank" types despise the Clinton's. But, the males of the red states, generally, like Clinton and have a closer affinity with him than with those "pointy-headed intellectuals," as the good ol' boy, George Wallace, used to call them.

This is a fascinating turn when you consider it's the Republicans who successfully pounded the elite theme to the red-state males ever since Reagan.

And the Republicans have a great problem that the Clinton's can deftly manipulate. By being so right-wing, way out there in the shadows of something that resembles Iran more than America, the Republicans have opened up the center again. And the Democrats have to nest there. They won't be able to but the Clinton's will. And they've proven over time to have much more loyalty to their political ambitions and their desire to make history than to a silly old political party.

They will design their appeal to a broad-base of constituency and make it very clear that they are a partnership. That Bill Clinton will be doing much of the work in the White House. There will be complete transparency and the people will eat it up. If the people are electing actors and wrestlers to state houses why not this arrangement? And by 2008, the people are going to be sick of George W. Bush. And they are going to be rather nostalgic for that wonderful late 90's period I called, The Clinton Bubble.

Everything will come together. We will finally admit that a woman can lead us. The poet will become a millionaire.

It's necessary to go back to the 1930's and the confrontation of the major crisis of the day by President Roosevelt. This is further hammered home by the debate on social security and how, even at this late date, there is no enthusiasm for the Republican plan. The "New Deal" ushered in the new era that ran up through Jimmy Carter. President Eisenhower did what Clinton did; he pulled the "out" party back to the center.

Eisenhower is significant here because he understood that the Republicans were going to have to shuck off the right-wing to win the Presidency. The lopsided defeat of Goldwater cemented this and it wasn't until the backlash of the late 70's that the right-wing came into prominence. Gone was their McCarthyism or their anti-Roosevelt diatribes. Gone was their association with crazy wealthy men who wanted to be players in history.

April 13, 2005

The Democrats have a problem because the baby-boom generation is aging and as a population ages it gets more conservative and it turns out more of the vote. The conservative tsunami will continue, certainly not without opposition, and transform both the educational system and the media. We can see that clearly in media as the new blogging watch-dogs yip and yap at the heels of "big media." In the educational system a much more conservative agenda will make its way to the fore; in fits and starts certainly. The judiciary will certainly become more conservative. America will fall into that happy little sleep that occurs to people whose strength has been zapped from them by "modernity" or the cruelties of time or whatever it is. And we don't blame them for it.

There is always opposition, always resistance. But, for the liberal wing of the political system to regain stature and power it must find a way to the high road. The entryway to a new political era is the high road. That it corrupts and crumbles over decades is fait accompli and yet, for the democracy to remain fresh it must be done.

Who spots the high road first is usually a prophet but of no use to the political world of operatives and slick willies.

For the benefit of that prophet, male or female, let us list some of the stark things we see casting an eye over the hard lines of the nation.

- Both fear and stability=paralysis
- A disturbing lack of knowledge among many citizens

- A brazen sort of hatred in the world against the United States, most of it unfair or purely calculated ala the president of Venezuela.
- Gambling is becoming the central vice in the early part of the 21st century. Even state governments are financing their budgets with casinos set up by native Americans.
- The need to transform the fuel system over this century from oil/fossil fuel based to a new base.

It is usually the collapse of an economy that signals the beginning of a new era. The next one will probably be no different. The conservatives will appear idiots as their economic system goes down as it always does at some point. However, the savior will not be socialism or some form of leftism but something new and spun away from the habitual ways of thinking. The prophet who sees this and calculates this and sacrifices to gain this insight will help mark the new era. All other are doomed to the dusty remains of our period which will not be attractive to those trying to survive, "hard times."

The high road signals a kernel of truth that emerges whenever sincere people spot or experience something rotten in the world they live in. It is usually spot on and can become a wildfire through the wilderness of complexity and stupidity.

A reactionary era, such as the one we live in, is ultimately futile because the problems do emerge and do suffocate the free people who become livid towards those who support the status quo.

It is an era proud because it tolerates masturbation on stage and the fact it can throw housewives into prison.

Do what thou wilt o wonderful era.....One wonderful consequence of studying history is that all era's tend to blend in and become a mass of nothingness. Only that which peeks out of history, that tries to find a way to the surface, survives. I think of the Constitutional Convention and the strange, elitist types that framed the document. What beautiful, wonderful cats! Cats as in the old beatnik sense of dudes, men, hipsters. They knew. And we should know. Anytime an age produces knowers it should be aware that the knowers will be known to the future and everything else; all the silk dresses and shy love-making under the frilly sheets, and the pissing in the churchyard, and the slaves, and stupidity that you allowed as your "life" disappears. It vanishes into nothingness like a cruel wind and wild dancers take the stage in blackface to sing soulful songs of the plight of old slaves.

We live in an era of unmitigated gall. Of men and women who haven't lifted a finger on behalf of the great American ideals yet claim its privileges.

April 3, 2005

James Madison, writing as Publius in the Federalist Papers remarks that, "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition." Thus, politics. And we are witnesses to what happens when one ambition succeeds and dominates.

The political parties are the fullest expression of political ambitions. Ambitious men and women make their way through each one and they are always met by other ambitions contrary to their own. This is simple enough to know. We expect the political parties to have one large ambition, outside of wanting power, and fighting another large, nearly philosophical ambition. We can say that in the Democrats are the ambitions of those who have been slighted, excluded, impoverished, and so on. And in the Republicans are the powerful and those who want the same sort of power, especially economic power. That's a very safe thing to say and it's generally true. And each of these parties has their own rationale for why their ambition should succeed to power.

As we noted before, the 60's and 70's saw the successful ambitions of the slighted, excluded, impoverished, idealistic come to the fore in a time of great adrenaline. That tsunami was met head on by a countervailing ambition contained in the middle-class tax payers, neo-conservatives, and fundamentalists. Both, at the height of their victory appear eternal and destined to rule forever.

It never happens. A new ambition must arise to fight the successful ambition.

This was brought home by the election, yesterday, of a Hispanic as mayor of Los Angeles. The Hispanic's are ecstatic, some observers believe it will awaken a sleeping giant of Hispanic political involvement and so forth. And others rightly caution that he is the mayor of Los Angeles not just Hispanics of Los Angeles and will have to step lightly through this ethnic minefield to be successful.

At the state or national level a candidate is always going to be judged by their leadership and not their ethnicity. And ambition, again, thwarts the savvy political leader who steps from local and city politics up to a larger stage on the basis of ethnic appeal. There is only one "ethnic" politician at this point who could garner a national following and that is the Senator from Illinois.

I'm sure there are good and bad things about ethnic politics but to fear ethnicity is foolish and does not understand the political system. Personally I think it would be foolish for ethnic groups to fight each other for different ambitions.

What transcends ethnicity?

There are two main problems when thinking of ethnicity. One of them is that majorities are always oppressive or can be. It doesn't matter the race, religion, or ethnic background. We're fortunate that the framers recognized it, it was a chief part of the debate, and resulted in the Bill of Rights along with whole idea of checks and balances. So, praise to those wonderful folks! They erred on the subject of slavery but the question was the same then as it was during the Civil War: Union.

The other problem, which is more contemporary, is that when majority populations sense their self-interest is threatened they tend to band together. And there's little question in my mind that the conservative mood in the country is related, somewhat, to the ethnic politics of the 60's and 70's. What politics needs to do is convince people that their self-interest is not damaged or destroyed by the ambitions of another ethnic group. In fact, the argument has to be put forward that the success of an ethnic group is very beneficial to all groups.

That is the sort of awareness that happens over time and will happen in the United States I believe. And it's a good thing.

May 19, 2005

It's ironic but true that the worst trait in a democracy is contentment. Democracy should produce anger from time to time. The citizens sitting around watching the golf tournament or Survivor, believing that life could get no better; who drive SUV's down the freeways with bold contempt for everything else are not the peak of democracy. And we hold nothing against those who do we simply ignore them.

We believe that the founders of the democracy did not want syphllis-riddled leaders who had simply inherited an office their families could get for them. They feared that a good deal because they were victims of it. To prevent such a malady they put in a lot of checks and balances against power and against those who sought power. But it all depends on a strong, intelligent citizenry, and a strong, critical press. And if there are huge segments of the population who can't stand the heat, then they should remove themselves from the practice of democracy.

We live in a huge womb-like nation that is privileged and unprecedented and happily so. We should be happy about it and protect the system against the stupidities that led to the revolution in the first place. That led to the downfall of many empires and unprecedented societies. It's the willfulness of the people to forget how it was built; where it came from and why. This is very disturbing especially as we see the types of blinders and complacency that's fallen down over the eyes of the people.

Democracy is activism. It is work. It is deferral of gratification because, one's hope and vision is greater than one's appetites.

More than any other system democracy depends on the quality of people who make it up. It is that and little else. All the armies and bombs and billions are meaningless if the people don't raise above what they believe they are capable of.

Saying that I still believe there are excellent character strengths to Americans. The culture went through a terrific crisis in the 60's and 70's where nothing was believed and all was attacked. And the people outgrew that and became stronger, I believe, from the experience without giving up this belief that things will get better. Once the people give up on progress as an idea they are cooked. Now, they need debate what this progress is and how it works itself out in reality but it must seize on something pointing toward the future it can strive for.

More things? Oh goodness, that's probably fait accompli. So what?

May 12, 2005

President Bush spoke today in front of a large group of stone-faced, unenthusiastic Marines. He said what he needed to say. But, I ask again, who among the Republicans and their kids are volunteering for Iraq? And that is the bottom-line. And I ask Senator Warner who defended the president, "What does Iraq have to do with the "war on terrorism?" This was an Ahab like operation that President Bush was manipulated into doing on behalf of Rumsfeld and the rest of the Bush-Senior people. And it's disgusting that no one has the courage to speak out against it.

Iraq is irrelevant. The waste is appalling. The damage to America is incredible. Getting rid of Hussein does nothing against the threat of terrorism. Bin Laden was the greater prize but that was given up. If we go into Iraq on the pretext of handing the people a "democracy," why aren't we in all other parts of the world that are backward and awash in military dictators and theocracies? President Bush has made us the hypocrites of the modern world.

It is so telling that the young Republican conservatives are not serving up their asses for this "cause,"; no one is. Is there anything more disgusting than rich, privileged kids who argue on behalf of power but will not fight their wars? No. Absolutely nothing.

Empty, useless words. Those come out of this president. And people die for those empty, useless words.

The only way we can get out of Iraq is if we pay off the terrorists. And one of those payoffs will be a "seat at the table," and when America leaves the scene the terrorists will bite off a bit of territory for themselves and have the staging area they've always coveted. That's a scenario at any rate. It's obvious the American people will not tolerate ten or twelve years of this nonsense.

Certainly we should monitor the bad-boy weapons and those who want to possess them. No question. The American people will tolerate that for many decades.

* * * * *

President Bush does not diminish, one iota, my love for America and all its promise, potential, and honorable history. It's very difficult not to be concerned about both his foreign policy and economic policy.

In foreign policy he is trying to initiate a democracy in the middle of a chaotic, bloody insurrection. He is trying to do this with half the troops he needs (according to the experts), allowing, then, Rumsfeld to call the shots and formulate an idea of military strategy that was pre-9/11. The situation is so foul it's very hard to say what needs to happen or what should happen. And all good people would want the best for the Iraqi people. Reality seems to get in the way.

There was a very pungent analysis of the epoch-making changes taking place in American economy. [The opinion piece in the Baltimore Chronicle by Paul Craig Roberts](#) points to a continual shift of capital from the West to the East due to a number of factors.

It is intolerable that the American people can not be criticized for contributing to the demise of their own democracy. This has become a taboo subject. "Oh, don't mess with the people, they work hard and do what is expected of them. It's the corporations, the corrupt politicians, the pornographers, the Hollywood types, the fundamentalists... these are the agents of demise in this society."

The future hinges on the health and acuity of the people. Nothing more, nothing less. When the people decline then America will revert to the European model that has elite's in the driver's seat for centuries and the people kept dumbed-down. There is nothing more controllable than a dumbed-down, superstitious, fearful, powerless person. The Church learned this long ago and now the elite's of our own kind have learned the lesson. That's why they will never permit a sorry word said against the people. But, we lay almost all the blame at their feet.

Produce a critical mass of excellent, thinking, liberal, democratic, self-reliant, relatively sober, aware, people who demand from their press, from their government, from their businesses a range of excellent results and you will produce an excellent liberal democracy. And, to be fair, sometimes it approaches this place but it hasn't recently. Our era is a foul one. It is filled with nasty and parasitical celebrityism, stupid people who say that nonplussed O'Reilly is a better journalist than Woodward, ugly people who have not a scintilla of

redemption in them. They've given up God, beauty, truth, and all other demanding things for something that always appears suspect, awful and doomed to extinction.

But then, the people are multitudinous and complex. There is no quaint phrase to wrap them up and deliver them to the mind. In America, literally, a thousand flowers bloom. This is the truth and true experience of one who is experienced and wants the better part of nature to flourish. Honesty makes us admit that whatever abstractions we have about the American people are complex emotions within ourselves, cut and woven out of our adventures among all these people. Sometimes it is good, sometimes not so good.

But, the people stretch beyond our abstractions and into nooks and crannies we can scarcely know. Many people in this society can startle one with their beatific sense of things. The more alert, the better one is.

At the top, the literary imagination watches the prancing show of those in power, hands on the levers and buttons that initiate the good, bad, and ugly. They are who they are. And they are not embarrassed by it!

Nonetheless, we can not divorce the upper layer of ruling types to the grand forest of people out of which the upper emerges. It all comes from below. So, if the upper layer types and institutions seem foul to us we blame the people and say they are co-conspirators in the debacle.

June 30, 2005

A conscious American political life has two complementary aspects to it. It is usually seeded in idealism; the idealism sets the stage and then comes the fierce entrance into pragmatism akin to a space capsule re-entering the Earth's atmosphere. Idealism is utterly necessary because there's nothing that exists or is done that was not seeded in an idea. And so the typical American political animal must go through a period where ideas are seeded, where ideas count. The second phase of this is a telling one; painful but inevitable.

I think of two interesting innovations that came to the fore in the 70's and have had different destinies. One of those was the personal computer. The other was solar power. Both of these were part of the idealism of the 60's. The personal computer was brought into being to fight the dark Darth Vader mainframe computers located in police agencies and credit card companies. With the combination of idealism and strong anti-authority trends at the time it was believed that personal, desktop computers would give the citizens some equity in relation to these vast powers. Powers that turned healthy, liberal, democratic citizens into schleps who go through life not knowing what has hit them.

There was also an environmental, resource problem and solar power was thought to be an answer. Ah, windmills! Every house built using passive solar techniques! Even using the tides and ocean thermal gradients to develop endless sources of clean power.

Both of these ideas were part of the idealism of that time. One made it back into the Earth's atmosphere, stronger than anyone could have predicted. Solar power had a different destiny, not quite disintegrating in the atmosphere but having difficulty in making it safely to the ground.

Both exemplify why some politics works and why some do not. An idea must be held in the hands of many distinct powers. And the only way that idea is going to get form is through the cooperation of those distinct powers which can be characterized as, financial, political, technical, legal, consumer, special-interest and the rest of it. In the case of computers resistance broke down early because there was an apparent market both in the business and consumer section. In the case of solar power there was a lot of resistance and not a great public demand for it. People only care that when they press a button or turn a switch it works. They scarcely give any attention to all the work and technology and money that is necessary to bring that power to their fingertips. Computers however, are hands-on and people identify with them.

The odd thing is that in the long run solar power or renewable energy could be much more significant to the future for the nation than computers. So, while it runs into pragmatic resistance it remains an ideal and is kept alive as such. Again, this is part of the political education of the citizen.

June 1, 2005

The most hateful denizens seize power when the people are scared. That is the terrible truth. And the hateful, eventually, ruin the people and the nation and must be taken from the scene. They must serve time in a Hell reserved for those who are disconnected from the suffering of people. They must be led into the cave of

demons who will deal with them with tooth and claw. Poet's, above all others, understand the anger of the betrayed. So, the betrayers lie and laugh; they lie and laugh and shift the blame elsewhere and are the gargoyles one spots on medieval fountains in some ancient city.

Brilliance is nothing but the mask of evil. It can be. Especially if that brilliance is responsible for the deaths of men and women better than, even, the brilliant man. And so a certain anger, a certain bursting at the center of the soul arises at the acts of evil brilliance. Something lets loose. A torrent. A terrible sky appears one late summer. And the innocent only weep for their nation.

* * * * *

No one can blame people for feeling passive in front of the events that tromp across the screen or the mind on a daily basis. Very few of us are actors in the events of the time. But all of us must have a relation to what goes on if we consider ourselves free. And we have that particular American prejudice that Teddy Roosevelt had that those bloodied in the ring are more noble than those who sit outside and criticize. Nonetheless, few of us are direct actors in the history of the time.

Many years ago I covered a riot in Berkeley, CA for a local newspaper. This was a consuming, exhausting, dangerous affair that had cops chasing protestors, protestors chasing cops; it had humor and pathos, flowers in gun barrels and cracked bones. I was standing next to this big, bearded guy and he got nailed in the center of his forehead with a rock thrown on the otherside of the street, intended for a police car spewing out tear gas from under the chassis. It was a national story many years ago. But, in the larger scheme of things it leaves hardly a trace. In Facts on File, a bare mention that underestimated the crowd count. In other references, a bare whisper. And at the time I thought to myself, "this is the biggest thing I've ever been in." It was a few months before the killing of students at Kent State. Events disappear and reappear like old stage plays. But as someone said, "the first time history occurs it is tragedy, the second time it is farce."

Our history is not so much in these little events we think are so big. Our history is written very large; the effects of technology, the good, bad, and ugly of science, vast populations supportable by modern economy that is driven by cheap oil, the penetration of space, among other things. It is blowing through us without sentimentality and leaves nothing in its wake but nonplussed human beings. In that sense we are all actors in history and pay attention for a reason.

Many give up the need to try and understand out of the sheer frustration of it. Others become convinced that human nature, history, and even the future are so filled with evil all we can do is tend our little gardens and live as gracefully as we can. Many of the good-willed do what they can in anonymous pursuits based on their belief that things can be better. Those, too, are actors in history.

It was Ghandi who said that human beings can do very little but the very little they can do is vastly important. That is a true perception and one that resolves the terrible problem of wanting to be big and powerful but ending up small and barely significant. If you surrender to either side of this equation it creates grave problems but if you resolve the equation then something decent gets done.

July 13, 2005

As I wrote back in November 2002, "[The Democrats are in serious trouble and need a radical change to be effective in the first quarter of the 21st Century.](#)" I read those notes back after looking through an article in the SF Chronicle about the Congressional Progressive Caucus, described as a "government in waiting." I have my doubts, although I admire anyone stepping up to challenge the Republicans. The problem for them is that there is nothing new in their proposals. And those proposals were defeated for a reason. You could only get universal access to affordable, high-quality health care, and raise the minimum wage when the loyalty of people shifts from the private to the public sector. It will happen but later rather than sooner in my humble opinion.

The disgust for the private sector has to reach a certain threshold or critical mass before the people go out and find a new TR or JFK. There are certainly chinks in the armor in the private sector. One is the malfeasance issue. And the other, more important one, is the offshoring of American jobs to Asian economies who will not permit offshoring back to the Americans who will be willing to do minimum wage jobs. We point out, again, this [opinion piece in the Baltimore Chronicle by Paul Craig Roberts](#). He indicates a continual shift of capital from the West to the East due to a number of factors. Obviously, nothing is forever but his point is that unless there is a remedy from the federal government, things could get very dicey. So, we

expect some battles along this front.

The progressives have huge obstacles. For one, there is no charismatic leader in sight, akin to a Ronald Reagan, who could transform the attitude in this nation as Reagan did. Hillary can't. Hillary is a brilliant political animal but lacks the character to effect a shift. For another, the private sector will be a formidable block unless there is a wholesale reappraisal as there was during the Vietnam era. And era's can't be fabricated. For a third, there simply is no momentum for it among the young. The young can change in surprising ways but we don't see them sacrificing themselves to the maw of bigger government. For a fourth, until the terrorism threat is cleared up the federal government will be a principle actor in planning and executing strategies versus the terrorists and not a leader in social policy. While "socialism" and "liberalism" will lose their sting as negative buzz words through time, the people don't want the government to be the sugar daddy.

What something like the Congressional Progressive Caucus can do is shine light on the shadows of the current administration and, perhaps, get a few changes underway.

The progressive era in the 21st century will have to wait for the unpredictable confluence of events and ideas. Meanwhile, it should focus on the larger questions that neither government nor politics can handle at this point. One of those is the shift of the energy system from fossil fuels to other fuels, besides nuclear. Another is a massive effort to re-educate the citizens for the 21st century.

July 5, 2005

I read the news today o boy, read the columnist and his "progressive" screed o boy. Read the rants of the insane and inane; read the fears and hatred of the many. Read them all in a single hour. They appear without fail; they are eternal and will return to whatever comes next on this continent, tomorrow or a thousand years from now.

Was there a cultural reaction to the "polymorphous perversity," of the 1960's era? Yes. Is the conservative dominance in our time a backlash against the rebellion by the dark children of privilege? I believe it is to an extent. Of course, a backlash that creates its own age must stand on its own and so, in turn, it fails and crumples like the wounded soldier.

The liberals have this terrible dilemma that they, themselves, can not solve: Americans never want a return to the welfare state. It may be forced on them if there is another catastrophic depression but of their own free will they will not go down that road. Liberalism demands a strong public sector that can "right the wrongs," of the past and help distribute capital to needed areas. But it can only do so with the consent of the governed; of those who pay the taxes and they've lost those people for a generation at least.

The ranting columnist is angry because the society, as a whole, is not "polymorphously perverse," as the columnist is. But, the truth is that the columnist can be as polymorphously perverse as he wishes to be. The repressive, pent-up, slack-jawed, dumb, backward hick from Arkansas is not going to come into the columnist's region and tell him to stop his polymorphous perverse ways. All the hick can do is tell his congressman, "he can't do it on my dime." And that is politics and why any plurality must be sublime if it wants to make inroads in this federal system. The polymorphous perverse provide a bit of entertainment, the dumb, backward hick provides some sorghum and it all evens out. "Don't kill me and I won't kill you."

Liberals needs to let the past go. They need to get humble and go out and learn about the society they want to change. They need to go to the hick and understand him and his way of life. They need to view the country as a buzzing, lit-up challenge to an imagination that understands and appreciates the fascination of normal human beings unleashed as never before in history. Anytime stereotype enters the picture there is loss. The liberals need to understand this and understand why they have been defeated by the lowly American citizen. And when they learn this lovely lesson, then, they can start that long road up toward the high-road, standing high over the valley and make their grand insights that will lift the people from their misery.

* * * * *

On the other hand, the right-wing evangelicals have revealed themselves as the craziest cats in the barnyard and are deserving of a swift kick from the stage of history. One of the prominent leaders calls for the elimination of a foreign leader by covert operatives. And when we look in the New Testament or the Constitution for this precedence we find none. Ah, they are as insane as those we fight. And shouldn't that upset people in this nation? Shouldn't they be concerned about the people they give their money and power to?

President Bush looked like a deer in the headlights as he scampered off to Idaho to explain his policies in Iraq. Rumsfeld looked confident in policies he knows in his heart have failed. The "leadership class" in this nation is as low as it has ever been. The good people need to rise up and wipe it from the center of the stage. They won't because, in large measure, it is a reflection of themselves; who they are, who they have become. And they will not admit it. And the great fear that was sounded years ago will start to take place. America will become the rogue nation that the rest of world puts in its telescopic view finder. It has not grown up. It was never ready for the type of power it gained after World War II. The baby-boom generation failed miserably at understanding the experience of the time it is identified with.

The mess is palpable.

Often we tell ourselves, "as long as there is no shooting between political parties, all is well. We may pursue our aspirations and not worry too much about things." This is true to a large extent, as long as we have the courage to look into the structure of governance, at least once, and see how easily things can topple.

After all, in this era of private sector power we've seen companies destroyed by a few corrupt people. All of the nice checks and balances, like law and regulation, couldn't withstand the assault of corrupt human nature. No appearance of towering, glittering strength could mask the internal flaws that would, eventually, do the company in.

And the American must look, at least once, from the constituent level, all the way to the top where things are obstructed by complexity and secrets. It is tied together. The constituent level shows a great deal more variety and human complexity without a doubt. And every single person then must ask, "Am I proud of what has emerged from me? Am I proud of what has emerged out of my collective self, called America?" These questions are typically made into political sausages and served up when the political campaigns heat up.

There is a personal side to democracy and it must be articulate for any of the checks and balances to mean anything.

When I look at Hiroshima, for instance, or Vietnam I ask myself, "how can the normal, decent American recover their humanity from these events?" Something of themselves has gone into them. It does no good to feel guilt. How, though, does the human being recover from these massive failures of humanity and go on? How does one say, then, "ah, well we are going to build a new world, join up, come on in...do the deed with us!" How can that happen when we look deep down into the amount of suffering unleashed by our progress?

And so we hit a central nerve that has been zapped the past sixty years. Progress, the fear of progress, the disgust for progress, the need for it even against all rational sense that says, "any progress you make will be destroyed many times over by the sheer power you bring into the world." Do we, then, simply turn against progress and try to construct a "perfect present?"

There has been progress in the past sixty years. There has been progress along many fronts. The adventure into space has moved in stages toward colonization. The computer has gone from a huge and expensive oddity to a necessity in the modern world, health-care has improved even if the system of delivery has not. Individual people progress, they get better through time, they correct themselves, they make peace inwardly. In fact, one can say that when there is no progress what happens? Decline sets in; any institution or person or nation that doesn't progress is in danger of believing its decline is its halcyon day.

Of greater interest, perhaps, is the case when one aspect of things progresses while all other aspects stay the same or is neglected.

August 7, 2005

I have been reading the wonderful Pulitzer Prize winning book, "*Original Meanings*," by Jack Rakove. He mentions in his chapter, "The Madisonian Moment," that James Madison was convinced that, "A still more fatal if not more frequent cause (of injustice), lies among the people themselves."

Madison, like most of the framers, did not trust human nature especially when it was coupled to power. He had served in the Virginia assembly and cynically observed why legislators ran for office: "ambition, personal interest, and a regard for the common good," with heavy emphasis on the first two.

At all points in their construction of this document the framers saw the implications of rotten human nature.

They placed checks and balances at every level, had no belief in direct democracy, but wanted at least one part of the legislature to be perfectly reflective of the people.

We raise this question because in all of the conversations about democracy very few circle around the problem of "the quality of the democratic people." There are exhortations for better education, more stable families, safer neighborhoods and so on, all of which imply a "people getting better in themselves." But the real question is, "what does it take to be a liberal, democratic citizen in the 21st century?" In their discussions the framers keep going back to three distinct groups who made up society in the late 1700's: professionals, merchants, and those who worked the land. All three had distinctive roles and all three were dependent on each other. So, politics was often the art of melding the interests of these together while maintaining the integrity of each group.

This changed during the 20th century to economic classes of people: wealth, middle-class, and poor. It changed because the goal of democracy was to produce happiness in the people and most people are happy when they are surrounded by goods they own. Will these classes be sufficient for the politics of the 21st century? Politics is hugely shaped around these classes and will for a long time. But, still, what needs to be inside a citizen of the 21st century for the liberal, democratic values to survive?

The question is raised because there are all kinds of threats against the integrity of the person. For one thing, the glut of information now is dividing people into two camps: those filled with inane gibberish and those who are seeking ignorance as a great refuge from having to think about all the things put in front of them. We could ask simple questions like, "is a life dominated by machines conducive to a liberal, democratic culture?" There are no easy answers. "Is the liberal, democratic life a leaping off point to the undiscovered future? Or, is it a vast compromise, defeated by the forces that make up the world today?" "What is the relation between today, the beginning of the 21st century, and all that has preceded it? And if huge discontinuities are spotted what do they imply for the development of free, liberal, democratic people?" And we even ask literary questions. "What is the difference between a citizen formed by working the land and a citizen formed by working in a corporation?"

These questions are at the heart of a problem as old as Adam. What good is a powerful world if it destroys the constituent elements? What good are all the massive effects of modern life if the individuals are ruined? What good is a powerful economy if the environment is destroyed?

Is the modern mind a kind of insanity that ranges over so much material, so many perceptions that it easily destroys what it wishes to destroy? When does freedom lead to its very opposite? And why?

These are some of the questions opened up by the type of world in place. A world that can be quite good and pleasant but one, too, that can turn on a dime.

In reflecting over the past few decades one comes to a startling conclusion. Things change in American society, new values are created, the society recreates itself. Reading some material about the infamous 60's and 70's and all the nuttiness that went on, still, prime values were created. Equity between races and genders, at least as a stated value; husbandry of the environment among them. And in the last two decades, one of which, the 80's was a complete backlash against the first two, one thinks of the definition of a "society" again in the form of good citizens, good families, good communities and the taking down of "big government." And I think the last term is very important. Government is big anyway you slice it but the psychological tie between the citizen and his feeling that government is way beyond him or, conversely, accountable to him makes all the difference in the world. The 90's were a melding of these values.

Things change rapidly. We believe the change is rather epochal in nature. The last 40 years will fall from us like the first stage of a booster rocket. Those of us still aware we are hurtling through unknown space will have all those values intact but we look out into the distant black stars for the new challenges. One of them we know: the threat of terrorism. The other is the global workplace. Another is the changing of the fuel systems in transportation and the production of electrical power.

August 1, 2005

The Hurricane proves several things: Nature is the biggest terrorist, the Bush Administration is incompetent, and the Louisiana government is corrupt. These are all coming to the forefront at the expense of the good people of New Orleans and Gulf region.

Some excellent discussions have taken place about the role of government, poverty, race, preparedness and so on. Newt Gingrich evoked the spirit of Alexander Hamilton who desired a "strong but spartan" republic.

government." It sounds better than it would be in practice and, in this day and age, an impossible feat until you get money out of politics. That is not likely in the foreseeable decades ahead of us. You certainly don't want a big, bureaucratic government headed by someone who has immense, dictatorial power either. The best answer is in teaching the people how to do it themselves. At the cutting edge where the people can't do it and where problems still exist, then government should show up.

There is no such thing as perfection in the real world. The victims of 9/11 are served up as lessons to prevent the deed from happening again. The people of New Orleans and the Gulf will be the sacrificial lambs who offer up the lessons all cities and governments will have to learn in dealing with very large emergencies.

The key word that keeps coming back is Leadership. It is the quality that either forestalls disaster or knows how to handle one when it descends on the innocent. In the case of Iraq, leadership has made a bad situation worse. And in the Gulf it did not respond to a threat that was out there, to be seen, for days.

People predicted that one day New Orleans would drown. And they have predicted that my region, San Francisco, will be destroyed by an earthquake. Nature is an unrelenting terrorist. We see now why the earliest men and women were inhuman. Their model was nature herself; "red in tooth and claw," ready to devour the most sensitive soul at moment's notice.

Note: There is nothing more egregious to the civilized than floating, untended bodies. Nothing can be done for the floating dead but a kind of silent prayer that it was not us floating along the muddy waters of the Big Easy.

Corruption in government, local, state, or federal is nefarious because it leads to a complete inefficiency in the working of government. New Orleans and Louisiana have had reputations over the years as very corrupt but in a kind of quaint, southern way that is expected of gentlemen who visit good brothels and make deals at the horse track. Such a city is loved by novelists like Faulkner who go back home with a thousand stories on the fallen state of humanity. The people, then, must decide: Is this quaint corruption, this genteel corruption, worth the price? And if not, what can we do about it when the city is rebuilt? And it will be rebuilt just as San Francisco was after 1906 or Hiroshima after 1945. Human beings build equally well as they destroy. And when the heart is in it, the citizens behind it, money supporting it the building can be extremely impressive and pass in a blink of an eye.

But watch the money very closely.

Try as we do to flee the arena of politics, here we are. Politics is dangerous territory for writers to enter. There is no truth in politics, only argument and manipulation. In fact, it becomes clear after some years of being a citizen that politics is a repressive form of knowing in a free, liberal democratic society. The first free act of the citizen should be the leaping out from the assumptions, prejudices, ignorance, hatred, emotionalism of the politics that has dominated him or her.

Notice: Those pinned down in a political form of knowing lose their potentials and sense of humor. If one offers a truth they are killed off. If one offers a con job the people give them the world and more. This disconcerting thought doesn't forbid us from wading into the stink of politics. And stink is there whether conservatives or liberals are running the show. They begin with a kind of sweet smell that decays over two decades. Then the good people have to open the windows and let the stink waft out into the open, clean skies.

Writers get fascinated by politics because power is a rather hypnotic feature of any time, any era. But the real drama in a democracy is not political power but the system of governance that churns below the battles over power. Is the system of governance well? Is it sickly? Politics works like the economic system; there is competition, one strives for their self-interest, leaders arise to stake claim to that self-interest, and the whole appears to work, oddly, like the "invisible hand," that is supposed to guide free capital to the promised land.

The "invisible hand" is now fracturing and, even, destroying the Republican Party. And this is necessary to set up a surge of vitality in the opposing party so that new agendas, new ideas, new personalities can leap up and create a new public. It simply is not about Mrs. Miers. It's about the direction the Republican Party is going. It's about a struggle between the neo-con's and the right-wing religious types. The neo-con's, to a large extent, represent a kind of patronizing "what is good for us is good for all," attitude that is ancient and anti-American. Very smart men, for the most part, and a few obnoxious women make up this faction of the Republican Party. They did a very intelligent thing by looking at the extraordinary weakness of the counter-culture and welfare state that marked the liberal way back in the 60's and 70's. They were as much a part of the "invisible hand" as the rise of the digital publishing system to do battle with the corrupt Big Media. Their power and influence has been wide in the last two decades and any group with that type of power will

corrupt and have to be overcome in a manner of speaking. That's the American way. That's the dynamics of a free society. "No standing elite's please!"

We live in interesting times. The times now are closer to the 60's than any other time since those fabled years; there is a tremendous tipping of the pyramid. And there are vast global events going on, just as in the 60's.

The outrage over the poor woman is so public and profound you wonder if the Republicans haven't been smoking some of the ganja stashed away in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. Actually, the firestorm resembles a case of bad alcohol served at a bad party. Eventually, a fight breaks out on the lawn between drunken men who are friends. It happens at 2 in the morning and things break up after this. And they all suffer in the morning.

Obviously, the Republicans, at least the elite intellectual types who Governor Wallace called "pointy-headed intellectuals," are reading the tea leaves, the polls, the temperament in the present day and want to cut loose of the lame duck president who is going to start to resemble a very sad figure.

And isn't it interesting that the "pointy-headed intellectuals" are the thought-arm of a conservative base made up of a lot of Wallace type supporters? That comes about when there is a deft political leadership that is able to convince each group that it is the core and power of the party. Perhaps this deftness has left the stage. It remains to be seen.

The problem, of course, is that there are no vital ideas coming from the liberal wing. None. Their analysis and criticism of the policy in Iraq can be right-on target and acute. But that is a because they are now quite practiced in being the loyal opposition. Quite frankly, the left has been shell-shocked for the past two decades. And this is where the political correctness of the university has dampened the ability of the left to get new ideas. There won't be any new ideas until you break the hegemony of old/new leftism in academia.

Academia often looks like a failed writer massacred by the will to power; its will to power that didn't pan out. So sad. Tragic in a way.

October 26, 2005

The Speech

It's finally getting to him. This feeling emerged while listening to the speech and how it separated those who have deep disagreement with him and those who are "defeatist." This is a typical ploy when the going is tough. And President Bush sounded more a leader than most of the times he speaks in public. When he's off he looks like Alfred E. Newman of Mad Magazine fame; perhaps they came from the same family tree, I'm not certain.

He's definitely right about this: We're in there and we can't pull out anytime soon. For inflicting this on the American people we think his power should be diminished or, at least, the political party that has supported him through the years should be removed from the scene.

President Bush made it sound rosy enough. He was, at times, convincing. Nothing new was said except he is more contrite now, as long as you aren't defeatist. Heaven help those who are defeatist. They may get their e-mail zapped. As we have said again and again, false pride does not stand in the way of wanting the policy to be successful. If it turns out the way President Bush outlines the situation then he goes up in esteem and his party is safe for the rest of the decade. And who would not want a wonderful, stable democracy in Iraq?

The problem is that President Bush has been played a fool throughout this whole ordeal. The potential allies in Europe bugged out. They have experience in the Middle-East and they watched Bush walk right into a firestorm. And now every group, insurgent or terrorist or, in fact, elected official is simply waiting the day the U.S. leaves the area. Here's what President Bush did not say:

- Almost literally no one in Iraq fought for their own freedom. Democracy has been handed to them on a silver platter. And we know what happens when something is given to people. It has no meaning or value.
- The culture has no experience with democracy. It takes years of experience to get the good habits that will prevent the fatal factionalism that Madison and that crew were so worried about.

- The many who ruthlessly seek power now have the opportunity to do so. Those, in other words, who will steal, kill, lie, bribe, and collude in order to gain and hold onto power.
- The insurgency can't be stopped until the borders are sealed and the Iraqi police/military force come into their own. And how many of those forces will go over to the insurgency at the first chance? Perhaps more than a few.
- No one in that region wants a sterling democracy in their backyard.

There are many more reasons. Yet, if the President succeeds in his adventure it will be a truly historic moment.

He tied this to the war on terrorism. Personally I feel no safer with a war raging in Iraq. And I don't believe the terrorists are being killed. I believe they are being trained in combat skills; something their training camps, for all their rope swings and climbing walls, could never provide.

Are there defeatists? Are there people who just hate America and want it to fail? Yes, I believe there are. But, there is also the Socratic need to provide an "opposite view" so that the picture is clearer and people don't descend into the mythology that many tyrannies fall into. The President of the United States, Congress, the Supreme Court and other powerful institutions are criticized precisely so there won't be lethargy in the citizens who are constantly spoon-fed a fabrication. The critic, after all, doesn't have the ability to call up the generals and order an attack. And the critic is doubly-energized in a frightening environment that now exists in the U.S. where citizens are afraid to question the government and obeys it when it says, "Yellow alert, buy duct-tape!"

December 18, 2005

"A Republic may be converted into an aristocracy or oligarchy as well by limiting the number capable of being elected, as the number authorized to elect."

-----James Madison

This is a relevant quote when one ponders on his or her chances of being elected to any local, state, or federal office. It would be a task that would require what only a tiny minority of people have: Charm, good looks, money, no major skeletons in the closet, and a supporting spouse. And we know that some of the most infamous criminals in history possess these very attributes.

The important point, the relevant point that Madison was suggesting is precisely this: If members of the democratic polity feel that they will never have a chance to serve the Republic, then they will either quit on it or slavishly support it like a love-sick puppy. In either case, the Republic falls or we should say, fails, and by the time the people are alert it is too late. Too late. What a horrendous thought at this stage of the game.

And the lack of outrage among the people tells my gut it is too late. The people are busy betting on games, going to Indian casino's, laying down the tracks of treachery for some slight twenty years ago, laughing at life, trying to avoid the confrontation that will make them feel small and dozens of other things. They feel the Republic is not theirs so they have lost interest. And this is much more catastrophic than Iraq.

It's likely that America will start to resemble the Europe that emerged out of the medieval period, after the Crusades. Once Europe was a Power the social relations froze and weren't thawed until the democratic revolutions. And it was much more democratic in those days in this sense: Those in power understood that their power was dependent on the working of all other parts of the society. Now, the powerful have no such illusion. They have no such connection.

That, of course, is only one aspect of it. Many people do run at the lower ends of the Republic. You might even say that the lower ends of the Republic, save it. That would be saying a lot. But, when I see a housewife, for instance, or a middle-class store owner on the city council or on a county board, it makes things seem plausible. Yes, often the housewife or the business owner are indicted for corruption, but more often they are doing the work of the people. A local board or city council can see with their eyes what the problems are. There are too many homeless people or traffic is in gridlock, or sections of the city are dying for lack of money. Most local politicians and people can see, smell, hear, and taste the problems that surround them. How is this possible in a huge nation-state like this?

Since most of the problems at the federal level are too complex for even those elected to high office; especially those elected to high office, we rely on experts and scholars to tell us what is wrong. This is one thing the framers of the Constitution did not foresee. They figured human beings have an instinct to solve problems because everyone lived in close proximity to everyone else. This is hardly the case now and one reason why people, at large, seek some form of community through the internet or television; something, anything to connect them to a representation of the society that claims them. So, on the one hand, incredible mediation at the expert level between the citizen and the politician and on the other huge fabricated communities through which the people are fed an incredible array of pap. This, I would say, is an awful disconnect that results in the corruption of the system as a whole.

Many people assume we live in an oligarchy. Some prefer it as long as their lives are good. But, it will only be a matter of time before the oligarchy lives at the expense of the people and while they have stupendous Roman holidays, the people wallow in a degraded life.

We are still in the habit of comparing our lives with less robust economies and, in fact, "the way they lived in history." This is not the thing to do. A citizen should live in the utter present and compare his life to the richest life and poorest life and see where life connects between them.

December 5, 2005

Politics is an awful green room filled with the moans of the dying. There is no joy there. It is either about stabilizing power or overcoming it. It is a ceaseless battle that we try to subdue in ourselves but see out in front of us like the vision of an ancient army climbing over the hills we have played in as kids. No person of good sense wants President Bush to fail in Iraq. But no person of good sense wants to see his misdeeds go unpunished. And they are punished by taking power away from those who have fostered the policy and who keep claiming the emperor has beautiful raiment.

And so the thing is irrevocable: The Bush Presidency is dead and nothing will revive it, including the sweet ass-kissing types who stumble over their words in defending the man. We are in a period of transition. President Bush is a dead duck. No one believes him. No one listens to him. This is the saddest event a president has to suffer. And yet, even at this late date, we want things to work out.

An administration that starts to resemble the KGB by planting stories in newspapers is shamed from the get-go. And good luck when it tries to retrieve its credibility. I view the present administration as paranoid, ignorant, inexperienced, without any type of leadership. And yet, even now, I want the policy to succeed.

A more reflective question is this: Why have the baby-boomers produced such awful leaders? And it goes back to the excess of the 60's-70's, to the disaffiliation of the time, the alienation, the fear of atomic war, the grotesque visions fostered by dope and loud music, the total turning off to intelligence, "intellect," and the embracing of cult thought, of shadowy mythology and the rest of it.

It's a putrid mess and our fuming intellectuals will not save us. Don't fear taking the heels of the leaders and holding them to the ghastly fires of truth. Only a populist movement enraged by what has happened to the democracy will save it at this late date. And, by the way, the rest of the world is rubbing its hands waiting for our fall. Americans carry around them the fallacy of some type of invincibility but it's a terrible illusion by inexperienced, ignorant people. We must see ourselves as better than we act at the present time.

And what, eventually, happens? The culture experiences a catastrophe that puts it back to square one. The values become bottom-line, there is no or little discretionary income, everything goes back to the beginning. And then there is building upward, over time, through very tough times and it disciplines one generation and fosters the resentment of the next generation. It's an archetype for a democracy that can not afford to have the barbarism, ignorance, alienation that this one is currently carrying.

What one doesn't want to lose is the beautiful foundation of the culture: The belief in options, in new horizons, new visions, outrageous ideas and imagination that will help seed the future.

We are the oldest democracy; but we are the newest one as well when we learn with every new generation that democracy fosters great aspiration in new people, on the Earth for the first time. Much of the filthy past slides from them and they see a magnificence that can be theirs.

December 1, 2005

Many of us experience what David James Duncan experiences in his essay, [No Great Things](#). He evokes the splendid example of nature which does not care for the bs of political manipulation and, in fact, is an antidote to it.

The strain of Thoreausim is very strong in parts of the United States. What real man would choose to live in a political culture over living in and among nature? I suppose nature and politics commingle at one central point: We wish to possess the secret to both and yet they fly onward, their own secret, showing us always our state of powerlessness.

Rousseau contended that the criminal fleeing the cops is better off than trying to survive by himself in nature. Once in a great while you read about a criminal who lives in the mountains, escaping the FBI and local police but most criminals usually hide in the bad section of cities and are caught and put in jail. The normal person always feels great in nature because he knows he will return to human society. After all, when men or women are lost in nature large teams of rescuer's are sent out to bring them back. They don't belong there. They will perish there against the powers of nature. Some of the more brilliant suicides occur when men or women walk into the woods until they are devoured.

And the question is never "either politics or nature," but what can we learn from nature to apply to our political culture. One could even assert that politics is nature without the beauty and texture. That politics is the war between tribes of ants who must war or be annihilated. Every instinct in them tells them so. "If my tribe does not build defenses it will be devoured, run over, by this tribe over there." And, obviously, the other tribe says the same thing and so the great clash happens. It happens in nature, in history, and in the present day. Nothing in nature redeems us except beauty. There is no behavior that can help us. There is no law in nature that will fulfill our promise as free people.

That's not to say we can or should destroy nature. We do so at the risk of our physical existence and our souls. Nature teaches us balance among other things. It teaches a great sense of communion. We grew out of nature, not to conquer her, but to be what-we-were-destined-to-become.

Politics looks, often, like the fight between birds in trees I have known. It is fierce and all-involving. Who finally wins? The mere observer can't know. But he knows that the fight was utterly ferocious with dive bombs into the bird nest and wild screeching from different limbs or the arching trees. There was no peace during the war of the birds.

Why?

In good societies politics is war without bullets. And later on the soldiers realize that while they have pride in their battles they were merely the manipulated ones. And they see their putative enemy as, too, a cog and so can enjoy a beer together at the local tavern. Why not?

The brilliance of the founders accepted politics as war; a war from which the majority benefited since there is no such thing as "absolute politics." In our day the conservatives protect the organizing principles and the liberals offer up reasons to sacrifice for the future. They both need each other. Whereas in many part of the world the war is deadly. The bombs go off. The hatred is profound and long-lasting. Europe sank in the 20th century because it was caught between communism and fascism. America, thankfully, escaped both those scourges and created a liberal democracy that, on the one hand, recognizes that every person must fight for what they know and believe and yet, understand the necessity for the enemy as well.

The question is as old as Adam. We were thrown out of nature. The disgust or adrenaline of such a thought determines a great deal about what a person may be up to. It is a war that slides up and through time leaving behind either good laws or terrible lessons. When change is a necessity it becomes an instinct that is driven deep into the spirit of the political animal. Some of the animals rally to the instinct and others try to fight it. It is rarely fabricated and in our time so much fabrication occurs, so much of the fake and manipulative that politics is a war most people choose not to listen to. And what are warriors and generals if no one pays attention to their wars? They are nothing but sad human beings.

March 28, 2006

There are times when America seems so perfect we can hardly bring ourselves to point out problems. Perfect inasmuch as a huge nation-state can be perfect. I may believe democracy won't work in Iraq because none of the habits are in place for that to happen but in America those habits are well-worn in the grain of things.

Checks and balances, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, equality under the law, accountability are all parts of the great core habits in America.

The greatest failing in America is ignorance. This is the great blind spot of America and it damages the great potential that exists here. The central reason why ignorance is so damaging is that a democracy demands people know as much as those who rule them. When the equation is skewed there is manipulation, control, and rage as people discover the gap they are falling through. Ignorance can be enforced by a family, community, church, corporation, government agency; anything with authority. The results are appalling. The effect, itself, can be a toxic ceiling imposing the will to ignorance on everyone.

At that moment people are cut-away from the animating principles that drive the whole ship forward. Tolerance, for instance.

The Principle of Rapid Turnover

The framers of the Constitution pulled down King rule by limiting and staggering the terms of the representatives. Every two, four, and six years those in power must account for themselves. We may bash the ways and means those in power account for themselves but we are glad the process is in place.

What would things have been like had, for instance, John Kennedy become king in 1960, escaped assassination, and was, now in 2006, in his last days of rule? Certainly, his advisers would have wrangled among themselves to take over from the feeble king. It is a book that should be written: The rule of one man through the 60's, 70's, 80's, 90's, and first few years of the 21st century.

For one thing, whatever his liberal leanings were in youth, he would have become much more conservative when older as usually happens to people. Failing health would be accompanied by failing memory and mental abilities leaving him open to a paralysis of ideas and manipulation by the inner circle. He may have initiated any number of eccentric policies that would, in the long-term, prove disastrous. It's all interesting speculation because we know that during that time we had JFK, LBJ, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush Sr., Clinton, and Bush Jr. And eighteen different sessions of Congress. And several Chief Justices and a bevy of new Associate Justices. This rapid turnover creates vitality and is supposed to mitigate against corruption and paralysis but let's not judge too quickly.

The People Are Ignorant of the Power They Have

Here is the interesting point. While there is a rapid turnover in the political class there is a slow and evolving shift in the collective mind that determines so much in any given era. In my time I've seen two dominant shifts. One occurred from the Kennedy election in 1960 to the Reagan election in 1980. This era was dominated by a populace giddy for the new wealth created after the World War II period, giddy for being the powerful entity it had become, optimistic about the use of government to solve problems and do the extraordinary like land on the moon. It was an era of huge issues and demanding thought since everything seemed up in the air, especially as the war in Vietnam became more controversial. In the final five or six years of that period, after Watergate, there was an enormous deflation in every sense of the word. Cynicism came to dominate. Escapism replaced commitment. The era just died into the good Earth. It was an exuberant time, with new ideas leaping out of every box imaginable. The young had their swords out cutting the legs off everything that was inauthentic to them.

The shift occurred with the election of Reagan in 1980. It took several years to kick in but by 1983 the shift was palpable. There was a reversal of good feeling about the previous era, it was denounced, government was vilified, the activist marginalized, the entrepreneur at the center. Looking back over those two decades many exciting things happened. For one the computer revolution and Internet came into being. For another, the cold war came to a whimpering end. The good habits of the previous era were not buried but integrated into the era: environmental husbandry, equal rights for women and minorities, among others. The counter-culture was replaced by personal faith and family. Collective thinking was replaced by individual action. The liberals floundered and the conservatives pranced.

In both eras it didn't matter who was running but how they stacked up against the prevailing zeitgeist. When you think about it only Nixon could have become president in this new era and only Clinton could have been president in the 60-80 period of time. And it's interesting to note they were very flawed people; Nixon had a mental illness of some sort but, ironically, would be effective in this time because of his abilities in foreign affairs. And Clinton was a pure political animal changing spots when he understood the environment around him.

"Well," the man asks, "is the twenty years up for this present era?" There is one fundamental difference between the two era's. In the first one from Kennedy to Reagan the country and, in fact, world experienced an adrenaline hit the like of which it hasn't had before or after. And it appears that these fits of adrenaline are necessary for huge nation states to make necessary changes. They occur once or twice in a century and if you go through it you survive (America) and if you don't you perish (Soviet Union).

So, what's up ahead? Certainly another shift will occur, another hit of adrenaline but it won't come until new ideas are applied to old problems. The habitual ways of thinking among the left simply dries it up. The conservatives can beat the drum of fear and caution for quite awhile.

February 27, 2006

It is the poorest political era in my recollection. It is rich in largesse and the representatives are deep into conspicuous consumption. But the spirit of politics is a beggar on a street with no name.

I went through the 60's and 70's period. The politics was exciting because everything was up in the air. There was possibility everywhere. The 80's and 90's settled everything down as emphasis shifted to the private sector. But now, this thing, whatever it may be has turned into the most toxic, foul era of politics in my lifetime. Why?

Part of the blame goes to the dumbed-down American people who are under the strange belief that they need not do anything but make money, birth babies, and vote every couple of years. In between all of this is the drama of petty lives, petty affairs, and petty office politics. Some of the blame goes to the intellectual class who became mindless power-mongers and still think they deserve to gain the center-ring even after thirty years of rule by the fundamentalists; their doppelgangers! And the fundamentalists are the scariest crowd of people ever to arise in American liberal democracy to actually take power. And the people don't seem to be moved one way or the other. Therefore, there is a seeming break-down in whatever passes as a cultural system even as the infrastructure goes about its daily business.

"If the people don't care, why should I care?" This is a crucial question a bit-player on the scene asks himself. If the people don't care, are easily manipulated, are cut away from the sources of power, are ignorant and so on then why should people who actually care about things, that tiny minority of pissants, stand in there?

"Tear it down. Destroy it. Absolutely eviscerate it." It is merely a scary voice in the literary imagination, perhaps an old-framer reaching through time, at the moment he realizes the people are disconnected from the promise.

No, no, no cranky old ghost! Do not go out and tear it down or throw negative thoughts against it. Simply inspire them to obey that quintessential American political myth of "make it new but know all that has happened previously." Try it.

"Your ignorance is a giant fist hammering at the heart of the liberal democracy."

The American people believe they are complete and all they need be. The reality is they are some of the worst batches of people produced in this liberal, democratic culture. No where else in American history do you find two generations of people so removed from the sources of the liberal democracy; so certain of themselves in ignorance. So without shame and guilt that they represent a full-fall of America in the 21st century. The only ones close to having a shot of doing anything are the X'ers now traversing their perilous thirties. Many of the boomers are lost dogs. Not lost sheep because boomers were never sheep. But lost dogs can find packs of other lost dogs and become rather dangerous. The one's coming up after the X'ers don't look very remarkable and will be controlled by a celebrity culture until, finally, a cartoon character will be elected to high office.

It doesn't bode well for the future. "People," the philosopher would warn, "perception does not equal knowledge!" But, even the philosopher would give up after a period of time. And if those who love the idea, love the acts that occurred are not concerned then they are simply under the hypnotic eye of something they can't not name. Help me here, I don't wish to be buried in this awful pessimism.

If each citizen has the naive belief his values and interests are sustainable simply because they exist in him, the disillusionment of this will drive him into the protective womb of some group. The more this occurs, the more groups gain power, the more dependent the citizen is on groups of interest, the greater is the separation between himself, as a citizen, and the organizing principles. As this occurs there is less loyalty to those principles, more ignorance about how the thing got there in the first place, the more easily duped the people become, the harder the fall when they discover the truth, and the resulting splatter does not change

anything except add to the unique ways power has of avoiding the mess.

The Democrats do gather much of the mess and tuck it away in their soft pouches. But, for the most part, the mess is absorbed into that stink-pot called society and dissipates through time.

Of course money, organization, and rhetoric are all necessary parts of a living world. If I want to help people the best thing I can do is raise money, gather an organization together, and then advertise the cause to build both money and organization up. I can't do it by pure reason alone. The problem is the effect of this "total perception;" that it is nothing but money and special-interests that believe in themselves.

This is where disillusionment begins and ends. It begins for people who have ambition. It ends for people who have ideas or ideals. From that simple, singular fork-in-the-road all the cancerous growth comes from. The body politic, hopefully not a big, passive blubbery thing but one that wants to stay alive, checks this perception by keeping politics local and personable. Sometimes that's enough to keep the essential functions of the body going.

* * * * *

The pure democrat is always lectured as a child by those who believe in reality. "This is not a pure democracy but a republic, a representative democracy--may the best representation win!"

This view is true but it's also filled with consequence. For instance, if the citizen is crushed under the rolling wheels of systems greater than he or she how can the citizen build anything like a "republic." And it's quite evident that the republic needs to build itself every generation. How can the citizen be anything other than a piece of moss stuffed away in cities and suburbs watching life roll furiously above him? How is this beneficial for a liberal democracy?

Even the strongest citizen is whisked away into the intermediation of a huge nation-state, molded, and then spit out when he is no longer useful to power, clueless as to how much damage has been done to the spirit of democracy.

May 31, 2006

So, where is your loyalty?" This was asked of me by someone who read an article I wrote criticizing the Bush policy in Iraq. "That's an interesting question. It's a fundamental question in a liberal democracy filled with millions of self-interested people and institutions. And I will answer you this way: First, and foremost, as a writer I am loyal to the most articulate, precise, intelligent, imaginative use of language. It's my belief that an articulate culture can rule itself better than a dumb one. And a dumb one would be filled with the wrack of images spewed out by propaganda mills rather than words, sharp as swords, cutting through to the truth. A dumb culture is delusional when it calls itself a democracy.

I am loyal to the Constitution because I've learned over the years how it was built. And anything built well has my loyalty. Since what has been built is the foundation of the government, it is one of the primary objects of loyalty.

I am loyal to the few in history who have articulated a perfect system of belief.

I am loyal to the idea of the progress of human beings; if not all-together than one-at-a-time.

I will tell you what I'm not loyal to: Those who do not pay attention.

April 29, 2006

Looking over the past fifty years one comes to this conclusion: That the simple bottom-line political drama is the survival of large nation-states. The 20th century saw huge land-masses arise, through modern technology and scientific organization, along with tremendous economic growth, to dominate the world.

One thinks immediately of the United States, the late Soviet Union, and China as creations of the modern world. It's also apparent that the survivor is the one who renews the organizing principle of the culture and revivifies it despite the pain it extracts. The infamous '60's, for instance, were a world-wide phenomena in the so-called first world. America, western Europe and Japan were all rocked by the energy that swept young

people, then all people, into a whirlwind.

No matter how painful and jarring it was to many segments of the culture, including the institutions, the adrenaline of that time was precisely what saves a gargantuan nation-state.

At the center of the cultural restlessness, no doubt, was the nuclear dilemma. This development threw an extraordinary gauntlet at the feet of people during the 50's and 60's. For a rare moment a nation-state, dependent on progress and building toward the future, believed the future was an absurdity, and threw off progress as an idea. Paralyzed by this fear the young people, world-wide, initiated some enormous and energetic hope to, if nothing else, save their sanity.

Many things changed including the massive entrance of women and minorities into the productive society; environmental consciousness, a more sophisticated culture, the seeds of renewable energy and personal computers, an authentic attempt to believe that all men and women are created equal. This whirled through Watergate and Vietnam and lost a good deal of momentum when Reagan became President. A natural sort of homeostasis flattened the thrill of things and everything shifted to money, family, and faith. Reagnum was impossible without the 60's. One implied the other. And just as the adrenaline got rather crazed and out of control, more vitality began to emerge from the conservative parts of the culture.

It's interesting that America went through that process but the Soviet Union blocked and thwarted it at every turn, still at the center, since only a few people actually believed in the animating principles. The free people proved themselves flexible while the totalitarian mind was fixed at a point rapidly vanishing into the past.

The lessons: Stay light on your feet. There are no absolutes, only discoveries. There are always credible facts on the other side of your argument. Never stop learning.

July 28, 2006

I was thumbing through the NY Times and came across a review of a new book by Morris Berman called, "Dark Ages America: The Final Phase of Empire." The book was panned enough to make me interested. And it is amusing what a mere forty years will do to a nation's consciousness. At the height of the Vietnam War this effort would have been touted, probably a best-seller on campus, used as a reference by others who predicted end-times back then. And they seemed much more probable at that time, especially among the young. Something happened in the intervening generation and a half worth looking at.

The huge difference of course was at that time any criticism of American culture or the people was followed immediately by a positive policy idea or a change in habit. For instance, the criticism of America's tasteless food in the 50's and 60's transformed into a marvelous quest for interesting and healthy food. When there was great criticism about American's who smoke cigarettes, there was a decline in smoking.

In those days, then, one could say that people were more open to criticism because the establishment had been discredited by Vietnam. Now you have a much more difficult job of convincing people of anything. They don't listen to intellectual critics, novelists, social psychologists unless those types are telling them exactly what they want to hear. "Give us the good news about ourselves and we will reward you richly."

American intellectuals, of course, made a fatal mistake. Number one they suckled off the dried teats of the European intellectual who was watching his vaunted civilization blow itself up and could never reconcile the fact that America was quickly replacing Europe at the center of world power. Since the American intellectuals were not plugged into American experience they relied heavily on the attitude of European intellectuals which was one of pure pessimism. The pessimism in Europe made sense, it doesn't make sense in America. So, the author of this book is between a rock and a hardplace. On the one hand he can't initiate a great revival of social criticism because the people are in a state of torpor. And he can't really be a prophet because time will roll merrily on revealing that America is only at the beginning stages of its life as a culture. That if one were a prophet he would say that America exists now where Europe existed when it started to emerge out of the "dark ages" and into its run of powerful history. It's not exactly the same but there are tantalizing parallels. For one, at a certain point the European must have experienced his culture as a new, unprecedented thing and yet was in the process of re-discovering his own past. For another, class divisions were becoming much more permanent.

A better approach to the finicky game of critiquing the American people is to simply say, "people, God bless you, you aren't ready for the 21st century, here's why. Do you want to survive as a nation-state or not? Here's

where you are lacking. This is where China or India will get a leg up on you." A writer would do this out of love for the beauty of the liberal, democratic culture. Or, at least, the promise of it. And one of the great principles of that creed is simply, "don't be afraid of the people." Despise a few of them, try to teach a few of them, laugh at a few of them but never fear them.

A man or woman of experience or knowledge will not accept the common generalizations of either the intellectuals or the reactionaries. In fact, the best way to gain credibility among large groups of Americans is to demonstrate to them you know how things are put together, whether it is a law or a machine.

The intellectuals need to get themselves from under the shadow of Europe and start thinking bravely into the stone-face of American culture. That courage will win in the long run. They need to think as though a good future is available and that it requires this, this, and the other thing to be in place. It must emphasize the process of growth and development available to every man and woman; every organization and party; every piece of technology and idea. It has to have so much faith in itself that it can afford the luxury of viewing reality as it is and take it as it is and offer something of what it can be. Americans will not respond to the negative. This is a part of the grain of American culture. If the intellectuals and artists are negative the American people simply pay off pop heroes and preachers to keep positive and the intellectuals wither on the vine.

Well, we could go on and on about the survivability of the present-day America. We hope for the best because we stake the future on the ability of people to recognize they are less than they are capable of being. But, we often overreach ourselves and get too far afield.

What does it take to be a liberal, democratic citizen in the 21st century? That's one premise:

Knowledge of how the Constitution was built, from what sources and what were the hang-ups.

Knowledge of the laws and how they become laws.

Accounting for the money in the budget.

Fighting for one's liberty to be a fully developed person who is not afraid of the facts because many facts have passed through him and he has seen he has been wrong and facts have corrected him. That he fights for the best in himself and fights against the all-too-common inhuman that sweeps him into a never-never land of ultimate power. That freedom is a reality. That check and balances, due process, due diligence, and accountability are all necessary habits of mind that have to be learned over and over again. That there is no taking-for-granted that one is ipso facto a "citizen," without some dedicated effort.

Tolerance and open-endedness; curiosity, boundless optimism that the future will be better.

Experience of all regions, all peoples, all activities, all environments, all modes of communication and transportation; everything that teaches the citizen that there is more than himself or herself. But that, in a real sense, all belongs to the citizen him or herself.

Knowledge of the world and of other citizens in the world as a product of knowing him or herself.

Making political decisions based on: (1) vision of future (2) correlated with pragmatic problem-solving.

Paying attention in every sense possible. In other words, having a skeptical view of the representation of their power.....

Sometimes these are in place, sometimes not. Something seems to get short-circuited in the American people on their way to enlightenment. They either become highly disillusioned or they become so hard and cynical it plays on the land like a superstition. Freedom and liberty are earned every generation. If not the battlefield, then the ability of the people to govern themselves. Self-rule is the ultimate thing fought for, the ability to rule oneself and expect others to rule themselves and for the powerful to rule themselves in ways that contribute to the culture. And often it works that very way.

What is the intermediation between the pure liberal democratic citizen and the representation of power? One, obviously, is that the powerful collect among themselves to do their deeds and only answer afterwards to their constituents. Two, are the self-interested who sometimes blatantly write the laws for the representative. Three are the staff support who consult a variety of resources to find out about problems and

possible solutions. Now the staff might do research in various databases or have consultants come in and write a report. Eventually the representative expects the best available information that he can, at least, discuss. Then, the law is passed and experts and lawyers are the ones who test and interpret the law. The people may or not be involved in the process. Suddenly the law is among them, acting in a variety of ways.

The danger is, of course, that the representative is as shallow and ignorant as the constituents and is easily swayed, easily bamboozled by the self-interested to make law according to their interests.

And any self-interest will have lawyers, experts, consultants on their side to advocate for them all under the guise of "truth seeking." And so the question the citizen puts to the representative is, "who do you trust?" And "who do you go to in order to make your decision?"

Every problem has its complexities above and beyond the ability of the normal citizen and his or her representative to understand. Staff members in different agencies will help along, certainly. Journalists can clarify some of this by consulting with the advocates and presenting each side.

There is then several flows of information. One is from the staff to the representative. Another is the flow from self-interest to the staff and representative. Still another is from experts to staff members in agencies. Still another is from advocates to journalists. And from journalists to the public. Pockets of the public will consult much more detailed reports from a variety of sources. At the end of the process the public must have a certain knowledge of the problem, possible solution and law that emanates from the attempt to solve the problem. And the representative, whatever resource he uses, must do the same thing. If there is clear understanding between them, communication about all of this on them, then the condition between them is healthier than not. That is, if what is transacted between them is authentic information, even knowledge, and not meaningless platitudes.

The truth of the matter is that the citizen is only interested in his own life. What matters in his own life? He asks this and since there are millions of citizens there is a vast array of "what matters," and no attempt to reach beyond his self-interest. This is the heart of conflict in a big nation-state and why power is distributed widely so one self-interest will have to ally with other self-interest to get anything done. But it is also a challenge to the citizen to know beyond his self-interest, to get beyond it and know "what matters" to many who are not himself. This one could term as the maturing of a democracy. This takes a willful act on the part of the citizen to know more than his self-interest, to go beyond his own "matter" and look at the whole society.

June 30, 2006

I've been reading an excerpt from Ann Coulter's new book, "Godless: The Church of Liberalism." It's an odd thing and goes to the concern I had in my previous report that we happen to live in "the poorest political era in my recollection." Coulter uses the old Limbaugh ploy of total denial, mixed in with some literary piss that she dispenses with skirt held high over a voodoo doll called, "liberalism." As with Limbaugh it is all entertainment for the purposes of making her rich, with the ability to live the life she chooses and get away from the awful masses.

The secret to the success of Limbaugh and Coulter is very simple: They express the *majoritarian* point of view. This view is a dim one based on the fantasy of television and its ability to absorb the common sense of the mind. A person outside of this reality is a lost soul, no more a part of the political culture than a bug that was squashed a thousand years ago.

Ms. Coulter is a corollary to the crazed leftists I've heard over the years who, quite frankly, have some kind of murderous outrage that goes to personal problems they won't own up to. I won't speculate what hers is.

She intimates that *liberalism is a religion* and then tries to prove it. It reminded me of religious tracts I read in the late 70's from the newly energized Islamic fundamentalist movement. The only difference between her brand of fundamentalism and the brand sprouting up in the middle-east is that her hatred, frustration, and profound alienation is converted to political fuel to burn down every remnant of a liberal democracy. Personally, I trust the flawed men who created the political culture infinitely more than the parasites and jackals who want to manipulate it today, such as Ms. Coulter.

In the middle-east they don't have these fine political institutions centuries in duration and their rage is expressed in a more primal fashion.

It is an odd feeling to realize that there is a greater common bond between the Islamic fundamentalist and his counterpart in Dallas or South Carolina, than with the men who created the American government in the first place.

So finally the common citizen, rational and bemused says, "the system worked but the culture failed." And the cultural failure is probably more dangerous in the long run. The American people do not avail themselves of the opportunity to create a new and great culture. The tools are there for them to pick up and build a few decent decades of political culture.

Instructions for the jury.

As a judge will instruct a jury, "you bring in your common sense, your life experience, your knowledge; that all comes in to enrich the ability to discover the facts of the matter." Please have a lot of experience, knowledge, and common sense when you enter the American political culture! Don't leave anything out when you study issues or candidates. Get rid of every prejudice, every stupidity, every trick that prevents you from making wise judgements.

Ann Coulter argues like a madwoman defending herself in a murder trial in which the trail of guilt leads directly to her. Is she using the courtroom as a personal ax to chop away all thoughts she is crazed, paranoid and delusional? Possibly. Only the doctor can say whether she is insane or not and she avoids him like a virus. Is she cold and hateful at the core of herself? Yes. Is there something intelligent about her? Yes...wasted intelligence but something is there. It's intelligence bought out by the oldest game in town: Get crazy, Get rich, Get out and show them your fine rear-end as you leave the show.

This juror says Ann Coulter is guilty as charged, take her away please.

The left-liberal type has become a kind of shibboleth. The remnants of the old sixties crowd have been flattened by time. The vast majority of people in this country are middle-class property owners or those who want to become middle-class property owners. Fringes rise up in urban areas and rural areas. That tells me that the political spectrum is decidedly suburban and everything else a kind of tragic entertainment. That is part of the problem in our body politic. The suburban center needs to connect to the rural poor and the inner city poor and demand that intelligence figure out how to move these groups closer to the middle-class. And not pit one group against another.

Finally, a reaction is brewing against the dominance of the Republican, fundamentalist crowd. It has the chance of being a good and creative thing. Those who are about to enter this arena should strip themselves of all assumptions, all the soft-wiring that has been developed because the "liberal" has been on such a defensive run the past twenty years. Earn the respect of the middle-class property holder by developing positive policies designed to solve their problems. Spewing on about greenhouse gasses means very little to people unless you figure out how the problem impacts them locally. It can be done and it should be done.

We have passed through a very unremarkable period of time mainly because of this "cultural war;" a hold-over from the 60's and 70's. It's rather stale and bubbles forth in any number of crack-brained "commentators," on and off-line. I wrote back in 1998 on [My Virtual Space](#) that we were ending a thirty year cycle in American politics but that the wheezing hatreds of that time keep pushing it forward like the old engine that could.

June 9, 2006

The latest bit of political B.S. was laid last week when ex-President Clinton got upset at Chris Wallace on an interview show. Both parties and pundits ran with this one for awhile. I saw a Charlie Rose program that seemed to be gleeful over the way Clinton has shown the democrats how to have some balls. And we know Clinton has those everywhere but his mind and spirit. He is impressive as a speaker and looks like a giant figure until he wheels off and gets slick as a young interns tongue.

The incidents are staged by very alert, media savvy politicians. It comes and goes like most ill-wind. And they don't work because people see in them what they want. The Democratic supporters see it as a kind of aggressive anger to show that their kind can get down and dirty; if not with terrorists than with Fox commentators. The Republicans see it as evidence that President Clinton is off-balance, even mentally disturbed. I may think Clinton looked and sounded like a pissed off Mafia don ordering a hit but then we all see what we want to see.

The crucial thing is that the Democrats are not going to get back in power until they come up with new

angles of attack to problems that the people have lodged their democratic hearts in. That does not take staged "anger" events that are contrived to fool the boob people that Democrats can be tough on terrorism. It takes authentic leadership that is not so transparently imbued with charts on who needs to be manipulated to vote for them to swing elections.

The Republicans are filled with thugs, thick-brained hypocrites, provincial yahoos, racist wealthy people and a whole group of suburbanites. But the Democrats are filled with idiots who should never enter politics. The Clinton's are the one exception but they are utterly transparent. As I said before they are brilliant political animals and fascinating literary characters in a nation filled with fantasy and disembodiness.

Perhaps it's true that there is too much Money, too many Machines, too little Contemplation, too much Ignorance, too much Image, not enough Word and so on and so forth. It's really fodder for some future historian to figure out. History, good and bad, moves much more quickly than even the American people can keep up with.

As long as people feel free, have some discretionary income, are relatively happy it doesn't matter too much I suppose.

The liberals have a very difficult time because they have become nothing but critics. And critics are good and many of the critiques from the left are right on target. But criticism always falls short of explaining anything. It is one component in a galaxy of many components in a liberal democracy. How about having the courage of thinking through illegal immigration or the war on terrorism and offer a positive, creative view that captures the people's belief that these issues can be solved?

Brilliant critics burn like seasoned wood and are ash before anyone can congratulate them. When I think of the old critics that have been around for a time I laugh at the outrageous ability of hurt pride to keep the old, decrepit cowboy in the saddle shooting at what he takes are buffalo.

Meanwhile the conservatives pick out a few red herrings, a few objects of hatred and then spew. (This is called the "animal theory of political warfare.")

At the core of it I don't get any sense the Republicans want a genuine furthering of development in the democracy. They only study the fault lines of the population, find the buttons to push, and push hard while hiding in the skin of patriotism.

The art of criticism is this: Bring in all your thunder to get the people to think on their own. Bring in your knowledge and experience and let loose and get the people to start using their independent minds, experience, and knowledge. At that point you'll have a possibility of a liberal democracy. As long as the critique is felt in the gut and not contrived in some office where the participants laugh at the effects it will bring.

September 30, 2006

I ran into this [Public Journalism Summit Discussion](#) and it presented some very interesting questions about the internet and citizenry in a democracy. The actual event took place over three years ago but asks central questions about the idea of re-invigorating the nature of citizenship in a democracy. And as we noted [elsewhere](#) a great deal of the popular revolt today centers on the professional classes, including journalists and editors.

August 22, 2006

The extraordinary thing is that the American political system is in chaos. Those who understand this and respond with some value will win out. All others will be swept to the dark, angry sea. The Republicans are in disarray because of the fallout from the incompetence of the Bush Administration. When the president is a dead duck no one wants to eat at his table. That is plain enough. He made the egregious mistake of believing he and his cronies knew more than anyone else and has fallen into a bitter, painful trap. The American people are now convinced that they must recover from the Bush Administration and that has thrown the party into a state of panic. They are implicated in every aspect of the debacle.

The Democrats are in disarray as exemplified by the Lieberman problem. Just last night large, old, white-haired veteran Democrats declared their backing of Lieberman to stave off the obviously damaging defeat in Connecticut.

We of the west coast blue love Connecticut and understand them perfectly. But we never or hardly elect Presidents and usually provide easy fodder for the other side to get electoral victories in border states that are mixed up with a lot of blues and reds. The Democrats know this and are now in a huge quandary.

The Democrats are, in their own way, as much in confusion as the Republicans. And this is where the American people can step in with their common interest, their common wisdom and take the feet of these political parties and hold them to some burning fires. For the first time in a long time the American people have the ability to make the political class conform to what the American people want and need. This is an extraordinary moment that comes about because of incompetence on the part of the majority party and disunion among the minority party.

Blend them and pick out the best attributes from each and demand that the representative enact on behalf of each of the best of the discredited parties. If the American people grasp that they have a shot at taking back the political culture and making it sane and honest; even noble.

No, never noble but, at least, from the dim horizon of political reality "seeing with new eyes," and invigorating a scared, cynical but passive critical mass of citizens. The idea was always fairly simple: The people will be better than that which represents them. Of course it didn't mean that they both stopped around the same pig trough trying to prove who was dirtier than the other. It meant that the people rise above their own limitations and decide what is best for the whole society and then transmit that to the representatives in power. Short of that and what is produced is the type of complexity so easily a mask of incompetence and corruption.

The people do not study the complexity and don't want it in their life. And the politicians are safely removed from the people, yanking out well-worn rhetorical devices to keep the people rounded-up and hoofed for the slaughter.

Despite that the people must decide several very crucial questions: What is the nature of American power? How are they going to wean themselves from cheap oil? How can they educate their sons and daughters for the 21st century? The failure in Iraq requires a wholesale evaluation of American power and its uses. And I believe the terrorist threat is real and maybe even more threatening than it appears. It initiates something that may get gruesome down the line and involve more than crazed, evil terrorists. It tells me that the American people had better think about the type of person to steer through these wild waters.

[I came across this review by Richard Holbrooke](#) in Foreign Affairs that, better than I, says what the crucial moment this is in the life of the nation.

For gods sake, don't allow the elite's decide this question. It must be on the minds of all people, in whatever region they live in. Anything less is tantamount to losing the democracy for good. It will never be recovered if a dedicated elite takes over foreign affairs because that is the field of battle the United States will fight in for the rest of its days.

August 16, 2006

I like to think in a "nation-state" there exists a nation of free people and a state that is responsive to the people and to the facts in the world. An individual who is also a citizen is always in the quandary of how much democratic ideals or conscience he can apply to his evaluation of the state. And the citizen has the responsibility to keep tabs on what power is doing, what its decisions implicate, and how the state is orientated to the other states in the world, if not orientated to world history.

The key is not being afraid or intimidated by power.

I think this has been established by tradition. Also at the base of the democratic tradition is the belief that power corrupts. And power corrupts as easily in a democratic one as a theocratic or tyrannical one IF the people don't have the ability or the heart to confront the facts.

There is political instinct and the American people respond when change is necessary. The civil rights and Vietnam era saw that, then the tax-payer revolt as the citizens felt the government getting way beyond them. And now a demand of some change in foreign affairs. This comes out of a deep national instinct.

What the people lack is the ability to convert that instinct into something other than helpless pleas for a leader to rise up and save them. Barack Obama being the latest savior.

In America the government is as good as the constituency. If the spirit of the people withers along the way it is only a matter of time before death strikes the heart and brain of the whole system.

That spirit withers when the people are either too frightened, too overwhelmed, or too complacent to generate the ideas and action necessary to shake out the toxins in government and run new fresh streams through it. The people seem on the verge of shaking it out but one wonders about the direction it will take.

The key principle we have learned globally, in the past few decades, is this: You can't hide behind power. This is especially true in a liberal democracy where the people need to grow and develop way beyond the sense stimulated state they are in today. And it appears that the government doesn't really want that to happen and would welcome a wholesale loss of growth and development to some silly collective self that could be easily manipulated.

If a vision of the globe or of the future does not emerge from the people, where will it emerge from? If the people are dumbed down, addicted, superstitious, alienated where will the vision come from? If the state reflects the people then how will it operate in an old world utterly pissed off at America for making it lurch up into the 21st century?

The world and its evil is way beyond the group in power today and it should move the people to think about the nature of leadership now that America has reached the level of power it has.

What is frightening and real to the casual observer is this: America is not the government of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, FDR, Kennedy; it has entered a new phase in its life wholly defined by a culture that has no connection with what has gone on before it.

A people benumbed, bedazzled, bewitched, unprepared for a century that could see nuclear weapons used on a consistent basis and incursions through Mexico into the United States. If this frightening sort of scenario is all the government inspires in the people, good luck.

And the enemies will chortle, "ah you see, freedom does not work....it simply transmutes into a consumption of society and its disintegration...imagine, freedom was too much even for the vaunted American people."

December 9, 2006

I don't think the election yesterday was "historic," but it could very well be the beginning of a new, historic era. Reflecting on the last forty years there have been two historic eras in politics. One was the Kennedy Era and the second was the Reagan Era. They were very distinctive and are becoming very historic in the "passing of time," sense of the word. The Kennedy Era is fully gone as far as animating the political culture and soon the Reagan Era will have the same fate.

Politics is often the interplay between the Era and the adrenaline of the Present. The Era draws the limits and the adrenaline channels through the limits until it is exhausted. If the Era is defined by a kind of boundary-less ethic that often dips into dysfunction it is one thing. If the Era is defined by "no new taxes," or family, faith, and money that often dips into repression then it is another thing.

The Reagan Era was a distinctive male energy that wanted to purify itself after the wet 70's. It did do some marvelous things but, eventually, that energy runs down and becomes corrupt. The energy that was repressed reawakens and shows a new way. It's not that the "feminists" will assume leadership but the feminine energy will gain much more legitimacy in this new era. The Texas male will be shamed. Perhaps, in a moment of speculation, the Al Gore male will come to dominate.

The new Era will be marked by the disgrace of the Republican conservatives. Their time has come and gone. They played a role but now the role must change since what is at stake now is the American enterprise. No faction so anti-science, anti-creativity, ignorant to a fault, unconscious of the grave challenges ahead can stay in power; not with the challenges America faces in the 21st century. A democracy of this sort demands educated, enlightened, experienced citizens, nothing less will stave off the enormous challenge the rest of the world will throw at the United States.

We are now in an Era not yet defined. In other words, a creative Era that will find itself down the road a bit, perhaps in time for the 2008 election, who knows. It is exciting for the experienced mind. Perhaps to the young and naive it means nothing. They will live their cycles; two or three of them at least. They will perceive how the giant will of the nation changes and opens up here, closes off there in ways that are fascinating and uncanny.

The "American Way" that works is never the way of fear and repression. It is always a positive response that ups the ante for character, behavior and values. "Get up to the level of your predecessors, please....do not descend to the false leaders of today."

The people have been morally, spiritually, and intellectually assassinated the past 25 years. They came out of an era that scared the life out of them and tried to wall it all off with money and things. That is not the American response, it is an old, faulty Roman sort of response. The American people are more resourceful than the Romans. And they have just as much to lose.

November 8, 2006

As I fill out my ballot I try to understand how all these things got posted on a printed piece of cardboard. I was impressed with all the energy, hard work, intelligence, and money that went into getting propositions and candidates on the ballot. I boiled it down to three elements: those who propose and run, those who watch, those who vote. If each one of these elements is doing their jobs then the system seems to work ok. If one of them is messed up it will, at the very least, distort the other two. Ideally, a democracy would want the voters to be tremendously well-informed, conscientious, experienced, skeptical without being cynical, hard but not hardened. And now with the internet running wildly a voter can go to many sources of information to get all he or she needs to understand the local issues, state propositions, and federal issues.

And, too, it would be ideal if the media had editors and reporters who set a brilliant lens into the workings of government and gave the voter great clarity about the propositions and candidates vying for their attention. That the media would be as endowed with experts and capital as those running for office or those developing propositions. And, ideally, the people who have assumed these offices would be honest, hard-working, actively engaged in assembling the best information about problems and asserting the wisest solution, without taint of interference from special interests.

That is an ideal that appears like a kindly ghost when holding the ballot in ones hand.

Of course, the real question put to one is this: Who are you loyal to? Is it a party or an idea or a particular issue? Confronted by this question I would say my loyalty rests with the following acid tests:

- Are you sacrificing for some future?
- Are you setting aside personal pleasure to build something of value?
- Have you climbed a mountain to go view the future? What is this mountain and what is the future you see?
- Tell me the dynamics of how to solve a simple problem like bums pissing in the street?
- Convince me that you believe law rules over men.
- Tell me why the belief in God can not rule a free, liberal democracy.
- Tell me why the non-belief in God leads to diminution.
- Describe your region as richly as possible.
- Tell me where you think America exists geo-politically, in the context of world history.
- Tell me how you are orientated to the contemporary scene.

As with Diogenes and his lamp we keep looking for this person in the public sector.

October 31, 2006

Some Impressions on Politics

Politics is important because the Constitution makes all the people players. Franklin's challenge that, "we've given you a Republic if you can keep it," makes more sense now than 1787. After all, the generations up to the present can say, "we've kept the Republic going for 220 years. Will the subsequent generations be able to say the same?"

People suffer with bad politics. Just go ask the people of New Orleans or Iraq. Democracy tempers politics to a degree that would have been admired by many in the past. Words can hurt but those knives and vials of poison can create generations worth of bloodshed.

The problem is that politics is good only when the critical mass of people in it have an extensive knowledge of the structure of power, from the founding document up through all the add-ons, through the administrations of executive power, to the major crises the government is called on to solve. Only then can they produce authentic leadership from themselves rather than leadership that is fabricated out of images, sound-bites, consultants, and the like.

And without that critical mass of people you lose the republic and gain an enormous front for criminal activity and neglect of the people who, despite their self-myth, can not do it all themselves in the modern world.

* * * * *

Politics is never good when the critical mass of people are dumb and ignorant and the critical mass of politicians ambitious and savvy. At that moment the democracy is in need of critical care.

* * * * *

In the absence of government many "powers" would fight it out as they are doing in the vacuum of Iraq.

It's hard to imagine any time or place experiencing an "absence of government." Thinking like an anarchist may be an excellent, safe way to gain perspective but I don't think even 40,000 years ago cavemen ran around without ways and means to distribute power. It seems bred into animals that want to survive.

Terrible governments are marked by corruption-as-a-way-of-life. It becomes a necessary habit that is enforced by the bureaucratic will to survive. This is called, "choking off the lifeblood of the people."

A citizen stands in a specific place. He follows a thread through the local community, region, state, on up to the federal level. When the thread knots at one of these places the citizen asks a simple question, "what reality is this level of government acting on?"

The key to the art of politics is to tie together the abstractions at various levels of power with the actual experience of human beings. The people behind the scenes in politics deal with the algorithms of politics while the politician always tries to connect to the people and share in their experience. They attempt it or fake it but once there is disconnect between leadership and the people there is no ability to lead them anywhere.

* * * * *

Katrina proved that the huge bubble at the core of bureaucracy is significant when incompetent or corrupt.

* * * * *

March 19, 2007

Thank goodness reality is always bigger, tougher, and more enduring than our opinions about it.

* * * * *

The Republicans are in that place where all baseball teams must go. A few bad seasons, a few bad decisions and suddenly they are out of the pennant before the All-Star game. The fans boo and start going to women's basketball games. The real fans expect the team to strip themselves of the debacle and re-make the team from the bottom-up. "To the bottom you go. You are going to see interesting things at the bottom, Republicans. Some things will terrify you, some will turn on the juices of exploitation again. But, you will not return until you regain your credibility that has been destroyed by the Iraq fiasco."

So saith some law of political justice.

* * * * *

How come men who tried to kill each other in war, later on embrace as old men and talk about peace? But politicians never resolve and are bitter to the end? War is the final act of politics and if politics fails to become war the actors are frustrated, unrequited. That's only a guess.

* * * * *

Eventually the domestic scene in politics centers on poverty. Poverty and the environmental concerns may clash; may not. The environmental problems are certainly more articulated these days with global warming dancing in the minds of anyone who goes out into the open air.

The concern for poverty seems way on the back-burner. One but not the only reason is that the middle-class disconnected from the question when poverty was radicalized and racialized. Throw the pc crowd in there to do everything possible to prevent students from taking on middle-class values and there is a regular piss-pot of disinterest among the propertied class.

That is, the class that confers the final value on political ideas.

Here's what has to happen.

Liberal thinkers have to assert that poverty transcends race and gender.

The goal of poverty-policy is to move poor people into the middle-class, with middle-class values and expectations. It is not to "radicalize" the poor and their supporters.

The middle-class must be convinced that policies will enhance the power of the middle-class to deal with a much more militant, almost imperial wealthy class that won't even fight in their war for "survival."

When the middle-class has a mighty shift in this direction, away from wealth and towards poverty, politicians will be jumping like hungry rabbits to lead them.

* * * * *

The Democrats are in danger of losing a lot of credibility with their call for troop "phase out." They are trying to deal with an irrational act by being "rational" but all they do is expose themselves to the fact their unreality is on par with the unreality of the Republican party. When I look at each party I see two fuzzy-wuzzy animals that don't have a clue when it comes to war and conflict.

Iraq has become another quintessential war of politics and that means failure. Not that it's bad that politics is involved, obviously, but that truth-telling and fact-finding become impossible. Violent opinions sift through each other and "something" is resolved. Meanwhile, on the field of battle, complete disaster.

The key to winning a conflict is leadership. All else is irrelevant. Most genuine citizens have called Bush a failed leader. The Republicans were chastised by the mid-term election of last year and should be held over the burning coals in 2008. The Democrats have to play it right down the middle.

The ultimate burden of responsibility belongs with Bush and his administration. Let the policy attain whatever level of success or failure it's going to. The Democrats, by rushing so ferociously into the vacuum of the Bush administration, could be trapped by what they are saying, especially about "phased withdrawal," which means what? We could very well witness a repeat of the tragic events after the end of the Vietnam war when southeast Asia became a killing field.

Democrats have to convince the people they are not "isolationists." And there are more than a few people who want the rest of the world to go away so they can engage in the innocuous sports they do. "Why can't we just play? Don't we pay taxes? Leave us alone! I don't want to think about the future."

So it goes, as the novelist said.

March 14, 2007

A Few Impressions of American Culture

Two enormous changes have marked this epoch in American history. For one, the economy now produces "surplus," rather than scarcity. It's not that money grows on trees but that Americans expect to live fairly well by just showing up. This is markedly different than the historic scarcity that sharply divided the roles between the genders and allowed for the development of two qualities now missing from American life: Deferral of gratification and sacrifice. In fact, the military is about the only institution where these attributes survive and last I looked there isn't an overwhelming desire on the part of young people to join up.

The second change is that no one and nothing in American experience prepared us for the role of "worlds only superpower." Psychologically this demands an end to the small-town, sentimental qualities that has marked American culture and to something that is rather ancient and calculating and less than ideal.

It's the idealism of democracy and its conscience versus the realpolitik of a world not-America.

This change is vented off and expressed in a number of ways, in and out of popular culture. The real question is if this huge contradiction eviscerate the heart and soul of the people.

The people are sometimes disciplined by economic necessity. It can be a gravitational force that keeps things rolling onward. Stray from this force and ye will be eradicated like a meteor trying to reach the surface of Earth. It seems that way for anyone who has had to scratch to survive. The problem with this universal experience is that it tends to produce bitter, cynical, and intolerant people.

Somehow America has to produce self-disciplined people who are open to new knowledge, new things and new experience. Maybe the future depends on the art of this.

We are a better society because of the civil rights movement. We have learned that respect for other people is the first rung on the ladder to a civil society. We have embraced the voice of rightness and reason that wants all people and every single person to fulfill their potential and empty that back into the society that belongs to all. It was not a smooth road.

Every man has his pride. One of the arts of life is to maintain and nurture the pride while negotiating through the demands of the larger society.

A free man or woman uses the resources that are available only so new and better resources will develop. This takes patience and knowledge to fully manifest itself.

Where is the resolution between "morality" as we understand the term and "bigness" "hugeness" and effects never experienced on planet Earth? The character of the people and of a whole epoch hinges on that question.

February 28, 2007

Some Impressions on the Sense of Decline

I don't think America is in great decline. Obviously, if a critical mass of people think so then it travels along a rather fated path. At that moment I, for one, will find a small group of people who don't want to decline and

form a nice community of monks.

No, I think we are entering a new horizon, one that we have not experienced before. The most important fact to understand is this: America has become the model of how to modernize. Every area on the globe is rooted in thousands of years of past. Past's that still exert a pull to them and can still be identified by the living people and which connects them to many generations who have lived in and around the same region. That is one reason why the "modern" world has been such a wrenching experience for many. Western Europe was ripped apart by two powerful, primitive responses to the modern world; communism and fascism. The Middle East is being ripped apart by a third response, fundamentalism.

. "Modernity," and the violent responses to it will be one giant theme for future historians if they pay any mind to this time.

America is the face of modernity but allows in its bowels and, even, brain some resistance to it. That means to me that if we studied ourselves and our own nation thoroughly we'd know the world better than it knows itself; at least its conflicts.

All free men and women should study: Science, Technology, Capital, and Representative Government. And not simply a survey of these things that would make them a good Jeopardy player but to immerse themselves in these subjects as if nothing else exists. And if they come out the otherside with some humor or wisdom then they can call themselves "moderns." Then they are utterly famished for the spiritual, art, poetry, and the intangibles.

* * * * *

Obviously, a nation dependent on one man or one woman is going to decline much quicker than a nation dependent on many men and many women.

* * * * *

We would do ourselves a lot of good by getting rid of all the political posturing and idiocy of the past forty years, clear the decks, wash ourselves thoroughly with those thoughts and ideas that keep liberal democracy alive, and then head out toward the world as bold, no bs, alert, tolerant citizens.

Most of the abstractions of fear prove unfounded in the long run. We can not predict the event that will assuredly happen. But fears serve a use in revivifying the mind as relevant to the future and to keep it orientated against the emotional responses or the hard-headed responses, both of which have a place.

* * * * *

Politics, like law, is not something separate from me as a person. I can not own it. I must have a relation with it.

* * * * *

My feeling is that the culture, especially the political culture, is arranged in concentric circles. If you are stuck in one of them without knowing, fundamentally, the others you are simply fodder for greater powers than your own. The closer you are to the organizing principles of the culture, the more you leap from one circle to another in higher and higher states with at least a modicum of free thought left in your brain.

* * * * *

The art to this sort of culture is to keep the boundaries strong without making them corrupt.

* * * * *

History, even recent history back in the 20th century, and the present time can be fairly disturbing. There is a kind of amateur delight in studying and understanding history and then applying what one has learned to the present. It always leads to the ineluctable paradox: War is inevitable and yet when we give-in to the inevitable it is that much closer to our own face. We should resist war with every fiber we have, drive it from our consciousness until we are utterly aware there is no other choice.

* * * * *

The oddest thing is that looking at the planet with history-in-the-making in mind, the United States is prominent but Europe looks more and more removed from the center. Asia looks like it will pounce on the scene in many ways. America has the brilliance and experience to use Asia well as it is used by Asia. The further the center of action gets from the Middle-East, the better. .

A nation is more than a map.

* * * * *

If three cartoon characters were to run and one win that would be more significant than all the meditations on "politics" by one who knows the full history of politics. Oh, that's already happened, ok. Take an actor....no, that occurred. Then a sex-addict. Oops.

After all, the people are supreme. The vote of she who is beguiled by a cartoon character is just as important as the person who has studied things out and turned it over in her mind, and who is aware of some of the consequences of things.

A man or woman's sense of politics and power deepen with age and experience. And yet the focus is always the present and the few who act on the stage of the present time.

I count that as a value to be transmitted .

* * * * *

George Bush's failure is the people's failure. When they wake up to this fact perhaps they will shake out the habits of stupidity that have grown deep in them. Their vaunted common sense can not cope with the modern world.

Their survival is at stake. They can't hide behind power or bombs. They need to know now more than ever.

Since I don't think "decline" is in order I bet on them to do it.

April 20, 2007

Some Impressions on Political Culture

I bought a used book as a kid, I must have been nine or ten, and I was with my dad in a used bookstore in San Francisco. The book was Volume Four of a history of Rome, "Roman Supremacy," published in 1939.

The Oxford professor, Hugh Last, wrote a chapter on "A Roman Citizen Surveys The World," and concludes with these words. He's summing up the decline of the Empire and some lessons to draw.

"Barbarian attacks on the frontiers and a consequent increase in the tax-gatherer's demands forced the emperors' hands to measures which in the end were disastrous. But from the tale there emerge two lessons which are clear. The first is this-that, if human life is to be at its best, men must be allowed at least a certain freedom to manage their own affairs to work out their own salvation. And the second is not very different: that state interference with local business and private affairs, though it be begun with the best and most beneficent intentions, runs a danger of leading to a bureaucratic control which deprives its subjects of their essential independence and turns free human beings into machines of the state."

And if that last phrase doesn't resonate with a few modern Americans about their own society I don't know what will shake them out. It is also interesting to note this was written at the eve of total world war with a Nazi regime that fit the citizen to the bureaucratic state through political myth.

One might raise the question, "but what if the citizen doesn't believe he has any salvation to work out?"

It is an interesting question too full of meaning to deal with in a column of simple impressions.

* * * * *

Every citizen, man or woman, in a liberal, democratic culture walks with a political animal at their side. Sometimes it is a rather demonic wolf-like creature and other times a kind of naive child. But it is always there.

When it is cut-loose, as so many in a liberal democracy want to do, the political animal at-our-side converts into an intelligent demonic wolf-creature and prances away to all the other demonic wolf-creatures who collect in the high country to wait the passive citizens; their heads bouncing between the ear plugs of an iPod, thoughts on big-breasts and money.

"Come through the pass so we may eat you clueless ones!" So hopes the demonic wolf-creature.

Any citizen who pays attention to this animal (always stalking by his or her side) is aware that it changes and, in fact, the relation the citizen has with the animal changes through time. But it is always there and most of the time not wanted. It is roped to us unhappily and we settle or cut it loose.

* * * * *

It's interesting to understand that the generation of the "framers of the Constitution" lived in a world much closer in every way, shape and form to classic Greece and Rome than to modern-day America. In the present world we seem to be creating cults or tribes rather than self-reliant, self-ruling people. And this can be ascribed to, I think, the massive-powerful-world of effects the young and naive enter without a lot of preparation. The world becomes so frightening that they rush into any number of tribes and cults prepared for them. And so we see a great loss of both "liberal democracy" and the self-rule of self-reliant men and women.

* * * * *

When people are ignorant they get frightened, they are unable to accept reality, they shut down, they get angry and strike back.

Ignorance is produced by the ratio between the volume of information and knowledge available to a free, democratic people, and their ability to deal with it with some intelligent structure.

When this ratio is skewered then perception seeks a critical mass to hide behind.

At that moment the arts of propaganda win out over the arts of a liberal, democracy.

Even among those who work hard to maintain basic liberal, democratic values of self-rule and self-reliance there is great limitation. One person can't possibly know everything that needs to be known in order to become that quality of self-rule.

It is very apparent to me that people of good will exist everywhere. That people of different backgrounds can communicate and work together. That race, religion, ethnicity, gender and these emotional categories become less and less bound up with destiny.

In the modern world the people strive to "be all they can be," and if they succeed at it go back and try to pull the rest up.

We are not the Roman Empire.

We have much more to lose than the Romans.

Politics is important because the Constitution makes all the people players. Franklin's challenge that, "we've given you a Republic if you can keep it," makes more sense now than 1787. After all, the generations up to the present can say, "we've kept the Republic going for 220 years. Will the subsequent generations be able to say the same?"

People suffer with bad politics. Just go ask the people of New Orleans or Iraq. Democracy tempers politics to a degree that would have been admired by many in the past. Words can hurt but those knives and vials of poison can create generations worth of bloodshed.

The problem is that politics is good only when the critical mass of people in it have an extensive knowledge of the structure of power, from the founding document up through all the add-ons, through the administrations of executive power, to the major crises the government is called on to solve. Only then can they produce authentic leadership from themselves rather than leadership that is fabricated out of images, sound-bites, consultants, and the like.

And without that critical mass of people you lose the republic and gain an enormous front for criminal activity and neglect of the people who, despite their self-myth, can not do it all themselves in the modern world.

* * * * *

Politics is never good when the critical mass of people are dumb and ignorant and the critical mass of politicians ambitious and savvy. At that moment the democracy is in need of critical care.

* * * * *

In the absence of government many "powers" would fight it out as they are doing in the vacuum of Iraq.

It's hard to imagine any time or place experiencing an "absence of government." Thinking like an anarchist may be an excellent, safe way to gain perspective but I don't think even 40,000 years ago cavemen ran around without ways and means to distribute power. It seems bred into animals that want to survive.

Terrible governments are marked by corruption-as-a-way-of-life. It becomes a necessary habit that is enforced by the bureaucratic will to survive. This is called, "choking off the lifeblood of the people."

A citizen stands in a specific place. He follows a thread through the local community, region, state, on up to the federal level. When the thread knots at one of these places the citizen asks a simple question, "what reality is this level of government acting on?"

The key to the art of politics is to tie together the abstractions at various levels of power with the actual experience of human beings. The people behind the scenes in politics deal with the algorithms of politics while the politician always tries to connect to the people and share in their experience. They attempt it or fake it but once there is disconnect between leadership and the people there is no ability to lead them anywhere.

* * * * *

Katrina proved that the huge bubble at the core of bureaucracy is significant when incompetent or corrupt.

* * * * *

March 19, 2007

A Few Impressions of American Culture

Two enormous changes have marked this epoch in American history. For one, the economy now produces "surplus," rather than scarcity. It's not that money grows on trees but that Americans expect to live fairly well by just showing up. This is markedly different than the historic scarcity that sharply divided the roles between the genders and allowed for the development of two qualities now missing from American life: Deferral of gratification and sacrifice. In fact, the military is about the only institution where these attributes survive and last I looked there isn't an overwhelming desire on the part of young people to join up.

The second change is that no one and nothing in American experience prepared us for the role of "worlds only superpower." Psychologically this demands an end to the small-town, sentimental qualities that has marked American culture and to something that is rather ancient and calculating and less than ideal.

It's the idealism of democracy and its conscience versus the realpolitik of a world not-America.

This change is vented off and expressed in a number of ways, in and out of popular culture. The real question is if this huge contradiction eviscerate the heart and soul of the people.

The people are sometimes disciplined by economic necessity. It can be a gravitational force that keeps things rolling onward. Stray from this force and ye will be eradicated like a meteor trying to reach the surface of Earth. It seems that way for anyone who has had to scratch to survive. The problem with this universal experience is that it tends to produce bitter, cynical, and intolerant people.

Somehow America has to produce self-disciplined people who are open to new knowledge, new things and new experience. Maybe the future depends on the art of this.

* * * * *

We are a better society because of the civil rights movement. We have learned that respect for other people is the first rung on the ladder to a civil society. We have embraced the voice of rightness and reason that wants all people and every single person to fulfill their potential and empty that back into the society that belongs to all. It was not a smooth road.

Every man has his pride. One of the arts of life is to maintain and nurture the pride while negotiating through the demands of the larger society.

A free man or woman uses the resources that are available only so new and better resources will develop. This takes patience and knowledge to fully manifest itself.

* * * * *

Where is the resolution between "morality" as we understand the term and "bigness" "hugeness" and effects never experienced on planet Earth? The character of the people and of a whole epoch hinges on that question.

February 28, 2007

I listened to the Democratic debate on CNN and came away genuinely impressed by the row of candidates. They know their stuff because each one of them is intimately connected with the running of the government, either as Senators or ex-Ambassadors and such.

Only one person on that stage had the indefinable quality that says "leadership" rather than "just-another-ambitious-politician." And that person was Obama who is either a leader or a kind of glass figurine. And by some of the looks Hillary gave him, I think she sees him as fragile and can't wait to sweep him to the floor where he will shatter.

My personal view is that the largest figure in the field wasn't at the debate and is waiting for the fatigue that will set in during the summer as Hillary sounds slicker than her husband and someone-who-is-nameless pushes Barack off the table to the bitter floor below.

That guy, of course, is Al Gore. And I still peg him as the front-runner for any number of reasons. One is because of the pure sense of justice that he won the election in 2000 and it was taken unfairly from him and he was a man about it. Two, is the mythic sense of the "parallel universe." We will get a chance to see what would have happened had the election gone the other way. It will be a kind of alternating current version of history rather than direct current. Third, he can come on stage as a hero-figure who has dismissed politics and involved himself in a cause and demonstrated great leadership ability outside the realm of official politics. He can become the Cincinnatus of modern American politics, which is closer to the Reagan model than anything the Republicans can put up there. Oh, by the way, he is vastly experienced in politics. And yet is not seen as political. He hasn't been tainted by the last eight years of Bushism and Democratic stupidity. So it's all set up. He'll wait until Hillary and Obama dip a bit, their campaigns tired. He will send a great electrical surge through the Democrats and have an excellent shot at the nomination.

Knowing how shoddy the people treat prophets I'll keep my views to myself.

* * * * *

It's appalling when candidates try and convince voters that "government and the states they represent can be moral." I suppose there is a "the-states-obligation-to-moral- decisions" sort of philosophy but it is a mere fragment, a shadow of "the states-obligation- to-its-self-interest (ie. the majority of people)" sort of philosophy.

You could go to any number of states in the world and find in the government all kinds of men and women who uphold moral principles while sending many people to their deaths or poverty.

All of the candidates need to say this: "We (Americans) are in the tragic phase of our development. We can't go back and pretend we are not the center of world power, nay, the center of world history at this point. If we go back to more naive and provincial days we will simply go down, go down mighty to the long river of death as far as nation-states. If we decide the world is too nasty, too chaotic for our moral taste and retreat and lick our own wounds we could do so for a generation. But, eventually, the vacuum created by the withdrawal of America would see a rush to the center, a grand fight for that center and the emergence of a power that would be a deadly threat to the United States. So our isolation would simply inflict on a future generation a horrific war of survival. But if we persist in the Bush idealistic-stupidity we'll turn into a rogue nation despite all the good and decent people in it." Our candidate pauses and see's if his words have made any impact on the throng of citizens. No. He brings out plan B.

"Here, my dear American constituents, are some facts:

- We will be hated by much of the world for the rest of our days as a nation-state. Much of this hatred will be fomented by dictators as a way to rally people and deflect criticism from the dictators own abuse of power. Don't listen to it. Listen only to constructive criticism.
- Get off your asses and study what Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, Spain, England, Moslems, Chinese among others did when they reached the pinnacle of world power. These are your lessons. We don't need to follow their dead paths but the whole psychological state of a people changes, its culture changes, at this lofty place. And when it goes down it never comes back.
- The future will be decided by the health of the people. It will be decided by the collaboration between the people and the leaders they elect. It is the people who need to think about where America is, how it is orientated to the rest of the world, what it's self-interest is, who challenges that self-interest, and what imperils us as a people. A lot of that debate is underway now with the focus being terrorism.
- What does it mean to be a "wise and prudent" nation-state in a world more dysfunctional now than at any time in history? Of course one could argue that every living, existential moment is a dysfunctional and dangerous one but each is crazy in its own way. Our dilemma is so profound it's almost painful to write down. Let's just say 19 crazy men were able to stop the globe in its tracks for a few days and leave it like that."

* * * * *

I suppose the American people need to re-moralize themselves, understand what is at stake and how important it is that they leap beyond what they are, learn to sacrifice for the future, and to extend their ability to learn and comprehend the experience of the world and of the United States, the putative land that they love. We are privileged because we've been able to develop as we please in a womb-like comfort and security that makes all people envious. And we need to take that privilege and transform it into something startling new that the world has never seen. Unfortunately, Americans always seem to slip back, in their habit of thinking, into the inferior history our founders, at least, tried to propel us out of.

June 14, 2007

Some Impressions on Ugly Words

We too have our Victorian age. If, back then, a man had said another man didn't have "balls," there would have been a scandal. If a magazine had talked about "tits and asses," it would have been shut down due to outrage. We laugh now but we are as immersed in language-scrubbing as they were.

It's astounding to me how the shadow of one generation becomes the light of the next. The good of the generation is buried and the shadow carried up and out of the corpse of youth. The shadow gets credibility in the marketplace, eventually in politics and then the whole thing shudders into a nightmare. That is one impression snatched from the last forty years or so. The light of the present generation is equality and

environmental enlightenment. It's shadow is resentment and ignorance. And I will be curious to see how the next era takes resentment and ignorance and turns them into light.

Bigotry is serious business in our time as sex was serious business back in the Victorian Age. It was a cartoonish attempt to make human beings more "divine" and less "animal." One can at least give them the credit for trying to live exemplary lives. Bigotry is serious business to us because we are aware of how wrongfully people have been turned against themselves in this society. In an era-to-be there may be a generation that says, "wait a minute that was in some distant past. We are all equal now or all the same and we despise each other just as much." A bad-word bloodbath may ensue.

We know that the Victorian Age lost its *raison d'et* for any number of reasons. Sex was active. Sexual talk was driven underground and a large porn industry existed for gentleman of leisure. The succeeding era has made it a kind of healthy plaything of no meaning or consequence, heightening the social tension since there is so much anticipation and resentment/sexual jealousy right under the skin. Go ask your favorite dark age if sex and violence fit hand-in-glove.

Oh, our judges in the future may say, "a sex-driven culture that celebrates itself with explicit sex and seeks to unleash every bit of sexual energy is one that will not sacrifice for the future. Thus they delivered us a screwed up era, thus we have returned to wearing black, full-length clothing."

It's also fascinating that a rapier word in one era is a flabby joke the next. And a word can be twisted at the foundations by what can only be described as human silliness. For instance, asking about the supply of hoes down at the hardware store is going to take on a whole different texture of meaning.

Obviously we are trying to do exactly what the Victorians tried to do: Live up to some ideal that is simply fodder for a new age that comes behind it and says, "your civil society is a lie."

The fact we repress some words but openly flout others makes us fairly transparent, especially for the novelist or social critic who wants to put the era to bed.

* * * * *

Saying wrong things is often an excuse for irrational politics to leap into the hot vacuum to declare its piousness and to say **that word** destroys the integrity of our nation. The Right swam its way into power on that muck.

It raises the disturbing question, "with all the thought-police out in force for the past thirty years on both the left and right, how come the culture hasn't improved one iota?"

Where has all the language scrubbing got us?

And one could make an excellent case that the culture is worse off; cruder, coarser, with less redeeming quality than any other "great" culture ever produced. A society where people are afraid of each other. A culture where there is less equity than in the Victorian Age. A culture exhausted of dreams and wondering why it is so pessimistic.

* * * * *

The most powerful antidote to the stupidity of Imus is the poise and beauty of the women he insulted. No more need be said about it.

For awhile the thought-police of many persuasions will be out in force, with cadres of bloggers showing the way, inspecting every sentence, every word uttered in public. It won't matter left or right. It won't matter black or white. The American culture is more susceptible to pandemonium in these matters than one cares to think about.

Or is it merely an entertainment to pass the day because life has become awfully boring and meaningless?

* * * * *

Two types emerge out of a culture like this. One exploits the situation, the other understands the situation and searches in all the manure to find at least one seed worth recovering and then moves on and leaves the mess to itself.

May 8, 2007

When I see families ruling the political roost the first term that comes up is, "benign despotism." And while it is true that the people still make the political class accountable to them, networks of the elite's thrive win or lose. The networks are never destroyed. If a man or woman loses political office they simply slip into the side pocket, into another node of the network.

This is disturbing or funny depending on your relation to the cosmic history of things. On the one hand the democracy still has some suppleness left and is attempting to deal with a huge machinery of effects. On the other hand, the spiritual in me says that when the foundation dies all else will die on top of it, eventually. It may take a few centuries but there it is.

The foundation in this case is the belief that the gene pool for political leadership is rich and deep. And that the American people have an uncanny ability to smoke out leaders rather than annoint members of privileged families. It's another indication that democracy is lazy and has lowered itself down into old habits, ancient as Sumer along the Tigris River.

* * * * *

Watch how the consultants teach the candidates to be fragile snowballs so they can connect to the sentimentality of the people. Yet, one of those delicate snowballs will be called on to kill many innocent people.

* * * * *

The danger exists that as the years go on, the good people in it will view the machinery of power in America as no different than the machinery in despotism's around the world and either drop out or sabatoge it. The good people that is. The bad people will revel in the setup and effectively take control of a lot of the institutions. As the process accelerates, the process of complete demoralization will accelerate and then you have another mighty kingdom going down.

It is only stopped by the re-moralization of the people.

And how do you re-moralize people who have acted either like the downtrodden in the middle-east, tossing their loyalty over to fanatics, or the satiated Romans of Nero's generation?

As we observe the political culture we are reminded of a kind of axiom experience has produced for us: A powerful, unprecedented world produces two types: The fearful and the nihilistic. It does not produce a fully-moralized liberal, democratic citizen.

We have more money and things, even more knowledge and experience but we lack an understanding of ourselves and the foundations that got us to this place.

Those who know usually divide, 98-2, between the will-to-power and truth-telling.

* * * * *

Ideally a citizen would have both secular and spiritual streams running long and deep in him. They would know each other but would not pour over their boundaries and destroy the good of the other. The secular exists for problem-solving in the real world. It requires, if not science, technique. It requires practical experience. Leaders must know how things work, especially systems, and then have the leadership capability of collaborating with the people to get the "solution" in place.

What you have now are ambitious people who are taught the skill of appealing to a critical mass of people, connecting at every hinge of sentimentality but who have many others telling them the way things work. This seems to me to be a large failure in modern democracy. The Bush Administration is largely a failure because the President and Commander-in-Chief ***did not know***.

And as war magnifies so raw and blatantly, "if the Commander-in-Chief does not know, no one else knows." In this case everyone knows he is an Emperor with No Clothes but no one knows what to do about Iraq.

* * * * *

Historians like Toynbee point out that the future of a civilization can be predicted by the types of challenges it takes on. If it ignores the challenges it loses its resourcefulness and the challenge suddenly becomes a demonic whirlwind. The people abandon all hope and demand authoritarianism, which they get, the crisis deepens because the authoritarian nature of power corrupts so, eventually, all is lost.

We are not at that point yet.

Intuition says we will approach that point in the 21st century since we enter it the big stick in the world. And the big stick is always the center of action.

* * * * *

Some Points of Order

Three things determine the nature of a good government.

- One is self-rule
- Two is "perfect representation"
- Three is excellent leadership.

The people must do as much as they can for themselves. If a problem exists on a local level they have the right to band together and get their representative in city government. to deal effectively with the problem. But they also have the duty to try and rule themselves in such a way that the problem is mitigated. Therefore, buying solar cars or driving less or at a lesser speed is an example of self-rule because they have the power to solve the problem rather than shuffling it onto inefficient government.

Representation is perfect when it is a direct conduit between the people suffering a problem and the law making body that can do something about it.

Leadership artfully deals with the inevitable conflict when problem-solutions are advanced in the public forum.

* * * * *

In the hive of complexity self-rule is practically impossible. The more complexity exists, the less self-rule there is. This speaks to the chronic problem of a successful organization. The more complexity, the less self-rule, the less efficient the solutions, the more chance there is of corruption until there is exhaustion in the political life of the people. That seems to be the way of all things until a shot of adrenaline is applied at the right time, in the right spot.

* * * * *

The environmental/resource problem(s) seem to be one such challenge ahead of this civilization. And it's amazing how much resistance, how many insults, how many egregious lies and rationalizations meet up with this challenge. But those who resist the challenge are in the same boat as those who did not believe slavery to be a problem and resisted its abolishing at every turn until it was settled by a bloody Civil War. Those who stood in the way were on the wrong side of history. They are now shunned and forgotten by the culture and viewed as enemies to the greatness of America.

In much the same way those who ignore this, those who dismiss it with a word or two, those who sneer and lie to keep themselves from having to go find facts on their own are doomed to the same fate. And not simply because it is a problem but because they refused to take on a great challenge and spur the thousand and one great innovations, ideas, changes of habit and other wonderful saviors of civilizations.

The problem will not be solved through politics or rock concerts. It will be solved by encouraging the best and brightest to go out and do the million and one simple and complex things that lead to change. A change of habit, a change of value, a change in the expectation of people and so forth. The people must do this. The political class can't do it for them. The ridiculous ranters and ravers on TV won't solve it. Big money won't solve it. It is the people themselves who must solve this in every way, shape, and form. When they do take on

some responsibility for a challenge all kinds of wonderful unintended consequences pop up.

It will be solved when the challenge is made into a value that is transmitted across generations by the sacrifice of the current generation.

* * * * *

INSIGHT: The omelet is not made by the eggs yelling at each from different sides of the pan, accusing the other of heinous crimes.

* * * * *

It appears the people are addicted to gambling and media. Gambling is understandable and takes some effort on the part of the addicted. But the media is a passive liquid that drives between the eyes and makes people participate with it on weird and insidious levels. Aren't they sick unto death of it? The media is a dope and you know what happens to a brain on dope.

These may be slight addictions but each is magnified when what is needed now is not simply sacrifice but a sense of the future, a sense of progress among the satiated American people.

I think, immediately, about changing the fuel system but there are others. I think of the fuel system because the cheap oil is drying up and the effects of fossil fuel on the living systems are well documented. Not to mention that much of the cheaper oil lays under the most treacherous ground today.

America must maintain itself as leader by showing the way to a world not dependent on fossil fuels. And it will require a great challenge and require the collaboration of financial, regulatory, engineering/scientific, community, and education regimes.

People should think of the use of energy not by what brings pleasure to the moment but what effects it will have on the mid-late 21st century.

If we could take out this burden it would help usher in some new possibilities in themselves.

Some challenges off the bat:

- Senators in key fossil fuel states that can bog down any initiative.
- Getting the people excited about taking on a challenge like that.
- Getting the technology to the point where financial regimes say, "if I invest in this it will appreciate and I will make money."

Two other great challenges for the 21st century:

- Getting the America student up to speed for the 21st century.
- Getting the American citizen up to speed for the 21st century.

August 14, 2007

Some Impressions on Things

Things come and go; issues and players come and go. Two, three, four passages flow through a citizen in one lifetime. The passages are either defined by con-men or sincere men and women.

Now we have President Bush, the candidates for '08 and continuing issues like Iraq, illegal immigration, health-care and so on. These will pass through the body politic, into the bowels and move out at some unsuspected moment.

A citizen not only needs orientation, he demands it. If a citizen doesn't orientate toward the political system, toward the world he lives in, then what does he orientate toward?

* * * * *

I read an interesting poll of people in the streets of Baghdad. Two things are evident to me: One is that those on the receiving end of bombs usually know more about the situation than those dropping the bombs. And second that Iraq is likely to be taken over, again, by a strong-arm military guy. In other words, another Hussein who will be championed by the people and stop the sectarian violence through his own military/political brand of violence.

* * * * *

Life, whether in Iraq or America, is a difficult thing and allows for a kind of certainty that is useful in a world rapidly racing in all directions. The fact it is racing away from us should make us humble and learn a few things.

As a citizen I either have renunciation or acceptance. If I accept the system then I need to know it as well as I know myself. I need orientation on the local level, on up to the federal level, out into the sinister geopolitics; each level different and posing different problems.

The best antidote to "alienation" is the study of the systems that flow through the alienated.

Study them until you run into the experts, know the experts, move on until the influence of the systems has passed through you. Report. Meditate. Recover, etc.

- Social system
- Political system
- Economic system
- Natural system

That makes up the big four.

- Educational system
- Water system
- Electrical power system
- Transportation system
- Communication system and more should be studied.

Why am I interested in all of this? If America were preparing for a revolution I'd be interested in the revolution. If America were on the verge of a civil war I would focus my attention on civil war. If the frontier were being settled I would be riveted in the frontier. If industrialism were sweeping through the cities and countryside I would concentrate on industrialism. If America were in a depression I would be scouting out the depression. If we were fighting nazi's I would be there fighting nazi's.

Now it is fighting both terrorists and its own complexity, a barrier to its better self.

I came from an era where America fought communism. I did go through a period of crisis in the 60's, a very disruptive and dynamic period which a person who experienced it must try to come to terms with.

But now we are here, after two decades of relative calm and security. We are here, at the pinnacle of world power, on a real Earth both amazed and congratulating ourselves on a fine place to be and yet inexperienced and rather overwhelmed by it all.

Not yet toughened enough to laugh at those who hate us.

The tragic phase of our development.

What else is happening but this phase of our development?

The rest of the world is, if not in complete chaos, trying to ape the success of America and is both sad and predictable.

Sometimes the best thing is just to stare out into the universe hoping to spot that one wink from intelligent life to let us know we inhabit more than a mound of serious jokes.

July 27, 2007

Some Impressions on Political Wars

Politics is a war most people survive and are better for the experience. At least that is true in America. When politics fails, the killing begins. Witness many of the squares of longitude and latitude on the Earth.

But when it is healthy the war is on and a citizen discovers for him or herself how this war is to be conducted and what part they will play in it.

(And killing is bad because from the beginning of time there is nothing more ferocious or memorable for people than "blood feuds." Go ask your favorite Shiite or Sunni.)

After the war, in a land of good politics, the losers are embedded in the winning army and must be consulted for the victors to be successful.

Most citizens are foot soldiers and follow the order of the lieutenants, colonels, admirals, generals and other Pooh-Bahs of the political party who wave their different flags exactly the same way.

The writers are usually on the mountain observing the ways and means of combat. They have no other substantial role. Most of their observation is pure entertainment.

* * * * *

The war is waged to produce "leaders." In the old days they would fight each other with swords. Now it is with two-bit words that have been lost in the second or third bout of disillusionment among the people.

Seven years of very poor leadership will produce that state of demoralization. The people are feeling it and, according to the polls, see the country moving in the wrong direction.

What is a leader?

More importantly, what is a leader in the early part of the 21st century of a huge liberal, democratic nation-state? We know the leader can not bully and coerce the people. Our guess is that the next authentic leader will be one who connects with the people and begins a happy collaboration toward something richer and more productive than the past seven years, maybe the past 25.

New vision, new competency, new direction.

But, collaboration is the key word.

* * * * *

In this war the people give themselves the orders.

We call democracy, "self-rule." And what is self-rule but knowledge that combines with full-mindedness? And what are these things but miracles in the middle of a kind of awful eternity we are never prepared for? Manipulation of information is not full-mindedness. Neither is dumbing down. Neither is the passionate hatred of anything that gets in our way.

And what is self-rule in the middle of wild-like-nature technology? That is a central question. And what is self-rule as it watches the passing through of trillions of dollars? In other words, can the morale of self-rule be sustained despite the assault by the huge world-of-effects? There are no clear cut answers but as we

noted, the framer generation was closer in experience to the ancient world than to our own.

Self-rule depends on the ability of the full-minded citizen to connect with the system of governance and, if nothing else, plug into the organizing principle and protect it. Self-rule permits that full development of a value or idea and expects that to be met with its opposite, believing as ferociously as I believe. Both warring parties protect the the system of governance.

After all, even though many disagree with Bush and the current administration there is not a great deal of violence over the fact. There isn't murder taking place because of it. There aren't huge crowds of people rioting about it. And we hope self-respect has more to do with it than disinterest or meekness.

We know for certain that the Bush Administration has been violent in every nuance of the word.

* * * * *

I'm not sure it is an iron-clad relationship but "good economy" is inferred by "good government." And good government is made up of many things, esp. the good energy of the people. That includes a people who know what is at stake, understands the slow processes of government and doesn't get discouraged by them, a people who have an excellent knowledge base, a people who "know" the ten or so people they need to know. Every citizen has one president, two senators, one representative, one governor, an assemblyman, a state senator, a mayor, a representative on city council, and a representative in the county board of supervisors. It may be different in different regions but those are the primary people a citizen needs to know. Then a citizen needs to know the "structure of government," beginning with the Constitution and ending up with the latest Federal Manual. Then the citizen needs to know who covers and reports on this Gargantuan better than anyone else. Then the citizen needs to know whose commentary and opinion is informed by the same characteristics of self-rule.

Some energy goes to understanding the history of it, some to the maintenance of it, and some to "how it can get better." Those seem to me to be the bottom-line responsibilities of the citizen; at least those citizens who understand that the "good life" is connected to "good governance." Sometimes it takes a scandal, grievous incompetence, or disastrous failure to wake them up to the fact.

The condition of the army

And it is nothing but the people. It is not President Bush, the Supreme Court, the Congress, the billions and trillions, the nuclear arsenals, the wheels and deals up in the ruling stratosphere. It is the people. Without self-rule what is democracy but a farce inching itself toward new forms of modern tyranny?

When the people break down it's only a matter of time before the infrastructure of governance breaks down. Look at the people! Then you can gauge the quality of the political system. Of course politics and government can reduce people, make them worse, rob resource from them, and slap them in the face with stupidity and corruption. That is all true. But then, isn't it themselves doing the rotten deed?

The optimum for a wise liberal democracy would be this. The people knowing everything that goes on, how things work, perfect identity with their living region, etc etc. A more perfect wisdom would include the knowledge of nature, the universe and everything not- America.

Power operates through valves of fear and intimidation. It doesn't matter whether it is a tyrant in the middle-east or the modern American government. It is far more obvious in a tyranny since one guy carries the tools of intimidation. In a democracy this is spread over the vast landscape of government. Fears check each other. The democrats fear big corporations and wealth, republicans fear change. The government, as an institution, always fears for its future.

The antidote for the citizen is knowledge and possession of the government as "his or her own." The idea of ownership of government is extraordinarily important.

The people could take back possession of the idea of government if:

They knew how it was made to begin with.

Were able to discover its full history from 1787 to the present.

Developed a knowledge of the full spectrum of human nature, esp. that nature that has power or wants

it.

Acted as if a public wound was a personal wound.

Intimidation in the face of power would make the citizen cynical, withdrawn, or angrily throwing irrationalities of every sort at the beast.

The intimidating beast is what all citizens need to face down. Bush has proven that bad government does not produce good people or good results. He has proven that bad government is tantamount to dripping poison into the clear and deep reservoir feeding the heart and soul of the people.

We wait that fundamental shift when the people realize that dumping on the government in irrational rage or as a token of proving who runs what is not enough. It takes a commitment to self-rule and that means courage and sacrifice.

That's usually what wins wars.

Politics is the last to know. It is at the end-point of a complex brew of populism and advocacy based on problems too large to handle by groups of interested people who, not suprisingly, want the power of state to solve the problem. Politics may begin in great love or great hatred but ends when most of the emotions have worked through the people. It's at this point when politics becomes the art and skill of manipulation.

All across the political culture is the odd dialectic that goes, "what I love, you hate; what I hate, you love." One might term it, the passion in politics. And then, after awhile, the conflict feels like an old, decaying marriage and the participants settle. But it is always with the backdrop of new passions stirring away ready for great battles.

* * * * *

Hillary's strength is similar to Bin-Laden's. They hardly believe anything but their place in history. They want to be renowned like [Eleanor of Aquitaine](#) or [Saladin](#). A person crazed with this passion will kill, lie, and cheat for certain but may, as well, do some significant things.

Obviously there is great difference between the two. Hillary exists in the context of a strong liberal democracy and bin-Laden operates outside the boundaries of everything but his nutty beliefs. Forced to choose and we would go with Hillary every time except for the primitive demonstration on bin-Laden's part that he is willing to do the physical sacrifice to prove his credibility.

It is much more likely the passion of the ambitions of these two will produce the nuttiness that undermines the leader and brings doom on his or her people. Captain Ahab is the still-standing archetype for the ambitious classes in the world. We mention those two because Hillary is winning the race for 2008 and bin-Laden is winning the "war on terrorism." We submit these as facts that may or may not frighten people but there they are. And it's highly likely their success is coming about due to the ineptness of their competitors rather than some special quality they possess on their own.

In the long tomorrow that will consume all we know, American presidents will have little play in the history videos or whatever they use. History chips perhaps. Three will be picked out as exemplary men who led America to its pinnacle of power: Mainly Washington, Lincoln, and FDR with Jefferson thrown in there as well. The rest will be obscure as medieval Scottish dukes.

And it gets more and more difficult defining what the long future may actually be. After all, short of a strike by an asteroid it is apparent that human beings will be on the planet for millions of years, not merely decades. I'm not sure that a guy six thousand years from now will be concerned with who the president was at this time. It is fairly clear to me that he will have the same relation to us, our vaunted time, as we do to fellow humans who lived 6,000 years ago. "They slept, they dreamt, they eliminated, they ate, they worked, they played, they sexed, they slept." Everything else will have been taken up and transformed many times, including the internet and jet aircraft.

And six thousand years will be a drop in the vast ocean of generations that will include beings with two different set of genitals, hair, and clear, beautiful eyes.

Having this consciousness is the consequence of cracking into the universe and knowing it as a physical thing.

It rushes into modern consciousness and is mistaken for God or initiates a run of nihilism.

Yet, mysteriously, we must live one step-at-a-time with-whatever-we-have as resource and environment.

* * * * *

Beyond mere politics is the health and instinct of the people who live in its stink. And they must be very clear what problems will harm the system of governance, their integrity as people, their livelihoods, their environment and so on. The stink of politics mingles with the health of the people to produce something; usually opposing ambitions that fight and struggle for the center of power. That's why it's disconcerting to discover the people as corrupt and conflicted as the government itself.

A distinctive hatred is always at the end of a good drilling down into the dark-soil of a political party.

The hatred for Democrats is for anything that escapes the commune, anything that does not have the orthodoxy. It's old world in that sense and easily rejected in a dynamic country like America.

The hatred for Republicans is in the form of anything different or suffering. They can't stand anything or anyone who doesn't share the exact verdict on "their" life which is usually propped up by family legacy and padded experience. Republicans remind me of little Buddha's in their father's kingdom, but instead of fleeing at the first exposure to real life they run back and hide further in the palace certain now that nearly everyone is against them.

* * * * *

It's assumed that political points of view have legitimacy ipso facto because they exist out of the free people. That is true but it also reveals the true state of the free people.

And why we worry about the future.

October 30, 2007

Some Impressions of Candidates and Generations>

Were it not for their ineptness I would say the Democrats are fait accompli for 2008.

The people rightfully punish the incompetent party who put-in-place this "commander-in-chief."

But among the Democrats I don't see too much leadership ability.

And they still have the albatross of the "left" hanging around their neck. The left is stuck in an old world that has seen the dissipation of all their founding fathers and mothers and nothing to replace them with but angry feminists who citizens, now, either laugh or yawn at. Women can cut their own deals in this society far more than in most other places in the world. That work is finished. And I don't think the majority of people want to go back to the old days. .

The Democrats don't have the leadership to stand up and tell the left to go change, transform and develop new ideas and new angles of attack to old problems. That would infuse a good deal of stimulation into the docile intellectuals of today. And what does it say that the clowns and comedians are at the center of debate and commentary, not the intellectuals?

* * * * *

Hillary has some good qualities but trust is not one of them.

* * * * *

Leadership is the ability for a powerful person to say, "we are at A and I want us to go to D and I will take you through B and C." And the people are inspired to go, are thoughtful about it, and changes take place. You can do that with some resistance. You can't do it with very vigorous and angry resistance. .

It begs the question, "how come a decent, intelligent, well-spoken, humble, good man like Jimmy Carter failed and a half-empty, sentimentalist like Reagan succeeded?"

It is a mystery but it is also a fact that one failed and the other succeeded in moving the people in the direction he wanted them to go. And it had to do with the nature of resistance among the critical mass of people.

Hillary could operate well in a time where government is "top-down," where it has won over the loyalty of the people and is allowed to operate as an inside job. She would be very effective. But this is a time of populism and demands collaboration between leaders and the led. It may be faked for awhile but is ultimately found out at the core of things.

And if you fake the collaboration you will lose everything within a year or two of the election.

The key will be the roll her husband plays in the campaign. When Hillary gets exhausted, retires from the campaign for awhile, and Bill bounds up on the stage to keep the energy going how will the people respond? That will tell a great deal about how the people take to this potential experiment in leadership.

And I believe a lot of the criticism of Hillary has been unfair over the years. There is something good and positive about her. And if the people put her in office the people should be fair-minded and let her work out her leadership style.

I think it is very healthy for a strong woman to run for President.

* * * * *

Barack Obama is one election cycle from being a serious candidate. And that time will come and he will be a very serious contender in 2012. Looking at the last debate the energy has gone out, he knows it and is looking for an exit strategy.

Biden comes close as a credible leader but there is something disagreeable about the man. There's something angry about him that is always ready to leap out and people don't like that in their leaders.

Edwards has affected a "I'm-goofy-just-like-the-regular-folks" demeanor and can't pull it off I believe. He does stand to gain more than Obama from a Hillary demise.

Richardson and Dodd have some good qualities but they hardly believe in themselves. And, in the case of Richardson, it seems like he's afraid something is going to come out about him.

We read all kinds of things into the people who want to be commander-in-chief because we are free, experienced, liberal democratic people. And now we know what happens with poor leadership. And so the bar is raised. If we simply read clever things into transparent people so what? We need to discover what a man or woman will do when thousands of lives are at stake. Except for McCain I don't see where any of the training of the spate of candidates prepares them for command decisions. And whoever is elected is going to be TESTED in their first year. And if they don't pass the TEST heaven help us.

* * * * *

Hillary is the summing up of decades of [feminism](#) but it comes just at a time when America is getting hard again.

* * * * *

Who is going to absorb the world of meaningful events, objects, and personalities and make out of it what is good for America? The candidates are shallow and inexperienced in everything but politics. They are rooted only in their will-to-power no matter how many sentimental tales they drag out from their childhood. I don't see anyone, for instance, who sizes up the real danger in the middle-east. And it is more than the failure of George Bush. We are committed to protecting the [flow of cheap` oil from the middle-east](#). When we leave Iraq that may become a real target and we will be forced back in on a very large scale.

What candidate will do it?

And they will have to do it to "save the global economy" since the American economy and the global economy

are embedded in each other.

Leadership is learned in life and death situations where people's lives or jobs are won or lost. Leadership stands its ground when pressured not to and changes when the facts demand it. Leadership learns the subtle art of collaboration that gives people the feeling it is they, themselves, that are making the decisions. This was the magic of Reagan and no one in the race today comes close to it. The Clintons have always been about the Clintons. They use people and the public ruthlessly for their own ends. But then the public has always been about "a sucker born every minute."

And one can never underestimate the yearnings of the female to shatter the glass ceiling. I'm not at all convinced that will happen if Hillary is elected. The women will have to take on the responsibilities of being a world power and deal with evil in ways they haven't traditionally done. They will have to countenance most of the things they've decried about the very society! The contradiction will be heavy in irony. What is the difference between a man or a woman ordering the death of thousands of people on behalf of American security?

Through history women have proven their abilities as leaders. [Elizabeth I](#) comes to mind. And note the roles of women during these ye olde England days and how vastly different the modern world is for women, at least in the United States.

Gender politics is a corollary to fundamentalist politics. They are very skewered and unsophisticated world views. They each contain a seed of necessary response to the society but then get fat on their sense of entitlement and decay into an ocean of innane complaints that have nothing to do with the health of the whole culture.

It's the people who have sunk down to these levels. They are the ones who pay the price when a George Bush or the Clinton's lead them. And why do the people sink down into these puerile areas when the future of the country is looking problematical? That is the question a curious citizen needs to address at this point. Where is the authentic new direction that will compel a new philosophy of politics?

* * * * *

Guliani is the Clinton's without the extraordinary craft.

Generations

With the spate of WWII memory entering the scene one reflects on the generations. And those were great young men who took on the responsibility of that war. I think of the conflict between themselves and the boomers. I think of the limitations of each generation.

My father's generation was overwhelmed by its experience in the war. Nothing was ever "as good," in the sense of energizing the self and sacrificing for the common good, for the good of all humanity.

The boomer generation was overwhelmed by its experience in the 60's and 70's. These were the breaking-out of minorities and women from subservient status to equal status, the care and concern over the environment among them. These experiences came about because (1) it was obvious that blacks were treated unfairly (2) an educated generation knew that the "freedom of women" was a mark of a strong, powerful civilization and subservience of women was a mark of a backward, barbaric society, (3) the threat of nuclear war alerted the mind of that generation that the world was more than border identities, and (4) the voyage to the moon put cameras in space to highlight and juxtapose the Earth to the infinite and hostile darkness it was embedded in.

It was the awareness that surrounding the shimmering light of Earth was an infinite space absolutely hostile to anything with life and that the only protection the Earth had was the shimmering atmosphere. These were reducible to actual facts. And facts are the drivers of the modern world.

The negative of these generations came out of some of the prime experiences of each. The men who fought WWII had tremendous camaraderie and had it well after the war. So, when minorities, women, environmentalists, anti-war types started to fight for something in the society that generation went into a war-time mode and linked together thinking they were fighting a terrible foe. They lacked the ability to see the facts. The Nixon paranoia was emblematic of the time.

The generation of "sex, drugs, and rock and roll," led to a tremendous dumbing down, addicted population

exemplified in the popular culture. It made cynicism a reality that surrounded the generation as assuredly as the space around the Earth. It destroyed sensibility and made for fanatical types without a touch of the sublime to them. It was very destructive.

* * * * *

It's more interesting to note the difference between the boomers and x'ers. The boomers experienced an excruciating political time in the late 60's and throughout the 70's. In the post-Vietnam/Watergate era there was a wholesale collapse in the "system of authority," and so thoughtful people were standing naked out in the cold world trying to solve huge problems. They did not rely on the discredited "system of authority," they had no confidence that problems could be solved there, and so tried to take on everything themselves.

But the problems of nuclear proliferation, environmental destruction, resource depletion among others was way too much to take on for people who did not trust the system of authority.

The core of the citizen collapsed into a dark, deep hole that produced cynicism and the escape valve of addiction or cults. Bill Clinton, an average president at best, and George W. Bush, a bad president without doubt are the result.

The X'ers lived in Camelot where populist leaders had two-terms to calm everything down.

- There was economic growth.
- Peace for the most part.
- Very little internal dissension.
- And the political system and other institutions of authority were "under repair," rather than collapsing.

If the X'ers became cynical it was the influence of the boomers in classrooms and media. But, their essential experience has been far healthier, far more trustworthy than the boomers. The problem is they were dumbed-down as soon as education was identified as part of the "system of authority" and became a political football.

October 4, 2007

Some Impressions by Shoeshine Men

My old pal Jude showed up the other day. I hadn't seen him in twenty-five years. He had disappeared during the Reagan years. I heard from a mutual friend he had hid out in the bowels of an awful city working a shoeshine stand at the BART station. "Yes," he said, he'd been doing that. "I've been reading in the libraries around town. God have they gone downhill, that is, until they put computer and internet access in there."

I wanted to re-acquaint myself with Jude and asked him for a shoeshine on the only pair of shoes I own that requires a shine.

"Absolutely, good friend! But as my hands and cloth touch your toes you must listen to me. Listen to a pent-up shoeshine man break-out after years of silence!"

I agreed and sat in what appeared to be a chair one would find in an old library with hard, curved plastic back and aluminum legs. He settled with a great display of odd rituals at my feet and began to prepare for the shine.

"A splendid house of cards can be made from wealth and power."

"The house of cards stands as long as everyone agrees that it is necessary and not to disturb the foundations. Those absolutely dependent on the house of cards look at each other to make sure they all agree that the house of cards is necessary. Arms, legs, and brains are stretched along the ridges that connect the house of cards."

"In a non-dynamic society like the old Soviet Union everything is dependent on the hypnotizing power of the house of cards and it's ability to punish that which is not hypnotized. In a dynamic culture as in the U.S. the house of cards is permitted to fall so a new one can be made."

"The most energetic Americans are either pulling down the old house of cards or putting up a new one. The dullards just go get hypnotized."

"Money is our great hypnotizing snake and it always has a fatal bite to it. It is too late to tell the dullards this of course. They cling to the house of cards without the energy to pull it down or make a new one."

"Ten years of no-money would teach Americans wonderful things about their potentials."

"I don't wish it on them."

"The two-edge sword is that anything hypnotizing will kill you in the end, after it has had its way. The key to a free, liberal democratic culture is to de-hypnotize from what is coercive and find out facts, truth, the good, the resourceful on one's own. That's the challenge of freedom today."

"The dullards rush into the mouth of the snake and are seen, later down the line, addicted and threatening to leap from the bridge. Or, they become hard as Attila the Hun ready to butcher any innocence that makes an appearance on the scene. "Take the head of the innocent!" says the new-bred American tribe. That includes the hard young one's who are too inexperienced to realize that they are removing their own head and placing it on a silver platter for con-men and criminals. The future. They are the future."

He spat like a character actor in an old movie and asked me to look down.

* * * * *

We are in that peculiar space where the American people are learning what and what not to despise. Despise those who have played you for a fool. Despise those who would ruin the future of your children for their own aggrandizement. Despise those who worship actors and ignore wounded vets. Despise those who lie in your face, through the camera lens.

The writer's dilemma meets him very early on. The writer is one who reads history for some orientation in an age he neither likes or trusts. It acts itself all around him and he finally tires of it and goes to history to find some things out. And he discovers that most civilizations are ruled in two parts: The people who cling to a central myth or belief and the ruling types who believe in their own pleasure and/or power and scorn the central myth of the people. They know not to expose that scorn but their actions are full of it.

When the writer confronts this he is shocked by the veracity of the cynical and questions most of what he believes. And he sees this working out, this conflict, in ways that are uncanny. And so he is in the dilemma of one who either has loyalty to those who believe in the central myth (in our time it being democracy) or those who have the wealth and power and will reward those who kiss the end of their alimentary canal.

This is the central dilemma for the writer. Machiavelli goes for the patronage of wealth and power; Dante takes up the central belief and gives it morale.

* * * * *

A writer will go back and forth on this. At times he hates the powerful but then he despises the people for their backwardness. At least the powerful read decent books! And the people were given the terrible burden of a myth that said "everything is subservient to you, the democratic people," and so they developed a very lazy and, shockingly old noble habit of being waited on by those who came to them on bended knee to serve them whatever gruel they could sell as gold.

This was, then, a matter of conscience pure and simple. And I put my loyalty with the people and democracy because hope only rests with them. The powerful are eternal and act exactly the same every generation. They act within the boundaries of their era and within that boundary do exactly as they please and define democracy through themselves. Whereas the people can actually grow and develop from this place, now, into something much better.

Change is possible with the people; improvement occurs with the people.

September 21, 2007

Some Brief Snapshots of Hillary

There's no question that Hillary Clinton is the strongest candidate in the field. That goes without saying and there is a better than 50/50 chance that she will be the first woman President. It will take many men and a few women a few years to recover but they will.

Those of us in California remember the run that Kathleen Brown made for the governership. She was the front runner, she was the most attractive candidate in every way, shape, and form. She led the polls and was thought fait a'compli until the day of the actual election. She lost and was never heard from again. Did the people lie to the pollsters? Did they have a sudden change of heart while in the booth? I'm sure both played a large role.

Whether this happens in Hillary's case or not is hard to say. I think some of the support for her is pretty soft.

As I mentioned before, politics is a war and war is a profound irrationality and if you want to win you need to be crazier, in a bright way, than the other guy. And that goes all the way down the line to the "commentators," etc. You must argue as if the other guy does not exist and get on top of him when he is wounded. This was the Republican strategy in 1980 and it worked and conservatives ruled the day for many years.

And Hillary is going after the "right-wing nuts." They will be the new voodoo doll to replace the "liberal" doll that is so tattered it's not even recognizable anymore.

The conservatives are the discredited ones now and are going to get a taste of their own medicine. Nothing they say will have any credibility. Their arguments will sour in the wind. They will appear as cranky-nut types no matter how many facts and reasoned arguments they bring out.

It's a turning.

Not that the Democrats are trust-worthy but any good political animal can smell the blood in the barnyard.

And the Clinton's are the savviest of political animals.

Some Impressions on Liberty

The "blessings of liberty" are a reality and a good. The immense variety of life in America speaks loudly to that. It can improve and it can get worse. That is the essence of the political battles fought today. What will improve the blessings of liberty and what will draw it down and make it less than what it once was?

A writer will naturally say, extend imagination, intellect, fullness of emotion and you will have more liberty. Shrink these things and you will have less.

It feels like we are in for another round of rich-hating, an emotional pogrom that doesn't make sense but seems to alter the landscape. It's a case of there being no checks and balances against wealth other than revulsion.

Somewhere along the way, around the time of Reaganism, the middle-class switched from their hatred of the wealthy to a hatred of the poor. That accounts for most of the politics of the past 25 years.

But experience teaches one a valuable lesson: Hatred destroys itself, never the object of the hatred. That seems built into a strong democracy and we count it as a good. Hatred, eventually, must heal itself. That is a key to a free society. "Hatred, heal!" Then offer me your solutions if any are left.

Rich-hating won't change much of anything. Neither will jew-hating, black-hating, white-hating, men-hating, women-hating and much of what passes as "political opinion" these days.

Hatred and cynicism are cries from the bottom and the distance it travels and the echo it makes tells something about the society. If these are laughed at the society is strong. If these qualities are feared then you have a weak society. Hatred joining hatred in a viral chain is the most dangerous thing to happen to a society.

* * * * *

Nothing in politics or the Constitution tells me what I should be or how I should live my life. In fact the range of freedom to figure that out is quite large and healthy. It also has flexibility so that if I want to be a doctor but change and decide, no, I want to be a writer that can happen. It won't happen by itself. And there is no guarantee of anything. And the culture requires some investment on the part of the individual into his or her development. The culture, then, is relatively sane and happy when people are pursuing their aspirations or best selves.

I focus on the "people" because big corporations, big insurance companies, big multinationals, big media, big govt. for that matter are beyond help. They do what they do to survive and have wonderful rationalizations for it. It is the way of nature. The framers of the Constitution realized that and why they wanted to pit ambitions against ambitions. And why at various points the Supreme Court has knocked down monopolies and collusion and so forth. Everything big and successful is connected to everything small and failing in that all the people rationalize why it is so.

Big things in America are beyond redemption; it is only the people who can make the necessary changes. And if the people are not prepared, not alert, not savvy, not active, not connected in common purpose, then by fiat they simply let the big take over and it does and it justifies itself fairly easily.

Reforms begin in seeds. Seeds have to survive the germination process. The plant of reform needs to find a good healthy sun until a threshold is crossed and the reform is a wild fire.

* * * * *

Some objective views of history as it pertains to the American future:

When a nation gets to the center of power, wars seems to appear in its midst. The wars are fought, eventually, at the center of power.

If 19 crazy, dedicated men can stop the world for a day or two, what could a million crazy, dedicated people do who possessed both crude and sophisticated weapons of mass destruction?

Every century has a period of disintegration where the "order" is vanquished by aggression and its response. That scenario still sits out there in the 21st century. In 1900 Europe who could have predicted by 1945, just 45 years after, Europe would be in ruins and lose its stature of the center of world power and center of world history?

There is no guarantee of victory when the "order" disintegrates.

When contemplating these dire thoughts the writer understands how crucial it is for the free people to connect their wonderful freedoms to a hinge that understands how and why that freedom has arisen. It is disgraceful that a free people, privileged beyond scope, are ignorant and won't fight for that freedom. If nothing else was exhibited by the failed war in Iraq it was the inability of Bush to rally the free people to go fight the war.

When the burden is put on a particular group of people to fight and die for a cause and yet the wealth and power go to a completely different group what is one to think?

First of all, I would totally distrust that class of wealth and power because they have no sense of responsibility or obligation, therefore, are dangerous to the very idea of a democracy.

And the further they are unhinged to that which makes the democracy strong and free, the more they come to be a leeching, parasitical group who can buy political favor.

In that sense the "democracy" has merely exchanged one form of aristocracy for another form of it; a modern one where the wealthy throw in a few chips to help the poor get Internet access but then float sub-prime loans to them as well to get the money back.....with interest.

Impressions of the Democratic Party

The fight between Hillary and Obama is a good one because it defines "what the Democratic party" will be to the end of the decade and into the first quarter of the 21st century. Hillary is a representation of the "Kennedy Era," that spanned from 1960 to 1980. Government was seen as "good," as a collaborator with the people to produce things like the civil rights bill, anti-poverty programs, and myriad environmental laws. The people said, "we are good, therefore what represents us is good, therefore what they produce in the form of law is good. And being good we obey the laws." That was the idealistic logic through much of the storied 60's.

It shattered apart with Vietnam, Watergate, "stagflation," Iran hostage crisis and morphed into the Reagan Era which is now slowly dying on the vine.

Kennedy and Reagan each cut through the morass of the time and set a path for new, stimulating adventures. It's needed now seeing how bogged down America is. The "Kennedy Era" ended as a period of irreconcilable differences, bitter conflicts, impossible idealisms and brutal reactions. It appeared that this condition would last and last and, eventually, destroy the society.

Reagan cut through that and successfully moved from one era to another, mainly because the people agreed it was time to move on. By shifting the emphasis from big government to private initiative a great jolt of stimulation took place. Even a guy who had more loyalty to the Kennedy Era than Reagan Era can see that. This Era is ending in Bushism, declinism, dummism, and a few other isms.

It is obvious, by an observer of these things, that the Democratic party needs a fresh start, a new horizon for itself. If it slips back down to the Kennedy Era-politics it will find itself sucking hind- tit again, at least in the race for the West Wing.

What it needs is Kennedy-like-energy and Reagan-like-energy. That is, energy that collaborates with a critical mass of the people who want to go forward.

Obama seems to me far more conscious of this while Hillary seems more interested in generating memory in the boomers for those storied times.

She overestimates how wound up people are about the "right-wing conspiracy." And that personal animus does make her look like Nixon. Is she going to have a "right-wing conspiracy enemies list?" And frankly what I know of her, she is exactly the type to use her office for personal vendettas. More importantly she doesn't represent anything new or exciting to cut through the morass of the past 25 years. She knows that collaboration is the key and tries to cultivate it but she doesn't have the personality to pull it off. Her form of collaboration is, "Bill and I are smarter than you rubes and we're the only shot you've got."

Her attitude is, "collaborate with me so I can have the power I have always desired and make it into the history books," rather than, "collaborate with me so we can slice through the horrible stagnant space we occupy and get excited again about freedom and the future."

Hillary would initiate another bog and slog era with a critical mass of people seething the Clinton's are back in the White House and being rather persnickety about it. Her base would be fueled up and dancing in the street but would learn what they should have learned after Mr. Clinton; the base comes second after the Clinton's vanity and self-interest as "historical people" has been served.

Obama talks like he wants a new horizon. He has the tone right but we aren't quite sure about his ability to pull it off. The model is perhaps what Schwarzenegger has done in California. His success is a result of his listening to the people, mostly especially when he is wrong, and moving in the direction they want to go. Only a politician with charisma, even with a bit of political innocence, can gain that trust with the American people. Reagan was the last example of that. Time will tell about Obama.

2007 is not like 1980. It's a space unto itself, bogged down, confused, embarrassed by the incompetence of the Bush Administration, without vision, without aspiration for a better future, simmering in old habits of thought and doing, no more prepared for the 21st century than George Bush was for being POTUS.

A space that needs a crack in its own egg so it can jet out to the future clean and with fresh energy and intelligence.

The man, woman, party, or philosophy that cracks that egg will win.

What is one of the great political lessons of the last forty years? If you fragment and nationalize gender, race, or class the large pool of conservative fundamentalists will rule. I would hope the Democrats finally get this obvious lesson.

The Clintons are like a powerful drug. At the first hit something of euphoria and a glow of greatness comes over one. Then it wears off and you are stuck with the reality. And by the third hit you are angry at the drug for fooling you and keeping you addicted.

Obama would make mistakes but if he gained the confidence of the people he would upright himself and present an interesting new horizon. Even though Kennedy didn't accomplish what he wanted he certainly energized the society and, in fact, the government. He took the people out of the Depression/World War II fixation and put things in a more emphatic direction; civil rights, space, confidence in fighting the cold war. That era was ground to bits by some of the things commented on above but after the dust had settled big changes had taken place.

Hillary would be an establishmentarian- school-marm making statements few would pay attention to. She would be the second-coming of Jimmy Carter and let her ease and fascination for details put a wedge between herself and the people.

The Democrats would be wise to throw themselves into a new direction, do some creative deconstruction on all their political assumptions, and bond with the people in ways that were not possible with the ideology they carried the past 30 years.

The key question these candidates have to answer is, "how to make government more effective without opening its gates for the vast dependencies of the past?" And dependency on the government is the worst condition anyone can get into because at that moment they are the inevitable victims of politics.

December 10, 2007

Impressions of political citizens

Politics works when free and ambitious people fight like hell for the center. The shooting only starts when "the center does not hold." It's not even a light year's worth of closeness to that point in 2007 America. It is that way in Iraq because you have non-free, ambitious people fighting for their own personal power and personal freedom.

The "conflicts" of today's political landscape are chicken-feed to what occurred in the founding generation or the civil war period or the 1960's. It's probably a good thing but then something outside of individual people determines these things. Not that the issues are any less important but that the nature of the divide is much less, despite the entertaining commentators.

A quick glance shows that Obama understands this but Hillary does not.

Politics is usually divided between people who hate change, people who want nothing but change, and people who once wanted nothing but change but have some doubts now. Everyone plays their role. To the old, change is hideous because it means a world is growing up and away from them without their consent. The young love change because they are its agents. And the slowly maturing types see that change is more problematical as they gain more responsibility in the society. Facts become barriers to political passions.

And out of the clash of ambitions comes something, never to anyone's satisfaction but when you look back

you say, "well, something good happened." And when you look way back you say, "Good God, what a new moon rises on us the living!"

After all, the purpose of American democracy is not to "tell people what to do," but to liberate the finest energies in all the people. The infrastructure to do such a thing, as Iraq proves, must be healthy for the finest energies to be liberated.

* * * * *

If reform is needed then the people have to reform everything, themselves included.

* * * * *

Government and politics are as much "victims" of the modern world as individual people. Huge, sudden effects have blown through the globe; the population has tripled, they are moving toward urban areas, monumental problems suddenly appear like nuclear proliferation or global warming, the people fragment into thousands of groups, powerful groups pour huge sums of money into the system to control it, politicians are inadequate to do anything, the citizen decays and gives it all up for temporary pleasure. This calculus has produced something unprecedented and requires the full energies of free and thinking people still devoted to the idea of "self-rule."

Everything at the furthest end of government and economy depends on the choices people make every day.

An argument could be made that economy is driven on the back of bad habits.

This is why democracy is always about the individual person and his or her character.

* * * * *

The art to being a citizen in the United States is recognizing that the fierce struggles of the past created permanent values each generation can take up as its own. And those struggles go way back to the very beginning, through the Revolution, through the attempt to overcome slavery, through the adaptation of the industrial revolution and capitalism, through the labor movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement, the civil rights movements, the tax payer revolt among others. All the just struggles in the United States have produced living values and the art of the citizen is not simply understanding these values but connecting, not to one of them, but all of them.

The sublime nature of the art is then to embed the values, forget them, and look at the culture as a brand-new-thing with long and deep horizons. A citizen employing this sort of art has to let the profound fear that jumps on the naive and innocent mind to, as the old song says, "walk on by."

The citizen naturally carries emotion and hopefully emotion motivates the citizen to participate in the democracy. However, emotion has enormous limitation and if kept at emotion, the citizen is simple fodder for smart people who learn early on how to manipulate emotions with the intent of gaining and securing power.

The question of illegal immigration is not solved by "emotions." The interest in it may be started with an emotion, one way or the other, but eventually the citizen has to learn how to break down the emotion, accept the shadow of the emotion, go to other sources besides his emotional resources and understand the complexity of the issue, cut through the complexity to what is reasonable-for-solution and then find leadership willing to carry up the reasonable solution.

* * * * *

The instant rush of information into the brains of people is making it appear that we can have a direct democracy. I think we are seeing something else. That instant rush of information is inflating people past the tipping point and giving them a rush of power. At the end point of this is an irritated sort of frustration that is both a good motivator but a bad decision-maker.

Even at this late date one would hope for a golden mean that cuts through a government that rules top-down because "it knows everything," and a people irrationally crazy at the idea of government itself.

Information built into solid knowledge, clashing with other knowledge-bases, intermixed with rich

experience, patience, due diligence, and due process results in a good liberal democracy.

Or, so it would seem. Some of the more remarkable changes have taken place by sheer populism that the politicians couldn't hold back. We are not in that type of era yet.

Impressions of the Old Political Life

It is an exciting political time, not because of the debates or the endless comments, or the winnowing of candidates, even because of the high spirited energy of the young. It is an exciting time because the "time" is searching for a new thesis. The old political wars are done with, burnt-out, trapped by useless language tricks. Politics, in that sense, is like the endless reruns of Perry Mason shows where everyone plays their role and says what has to be said and after the fifteenth time even the most distracted and lazy of people is able to figure out who did it, why, and so on.

We see the tired commentators on both the left and right making old arguments, old and common rages against the stick figures they've given names to, old and bankrupt *raison d' et* for "our point of view," and so on. This is understandable since careers are dependent on these old wars.

But, for real political excitement let a new thesis be created and taken up by the next administration in power. Let it dominate, let it percolate for a decade or so. Let us see who reacts to the thesis and how.

I believe Obama would spurt the growth of a new thesis quicker than the two others. But even if Hillary or McCain is elected, things and ideas that are seeds now will begin to flourish in three, four, five years.

It feels that way. The discrediting of the old politics, left and right, should be in full gear by that time. They will be embarrassments.

Impressions of Race and Gender

It's unfortunate that race and gender are "deciders" in the minds of some people. It was unfortunate that the jury nullified the facts in the O.J. trial. But, there is a large history where race and gender were used against the nullifiers and deciders of our own day.

Race, gender, a few issues and how much money you have in your pocket has become central in our day for deciding leaders.

But the dominance of demographic politics, as it is now being called, is a wonderful opportunity to look over the history of the last forty years to see how ideas, movements, and pure irrationality come to dominate a culture which in turn manifests it in its politics. It's not a pretty picture because it enforces the stereotypes and nasty emotions which, presumably, one would want to be liberated from. Hillary's "cry" being one of these spurious moments that people will scratch their heads about in the future.

It looks to me as if it will be "easier" to elect a black man than a female for president. For one thing, most intelligent people realize that the experience of blacks in the U.S. has been profoundly different than the experience of females. The election of the black man would close some wounds and herald a new era of politics. Whites don't have the intimate relations with blacks that men, say, have with females. It's the complex relations between men and women that creates some of the irrational animosity towards Hillary. Many people have difficulty in associating the obvious historic oppression of black people with the "oppression of females." The difference is that between Dolly Madison or Martha Washington and the slave women who lived at the same time. And I would like to have Hillary explain to me how equal a poor black woman is to her and if not then does she carry the brunt of shame and guilt? And then do we expect policies shaped by shame and guilt?

* * * * *

How can "race" or "gender" be categories of significance unless those categories are invested with great meaning? And if they have great meaning don't they become "myths." And don't great "myths" eventually fight to the death with each other? And didn't we fight a great war based on the fact that two races, the German Nazi's and Japanese, believed they were superior races?

Most political types who have some experience understand that race and gender are very easily used to

manipulate people in whom the myth of race and/or gender has lodged. These are simply one more in a long train of irrational modern myths that have wreaked havoc.

It's unfortunate because the choosing of leaders should come down to trust, connection, and the ability to make command decisions. And hopefully all three are in play in one man or woman, in a society that has moved beyond race and gender because progress is dependent on it.

In the case of Hillary gender will trump these qualities with a large group of people. But the same could be said about Obama, McCain, and Hucklebee.

In the case of Hillary much will be based on how mature the relations between men and women have evolved the last forty years. During the red hot vacuum of the 70's gender was reduced to a null point where it was either my gender or your gender. The zero-sumness of this struggle radiated into every city, town, and village because men and women hang around each other in ways that create drama. Every man, even the homeless guy, has a mother.

The truth of the matter is that traditional roles disintegrate in the transition from a scarcity economy to a surplus economy as happened through the 20th century. The buzz word is "personal freedom" rather than "rally round the flag" or "pull together, all for one, one for all."

The pulling and tearing apart of traditional relations is duly recorded and commented on and the pain lingers in individual people who vote.

The mature mind finally asks rhetorical questions of those in conflict over gender and race. "Does not the freedom of one gender mean more freedom for the other? Does not more freedom for one race mean more freedom for the other?"

* * * * *

The traditional roles and the ferocious competition for scarce resources returns with a complete collapse of economy. If a people is lucky at any rate.

* * * * *

A citizen is a powerless but free person who develops a relation to politics and governance. What works? What is power supposed to do? What has been done in the past? What thoughts have guided politics and governance in the past?

Meanwhile the machinery grinds onward. If the machinery destroys the loyalty the citizen has with the system of governance then evil has won the day. If the free but powerless citizen is able to stand his or her ground and see through the machinery to the possibility behind it then a bit of light has won the day.

From a historic point of view "demographic politics" belongs to a transitory phase as the politics post-civil war was or during the first 25 years of the 20th century. It marks a period. It believes in itself. It thinks its done something wonderful. And then is a mark for jokes and parodies before being forgotten altogether in time.

This fabled maturity that one would like to see in the public sector can only come through all the major participants of the demographic age. That is, whites, males, women, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics. One sees defensiveness in whites and males, irrational will-to-power in women, blacks and Hispanics; it's a dynamic relation with no one really at fault. If I'm a black man in this society and have to choose between a black man and a white man I'm probably leaning towards the brother. As long as the black man is vetted and qualified.

It doesn't end there of course because once you have a demographic-public-life it must work together, it must create alliances past the threshold of the demographic. That may be a large story in the 21st century. And it is appropriate that a nation of such mixture would try to integrate on a level heretofore unprecedented. The question is whether it will identify itself as one people or as a half-dozen identities who fight over resources. Will identity trump region, industry, religion, class as the thing that defines political loyalty?

And what free person would want to grow up destined because of who he or she is at birth?

Each age has its necessities and its inanities, sometimes emerging out of the same source.

February 11, 2008

Impressions on the South Carolina primary.

It's hard to say what but something of moment passed tonight. Perhaps it was the presidential speech Senator Obama gave, perhaps it was the way in which he deftly pinned in those two political horn-dogs, the Clintons. Perhaps it was the authentic and emotional appeal to unity that has not sounded as good as Obama made it sound since the 1984 speech by Gov. Cuomo in San Francisco.

But it sounded like a winner. And it sounded completely correct.

For a moment it appeared as if the divides had come down. As if the prospect of human nature working together in ways not seen for a long time could be realized. Good, common sensible, intelligent human nature and not that thing calculated by the Clinton's all based on "triangulation," false statistics, lies, and folksy sentimentality.

Maybe the people are much more upset by the direction of the country then the cynical Clinton's had counted on.

Whatever it was, it was emotional and real.

Hillary made a speech in Tennessee and it was an old-time politician's speech replete with "I'll give you'all everything...this for you, that for you, much for you'all, that for you'all, it's Christmas in America."

No one believes this old political rhetoric anymore. For the presidency it comes down to the three or four very significant decisions, life and death, that the president will make, alone, with the knowledge of consequence on his or her shoulders. That is what the people should nail down when they think long and hard about the presidency.

I doubt seriously that Hillary would have done any different than President Bush given the same intelligence reports on her desk and the memory of 9/11 still fresh. The results would have been pretty similar because there would not have been time or incentive in a Hillary Clinton presidency to re-make the military or intelligence in 2001. To be fair I doubt if Al Gore would have done anything differently.

* * * * *

It's interesting to me that the Kennedy clan seem more disposed toward Obama than Hillary. The Kennedy's, Bushes, and Clinton's represent the most profound infection of "family" in world power since the Roman Empire. We blame the people for their laziness and inability to penetrate the hypnotic hold of money and celebrity but it takes two to tango. There is deft manipulation on the part of these families especially as they cultivate the cultural myths that have grown up around them. I think the Kennedy's see the Clinton's as minor league, upstarts from the oak/arky land with some ivy league credentials to overpower the ignorant types down there.

One could term it the corruption of the public but I think it is pure laziness on the part of the people who have given up their sovereignty to powerful families since most families in the U.S. have been devastated by divorce, addictions, poverty, or declining wages.

One waits for that electric moment when an ambitious wife pours poison in the ear of the doddering fool of a husband or uncle and changes history.

In fact, it is a fascinating study to watch Bill absolutely sabotage Hillary. He's beginning to catch on to the fact that she used him much more effectively than the other way around. He appears to be a big white pussy and some natural resentment has kicked in. "Oh big white pussy whyfore art thou so?"

"I ain't no big white pussy, I is an ex-President and can make my own way!" So he snarls at the easy-to-despise stick, the journalist.

Ah, the era we live in.

Common sense says that Hillary would be more powerful and loved in the Senate, years in duration, where

she could wield enormous power and actually get a few of things she promises done. And that Bill should get that deep therapy he needs so he can penetrate and heal those profound emotions he keeps evading by his passive/aggressive behavior. And Obama would end the last 40 years of strife and open the floodgates to the future through which the people would pour and start to build a new horizon.

Common sense, however, is usually trumped by the raging ego.

* * * * *

The American people have no one to blame but themselves. They grew rich and fat during the past 25 years and it's all become a game to them with hardly any consequence. They hardly know what is in store for them up in the next several decades. They don't penetrate the high school level campaign rhetoric, they are terrified of confronting the shadows of their own culture, they waddle through time now hoping Oprah will save them. The intelligent ones realize that their fine-tuned minds are meaningless in a society where one good mind confronts thousands of minds turned to superstitious mush by mass media or out and out fear they can't deal with. They are looking for cartoon characters to tell them what their reality is.

It is a sad and tired era and why Obama is so appealing. We need pure idealistic, naive nature! One that says, "begin again....." End the past forty years of strife, conflict, idiocy that has resulted in the last seven years of tragic ineptness. End it. The Clinton's and Republicans thrive on it. End it and shift into a new direction as all good American generations have done because they did not fear the future.

January 29, 2008

Impressions on American culture.

To be effective America must always remake itself, renew its core ideas but break out in ways that few appreciate and, in fact, ways that are never discussed in political campaigns.

Every generation it decides whether it wants to remain a liberal democracy or give up the ghost to some scheme that is old as Adam. The boomers gave up to any number of schemes but did assert the power of the individual. Their children are awfully quiescent.

The more intelligent and imaginative the break-out the better. It is more than a few ecstatic dances in the summer wind.

Whether we wait a few decades more for some profound break-out or it is upon us now is a question that will be revealed by time.

That break-out would require the mind and spirit to go beyond the structures now in place. It would require an imagination that would go out and capture the next thousand years as its own.

It is a necessary sort of romance in a gargantuan nation-state, unprecedented, and dependent on its vital myths.

A person imbued by this spirit can't help but be depressed by the candidates. Their pure calculations require a lack of humor, intelligence, and imagination. It requires a salivating lack in the person that he or she believes the government will satisfy. Or, some magical, ignorant belief that the government will transform them into new people.

No.

Government exists as a weight. Sometimes it is a good weight but it never loses its sense of being a terrible anchor just when the people want to get up and sail into the new sun.

The most effective politician of our day called government an evil and treating it as such seems to do more good than harm. The evil isn't going away and yet the free citizens can dance around it and hypnotize its evil eye with fresh ambitions.

The tired heaving and sighing of the public as it counts its pennies and aspires to buy things is sheer boredom. Better that they were out fighting for a future that means something.

The poor American reduced to money-monkeys! Dominated by real money with the imposing will of machines to finish the deal.

And ever unable to break out of the roles assigned to him, the "free American" man and woman.

We are supposed to extoll the American as writers were once called on to extoll the Soviet-worker as hero of the people. No, we bend over the open trench and vomit a few times at what this breed of men and women has become. Their dumbness has conquered. Their superstitions rule the land. Their blatant fantasies create the market.

And so we sadly conclude that freedom is a very tough nut and requires more from the people than they are willing to give in this day and age.

The candidates can not express this and only one is trying to do something about it. And that is Obama.

Impressions on the Democratic Party.

Are the Democrats the weird nuts they appear to be? Well, they are narcissistic and embroiled in conflicts a long-time coming.

The Clinton's reveal themselves as that two-headed political animal that will run over anyone in the way, use whomever it is necessary to use, and try to destroy all enemies. And if the Democrats buy into it they will be as guilty as the Republicans who bought into GWB.

* * * * *

Back in the good old days there was enormous tension between the civil rights people and the feminists. Let us say there was dislike between African-Americans and privileged white women of the upper middle-classes. It was quite evident that the privileged white women of the upper middle-classes slip-streamed the honorable civil rights movement and got more of the booty. Affirmative action was much more successfully deployed by privileged white women than African-Americans. And then the privileged white women could parlay their leverage into marriages with privileged white men and make lives no one else could possibly reach. To say this is not a tension in the Democratic party for three decades is quite ignorant.

Well, this is the nest the Democratic Party has made for itself.

The Democrats have to decide very quickly if they are going to go for a very unlikable, transparently bad couple who think they can turn the clock back to 1998 and a likeable leader who could effect a shift ala Kennedy or Reagan. And if they split in two and fight like cats, the Republicans retain the White House, a fact no one in their right mind would want.

The Clinton's have made the Democratic party dysfunctional and toxic again. Doesn't anyone in that party care? Don't they have any sense at all?

"35 years of experience" is a meaningless phrase if the system is broken. What is "35 years of experience" going to do but add its own measure of filth to it?

Even an amateur psychologist can see clearly that Bill Clinton is an archetypal saboteur; he tried to bring down his own presidency and almost succeeded. Now he will bring down his wife's campaign.

These are not the people you want in the White House. The young people are quite right in their instincts.

Of course, what is honest opinion and instinct against the ferocious mad machine the Clinton's possess?

January 22, 2008

Change, that worn-out and meaningless phrase, needs some boundary. The only way change, in the political sense, will take place is if one candidate can shift the dynamics to put the people between the President and the Beltway rather than the other way around.

That is the only way the people will be affirmed and re-moralized. It won't make a bit of difference if you get

a brilliant policy-type in there or an old war veteran if the Beltway stands between the President and the people.

Challenge is another one of these phrases that means everything and nothing. "I challenge you to stop smoking." "I challenge you to throw away your SUV's and buy electric cars." "I challenge all human beings to be kind and funny for the rest of our days." "I challenge the Moon to merge into Mars and become a new planet." I challenge God to reveal Himself in the eye of a frog." And on and on and on it goes. The professional politicians throw out challenges all the time to prove to the people they are leaders. It's part of the ritual of power but fails nearly everytime because the powerful never demand anything real from the people.

The old-time politicians like Hillary and the Republicans are subpar mythologers in this regard but realize performance is all. It's a naughty trick considering what is at stake but it has been played from day one. Perform well for the people, get in the White House, shut the doors and start paying off friends, allies, money-supporters while basking in the drug of power; a drug that will convince even the most evil character that he is really doing the work of God. The only difference in a good democracy is that people can paint pictures of the powerful leader with his or her pants down by their ankles.

"Who is going to shift the collective emotion so that a new future can be born?" It's a rather portentous question but relevant considering the tasks ahead and the vulnerability that the "strongest superpower in the world" finds itself in. And should the citizens be reminded by these old-time politicians, that the "2nd strongest superpower" fizzled without a fight when reality smacked it between the eyeballs? And that the American citizens had better fight like hell before reality smacks them between the eyeballs?

You can't have an energized government without an energized populace.

The Aegean Beltway is filled with manure and the stink is so bad all parties, all political philosophies are blended together in the grand odor. It is the stink forty-years in duration.

For all the positives Hillary puts forward she will only enter the Stables to deliver her own set-of-manure-details and, despite the pink ribbon tied around them, it will smell the same as the others.

Obama is the only one with the will behind him to try and divert the clean river of American populism through the stinking stables. But that populism is made up of magnificent goofs who are either very honest but decades behind the times or very wicked and straight-up in the center of the times ready to manipulate anyone and anything for some lust we can only identify after the fact.

[This is an excellent description and analysis of the Clinton Years in the 90's](#); years that I don't believe were distinguished. They were filled with squandered promises as some have pointed out. They were built on the dot.com bubble and the vacuum of the collapsed Soviet Union and end of cold war. I don't fault Clinton for "triangulation."

I always called Clinton, "the best Republican president we've ever had." It didn't bother me at all because it was necessary to marginalize the remnants of the old democratic block, sever it, and move on into a much more moderate future. Inasmuch as that happened he was successful. But he was a great failure overall because the people gave him a mandate in 1996 and it all got sucked away by sheer adolescent folly. The "bridge to the future" collapsed into the abyss and the boy-king took over as a kind of ridiculous spanking to the Democrats. The reasonable, thoughtful and good Al Gore was the penultimate victim. Why the Democrats suppress this in themselves is quite odd.

When, however, the people are as disgusted as they seem now a new fundamental break with "the way things are," seem in order. That is done by a kind of mystical leadership Reagan and Kennedy had, the people then inserting themselves between the leader and his foes and critics as they did for Reagan and a fundamental shift, not simply in policy but in ways of thinking, takes place.

So the qualities to look for are trust and connection. It can't be faked. It can't be triangulated.

Trust, connection, and vision.

Hillary and her alleged competence will land us in a sticky, muddy thicket because she promises everything for everyone. She's an old-time politician and just because she has breasts and a pudenda shouldn't obscure the fact. She promises to take from the rich bastards and give to the poor slobs she makes into heroes whenever she speaks to them. But she knows that the wealthy are more powerful than her platitudes and it gives her confidence that she can make the rich the enemy. She does so for the same reason as Chavez does. It shifts attention from their own short-comings.

* * * * *

The reason politicians, Republican and Democrat, are reviled is that the people have caught up with the game that is being played. The parties have learned that if they can improve the lot of certain segments of the population for short durations, enough to keep their loyalty, but it always wears off, it always is a thin bandage applied to where the wound is filled with passionate voters.

* * * * *

The Clinton's are not bad people, evil people or any number of slanders they've suffered over the years. From a literary point of view they are a fascinating political couple. But they belong to another era whose days are quickly passing. They charm all the people they will, eventually, use for their own purposes like good politicians. If elected, they will work hard on a few issues that will gain them the votes for the '12 election. But they will not effect the shift that the people, in their heart of hearts, are rabid for. And they are rabid for it because the people have greater instinct for the survival of the culture than the politicians behind the Beltway.

They know what is at stake is far more important than the clever ability of the political class to read "analysis of the concerns of the people," and rat-a-tat-tat a line of stats or rhetoric to appease them.

If Hillary wins it will only mean that the people have not matured enough to deserve the shift they so desire. They will have been tricked a thousand ways and installed in the Oval Office smoke and mirrors. And if Hillary wins and walks around the Oval Office will she see some imprint of the young intern on her knees marking the end of the "bridge to the future?" And does anyone remember the "bridge to the future?" And how, in 2000 the economy was great, the Soviets gone, the terrorists scarcely a worry and Al Gore ready to succeed to POTUS? But for the "scandal" it would have happened and yet the Democrats don't seem to be able to lay the burden of responsibility at the foot of the Clinton's. And that tells me that there is an enabling factor that belongs to dysfunctional families rather than great Republics.

And without a doubt the "cultural wars," of the past few decades have all been about families. Or, more precisely, about the Family.

We need for a radical break-out of new thinking, new feeling, new ideas, new vision which is smothered by the Clinton's "control/command" form of doing things.

Impressions on Silly Questions a Citizen might Ask

There are questions a person has when entering his or her role as citizen. Some are very basic. For instance, "is it even good to have a government?" This is especially acute as a question when young and the government is a vague and meaningless power. It is the power youth is suspicious of.

Experience, if not knowledge, tells a person that government is necessary because in its absence would come a deadly struggle over "who will control?" It is usually a strong-arm tyrant who takes advantage of the chaos. There is, then, no absence of government only transmutations of power. So what type of power is best?

After some research one finally settles on a democratic republic and says, "well, it's not a perfect set-up but by taking on the problems it does, it permits me to chase after my own aspirations and goals."

Then the question is, "well, what is the government you live with best suited to do?"

- Is it an internal and external policeman keeping warring parties from killing each other while ameliorating conditions in its own domain?
- Is it one but not the other?

- Is it a marauder whose sole purpose is to bring booty to the people?
- Is it there to protect the sovereignty of the people?
- Is it there to be used by the democratic people in ways of their choosing?

The next question to ask is, "would the United States be better as a united sovereignty or is it better broken up into regions, each region with its own flags, armies, currency, languages even?" Here one pauses a bit. Hmm.

But the break-up of the U.S. into regional states would require trauma after trauma and we, the living, would never see the benefit. We would only experience the decline of the federal state.

If it is a necessary thing then what would damage it? What would make it more a burden than a structure that permits the lifting of burden?

Certainly if it acted on behalf of one small group and no one else.

Certainly if the critical mass of representatives were corrupt and permitted that to happen.

Certainly if it undermined the principles of liberty and destroyed the protection the people have against the aggressions of the government.

Certainly if the critical mass of citizens were so disgusted by the government they let it go as a concern and so the government became a free-wheeling entity driven by a few corrupt people. Eventually the citizens would be bled dry of their hard-earned money and freedom.

Certainly if the government got so complex and beast-like that it was not even manageable by hordes of ivy-league professionals brought in to manage it. In this scenario the people will go to the circus while their grandchildren are shocked when Attila comes knocking at the gates.

January 15, 2008

Impressions of the Iowa Caucus

Iowa has said, "it's time to say goodbye to the Clintons, the Bushes, the Kennedys, the Reagans. It's time to stop allowing powerful families from ruling the roost and start energizing a torpid nation."

And if that is simply me saying that rather than the good people of Iowa I'm sure they meant to say it.

America is in the tragic phase of its development because it is larded over in power and wealth. The citizens have become mere imitations of this and see their prime civic duty as making enough money to pay the taxes for the fat government and live life as though tomorrow never comes. They resent the tax part and curse it. But they do not engage in the ways that will allow the liberal democracy to be saved which is always through sacrifice, vision, knowledge, healthy experience, and belief that the act of democracy is a good and positive act.

Perhaps the good people of Iowa have changed that.

Americans view power like the odd characters who flit in and out of the Soprano's. It's a charge to be around the family but best not to mess around in their affairs.

People give up on democracy just as they give up on life; that is, when their experience of disillusionment is more powerful than the mythology they have been given to overcome it, whether that mythology is religious or secular.

In the case of America it's very size, power, wealth and seemingly invincible double-hull put people in a kind of stupor. They are like the first passengers of the Titanic on an ocean of glass and a full moon is rising and the ship effortlessly glides, bringing with it a brisk wind. The people wander the decks with fine liquor, make

love down in the state rooms, and have exotic meals with conversations of intrigue, rumor, and gossip. And one man stands on the deck and looks out over the still Atlantic and says to no one in particular, "life doesn't get any better than this."

And within several hours the people are screaming for their lives as the ocean swallows them whole with hardly any effort on its part.

The people can't afford this sort of self-satisfaction and must drive their instinct for freedom and survival through the self-satisfied political class. And do it now. And do it before it's too late.

* * * * *

The thesis for our time was created in the down and dirty 70's when the boomers were demoralized and disillusioned by the politics of Vietnam and Watergate, the establishment in general. The antithesis was created by the naive, pseudo-idealistic fundamentalist cum conservatism of the Reagan years.

So we are here. The living moment, the living edge.

When the thesis and antithesis have burned themselves out it is a exciting opportunity for those who have let go of both the thesis and the antithesis.

It demands, for one thing, leadership by force of personality ala Schwarzenegger and, possibly, Obama. It gobbles up old-time politicians like Hillary Clinton, Biden, Guiliani, even McCain. It does so because a new opportunity, a new opening demands a kind of irrational faith the people throw on its chosen leader. Old-time politicians are usually old dogs who know everything about the master and anticipates him very well. But, the master changes and the old dog is left sniffing the air in confusion while the new dog knows exactly what to do.

This happened in 1960 when the more experienced, competent, even more intelligent Richard Nixon was defeated by a younger, inexperienced JFK. And for all the criticism Kennedy has received about the inability of his administration to do anything in Congress it was his force of personality that moved the government and the society into a new phase of development. His martyrdom sealed the deal, at least until the highly problematical late 70's. And it shouldn't be overlooked that one of the changes at that time was the removal of barriers for African-Americans to enter the society and gain benefit, even get leadership roles.

It didn't happen by itself.

Hillary reminds me more of Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter than anyone else. On the one hand she has a delicate, sensitive nature that has been transformed into a beastly thing not trustworthy. This seems to be a terrible cost to sensitive types who stand up in the public arena. And she is a control-freak like those two men and demands to be on top of every detail and, before long, she has moshed her personal debilities into the ways and means of governance. Even if she wasn't facing a critical mass of irrational resistance, her administration would be bogged down in obsolete pc'ism, old-time vendetta's, old-time compromises, old-time secrecy.

Obama may be an authentic change-agent like the inexperienced stud or the old-time actor. And the people are wild for it. New faces, new agendas, new horizons, new skills, new dreams, new attitudes, new paths to new futures. The people are wild for it.

January 4, 2008

69,660 words

217 pages @ 320/page

Impressions of the Obama phenomena

"Pundits" are in a quandary about the Obama phenomena. It's like asking why Elvis Presley was such a phenomena. It's something you could think about for a long time but never figure out. Why did the

Republicans go for an old actor in 1980 over a much more experienced, intelligent, well-connected candidate such as George Bush? There's no explanation as you sit down and look at their resumes as though you're hiring someone for a job.

Popular will wraps a person in a magical veil that protects the hero from "evil," like critics, jealous lovers, power mongers and so forth. If this is truly the case with Obama then it doesn't matter what Hillary or anyone else says; their criticisms are seen as part of the hostile forces the people themselves are trying to avoid. And if it is carried through to the presidency then Obama will be permitted to do things he wouldn't be able to do during periods of normalcy. Any attempt to stop him will be met by the angry will of the people who, after all, are voters and consumers.

That is a significant change agent and creates new politics.

The central question is whether the people are really clamoring for this sort of change; a change in the vector of national feeling or whether they simply want policy changes. Hillary is betting that they simply want policy changes and Obama is arguing that they want a change in vector first, then the policy changes.

It's practically impossible to know until the thing is settled.

Obama would show his immaturity if, at this point, right before the Texas and Ohio primaries, he were to get as overconfident as Hillary was from the moment of the first debates back in 2007. It's a curious connection perhaps but isn't Hillary's mistake about her campaign like President Bush believing all he had to do was drive Hussein out, capture Baghdad and all else would take care of itself? In like fashion Hillary believed the campaign against her rivals would end after Super Tuesday, things would take care of themselves to the convention where a turbo-charge of unity behind her would propel her through September and October and victory in November.

We are not at the end of this yet but it may finally come down to young, idealistic people pulling an old fabrication off her high-horse. Americans are notorious for doing that sort of thing.

* * * * *

American culture is now rife with populism. What is the blogosphere but a direct, popular challenge to "professional pundits?" There is a "feeling" that Obama will open the Beltway, will open the channels of power and the people, themselves, will be the change agents. It's not provable ahead of time. It's just a feeling. And the voters instinctively feel that the Clinton's, despite the good things they might bring, would be a closed, command and control administration that would put the Beltway between themselves and the people. McCain too, for that matter. And that does make all the difference in the world.

If from the right, Gingrich says the system is broken and from the left Obama says it is broken and people everywhere say the system is broken what will fine-tuned policies be but fodder for the broken machine? Both Hillary and McCain will step out of the White House with detailed policy plans held up in triumph for the media and then they will be dropped into that vast paper shredder called the Beltway with thousands of lobbyists, cronies, policy experts and lawyers taking each shred and shredding it further until the mere piece of paper disintegrates without a trace.

The people are aware of this since they live in a real world. They are telling the professionals, including Hillary, they don't like the broken world propped up by their taxes. Obama is the only one who gets this. And why he has the inside track.

And If I Were A Democrat?

If I'm a Democrat I notice that the Clinton's engender a visceral negative response from, even, fair-minded people. It is death-knell to politicians.

If I'm a Democrat I want this thing over as quickly as possible. I don't want to go to the convention and have a skunk fight between the Obama people and the Hillary people. And blacks are more and more coming to the realization that an African-American has a decent shot at the presidency. Win or lose Hillary has made it much more likely that a female will run successfully for the presidency, as long as she doesn't have a spouse who ruts in the Oval Office or has any political ambitions himself.

If I'm a Democrat I see Hillary in steep decline and Obama with momentum that will not go away, even if he's defeated in Texas and/or Ohio. How could any candidate have credibility after losing ten straight times

in their own party primaries?

If I'm a Democrat I see the possibility of Obama appealing to a portion of Republican moderates who like many others are fed up with the broken system.

If I'm a Democrat I see Hillary shutting the Oval Office doors, working out an intricate plan for the next four years, trying to execute it from on top, and getting furballs out of the Giant Illusions she details in all-nighters with her husband.

If I'm a Democrat I'm asking myself, "why doesn't Hillary stay a Senator where she can do a great deal more for her pet projects and be a presence in the Senate for decades?"

If I'm a Democrat I see Hillary using the power of the president to get back at "enemies" who have made life miserable for the Clinton's.

If I'm a Democrat I see 1968 and especially 1972 all over again.

If I'm a Democrat I see Obama as a way to "start again," in ways that happen when the people are gasping from the stink of the old politics.

If I'm a Democrat I start to think through this question, "are the Clinton's more loyal to the Democratic party than themselves?"

If I'm a Democrat I start to wonder, "if the Clinton's take it to the end and lose will they take as many with them as they can?"

If I'm a Democrat I see John McCain and the demi-evil Republican operatives sitting back and letting the Democrats reveal all their weaknesses through a skunk fight between Obama and Hillary.

If I'm a Democrat I see a team that has just battered itself in a close, emotional win now lining up with a team that has had a few weeks rest and repair.

If I'm a Democrat the term "will of the people," means a lot more than "35 years of experience."

If I'm a Democrat I look at the differences between Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. Mr. Carter was far more intelligent and experienced in the world than Reagan. One could argue he was a better man and more conscientious. And yet Reagan had leadership qualities Carter never possessed. It is who can lead in the direction of their choosing: Who is the natural leader?

If I'm a Democrat I notice that the old radical feminists are in the forefront for Hillary and that the critical mass of Americans are either pissed off at them or fearful of them. They have made this race a referendum on their gender rather than for the good and future of the United States.

February 26, 2008

Impressions on Political Dreams

Politics often hinges on this perception: If the problems are overwhelming, if they're not being solved, if they continue to mount, then what is the justification for the process as a whole? What good are all the educations and rituals of power and billions of dollars if it can't justify itself at the very crux?

Hopefully, a sense of this failure generates long, profound reassessments.

From crisis to crisis leadership is a kind of Sargasso Sea floating through huge communities with offers it knows it can't deliver. But rarely are problems solved. The poor neighborhoods I drive through to get to the airport haven't changed in 40 years of politics, anti-poverty programs, preaching, teaching, or volunteering.

That's not to say there shouldn't be preaching, teaching, and volunteering. But there should be an admission that whatever the past has attempted to do has failed and that new vectors, new angles of attack need to be developed. The political parties and their ideologies have simply meshed together and effectively stopped the real dialog.

* * * * *

One reason why there is resistance to the federal government is clear: America, under normal circumstances, would have become five or six distinctive nations. The establishment of a federal system from the very beginning brought in all the distinctive regions with their odd political needs and leadership. A good Californian cringes when a political idea, twenty years behind the times, comes popping up from Alabama or Indiana and succeeds to push through some policy. And every region has its moments of cringing. The President and a few Senators are supposed to bridge all of this but they have great resistance across many regions. Hopefully the persistent facts win out as in the universal recognition of global warming.

Americans rightfully resist top-down management. But it can only be avoided when there is bottom-up self-rule.

The Morale of Democracy

One of the morale problems is that in a free society "everything is known." The ideas out of which the political and social institutions developed were known and are known now however deep they are piled under generations of experience. Every institution has a root that is known, discoverable, and rational. Yet the people themselves exist in a kind of blind fury without a discernable direction. One wonders how the people could have survived the disillusionment of their first ideas and freedoms unless those ideas and dreams were and are embodied into the stone and oil of the institutions and machines.

The morale of democracy suffers when things carry the dream and ideas of the nation, not the people. The people simply react. They are emptied of spirit, of nobility, reduced finally to a part. Nobility in the sense of being able to sacrifice for a better future.

If the spiritual dimension of democracy is carried on by things and institutions then the people have had it; they will have become persona non grata in the very land that gave them birth. We have this passing observation and it is disturbing. There is far more distance between those who have and those who don't have than at any time in the history of the planet. Much more than in the feudal ages or ancient times.

Democracy is wrenched from its base when the state becomes the myth for everything that cannot be attained in individuals or groups. This is why, at this point in time, the best relation between the people and the government is one of wariness. The people should seek to take back as much power from the government that they can while understanding the exact nature of the government and why it is necessary in the form that it's in.

Local, community organization and fight is the best example of American democracy. The best fights are made out of moral courage.

Democracy Dreaming

Good dreaming is rare in the modern brain thick with traffic. Perhaps for a brief moment the psychological fear of incessant necessity lifts and the spirit enters. For a brief moment that dubious fluid known as illusion disappears and then light draws up and a profound break is made.

Americans are excellent dreamers of course but those dreams are usually squashed when they find themselves staring into the hard and cold environment and they feel the scourge of working things. It's at that point that a radial tire becomes vastly more important than a poem or well-thought opinion.

And when does the good American ever discover that the hard and cold environment came out of dreams and are only frozen, habitual dreams?

And too, in America, early dreams are robbed of their potency and broken down into the germs of power.

Creativity is the leading edge in a free society, not those who want power or those who are trying to maintain power. It may start small but eventually a group of creative types shows the way. It is not apparent for awhile but, eventually, it is stark, even as power-to-be and power-that-is claims the leading edge for itself.

May 25, 2008

Impressions on risk and reward in the Democratic Party

Progress is audacity. It is willing to throw out the last forty years of political life and go with an open window to the future.

The American people are always called the least historical and yet they live with the weight of the last forty years on their necks.

Enlightened people weigh the risk: A new vital politics based on the renovation necessary after Bush or the muddling along in a morass fantasizing everything will be ok if we can just redo the 90's.

"Make it new but know all that has happened previously." That is the American myth in a nutshell, at least the type of attitude the framers wanted in the body politic. They knew that the teats that produced rich milk one era, soured in the next.

The risk of not throwing over the burden of the last forty years is a crumbling America, a mish mosh of pig slop, dead idealisms, and corruption masking itself as the unchangeable necessity.

There is only one certainty at the beginning of the new century. The future will challenge America as it has never been challenged before. And the 21st century may determine whether the U.S. survives as a large nation-state or whether it has a more negative outcome.

* * * * *

At stake for the Democrats is whether they take a leap of faith, put a genuine leader in there who will only mature as time goes on, and significantly keep a hold on the many millions of young people who will shape the politics of the next ten to twenty years. Or take an aging political couple who will deaden the weight of the future with their own personal glory and split the party. Remember, if Obama is rejected by his party he hardly has any future in it. Hillary still has a fabulous political future if she wants it.

In fact, the moment she falls on her sword and sacrifices for the good of the party she becomes a heroic figure. She would have the potential to become the next Ted Kennedy and help birth legislation for her pet projects.

To be frank about it I think she will take her rejection fairly well and move on. It will humble her to realize that the political culture is more inhuman than even her.

We will have a female POTUS one day but she will be an authentic leader and inspire the confidence of people. She won't have the arrogant belief she knows more than everyone else, therefore inspiring a level of lying remarkable even in these fin de siecle days. If Hillary is rejected it's not "of a woman," but of a "Clinton who will bridge, not the future, but this awful royal dynasty of families" that the democracy was set-up to defend against. Bush-Clinton-Bush-Clinton would be a remarkable failure of the vital democracy and signal a terrible turning into the 21st century.

Both she and McCain have been shaped by politics; Obama is a shaper of politics and arrives on the scene at the right time.

* * * * *

Strike the new thesis. Create the new vector. All that follows and all that does not follow will have to change one way or the other. The system is re-moralized by such tectonic shifts. Make innovation in political thinking as vital as it is in technology. Make the self-rule of men and women as important as the next generation of gizmo's.

* * * * *

Impressions of a political writer.

How political should the writer be? After all the writer has as much power as the bugs buzzing around the garden. Nothing a writer writes effects one vote, one piece of legislation, one idea in the head of one representative.

At the very least he'd want every implication of freedom to be played out. He would want every implication of

imaginative life played out. He would want the present to be exuberant in taking on large challenges. He would want a brilliant politics that knows itself better than it appears at this point.

We are free men and women after all. As long as the dysfunction of the system is kept to a minimum our stark and real freedom will be enjoyed. It is on behalf of our freedom that we keep tabs on the politics. And at this point the stink is either that of dead ideas or a compost heap ready to deliver up its rich soil to the new seeds around us.

* * * * *

For the most part the writer is simply concerned for the narrative that gives meaning to life. Is it Republican or Democrat? No. Is it conservative or liberal? No. Is it urban or rural? No. Is it male or female? No. Is it black or white? No. Is it believer or skeptic? No.

His loyalties shift as the necessity to bring about a greater whole shifts.

If politics becomes a new window the writer rejoices! If politics is a clogged artery that menaces the heart of the political culture then the writer is growly and pessimistic.

* * * * *

Of course, there is the vital jumble of people's we name "democracy," and then the professional structure that rules we name "Republic."

What is the connection between them? In the present time there is an exciting break with the past; the old politics is crumbling by the moment. Since the system is broken all must change, not one party or one special interest but all must change. That is what is implied by a "broken system." It is a time when democracy is most meaningful and most dangerous.

A writer is a member of the democracy and knows that politics is a responsibility and knows the moment he gives up on it, the process and organizing principle, then the whole is dead for him, the future is dead for him and that is that; perhaps the historians will come along and size it all up for one of many coffins the corpse will be stuffed into. Maybe the writer will be fitted for his own peculiar coffin but, at least, something good will have died.

* * * * *

In a McDonaldized culture one is damned if they spend too much time on politics. "There's nothing you can do unless you become one of the criminals yourself." And one is damned if they ignore politics altogether. "It is your duty to pay attention to what is going on. What are you, an idiot?"

At times a fashionable alienation breaks out or the snake-poison of cynicism is injected into the democracy and the consequences are predictable: removal of vitality in the democracy, more command and control among fewer and fewer people, easing into a comfortable corruption to give the comedians fodder, warning signs ignored, then a bolt of lightning that luminates all that is missing in the people and their Republic.

April 21, 2008

Impressions of the mind-game called democracy

In the mind-game that is modern democracy the Americans have two plays. One is to be very end-gamish, say we are on the threshold of a historical implosion and that the implosion will end the powers of the Constitutional government, weaken the boundaries, allow for massive migrations through the weak borders and end up destroying what we know and what we value. The problem with that scenario is that it calls on the very worst instincts in the people and finally rides itself out of the game altogether.

The other play is this: We are at the beginning of a new historic era that began at WWII, shifting the global power from Europe to America and introducing the globe to dazzling amounts of innovation and surplus. That we are in the beginning stages of learning how the dynamics of science, technology, capitalism, and democracy play through us. That we are in the process of trying to assess what it means to be a liberal, democratic citizen in the 21st century. That the future will contain the basic structures and values we will

recognize.

This is a healthier view, a better gambit and leads at the very least to what is sorely, pathetically missing in America at this time: Vision, progress, intelligence, dreams and aspiration.

The idea of progress makes sure there is no apotheosis in a secular sense. That would prove to be corrupting after a time. Rather, progress induces a sense of growth and development more appropriate to a dynamic period than this flailing period has proven to be.

An idea of progress would bring in the notion of sacrifice, would promote healthy vision, would promote the idea that people, even in a secular state, can have faith that things will get better. Almost all ideas of progress now are in the form of technology rather than in the idea of democracy and, in fact, hardly touch on the fact that it will be people, good, bad, and ugly who will be using the generations of startling new technology.

There is always the apocalyptic view, the dark view that most civilized people experience from time to time. That is, the people opt out, crazy beliefs supplant science, education decays, the culture separates into the professional rulers and the backward people, this is enforced and over time the professional rulers get so corrupt they don't notice real problems and the thing collapses, perhaps globally, and then you have enormous migrations of people, billions who have nothing to lose and move to the better climates, to the more productive areas and because everything is flattened there is hardly any resistance. This catastrophe is followed by a few centuries of brutal power, wars, a "dark age" followed by a slow move upward from the darkness to a new civilization that rediscovers "our time" and uses its contributions the best way it can.

If after death one flies free through space and time I would like to see what happens. As a living person I would not want to see it. I would not want to go through it.

A gamester would also admit that it would be preferable if the people were strengthened, made better, took on some of these questions as part of the democratic-minded-sporting-life. We can still say that now, at the beginning, there is a connection between the people and the people-who-run things. But under the pressures of global competition and a continuing fragmentation of the democratic people we see more and more the classic split between them resulting in new habits of thought and doing.

The habits, thankfully, have not yet been formed to enforce this split. But the potential of those habits are very real.

* * * * *

Politics is the tail that wags the dog. It's a necessary tail and the dog needs it. But the darling pooch can not simply be disgusted but welcome much which is not politics. This is the privilege won by brave people who fought in wars and who chiseled out a Constitution.

Mere change in policies is not enough. There must be change that involves every aspect of the body politic. The old-time politicians will never assert this, frightened as they are of the vox populi but the truth is the nation, to have any future, must change radically from one end to the other.

"How can we change, we have such a rotten political class!?"

Yes, they are bad, very bad but are you good?

The good invariably throw up their hands, "Well, there's nothing I can do about it. It's a serious game but I have other responsibilities!" And so, like clockwork, the bad come rushing in. And they have promises and they speak with conviction and they are self-righteous but underneath it is their great lie. Power has given sanction to the lie.

The lie trips frothingly from the words slipping between the lips of he or she who seeks power. And there are times when the will-to-power is an old-as-Adam-wish-to-kill-with-impunity, especially acute in the modern world since its lack of drama and lack of meaning puts incredible pressure to do something, anything to break up the empty moment one is enacting on the stage of history.

Their words are often the shadows of hate and resentment.

They will kill to gain power and yet the people cheer them on, identify with them and hope they gain the power they seek!

* * * * *

Who defines what politics is, why it is, and who is it who believes them? That's an interesting question to pose to no one in particular.

When the terms "liberal" and "conservative" are meaningless for a free person then what state of political reality is one in?

After all, we are merely in the middle of a politics defined by disgust. And despite Obama that could roll on for a decade or so. A small idealistic remnant may fight but they do so with the shades drawn. Liberals, post-Reagan, did fight for quite awhile until they found themselves in empty rooms, laughing hysterically to themselves. At least they had the temerity to understand that when a full-monty cynicism overwhelms the feeble people there is nothing anyone can do, at least in the political sector.

Politics is never likeable and likeable politicians can't be trusted. That is a nice and skeptical way to keep things under the thumb of the citizens. The other side of the equation is the need to know about the system of governance and why it is necessary. What are the lines that connect it together to permit more freedom and more good to pour out of the people and culture? It is a dangerous territory to venture in since what is at risk is more than a few opinions.

We are going through a soft but significant transformation as the tired old era's that preceded this one bite the dust. Let the historians rush in to write their books about the Kennedy Era and Reagan Era. Let them try to explain to the future what "liberal" and "conservative," meant. A "liberal" was a guy who read Marx too early in his life and a "conservative" was a guy who had his props kicked from under him too late.

They found their heroes.

March 17, 2008

Impressions on Political Disappointment

Politics is eternal disappointment. It follows the heavy stone of necessity up the hill only to go chasing down after it not once but every time; and that stone buries many good minds whose last thought is, "why is it doing this to me?"

In a democracy the politician is Sisyphus believing the next time will be the moment the rock stays at the top.

Most of the disappointment in politics is the result of building a democracy where there is no absolute. Human beings crave the absolute and only the fine mixture of strong checks and balances and the encouragement of self-interest prevents it.

Politics is a disappointment because it is made from many pieces and no single piece can stand for the whole; therefore political energy is spent in simply understanding the different pieces rather than building a much bolder political life.

The one thing that does connect the different pieces and regions is the jangle of coin in the pocket. That sound goes through cities and valleys and when the jinglejangle begins to be a faint echo change is fait accompli.

* * * * *

Disappointment in politics and hatred for federalism seems to be locked together. It is an appetizing thought that the federal system and all its corruption and hidden life behind the beltway will go away. "Go away, you Hell of misspent ambition that sucks the blood dry from the good people!" That is only one of many outcry's witnessed on that odd path known as "citizenship."

But what benefit would it be to the living to see the nation disintegrate into sections and weaken? We don't live a thousand years in the future, we live now. We live with the consequences of what those who will study do not. So we either mature as citizens, learn to live with the federalism, kick its tires intelligently or bug out of it and let it go the way of nature.

* * * * *

It is difficult to orientate where one is politically. One candidate, one party does not satisfy the whole man. I have to support and argue the candidate or party as if it does but if I let that illusion grab hold and make it real I've diminished the capacity of the liberal democracy to grow and develop in new and enriched ways.

The art of citizenship consists of fending off the projections of power while understanding the projections against power.

For that to happen the citizen has to know how things are built, how they work and have a grounding in the real life of the people; the actual thing that is here, temporarily no doubt, but here and racing around trying to get somewhere.

In that state of mind the citizen notices two things: his self-interest and the nature of problems that seem to surround him.

From these he makes his politics.

* * * * *

The most easily manipulated being is the fearful one. Fear exists in the absence of knowledge. If knowledge exists simply to manipulate the fearful, then it has lost its moral courage. But if knowledge cauterizes the fear and makes fear climb over itself to something richer and truer then it has taken the right road.

What troubles America is its loss of the austere. It is unable to deal with surplus and more, more and more. It looks like the Roman sybarite with hairy blood and bits of exotic food pouring from its nose and mouth. And it is never enough so the people worship those who have more.

But all good things come from an austere spirit.

* * * * *

Democracy is not a "rule by millionaires." That rule is called oligarchy whose great motto is, "money talks, bullshit walks." In fact, when it does become simply a choice between different millionaires the liberal, democratic citizen laughs and says, "this is not the epoch meant for me."

Democracy is the finest mind developed out of the aspiration for freedom. It is the cleverness of minds to figure out how to hold onto what it has.

But that requires a vigorous population; one energized to grow and develop because it has seen better in itself and in the society.

Otherwise you end up with the finest minds the frontmen and frontwomen to manipulate, use, and otherwise humiliate the American people on behalf of some political character. A character either incompetent or spying a chance to gain enormous wealth in payment for his or her "sacrifice" as a public servant.

* * * * *

As in most things there are two faces to America. There is "personality" and there is "psyche." The personality is effortless enough and comes by the boatload as people with wide-smiles-on and with the panache associated with a happy breed of people. The psyche is hardly seen at all. It is usually a very dark outbreak of some sort that makes people gasp at the underlying horrid nature all around us. It is especially acute in a culture that puts all the emphasis on the self-contained individual moving through life in a predictable cheat to cover weakness and lies. The lies accumulate, are even institutionalized. Everything is made complicated, trust breaks down, speech becomes machine-like, and is eventually thrown over for secret, revenge-filled dreams.

America is forever recovering from itself.

* * * * *

The present political culture points to how empty the American people have become; how resourceless and disconnected from their own source of power. It's gotten to the point where the political culture can't afford to be rational, just as on the battlefield when things hit the fan another modus operandi comes into play having nothing to do with carefully laid plans.

The American people have divided along the lines of either simpletons stashed away in isolated valleys, much more attached to a lost past or "sophisticated" yet strangely ignorant types who are seeking power without paying a bit of attention to the system of governance that grants them such powers. And that group has become as dangerous to democracy as would a new aristocratic class transported from medieval Europe.

It's difficult to predict who will win in the end. Sentimentality favors the simpletons but reality favors the new nihilists.

If we have inherited a democratic government, sustained over 240 years, is there any shot of sustaining the same government and its powers in the next 240 years? There's still a chance. It is not all gloom and doom. Things must be done a day at a time, week by week, month by month, and age by age, at least in the modern sense. We have passed through the Reagan Age so what lessons can we learn? Did it strengthen the democracy?

Thoughts of gloom and doom should inspire a writer's imagination into thoughts of splendid futures.

How else will it be possible to ferret out what would be rationalized away and one more straw on the camel's back?

July 20, 2008

Impressions of the Conventions

Democrats

The Democrats appear very weak to me. They have the dynamic leader but around the leader is a very soggy party weighted down by its old politics. It's so awful to hear the message as, "give us the power, we will take the money and we will spill a lot of it in your direction." It's the same message as the Republicans although the money goes in the opposite direction with them. To couch this game in idealism or soaring rhetoric makes the whole ball of disillusionment well up; it's the ball one thought in happier times had been overcome. And when you look out over the crowd you see on the faces the unmistakable marks of, "give us the damn money!" And all the talk is about money. And it is all about money. Even God wants you to have money. Money is the thing. Money will cure all appetites. We hope to get more money. We believe we will get more money. And the drive for money is not a positive one but a resentful and habitual one. "They have money, we deserve money. What? Are they superior to us?"

And it is a point isn't it?

Well, we all know it's about the money but a new idea or a new horizon of politics needs to disguise the real motive and when it is able to do it becomes the new vital force. The Democrats are failing to do this.

Of course the convention is not over, the campaign is not over. A person of political ideas would say, "no matter, the Republicans do not deserve any more power. It's their turn to sit off on the margins and figure out what they did wrong and make some corrections. It's only honorable. Not to do so would reveal them as the very bastards the old founders Jefferson and Adams warned against. That is, the "tories," whose idea of "nation" begins and ends with their assets.

The Democrats have two big problems. One is the emergence of the old civil rights crowd who want to abscond with Obama for their own. They have the right to do so but it sends a message that is deadly to many voters, especially the swing voters. "Ah, this is not about union, it is about them." And that is a message that must be countered by Obama.

The other thing is that when I listen to them their voices are filled with lead while straining to sound like flying angels. The "old" means to many voters, welfare state, labor unions, quotas, and the one that causes more problems than any other, "self-criticism."

There is nothing new about the old no matter that the Republicans got away with it in 1980. And just the shake out of the then current assumptions did vital things. That vitality has been quite put out, dissipating through corruption, corporate malfeasance, loss of national purpose, complacency, dumbing-down, incompetence, and national fissure.

There is great sadness etched on the face of politics because it is quintessentially a game of compromise. It can not, in the end, offer up the real goods. Most of the people know it and fight for their cause and the system objectifies it all after awhile and what needs to change, changes. It's a plodding thing and by the time those changes occur a whole new hot bed of coals has been delivered at the feet of the poor citizens.

But for the gas, shit, piss, vinegar, and vomit change and fear of change inspires, it would be a happy household.

Obama is a dynamic leader or has that potential. But the Democratic party has not learned the lessons of losers. Stop, reflect, be honest, change, get up and back into the race.

* * * * *

I cringe when I hear the old rhetoric because that rhetoric has failed again and again. Nothing happens.

And who is to argue that the government should not do everything in its power to lift people up? Government should be a help-mate of sorts for people but then the people, instead of quitting when things go against them politically, need to secure themselves in self-reliant ways. Otherwise you have people dependent on the government, therefore dependent on a politics that changes every 20 years or so. That is the sadness etched on the face of politics. It can't solve the problems, ultimately. It tempers them and if things are still standing after each generation then it is deemed a success.

And it is always working under the pressure that the government itself will disappear into history. It will not in our time but quite possibly it will transmute into something totally unrecognizable to what has been produced the last 240 years. Only the change will be so slow no one will notice and by the time they do it will be too late. It will be too late because people rationalize whatever structure of power they are thrown into, even with some resistance, until the system wins them over or clobbers them. After that interesting process they are ready to kill anyone who raises a contrarian view. This happens today, it will happen two hundred and forty years from now.

By that time America may have descended to a banana republic where wealth and power is inherited by the same class of people who have hired private armies to protect them from the masses. Birth will be destiny. Born poor you will stay poor. Born lower middle-class you'll remain lower middle-class. There will not be the great surplus this country has enjoyed to keep moving people up and away from where they started. The 21st century saw a massive shift in power as the new, hugely populated nations took advantage of the tectonic shift in technology and got the upper hand. In fact America may be fully supported by China or India by that time. It may even be that without the capital resources to support the people the euthenasia clinics will be built to allow people to do their "patriotic duty," as the elites will term it.

The vote will remain but it will be pro forma, simply an empty habit "because that's the way we've always done it." The masses will be so easily manipulated the contest will be a parlor game between the more clever of the ruling classes; whose fortunes are never in jeopardy. And who have a grand laugh about the outcome as opposing lawyers do after a big case.

Historians will point out the "golden age" of the 20th and 21st centuries but reviewers will point out that, "they lived in simpler times and did not have to confront what we, the living must confront." And that could mean that every "district" has a cache of "million-lives-destroyers," or whatever they may call them. By that time the people might laugh at the instant annihilation of millions of people. "Ah, more breathing space for the living!" And then a long swig from the jug to praise the falling ashes and their shadows over in sector 121. After all, mute, ignorant, poor they are yet alive!

* * * * *

Michele Obama made a wonderful speech I believe. Very convincing, credible and takes her "attitude" off the table.

* * * * *

Unspectacular speech by Hillary; in fact, the first part was a disaster because it focused exclusively on her. You could see the horrified expressions among the crowd. It was better in the second half but it reminded me of the speeches that she was criticized for giving in her campaign. I didn't feel anything from it which is probably the real measure of the inner Hillary. She killed those nasty things long ago.

It was not a disaster at the end but it made it very clear, "it's about Hillary," and that message came through loud and clear.

That said, she did not harm Obama at all and seems willing to work hard at his election.

* * * * *

The Democratic party often appears to me a kind of minor league that the predatory Steinbrenners of the world cultivate in order to steal the best talent or ideas. The Democrats always want to get up to the bigs but hate the players that are already there!

* * * * *

Obama's speech was the winner; one of the great political speeches of our time, probably since Cuomo's speech in San Francisco.

Republicans

McCain made a surprise pick today for VP. At first I thought it was bold and it looks like a maverick move. But when you pull it apart it's apparent that McCain believes he can't win straight up against Obama and needs to get as much woman/fundamentalist support as he can.

It's a typical pandering, transparent move further complicated by the fact no one knows this person and she has two months to nail down her credibility; something that took Obama 3 years and Hillary 20 years to accomplish. And listening to her for brief snatches of time it is apparent to me she is hand-in-glove with power and speaks for power and is a kind of female equivalent of George Bush, down to the hunting and fishing part.

There was no there, there in this person I heard today.

But you never know what will happen.

Her use to pump up the base reminds me how "populism" can be a deadly toxin as well as a saving grace. It has become toxic because the rest of the world is on a course to displace America from the center and at that point you praise intelligence and scorn trailertrashism. You praise secular education because that is the tool that will vault China or India or both ahead of the U.S. economy and create much more hardship for the people than they can imagine. You praise statecraft because the belligerence of the Republicans forces the U.S. into disastrous confrontations, one of which we may not recover from. All this belligerence does is transform the U.S. from a beacon to a target, not even a military target but one of collective disgust and hate from a world that is much more aware of itself as a world than the U.S. understands.

The Republican "base" has done more harm to this culture than any other. They had a shot at leadership for eight years and have failed miserably. All their vaunted "moralism" is some of the grandest bullshit we've seen and heard in many decades. It was snake-oil pure and simple and the gullible American people swallowed it whole. I can not believe how deep this nation has descended; how powerfully bankrupt it is. It has become an empty shell of itself. And I hope the "owners" of the country understand the implications of that emptiness.

To be truthful I am angry at McCain for being so reckless and irresponsible as to take this person and putting her, possibly, one heart beat away from making command decisions about war, economy, environment for the whole of the nation. This, when her experience consists of "governing" less than two years a state that has less people than my county, a state that has three issues; oil, gas, and recreation/wildlife. States like Maine, Montana, the Dakotas, and Alaska have enormous beauty. And one can admire the austere spirits that come out of those areas. But due to the low amount of capital and educational resources they are marginal to the rest of the union. Every complex state, including California, has an Alaska, a Montana, a Maine, and a Dakota embedded in it somewhere; the ancient eccentricities of the people are admired but their judgments are not. I would not take the mayor of a small rural town in the Sacramento Valley and put her in as mayor of Los Angeles. That would only happen if I had so much disrespect for Los Angeles I wanted to show them "who's boss."

Or, more appropriately to use her as an old con will use the wannabe novice.

It's apparent to me that Obama has gotten inside McCain's head and the old aviator figured all this out in a

flash of light; about vitalizing his base and getting some of the female vote as well as being able to promote her as an outsider/maverick without thinking through that two mavericks equals one stupid-stubborn-team in lock-step with their ignorance. It's likely her sort of small-town maverickism will melt on its first whiff of Washington money.

* * * * *

It's funny to me that 1968 has finally caught up to the Republican mainstream!

* * * * *

Politicians can't say what needs to be said, "Ignorant, backward, illiterate, dumb people of America, don't pull us all down to your level. That game must end. You must be pulled up to the level of, at least, average Indian or Chinese people. At least that. So get rid of your useless complacency, stupidity, and alienation and start improving yourselves." No, a politician wouldn't be caught dead saying that.

Which is why writers exist.

* * * * *

I hope smart Republicans see the necessity to break their party down and remake it as good baseball executives will do when the stink of amateurism and demoralization rise up from the team. The party is so empty now it is unbelievable. No one believes a word of what its representatives say. And even when the true believers clap and yell out inane things, I see fear in their eyes. Eyes that are embedded in very chubby, pale, old faces.

* * * * *

The Republicans, not simply Bush, should be held accountable for the terrible state the United States has fallen into, during a most dangerous period, headed into a very dangerous, uncertain future. Send them back to the minor leagues, let them build out in response to the mistakes of President Obama, surrender to the new vector and start a new ball game. That is what the times are saying to me at any rate. An authentic leader will swing the gate wide into the future and sweep all the accumulated foulness of forty years to the abyss. McCain will not change one iota. Obama has a chance of changing a great deal. It is the bottom-line and it is stark.

* * * * *

Leiberman made some smart remarks about bipartisanship. And apparently he was the number-one McCain choice for VP until the inner circle convinced McCain that he would flat-out lose with Leiberman as his choice. So McCain pulls a rabbit out of the hat and it uses a breast-pump and kills living animals with guns. And she appears to be a typical hypocrite or is that a typical politician?

* * * * *

Governor Palin is not a dislikable person; she's phony but that is de rigueur in TV-land America these days. In fact, she looks to me like the female equivalent of George Bush; a sentimental-empty-suit-2-time governor of a huge state who proved to be way over his head in his office and is now a sad, forgotten person even with four more months left to go. Killing rabbits out on the ranch didn't make him more decisive or tough. Talkin' cowboy made us meek and foolish before the world.

Governor Palin made a very dislikable speech and appeared to be the candidate-of-rotweilers rather than of the Republican Party. She took the gloves off and I'm certain the gloves will be taken off against her very shortly.

She's smart but ignorant and that is the most dangerous combination there is. It means she will be used by many people. And her spite will take it out on underlings. Once elected McCain will marginalize her as much as he can and it will finally sink in to her how used she's been. It will sting for awhile and then she will get used to it and start using the system herself. She will suddenly like the Beltway and all its allures.

The speech was uninspired because it went down, not up. It was a typical attack and quip speech and she repeated much of what she's already said.

At first she appeared to be the officious person who does the roll call. Then she turned attack-dog. A few attacks would have been appropriate but as they rolled on and on I got the sense of not a kinder, gentler nation but one of shotguns-up-your-ass if you disagree with us. If she had come on and been more "bipartisan" I think it would have put her on the right step. Now the impression I have of her is that pitbull she mentioned and I am afraid of pitbulls, especially if they have lipstick on.

A nasty sort of spirit pervaded this speech, for god's sake.

My lasting impression: "This is someone who you better watch your back on."

* * * * *

McCain's speech started very weak with standard platitudes and a huge question, written in red lipstick hovering over everything, "How, fine fellow, are you going to do what you say you are going to do?"

It got much stronger at the end since he connected his pains many years ago to the pains "his country" is suffering now. It was, in the end, a good rousing political speech they would have made in the post Civil War period. The problem for McCain is that this is not 1980, he is not Reagan and he is not trying to rally the nation from a failure of Democratic rule. The vast majority of those yelping and chanting in that hall put George Bush in office. That is a more powerful indictment of a political party than anything Obama can say or that, even, the brave tales of a brave but old man can save.

Now they are cramming the delightful painted pitbull with "information" about the world outside of Alaska and how it works, at least according to McCain. That inspires great confidence that she will be awoken at 3am and make an intelligent, wise decision about something with enormous complexity and implications to it.

Idle Thoughts As the Night Approaches

Why does one worry about liberal democracy? I'm not even certain I "worry" about it in the sense that I believe it will go away and be replaced by something harsher and more wrathful. Unless, that is, McCain/Palin make it to the White House. That could happen. It's up to the people.

I control only one of the people and expect him to tell the unforgiving truth. I don't trust most of the culture to be frank about it. I look at its expressions and its diversions and its politics and it feels and smells pretty unhealthy to me. To believe in the future one must believe that the present will forget itself, wash itself of all the stupidity and hatred that has accumulated in itself and start anew.

I know that most of the people hide behind power and will not challenge it except in weird, irrational outbreaks of stupidity and anger. They do not study issues. They have no interest in the rest of the world. They are fearful and backward. And they control the political and economic marketplace. There is nothing I can do about it.

Without trying to be obnoxious I see more potential of liberal democracy in the cities than the rural areas or the rural states like Alaska, despite the eccentric independence of the people and the natural beauty that surrounds them.

It is the people, top to bottom, that makes or breaks a liberal democracy. And the best of them are clustered in some proximity to each other and are constantly exposed to difference, to worlds beyond worlds, to fresh, startling ideas, to complex systems that run through daily life, and people who both have root and freedom.

Liberal democracy is a certain habit of being, a kind of commitment to openness, a confidence that permits the full development of the person and, by extension, the society. It is proven in cities now rather than the frontier.

And development never really stops. It's always pushing the envelope back. It is curious and thoughtful. When it stops, when it gives up, when it is less than what it can be, then one worries.

Liberal democracy implicates a ground of being but says you must learn the arts of transformation so that ground of being goes where no spirit has gone before. And it must go there without losing that ground of being. It is art rather than instinct frozen in rural valley's, producing fear and hatred.

Wouldn't then a liberal democracy be marked by extraordinary feats of curiosity to leap over the boundaries

mere society or family or temperament or town have pissed a fence around?

It would be marked by people who did not project out into others or ideas because the people are filled with self-knowledge. And, as well, would not accept the projections of other people, knowing and overcoming the process so well. Courage, intelligence, character, and enlightenment. These are words passed into action and ways-of-being in a truly brave land. And that land, now, is a great world power, not a struggling frontier.

* * * * *

The remarkable thing in this nation is that first there is restless discontent, then political change, then laws passed, a collective ethos is developed and its opposite, then the legislation stops because law can only go so far and the people move on. The groups and leaders who depend on changing the law get frustrated and upset but a remarkable thing has occurred. The people, as free people, have taken it on to rule themselves in ways that the hard-cover law can not. And so change in the heart and spirit; in the daily habit of the people. And so the change happens and it doesn't need the government or politics. They move to new places, new needs and new motives.

Throw away thoughts

As long as emptiness and incompetence rise to the top feel very discomfited in this culture.

But don't wreck yourself over it.

In fact, the great antidote to the stupidity of politics is to live well, live as though the nuts, cons, meek, and backward types don't exist. Live to fulfillment!

Make of the partisans a fine meal and drink hearty red wine to wash them down with.

September 2, 2008

Impressions of Debate and Decline

Pure objectivity is that realm where emotions run wild beneath a knowing eye that always sees a well-reasoned argument trumped by a pretty face.

* * * * *

Perhaps the ascension of Governor Palin is a sign from God to start learning how to kill, clean, dress, and prepare meals from wild animals you stalk in the nearest wood. Butchered animals may become the coin-of-the-realm as in the old days.

* * * * *

The debate and some of the poll numbers afterward prove that Biden was very substantial and Palin well-crammed with rhetorical devices and the technique of not-listening-to-your-opponent-but-pick-out-key-phrases-then-launch-into-a-pre-packaged rant. And smile. And wink.

But in the end the people will reject her because there is no substance or credibility in anything she has said. Let her go back and finish her term as governor, then let her run for the Senate and get her behind the beltway where she will develop the same baggy eyes, piss and vinegar as the other members. Then let us see her level of credibility.

* * * * *

The people rightly believe we are in a crisis on many levels and are demanding gravitas rather than clever TV-style persona.

After all, the Reagan Era is coming to a close.

And as we all fall toward the bottom the coin-of-the-realm will be basic values. And Obama is the value-laden candidate having spent 20 years at the bottom, working in tough communities in a tough city.

We will, as a nation, go to the bottom. Obama has already been there. And from that painful bottom we will

build up and out, slowly and surely until we are far from this mess. It will take years so get a dose of deferred gratification and start saving money.

McCain is locked into the mess that got us to this point. After all it was "mavericks" that killed Enron. It was financial "mavericks" that have killed the financial system. And a "maverick" at the highest level of government will kill us all. Mavericks belong at the bottom inventing, creating, building and living new things and ways.

There is nothing more dangerous than a "maverick" at the height of wealth and power.

* * * * *

The McCain/Palin ticket is filled with delusion about how they are going to "lower taxes" at a time when government is spending billions to bail out Wall Street, billions to bail out Fannie Mae and Freddy Mac, billions to fight protracted wars in the middle-east. And where revenues are falling day by day. How are they going to pay for all those education reforms and teachers Gov. Palin referred to without new taxes? And how is this team going to renovate the bureaucracy while putting a vast oversight on the greedy bastards on Wall Street? Won't that take a huge bureaucracy?

The Republicans should be shamed back to the margins and renovate themselves first before they tackle these very serious issues. Their credibility is nil.

McCain is in love with wealth and power.

* * * * *

The single best attribute to have in the citizens of a liberal democracy is the ability to objectify power. The typical Roman citizen, living well or living poorly, could never see the next storm coming, could never predict the end of his identity as a citizen of Rome, could not see the calamity of poor leadership. He could only feel the effects and simply developed a cynical or angry relation to fate. "Hey, what can I do about it? It's up to the gods."

But self-rule implies an ability to objectify and bring in as many resources to do the deed, including scientific techniques. Without this ability any political state or party promotes its own myth while the walls crumble and crash all around. The myth may be more soothing to the emotions but the end result is catastrophe. We place the Presidency of George Bush as primary evidence.

In the case of the present crisis we assign blame to Wall Street, Main Street, and the Beltway. But it is past blame at this point. We are struggling for our survival in ways that will become clearer in the next few years.

McCain and Palin evidence no ability to grasp the crisis we are in and how it is going to cripple all three of those guilty sectors. All I heard from both of them in their debates is gas; the same political gas that has gotten us into the horrible mess. They filled the air with the same rhetorical devices I was taught in high school to avoid like "folksy" talk and "glittering generalities."

* * * * *

If any myth is developed about America it should be a private one developed by the people in answer to questions like, "why is government important," and "how do things work," and "what has experience taught me about leadership?"

The emotions come because people are tribal and want to mystically identify with power or heroically destroy it. This is especially acute in a very fragmented culture such as this one where a thousand identities clash for, if not supremacy, some high degree of visibility.

In that sense Americans are no different than Iraqi's or Nigerians. The difference comes with the habits of democracy that have been relatively successful to this point. The people have learned over time that you win and lose equally and there is no need for gun play.

But those habits come from some idea of progress; in other words the ability to defer gratification, a degree of sacrifice wholly displaced in our time by a belief in "the sacred moment," divided between new age belief and fundamentalism. This is a hugely irrational force and has destroyed every vestige of rational thinking, therefore, the culture we live in. It is a "romantic" culture in every way, shape, and form. And that is to be

expected in a society that has become largely a speculative one getting further and further from its foundations.

One can nearly hear the disaster coming down the tracks. It's no different than when an individual loses his or her foundations and begins to build his or her self on mounds and mounds of speculation about how wonderful they are until they lose it all in a scheme and fall back to the good Earth.

In other words we live in a sentimental and degraded culture, sometimes combined in the same person or activity!

It is coming to an end and the fall will be a hard one. The past twenty-five years will be seen as a bastard and driven from the consciousness of the people.

* * * * *

The current political question is a simple one: Who will open the door to the future? McCain is too full of himself and too cynical to do it. He will promulgate the Republican myth and will be connected to the same people who brought us Bush, Inc. The Republicans are in a standard moment of disintegration that occurs after a long, fairly successful run from Reagan onward. These runs have a natural life, decay, and then have to be reinvented on the basis of "what comes next," which is usually completely out of their power to do anything about.

A fundamental change is coming.

Obama is the only one who has the capability of doing what Reagan did: Connect with a critical mass of people and wheel the nation in a whole new direction that creates, if nothing else, fascinating new sources of energy. This will happen even as he goes through a very rocky two years and is pegged a "one-trick pony," by the pundits. A shift will occur, perhaps with the collaboration between the baby-boomers and X'ers and the agreement to a new thesis that the Obama Administration will articulate. It will be values-based.

McCain calls himself, with his nasty smile, a maverick but no maverick surrounded himself with so many insiders and lobbyists as McCain has done. And, besides, mavericks are young people. An old maverick is usually an entertaining con-man who keeps wondering why his snake-oil isn't selling as it did in the past.

* * * * *

And what new horizons open up if America leaves the hideous nature of the last forty years!

We've created a perfect tension because we know history and we know all things end, even the Sun. Only by seeing that end can we put pressure on ourselves to think boldly about how America fulfills its potential.

And if America is wrecked 240 years from now, the same amount of years from the Constitution to the present, what would we want to survive as a legacy for the future? One would be the protection of the individual from the abuses of power. Two would be the freedom to develop the resources toward the most productive, creative, bountiful ends. A third would be a culture that promotes the full development of the self. A fourth would be checks and balances in the political state. These come to mind. But it's much more likely that the world will revert back to the ancient and medieval way and call "freedom" a total failure, like "marxism."

How dependent it is on one and all!

* * * * *

The erosion of the individual is the first canary to die in the mineshaft called "decline."

And that means, not simply his or her rights but her morale as a free person.

It goes to some of the questions I had as a young lad growing up in another crisis-laden period in the 70's. What kind of effect was noise, technology, information, huge complex cities, etc having on the morale of the citizen? We had obviously grown up and out of the democratic utopia's of the transcendentalists. The two effects I saw were, (1) everything in the society produced in the public or private sector belongs to the people in real and psychological terms. This produces pride in the people but it also produces blindness to the destructive capacity of some of the effects, and, (2) we are made mute to the huge system of complexity. Our

lives and deaths mean nothing to the complexity we have built. We are perpetually ignorant, therefore at the mercy of other people who have scoped us out to predict our habits of buying and voting. And then using propaganda techniques to skewer the hapless people to move this way, now that way.

The only solution to these views is knowledge, facts, and a joyful integrity of self. Knowledge and facts have replaced utopian ideas at the core of the culture. These things demand a very strong secular education that teaches people how to gather facts, how to deal with knowledge, and how to verify each so they are credible. It also takes a process of "growth and development" where young people have a true "education of the senses," rather than a blotting out of the senses as they have today.

Vast numbers of people don't care apparently. Or they have been stripped of everything but greed, sex hormones, and hate for anything that is different than themselves.

* * * * *

The last few days have proven this to be the worst run of political culture since Nixon-Carter in the 70's. At the end of that period America was a wreck. From the wreckage came Reagan who had the ability to connect with the critical mass of people and effect a large swing into the future, out and away from the stink we all wanted to leave behind.

Obama is the only candidate capable of doing that now but it's the wrath of the people that will determine the direction.

September 30, 2008

Impressions of The Economic Mess and the Future

This economic mess leaves us with nothing but questions. Here are some I would address to the economy and those who built the system that is now in critical care and who will try to build it over again.

1- Where will the trust come from? As anyone, even a writer who has a little shoeshine stand to pay some bills will tell you, in business, "trust is everything." When the trust is gone all value disappears. And all that wants to add to the value vanishes. So where will the trust be restored in a system that has now failed so dramatically? If the people who built it, protected it, benefited from it could not forestall the collapse who can? And if no one can then why would I invest in it? If the market is telling me that a stock is trading at 25 p/e what can that tell me but that the skewered system has applied a formula to a stock, a company, that has no proven value in anything but the skewered market? This is going to be more than a normal hesitancy because the "value" that is falling has been building for 25 years with hardly a blip. It's grown through the S and L crisis, the 500 + drop in the market, the Gulf War, the small recession of 91-93, the dot.com bomb, 9/11, on up to the present crisis. We are using an informative guess to toss in the possibility that the baby-boom cohort, the computer revolution, and the globalization/fall of communism have contributed mightily to the off-the-chart growth in markets, income, job growth etc etc the past 25 years. Which leads to the second question:

2- What is going to stimulate new wealth? Governments around the world are intervening in order to save the system but there is a huge difference between saving the system and getting healthy growth into the system. Again, we'll take an educated guess and say that after the poor economy of the late 70's/early 80's several factors came in, most of them alluded to above: baby boom cohort started to feel its economic oats at the beginning of their most productive economic cycle, computer/internet revolutions, a leveling off of oil prices, cuts in the interest rates, a wholesale change of loyalty from the public to the private sector. It produced a great deal of success but was destined to collapse as was the Reagan Revolution and the Republicans with it. Where is the next computer-type revolution? The computer industry is now a mature one. In 1982 few people or businesses had them. Now most of the homes and offices, even in developing countries are filled with them. Rather than new wealth the computer will simply and importantly sustain whatever growth emerges out of the crisis. But it won't provide the adrenaline that drives new wealth and the recapitalization of the globe. What will stimulate new wealth to take the cap off of a semi-nationalized global economy?

3- What will be the anomaly to strike the heart of the wounded beast? Any system, no matter how intelligent, blows up. A few tiles fall off, the o-ring is defective, a perfect storm of vibrations catches the building or bridge and down it all comes. The modern global economy is unprecedented. No one is certain how it works. Fixes only come in the aftermath of its breakdown. The hole in the machine is somewhere no one has figured out because it won't be discovered until there is a compelling reason to discover it; as when widespread panic plays havoc with the financial system. The experts, public and private, believe they have discovered it but it could be they have simply discovered one level of a larger problem. What will "blow up" as a result of the complete derangement of the financial system? It may be a few circles from where the stone first landed.

This is certain: Goodbye to the last 25 years of unprecedented growth. Hello crunch time. Hello bitter political schisms. Hello big government. Hello, "you can't have a pony this year," from investment bankers to their daughters. Hello to spam, the-kind-you-eat. Hello to "how to live poor with dignity" books flooding the market. It may be a very healthy period of time but it will certainly create its own imperative and culture.

Americans survive these things but then people survive jumping off buildings. Do they really want to go through the experience again?

The Democrats will have to be counter-intuitive and prudent. Some of their eyes light up when they see the government taking over everything and that a few votes here and there will be able to transfer huge amounts of capital to favored constituencies. If they don't act responsibly they will be held responsible for a depression going into the 2nd decade of the 21st century. Obama does have the right principle in play however; growth from the bottom-up.

That may be the first grand thesis of a new age in America.

Politics As a Wound

Politics is not pleasant because there is no "glory" in it. It was made to pit ambition against ambition and have the people decide who knew the facts and could approximate the truth. At least, who had the most credible leaders to act on the facts. Politics is the sad necessity and why we read books while innocently waiting to relieve ourselves.

We glorify the system of governance and the Constitution from which it emerged. But what takes place is both temporal and ugly. So be it. We know there are times when a grace comes upon it as when the political culture is deeply wounded and trying to live inside of conflicts that have decayed through time. Such as now. At that moment a break-out of healthy demand and action takes place.

* * * * *

Groups are hostile across all eras and beliefs. The reason consists of a tiny crystal of hate that has lodged in people spontaneously, coming of age in a generation, or going through a collective experience that is transformed through time into a structure of power. It is much more likely to happen in a free society where any crystal of hatred finds its lump of people to lodge in. And any lump of any size usually has some money

to toss around. And if the lump gets viral the PR types are called in to dress the hatred and the leaders nicely. And hatred finds its enemies. And the enemies fueled by their own crystal of hate oblige and the battle is joined. When it is all said and done people wonder why things ever got to this state. The crystal disintegrates under the pressure of its own absurdity. Some type of cultural transmigration through all groups takes place. There is a glimmer of laughter.

But more crystals are formed for certain.

And when one pillar of hate falls, vatfulls of piss follow from the ramparts.

* * * * *

Politics is the family you can't escape. A person can run off to Zambia and leave everything behind but soon enough the plague of politics will join him in one form or another. It always reminds us that we must choose. Choice is monumental in our experience. It both includes and excludes. The choice in November will initiate changes because the Republicans have no defense against it and it will take them some years to rehabilitate.

There are likeable and irascible things about John McCain but none of them are presidential. Ironically, he may even become a key ally for President Obama; time will tell. I'm sure the schism between the right and center of the Republican party will not go unnoticed by Mr. McCain.

John McCain has a fundamental flaw deadly for leaders; he can't stand to be contradicted, esp. by a younger and smarter guy. That is the mark of someone who lacks confidence and has learned to bully his way to the best sense of himself. But senators are not leaders in the way a president needs to be.

He will lose and, as I wrote last year, an era of momentous change will be upon us. It will not be good or bad but simply will be.

The good and bad will have to be discovered by an alert citizenry.

They will have plenty to choose from.

October 28, 2008

A nation grew up tonight. It proved to itself it wants to survive and build a future worth transmitting through the 21st century. It grew up by saying, "all those caught in the culture wars of the Kennedy/Reagan era's, let go."

History is moving onward with a young, vital leader. Rejoice! Study! Engage and carry through. Those who

should be humbled have been humbled; those who should be empowered have been empowered. They are not pulling each other apart but will connect and where they connect a new direction will be found.

November 4, 2008

Impressions of Obama Election

I always chuckled when I heard the conservatives refer to Obama as, "the most liberal member of Congress..." Obama is a liberal in the classic sense of being rooted in the Enlightenment rather than in Marxism as the old liberals were after '68 or so. Obama represents to me a man who reflected on that storied period of time and lifted out the nuggets that were there and let everything else fall by the wayside. He represents the best of the Kennedy- era which was crushed out by the radicalism on campus, Reaganism, fundamentalism, the legacy of drugs, and the assassinations among other things.

But he added into it the stability and need for responsibility that represented the 80's and 90's. And we know now that it's much more disastrous to have a responsible citizenry dependent on an irresponsible class of elites and power brokers than the other way around.

His liberalism is the type that carries a long uncontented platform ready to be filled with vision and good, rational ideas.

It is not filled with the predictable response that marked earlier forms of "liberalism."

* * * * *

It's impossible to know how the Obama election is going to effect race. At a certain level the races will have to speak with each other. It would be wonderful if the dialog was between blacks and Republicans but I suspect it will be between upper middle-class blacks and upper middle-class white Democrats. What Obama needs to worry about is if there is so much black solidarity that the whites begin seeing themselves as "victims." Believe it or not that does happen; it happened in the late 70's and resulted in Reagan. The test will be if it is perceived that the election was about "the further advancement of black people," or about "recovering the economy for the middle-class." It will be the latter in my estimation.

If, for instance, the lower middle, working class whites that turned the tide for Obama start seeing blacks advancing while they remain static they will turn very red very quickly. If "racialism" starts to dominate the culture look for a big turning if not in 2010 then 2012. I don't think it will happen because I think a terrific effort will be made in the red states to educate them about the stupidity of racial prejudice, the types of self-discipline needed to develop tolerance for the "other," and a general moving on toward the interior of the 21st century. Perhaps there will be a renewed pride in difference and plurality rather than fear of it.

His policies will improve the lot of poor blacks as long as those same policies improve the lot of all the poor. And his policies will be classic liberalism by pumping the bottom and middle so there is growth of the poor to the middle, an expansion of the middle in ways we haven't seen since the post WWII era, a new loyalty among the middle-class to Obama-type government. As long as healthy growth results there is no going back. Invariably that process corrupts, programs for progress become hand-outs that need more and more

money from the newly empowered middle-class and, eventually, the Republicans present a leader to take the loyalty away from the connection with the poor and link it up with wealth.

It's not rocket science.

The Obama victory is a win-win all around the culture. First, it puts a young, vital leader at the center of power who operates from both confidence and intelligence. This at a time when the establishment has botched things as bad as can be botched. His election enhances the democracy in one fell swoop.

* * * * *

It's always about the middle-class.

Wealth has become discredited even though they will not become less wealthy by any stretch of the imagination.

If Obama succeeds you should see slow, healthy growth in the economy based on the building of real goods and services.

That is, if he avoids plunging us into a major depression or some type of economy we've never experienced before by making a few key dumb decisions. And at this stage we highly doubt that.

* * * * *

President-elect Obama has one flaw that I can see and it hasn't been tested yet. He is highly intelligent and he is able to put in front of him many scenarios from which he develops his strategy. He did it flawlessly with both Hillary and McCain. But as President he could very well run into something that will knock this structure for a loop, some event that has no scenario yet, and in the process of dealing with it lose his calm confidence and is stripped of all his learned responses.

He will be aided by some of the people he's surrounded himself with and his uncanny ability to reach a nearly egoless state to allow the truth of others to penetrate his mind and make it part of his calculus.

It's stupid for Obama followers to "lower expectations," at this stage of the game.

We should expect a "post-racial culture," a new set of loyalties, esp. from the middle-class, a dedicated effort to improve education, change the fuel systems, and renovate our role in the world. These are my expectations and I won't lower them one iota.

History rarely travels in the straight line those caught up in it want it to. History is created not in the euphoria but in the disillusionment. That is where the rubber meets the highway and history veers off in a direction no one suspected.

I thank god I spent most of my youth in multicultural cities along the west coast! I hope the red states learn and grow in the next four years. That is a far better road to take than one of being rolled over by history.

Everything I see, hear, and read about Obama makes me think he's a genuine leader; he respects language, thinking, reflecting and all things that very few presidents have had since Kennedy. Clinton was a smart charlatan and the others were boobs in their own way.

* * * * *

Fears and crude mass thinking enter the picture. It proves my thesis that true vision has collapsed in this liberal democracy and people inhale the adrenaline of their first youth, their first bursting of the bubble when the world is starkly real, history is starkly real, death is realer than real and we are called on to understand it and work in it.

That, however, is the base, not the apex.

In a mature state one experiences joyful prudence.

When a charismatic and popular hero is elected President there is a struggle over the direction of the Republic. But, in the democracy a thousand new directions are lit up by free men and women.

A free man fears no one or no group. He doesn't allow himself to get pinned in by the shadows of others.

As a citizen I can only try and keep tabs on the Republic. But as a free man in a democracy I set out to do all I can do to fulfill whatever potential the spirits of life have lodged in me.

In a way, I always have democracy and the republic in front of me. I see them. They are seeds that transmute into odd and monstrous shapes.

November 21, 2008

Impressions of the January 20, 2009 Inaugural

A writer should never read the speech he has written. The words always get in the way of the intention.

After reading representative opinions about the coming days and years I am glad there is one president and that his decisions and opinions actually count and his name is Barack H. Obama.

* * * * *

"Make it new but know everything that has gone on before."

Democracy proves itself beyond the flatlands of history, current and otherwise, by going beyond self-congratulation that it is a democracy; when it strives for the spectacular and creative and says, "I have gone to the moon," "I have fed millions of people," "I have created a new communications system," it justifies itself.

Democracy implies a break from all that went before and, therefore, development at the highest level possible.

It does require a cultural humbleness no doubt.

Democracy thankfully removed the old social habits that were, in the end, unnecessary and inhibiting.

Shouldn't self-rule make persons much more interested in the world surrounding them? And if they aren't what makes democracy different than any other system that manipulates and controls its population?

* * * * *

Government is important of course. But government is not the destiny of the liberal democratic citizen. Government is what the citizen has an honest and thorough relation with so that he or she can execute their destiny, fulfill their potential and live merrily into the future. Dependence of government won't permit that but neither will a government that is incompetent because the people have cut loose from it.

The Obama victory points to the creative tension between the obligations of being a citizen and the freedom and liberty of the citizens.

Mere politics offers up equal parts of adrenaline, hogwash, and depression.

A Short and Happy History of a Republic

It emerged from the Constitution.

It has developed a history from the beginning of George Washington's terms as President.

It is a combination of elected officials, appointed officials, and hired help.

It is filled with intricacy and secrets. It says as much as it has to say about itself and very little more.

Ideally it would be fully efficient, fully just and so on but most sane people give up on that prospect early on. It is an amalgam of institutional objectivity, tradition, and human nature that has pledged its loyalty to the vagueness of it but is mostly loyal to its own self-interest. All of this is tested in due time.

Every bureau is it's own world.

* * * * *

It's too vast to be really covered by the news so something dramatic has to happen to know anything going on. The news is usually important only to the people directly involved, perhaps their family and a few friends and that's about it.

Frustration and fatigue mark an old government.

* * * * *

The Republic is too important to ignore but too slow, ineffective, and boring to get to know too well.

* * * * *

The most playful question to ask is, "does it need to exist?" The answer is always a yes, the more so the more experienced one is in the world. And even if we laugh at it, scorn it and try to keep it honest it does deliver, it

does do the good and necessary things that keeps things together. And when it falls it will be a very large fall. And the jolt will be felt. And our gig will pass.

Knowing this will happen, the citizen hopes it is way down the line.

* * * * *

The Republic was formed out of an extraordinary moment in human history when young, ambitious, intelligent men could start history all over again. They did so in a funny kind of way but the rest of the world is still trying to catch up, still hung up on the history they can not escape. But it is "historic" in that all groups, at all times, had some form of governance.

* * * * *

It is a practical fact that by the time a citizen gets into middle-age he or she is fully exhausted and disgusted at the Republic.

The political leaders become stick figures bashed around by the upset citizenry.

From one point of view a group of protesting citizens is as effective as birds dropping seeds on a battleship hoping to sink it or change its course. From another point of view an upset group of citizens is a mirror to the Republic and signals something to the Republic it can't perceive from its own position.

* * * * *

Depending on the density of the stench, its leaders can achieve stature. Most of the time it is a benign sort of machine that moves as a hive and time passes and little is known of some of the destruction the thing wrought.

* * * * *

In any community there is political ambition. It starts small. It's usually a person frustrated that no one recognizes his or her greatness and is determined to do something about it. It is a form of self-improvement but will quickly spoil into low levels of corruption if the attitude isn't corrected soon enough. And by the time the ambition has curdled in endless committees and useless legislation the person has rationalized it all away and uses the tried and true clichés well-known as a cover to get as much out of the thing as he can.

The community can stop ambitious people at the moment they first appear. There is a kind of intuitive vetting that goes on. Any community would have great regret if they could perceive some of those they have

rejected.

Old men can be found in any community who have a scrapbook of their campaign for the school board.
"Even though I didn't make it it was an exciting time for me."

* * * * *

The process of going from local, to state, to federal levels depends on any number of factors. The politician has to gain credibility at every level, to larger and larger groups in a much more competitive environment. Out of that spawn comes national leaders where the process goes on and on until a few get locked into the power of the Republic for a decade or two. They come on the scene, do their dance, then leave in startlingly quick fashion. Only a handful make a permanent mark.

And before anyone notices a whole era, a whole epoch is a few film clips and cliches. And yet every era and epoch is justified by sustaining, changing, and transmitting the forgotten.

* * * * *

The Republic is defined by the people in a variety of ways. Some of it is defined by ideology. Some of it is defined by principle. Some of it is defined by the experience of the citizen. It often stands there defiant of the people's definition of itself.

It is better to see the Republic as the child of the citizens rather than the father.

* * * * *

Doesn't the future want some evidence that a few of the citizens believed the spirit of a man or woman was greater than even the trillions of dollars and military might of nukes? And that they understood history and knew the relation between change and scale begins in the Republic?

And he speculates whether the Republic in its present form would be recognizable to the people who created it.

A free person always chafes under the burden of having no alternatives.

Boxed in like that he starts to think and tries to be as reasonable as he can be.

But history also proves that it is and it is yet to be.

That it is as susceptible to the act of pure idea as any other object.

January 21, 2009