



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #103 — MAR. 27, 2012

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What Are Conservatives Trying to Conserve?

(posted by Dennis Cox, Mar. 27, 2012)

This is an excellent discussion of political development over the last century.

"What Are Conservatives Trying to Conserve?" by Ira Glasser, Huffington Post

Mar. 24, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ira-glasser/election-2012-gop_b_1377280.html)

About a month ago, Jonathan Chait published an important article in *New York Magazine* arguing that demographic changes in the United States will before too long spell doom to the political influence and hegemony of conservatives, and that conservatives, well aware of these changes, regard the 2012 elections as their last, best chance to reverse the course America is on. "Conservative America," Chait writes, "will soon come to be dominated, in a semi-permanent fashion, by an ascendant Democratic coalition hostile to its outlook and interests." The Republican Party, Chait explains, had over decades found itself increasingly confined to white voters, "especially those lacking a college degree and especially rural whites." Meanwhile, Democrats have increased their standing among whites with graduate degrees, secular whites and racial minorities. And he highlighted swing states like Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, Virginia and North Carolina where this demographic shift was increasingly evident. In 2008, Chait says, Obama carried out that blueprint, and the trend is continuing.

Chait's argument is not simplistic. He recognizes that coalitions are fluid, and shift as competing political parties adapt. He recognizes, too, that short-term events -- like a 9/11 attack, foreign crises, economic catastrophes or a scandal like Watergate -- can interrupt long term trends and trump them. But, Chait insists, "the dominant fact of the new Democratic majority is that it has begun to overturn the racial dynamics that have governed American politics for five decades" as well as the "stew of racial, religious, cultural and nationalistic" identity politics that have dominated elections. As Frank Rich summarized Chait's analysis, "the 2012 election is likely to be the last stand for the older, demographically antique America" that the Republican primaries reflect. This "now or never" mentality among conservative Republicans, Chait argues, this sense that demographic trends are against them, is driving their apocalyptic view of what Obama represents and of the critical importance to them of this election. Republican conservatives, Chait says, see this election as their last chance to stop history.

Chait's emphasis on demographic shifts is powerful and mainly on target, but there is a broader historical context to his analysis that complements, extends and better explains the hysteria dominating the current rhetoric of the Republican party. In other words, there is content to all of this.

Most, if not all, political and social retreats from reality and descents into "once there was a golden age" fundamentalist fervor are the result of a panic reaction to fundamental change and a resistance to modernity that cannot be assimilated or accepted, and that so unsettles the ground rules by which they live and have always lived that they lash out at the changes, or what they see as the symbols of those changes, in a desperate, if ultimately futile attempt to hold back the sea. This is what characterized the wave of fundamentalist politics in the 1920s in America, when the advancements of science (as especially symbolized by evolution) so threatened the world as many people knew it, that they arose in a wave of repressive reaction to try and block it. This was also the period in which the world turned upside down when women won the right to vote (1920); it was the period when labor unions became strong and challenged the prevailing distributions of economic power; it was the period when the NAACP was created (1909) and the ACLU (1920). This is the period when Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood (connection to the present intended), was arrested every other day on the streets of New York for distributing informational leaflets and pamphlets on birth control; this was the period when the late 19th-century Comstock laws outlawed obscene materials, but also defined information about contraception as pornographic and banned its distribution; this was the period when John Scopes was tried and convicted for teaching evolution in Tennessee, a case so important in the evolving struggle to hold back the sea that no less than William Jennings Bryan was brought in to the small town of Dayton to prosecute Scopes. It was the jazz age, new, unbridled dances and scary music, most of it played by blacks. It was the time of Stravinsky, Gertrude Stein and the new cubist art. It was also the time of Freud, and of Einstein's startling theories. To many who lived traditional lives rooted in the past, these developments were profoundly unsettling; social patterns, indeed reality as many knew it, and the rules that governed reality, seemed everywhere to be in chaos and under attack. Many worried that everything valuable and important was ending, that society itself was becoming unmoored. Waves of fundamentalist revivalism developed, and seeped into American politics. This was when alcohol Prohibition passed (1919, effective 1920, not to be repealed until the New Deal). Much the same thing happened again as a reaction to the profound changes during the 1960s.

I think what Chait says about the force of demographic change is true, as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough. My analysis of politics over the last 30 years, and particularly "social issue" politics, often running counter to the real economic interests of those who subscribe to it, is this:

During the 1960s, we experienced -- in addition to the unsettling changes wrought by the atomic and hydrogen bombs and the beginnings of space travel -- a bewildering series of profound social changes: in my parlance, the Bill of Rights, more notable over most of our history as a promise unredeemed, woke up from its nearly two century old Rip Van Winkle slumber. The civil rights movement grew, arising out of post-war, post-Jackie Robinson America, beginning in 1955, when Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. splashed their way into America's conscience and its consciousness; other groups soon took the civil rights movement as their template: women, prisoners, mental patients, students at and even more significantly below the college level, people on welfare, gays, the disabled. Everyone came out of the closets of repression and invisibility and asked the same question: Does the Bill of Rights apply to me? Can I limit the power of those who have unjust dominion over my life?

Free speech expanded beyond the shackles of 1950s McCarthyism and the Comstockian residues of the late 19th, early 20th century restrictions. Barney Rossett published Henry Miller and *Lady Chatterly's Lover* and distributed the film *I Am Curious (Yellow)*. The civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam war movements resurrected First Amendment rights. These movements, happening during a time of increased secularism, fueled in part by the assurances to Protestants made by the first Catholic president in 1960, and enabled by the historically accidental Warren Court, saw group after group test its claims. And energized by these movements and the growth of financial support for organizations during a time of affluence, groups like the ACLU, NAACP, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDF) and others were equipped to bring these claims into court in a more systematic way than had ever occurred before. A civil liberties/civil rights/public interest bar arose, the first in our history: no longer were such cases limited by the number that could be brought by a few volunteers; now a full-time professional bar of such lawyers developed, and beginning in the late 60s, young people for the first time in large numbers began to go to law school for the purpose of working in such organizations, whose expansion permitted their employment in ever-increasing numbers. The ACLU, NAACP and LDF became templates for other groups championing the rights of women, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, etc. Environmental groups arose and flourished. So did groups to defend the rights of prisoners, mental patients, the disabled and gays. Roughly between 1954, when the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*, and 1973, when it decided *Roe v. Wade*, virtually all the rights most of us wake up with every morning and take for granted, became realized and enforceable for the first time. This

included equality rights for blacks, women and others; free speech rights; separation of church and state; reproductive rights; prisoners rights; etc. We forget how recent these decisions were, but it was not until 1965 that a Connecticut law making it a crime to sell married couples contraceptives was struck down, not until 1967 that a Virginia law making it a crime for blacks and whites to marry -- what Barack Obama's parents had done -- was struck down. Similarly, most of the decisions that struck down required school prayers, that applied the Fourth Amendment to state and local searches, that established the exclusionary rule and the Miranda warning did not occur until the 1960s.

Parallel developments occurred in Congress and in some state legislatures: in 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed, outlawing discrimination based on race and sex in public accommodations, employment and to some extent in education; in 1965 the Voting Rights Act was passed, outlawing racial discrimination in voting; and in 1968, the Fair Housing Act was passed, outlawing racial discrimination in the rental and sale of housing. By 1968, the legal infrastructure of Jim Crow was dismantled, and a new legal infrastructure of civil rights enforcement established in its place, at least formally. And in 1965, racist immigration quotas that had been in place since 1924 to quash the flood of late 19th, early 20th century immigration from Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and limit it mainly to Northwestern Europe, were replaced with race and ethnic-neutral standards, ushering in, for the first time in more than a half-century, large numbers of immigrants from South and Central America, Africa and Asia. This was a revolution, and taken together with the exponential explosion of rights across the spectrum during these same years, radically altered not only the demography of America, but also its distribution of legal rights and power. This was received as a bone-rattling shock in many parts of America, no less than the teaching of evolution had been received in Dayton, Tenn. in 1925.

Why? Because all rights are by definition a limitation on power: the right to a secret ballot implies a limit on the government's authority to peek; the right not to be unreasonably searched, absent a judicial warrant, in your home is a limit on the power of the police to do so. The right to marry someone with different skin color is a limit on the police power of the state to prohibit it. The right to march in the street is a limit on the power of the state to stop you. The right to buy contraceptives is a limit on the power of the state to prohibit it. And the right not to be forced to participate in a public school prayer ceremony that is not in accordance with your religious beliefs, or the right not to be singled out and stigmatized for your refusal, is a limit on the power of a state school to require it. The explosion of rights between 1954 and 1973 radically altered the rules of the game and, perhaps more importantly, the perceptions of those who lost their privileges (many of whom had little else).

Suddenly, and what seemed all at once, the lives of many Americans who for all their memory had assumed such powers and privileges, turned upside down. Now white, male, mostly Protestant Americans had to compete, as after 1947 white baseball players had to compete, on the merits (at least legally) not only with blacks, but also with women; the competitive advantages they had enjoyed as the result of the historical exclusions of blacks and women were, at least legally, over. Baptists who controlled the populations of small Southern towns had to give up controlling prayers in local public schools, had to tolerate speech and depictions of sex in libraries and drugstore news displays and in movie theaters that they used to have the power to prohibit. For many of them, it felt like they had lost control of their lives, and the lives of their children; certainly they had lost the power to control others and use the law to force their beliefs upon others who did not share them.

They did not take this lying down: already in the '50s and into the '60s "Impeach Earl Warren" billboards pockmarked the Southern, rural countryside; attempts to censor books proliferated; resistance to racial and gender anti-discrimination laws became entrenched, and sometimes violent. The civil rights laws in particular altered the political landscape radically: as early as 1964, Barry Goldwater broke the Democrats nearly-century-old hold on the Deep South; in an otherwise lopsided defeat, Goldwater carried only six states, his home state of Arizona and five states of the Deep South. This established the Republican foothold in the formerly solid Democratic South, and paved the way for Nixon's Southern Strategy and George Wallace's third-party bid four years later. Demography hadn't changed much, but the old New Deal working class white constituency had, and by 1980 many found their way to Ronald Reagan -- and not because his deregulatory tax policies were in their economic interest.

Then, after more than a decade of decisions expanding rights, in 1973, *Roe v. Wade* was decided, and a strong fundamentalist reaction developed. Driven doctrinally by the Catholic Church, it found ready allies among fundamentalist Protestants, who were already shaken by other sociological tsunamis in speech, race, women's rights and the separation of church and state. The antagonisms between Catholics and Protestants had long been

instrumental in maintaining the separation of church and state, historically and politically (as noted above, as recently as 1960, this was in evidence in candidate Kennedy's famous assurances to Protestants that he was not in fact an agent of the Pope nor would he exercise power along religious lines if elected). But now, and for the first time in our history, the social issue of abortion rights unified Catholics and Protestants and a systematic politicized religious assault on the separation of church and state, and the religious liberty it enabled, began. In 1980, Jerry Falwell announced his Moral Majority; an examination of their goals and precepts seemed to mirror an opposite agenda to the ACLU's and to the panoply of enforceable rights that had developed since the 1960s. In 1980 Reagan was elected, and the modern conservative political movement began, not as a protest, but as a hegemony. The lasting accomplishments of the Reagan years may have been the changes in the tax code and regulatory regimes that had prevailed for nearly a half century. But that was not what fueled his electoral success; what fueled his electoral success was the fundamentalist movement represented by Falwell, Pat Robertson and what came to be called the social agenda. Censorship of Kurt Vonnegut, Judy Blume and others, movements to pass "creationist" statutes that attempted to elevate the book of Genesis to a branch of science; hostility to the claims of gays, women and reproductive rights all combined to generate what began to be called "the culture wars." To a very demonstrable extent, I think, the conservative movement of the last 30 years (absent the economic issues of deregulation, also supported by Clinton and Robert Rubin and beyond the comprehension or the interest of most voters) may be seen as a panic response to a crumbling world and to the rights expansions of the '60s that struck like a tsunami, washing away all the prior governing arrangements. For these people, reality itself, or at least a reality where they felt in charge, was disappearing. As always, it was the symbols of these changes that were attacked: the federal courts, especially the Supreme Court, which (unelected) had rendered many of these decisions; the ACLU and Planned Parenthood, which had brought many of the cases or performed hated services; books and magazines and films; television and Hollywood and "eastern elites." When Pat Buchanan roared, in his quixotic presidential campaign, that "we" needed to "take back our country," he was talking about a country prior to the rights revolutions of the 60s, when people who looked and believed like him ruled the roost and did not have their powers limited by the rights we had won. What conservatives were desperately trying to conserve was not the values at America's origin (the Bill of Rights was, after all, ratified in 1791), but rather the privileges and powers of 19th century and early 20th century America. This is what has fueled the reactionary politics of the past three decades, and it is what we are seeing now in the Republican base and its candidates.

It is true that demographic changes affect this struggle. But demographic changes did not cause the struggle, nor do they lie at its roots. It is also true, I think, that the views represented by the likes of Rick Santorum are fading, and that his screams against the changes he cannot prevent are like a death rattle. That doesn't mean they can't damage, doesn't mean they can't temporarily prevail. But they know their time is passing and that the next generation will not react with shock to the changes that shock Santorum, because they will not experience them as changes, because they will have gotten used to them, because they grew up with them. There may be as many young women, including Catholic women, as ever who regard themselves as conservative. But nearly all of them use birth control, before as well as during marriage. Gays will be accepted, just as a stroll through the schools of rural Georgia or the streets of Jackson, Miss. today does not reveal what went on there in 1963. Problems will not end, the competition among values will not end, but the vision of life that Rick Santorum clings to will end, or diminish to a point where it is not politically viable. Chait is right that the Republican right wing knows this; he is right that they see this as their last shot (it may not be; I wouldn't celebrate victory quite yet); he is right that they are responding with a strategy that will probably end in hastening their political demise (having cultivated that fundamentalist reaction for decades, the Republican Party has backed itself into a corner); and he is right that demographics is affecting the outcome, and will do so over the next decade. But to understand what is happening politically, I think one has to understand that this is about more than demographics: it is about fundamental social change and the reaction to it. **And the fundamental changes at stake and at issue are mostly about rights, the rights won by submerged and subordinate groups roughly between 1954 and 1973, and the privileges and powers lost or limited, or perceived to be lost, by those who benefited, however unjustly, from the subordination of others.**

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The Right reveals its true colors...

"The Right's Etch a Sketch Imperative" by E.J. Dionne Jr., NationofChange

Mar. 26, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/right-s-etch-sketch-imperative-1332774625>)

Clarifying moments are rare in politics. They are the times when previously muddled issues are cast into sharp relief and citizens get a chance to look past the spin and obfuscation.

Americans were blessed with three such moments last week:

Clarifying Moment #1

Rep. Paul Ryan made absolutely clear that he is not now and never was interested in deficit reduction. After a couple of years of being lauded by deficit hawks as the man prepared to make hard choices, he proposed a budget that would not end deficits until 2040 but would cut taxes by \$4.6 trillion over a decade while also extending all of the Bush tax cuts, adding an additional \$5.4 trillion to the deficit. Ryan would increase military expenditures and then eviscerate the rest of the federal government.

Oh yes, Ryan claims he'd make up for the losses from his new tax cuts with "tax reform" but offered not a single detail. A "plan" with a hole this big is not a plan at all. Ryan's main interest is in cutting the top income tax rate to 25 percent from the current 35 percent. His message: Solving the deficit problem isn't nearly as important as (1) continuing and expanding benefits for the wealthy and (2) disabling the federal government.

Robert Greenstein, president of the progressive Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, is tough on deficits, careful in his use of numbers, and measured in his choice of words. These traits make his assessment of Ryan's proposal all the more instructive.

"It would likely produce the largest redistribution of income from the bottom to the top in modern U.S. history and likely increase poverty and inequality more than any other budget in recent times (and possibly in the nation's history)," Greenstein wrote. "Specifically, the Ryan budget would impose extraordinary cuts in programs that serve as a lifeline for our nation's poorest and most vulnerable citizens, and over time would cause tens of millions of Americans to lose their health insurance or become underinsured."

Thanks to Ryan, we now know that this election is not about deficits at all. It is about whether we will respond to growing inequalities of wealth and income by creating even larger inequalities of wealth and income.

Clarifying Moment #2

Last week the nation also focused seriously on the "Stand Your Ground" laws that the National Rifle Association has pushed through in state after state. These statutes came to wide attention because of the tragic killing of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager.

George Zimmerman, the man who pulled the trigger, was not under serious investigation until there was a national outcry because under the Florida law, a citizen has a right to use "force, including deadly force, if he or she reasonably believes it is necessary to do so to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony."

These laws perfectly reflect the NRA's utopia. No longer will we count on law enforcement to preserve the peace. Instead, we will build a society where all citizens are armed and encouraged to take the law into their own hands. If you feel threatened, just shoot.

Since when did conservatives start believing that laws should be based on "feelings" and subjective judgments? What kind of civilization does this create? Surely this moment should inspire the peaceable majority to challenge the entire gun lobby worldview — and that most certainly includes the legions of timid Democrats who have been cowed by the NRA.

Clarifying Moment #3

There was, finally, that toy metaphor from Eric Fehrstrom, a top aide to Mitt Romney. Asked on CNN if the primary campaign had forced Romney "to tack so far to the right it would hurt him with moderate voters in the general election," Fehrstrom replied that "everything changes" after the primaries. "It's almost like an Etch a Sketch," he added, "you can kind of shake it up, and we start all over again."

The context matters because Romney later said Fehrstrom was talking about post-primary changes that would be made "organizationally," a claim that is plainly untrue. Ironically, the semi-denial reinforced the lesson Fehrstrom taught: To win, Romney is willing to change not only his own positions but also reality itself.

Conservatives will need an exceptionally powerful Etch a Sketch to wipe the nation's memory clean of the education it received during the 2012 campaign's most enlightening week so far.

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20120326-02	12:12	Tom	Internal Memo: Keystone XL Pipeline Statement from Valero CEO
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From Tom (Mar. 27, 2012, 12:12 pm)—Internal Memo: Keystone XL Pipeline Statement from Valero CEO

Interesting viewpoint!

For those of you unfamiliar with Valero, it is an independent oil company based in San Antonio, TX. It owns 2 refineries, but no oil fields - it buys all the oil it refines and processes via contract or on the open market.

Its origin was as a public utility providing natural gas to the city of San Antonio, but it has grown to be a significant gasoline retailer in a good portion of the southeast and southwest, as well as a purveyor of natural gas.

It is a significant economic force in Texas, even in light of the other majors (Shell, Exxon Mobil, etc.) based in the state. This memo to employees is a realistic insight into the economic importance of the proposed XL pipeline.

<http://www.valero.com/OurBusiness/Pages/Home.aspx>

Date: January 24, 2012
To: Valero Employees

From: Bill Klesse

Subject: Keystone XL Pipeline Statement

As you know, the Obama administration decided last week to deny TransCanada's application to ship crude oil via the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada to the Gulf Coast. Valero has planned to be a shipper and purchaser of that oil since 2008, and obviously we were disappointed in the decision. We issued a statement in response to questions from the media, and I wanted to share it with you in case you get questions from friends or business partners, and so that you would know why Valero supports the Keystone XL pipeline. This is the statement:

Despite the uncertainty and political fighting over the Keystone XL pipeline, Valero has continued to invest in its U.S. refining operation. In 2011 we spent nearly \$3 billion on projects, and for 2012 our capital expenditure budget is over \$3 billion. These expenditures are keeping our employees on the job and putting additional people to work. To reference two of our refineries, at Port Arthur, Texas, we have 1,600 contractors working on an expansion project, and at St. Charles Parish, Louisiana, we have another 1,000 contractors working on a separate project. We need this kind of economic activity to accelerate to help all Americans.

This illustrates why the federal government's rejection of the Keystone XL pipeline is so absurd. There are pipelines in every neighborhood all across America . The administration's decision was not about pipelines, it was about the misguided beliefs that Canadian oil sands development should be stopped and that fossil fuel prices should increase to make alternative energy more attractive. Instead, we should be impressed with how well the oil sands engineering and recovery technology has advanced, and the economic benefits this development brings. Having more oil available in the marketplace has the potential to lower prices for consumers. As an independent refiner, Valero buys all of the oil we process. Due to the administration's misguided policies, refiners like Valero will have to buy more oil from other sources outside the U.S. and Canada . Consumers will bear the additional shipping cost, not to mention the additional greenhouse gas emissions and political risks.

With all the issues facing our country, it is absolutely unbelievable our federal government says no to a company like TransCanada that is willing to spend over \$7 billion and put Americans to work on a pipeline. The administration's decision throws dirt into the face of our closest ally and largest trading partner.

The point above is that it is not about pipelines as many pipelines cross the Ogallala Aquifer, in the Great Plains region, and, in fact, there is already significant oil and gas production in the area covered by the aquifer. This is politics at its worst.

Thanks for your support. H/T: Ed Farris, TX

20120326-03	15:42	Tom	Catoon: Casual Friday
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The Empire Celebrates Casual Fridays, and Strikes a Blow to the Rebel Alliance!



20120326-04 23:59 SteveB Photo: *Altiplano*, Bolivia

<http://edweb.sdsu.edu/sdpca/mines/Links.htm>

Chola in Sunlight



—Friends of the Middle,
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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