



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #106 — MAR. 30, 2012

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The Strategy: Repeat. President Obama *Acts Like a Muslim!* **Repeat...**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Mar. 30, 2012)

You all remember from 2008 that President Obama is a mystery man: born in some strange foreign land to weird parents, educated in a Mosque, selected as a baby by powerful, unseen forces to one day become President of the United States, non-Christian, no experience, incompetent, with connections to known "radicals", an "empty suit". None of that has changed. After four years as President, he has "no experience" and he's still black. All the idiots (And there are so many! But, thank God, a minority.) still believe he's some Muslim "sleeper" sent by foreign powers to destroy their sacred Constitution with "socialism". And this is the guy who got Bin Laden and appears to be the only politician in Washington who truly would like to reduce the deficit. Well...all the lies are set to return later this year, in spades! Ask Mitt. It's already starting.

"Creating the Muslim Manchurian Candidate" by John Feffer, Tomdispatch/NationofChange

Mar. 29, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/creating-muslim-manchurian-candidate-1333035060>)

Those who fervently believe that Barack Obama is a Muslim generally practice their furtive religion in obscure recesses of the Internet. Once in a while, they'll surface in public to remind the news media that no amount of evidence can undermine their convictions.

In October 2008, at a town hall meeting in Minnesota for Republican presidential candidate John McCain, a woman called Obama "an Arab." McCain responded, incongruously enough, that Obama was, in fact, "a decent family man" and not an Arab at all. In an echo of this, a woman recently stood up at a town hall in Florida and began a question for Republican presidential hopeful Rick Santorum by asserting that the president "is an avowed Muslim." The audience cheered, and Santorum didn't bother to correct her.

Though they belong to a largely underground cult, the members of the Obama-is-Muslim congregation number as many as one third of all Republicans. A recent poll found that only 14% percent of Republicans in Alabama and Mississippi believe that the president is Christian.

These true believers treat their scraps of evidence like holy relics: the president's middle name, his grandfather's religion, a widely circulated photo of Obama in a turban. They occasionally traffic in outright fabrications: that he attended a radical madrasa in Indonesia as a child or that he put his hand on the Qur'an to be sworn in as president. An even more apocalyptic subset believes Obama to be nothing short of the anti-Christ.

By and large, however, this cult doesn't attract mainstream support from the larger church of Obama haters. Indeed, these more orthodox faithful have carefully shifted the debate from Obama being Muslim to Obama acting Muslim. Evangelical pundits, presidential candidates, and the right-wing media have all ramped up their attacks on the president for, as Baptist preacher Franklin Graham put it recently on MSNBC, "giving Islam a pass."

The conservative mainstream still calls the president's religious beliefs into question, but they stop just short of accusing him of apostasy and concealment. What they consider safe is the assertion that Obama is acting as if he were Muslim. In this way, Republican mandarins are cleverly channeling a conspiracy theory into a policy position.

There is a whiff of desperation in all this. After all, it's not an easy time for the GOP. The economy shows modest signs of improvement. The Republican presidential candidates are still engaged in a fratricidal primary. By expanding counterterrorism operations and killing Osama bin Laden, the president has effectively removed national security from the list of Republican talking points.

One story, however, still ties together so many narrative threads for conservatives. Charges that the president is a socialist or a Nazi or an elitist supporter of college education certainly push some buttons. But the single surefire way of grabbing the attention of the media and the public -- as well as appealing to the instincts of the Republican base -- is to assert, however indirectly, that Barack Obama is a Manchurian candidate sent from the Islamic world.

Obama and the Muslim World

A succession of Republican candidates have attempted to run to the right of party favorite Mitt Romney by asserting that only a true conservative can defeat Obama in November. Most of them boasted of the same powerful backer. Michele Bachmann, Herman Cain, Rick Perry, and Rick Santorum all declared that God asked them to run for higher office. Together with Newt Gingrich, they have deployed various methods of appealing to their constituencies, but none is more potent than religion.

Rick Santorum, a Catholic and the favorite of the evangelical community, has been particularly adept at using his soapbox as a pulpit. The president subscribes to a "phony theology," Santorum has claimed, "not a theology based on the Bible, a different theology." Although he occasionally asserts that "Obama's personal faith is none of my concern," he nonetheless speaks of the president's attempt to "impose values on people of faith"-- implying that the president is certainly no member of that community.

In his attacks on the president's spirituality, Santorum is cleverly attacking Mitt Romney's Mormonism as well (a theology also based on text other than the Bible). At the same time, the suggestion that Obama is somehow "other" operates as a code word for "Black" in a race in which race goes largely unmentioned.

It's an odd set of charges. Obama, after all, did everything possible during his first presidential campaign to foreground his Christianity. He was repeatedly seen praying in churches and assiduously avoided mosques. He never made a campaign appearance with a prominent Muslim. He talked about his "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ.

The day after he clinched the Democratic Party nomination in 2008, he gave a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in which he reaffirmed that he was "a true friend of Israel." Although he would occasionally mention his Muslim relatives and the time he spent in Indonesia as a child, he generally did whatever he could to emphasize only two out of the three major monotheisms.

As president, Obama has certainly "reached out" to the Muslim world. In Cairo, in June 2009, he spoke of seeking "a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition."

That new beginning, however, has yet to come. At home, for example, the Obama administration provided federal funds that the New York City Police Department then used to expand its surveillance of Muslim American neighborhoods. (Even the CIA was involved in this "human mapping" project.) The FBI has spent the Obama years rounding up suspected Muslim terrorists in operations that flirt dangerously with entrapment. The administration

has expanded the no-fly list, though because the list is secret it's difficult to know whether Muslim-Americans are specifically profiled. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that they are.

The administration's record internationally is even more disappointing. The conduct of U.S. troops in Afghanistan -- the night raids, massacres (including the recent murders of 16 Afghan villagers), and the Qur'an burnings -- have enraged local Muslims. Obama has expanded the CIA's drone air campaign by a considerable margin in the Pakistani borderlands. Civilian casualties, overwhelmingly Muslim, continue to occur there and in other "overseas contingency operations" as U.S. Special Operations Forces have dramatically expanded their activities in the Muslim world.

Despite right-wing charges, Obama has maintained a tight relationship with Israel and the Israeli leadership. As former New Republic editor Peter Beinart concludes, "The story of Obama's relationship to [Prime Minister] Netanyahu and his American Jewish allies is, fundamentally, a story of acquiescence."

It's no surprise, then, that surveys in six Middle East countries taken just before and two months after the Cairo speech in 2009, the Brookings Institution and Zogby International discovered that the number of respondents optimistic about the president's approach to the region had suffered a dramatic drop: from 51% to 16%. A 2011 Pew poll found that U.S. favorability ratings had continued their slide in Jordan (to 13%), Pakistan (12%), and Turkey (10%).

And yet, perversely, the hard right in the U.S. maintains that the Obama administration has behaved in quite the opposite manner. "There's something sick about an administration which is so pro-Islamic that it can't even tell the truth about the people who are trying to kill us," Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich typically said while campaigning in Georgia.

Pro-Islamic? That's news to the Islamic world.

But it's nothing new to the world of the U.S. right wing, which portrays Obama as anti-Israel and weak in the face of Islamic terrorism. At best, the president emerges from these attacks as a booster of Islam; at worst, he is the leader of a genuine fifth column.

Although the administration's policy on Iran is virtually indistinguishable from those of his Republican challengers, they have presented him as an appeaser. The president who "surged" in Afghanistan somehow becomes, through the magic of election-year sloganeering, a pacifist patsy. Although Obama never endorsed the location of the "Ground Zero mosque," his opponents have suggested that he did. Although he was slow to withdraw support from U.S. allies in the Middle East like Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia, Republican candidates have accused the president of practically campaigning on behalf of the Islamist parties that have grown in influence as a result of the Arab Spring.

Barack Obama, the right wing has discovered, does not have to be Muslim to convince American voters that he has a suspect, even foreign, agenda. They have instead established a much lower evidentiary standard: he only has to act Muslim.

For this, they don't need a birth certificate. All they need are allegations, however spurious, that the president is in league with Iran's Ahmadinejad, Arab Spring jihadists, and anti-Israel forces at home. This more subtle but no less ugly Islamophobia has already insinuated itself into the 2012 elections in a potentially more damaging way than did the overt disparagement of Obama's religious bona fides back in 2008.

The Upcoming Elections

The 2010 midterm elections witnessed a sharp uptick in anti-Islamic sentiment. In addition to the concocted "Ground Zero mosque" controversy, Florida preacher Terry Jones threatened to burn the Qur'an in front of the world's cameras; a group called Stop Islamization of America bought anti-Islamic ads on buses in major cities; and a movement to pass anti-Sharia legislation at a state level began in Oklahoma. In response to this brushfire of hatred, Time magazine devoted a cover story to Islamophobia that year. On the right at least, Islam seemed on the way to becoming a litmus test in the way communism was during the Cold War.

Two years later, the hysteria seems to have subsided. The Islamophobes haven't gone into hiding. They tried to organize an advertising boycott of the TV show All-American Muslim; they campaigned against halal meats. But these efforts didn't get much traction.

Meanwhile, Park51-- the real name of the cultural center inaccurately dubbed the "Ground Zero mosque" -- opened in its original Park Street location with an exhibition by a Jewish photographer. Terry Jones is pursuing a quixotic bid for the presidency far from the media spotlight. Time has returned several times to the topic of Islamophobia, particularly after Anders Breivik's bombing and shooting rampage in Norway in July 2011, but with none of the intensity of the summer of 2010. The anti-Sharia campaign has passed legislation in several states, and laws are pending in more than a dozen more. But the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the Oklahoma anti-Sharia statute unconstitutional, and the anti-Sharia crowd has been unable to provide a single piece of evidence that Islamic law poses any challenge to the U.S. legal system.

Don't be fooled, though, by the relative quiet. It's still early in the election cycle. The Republicans, arrayed in a circular firing squad, have been largely focusing their attacks on each other. The last man standing will marshal his resources to challenge Obama. In the unlikely event that Rick Santorum emerges as the Republican candidate, religion will be central to his attack on Obama and the Democrats.

Mitt Romney has a more ambivalent relationship to religion as a wedge issue, given the level of discomfort that many American have toward Mormonism. But there are no Mormon countries to which Romney can be accused of owing primary allegiance. It will be safe, in other words, to challenge Obama for acting rather than being Muslim, for deferring to the Muslim world much as anti-Catholic voters in 1960 imagined John F. Kennedy to be taking his orders directly from the Pope.

Romney is already lining up his ducks, welcoming onto his team Islam critic Walid Phares and attack ad specialist Larry McCarthy (who did an distortion-laden spot on the "Ground Zero mosque" back in 2010). After securing the nomination, Romney will simultaneously appeal to the center and shore up support among evangelicals. The message that Obama is weak, anti-Israel, and appeases Islamic movements and countries could catch the attention of both constituencies.

A disconnect between accusation and reality hardly matters in American politics these days. Obama the "socialist" somehow manages to work hand in hand with Wall Street financiers. Obama the "Nazi" courts AIPAC. Obama the "peacenik" has been very much a war president. And Obama the "Muslim" gets a big thumbs-down from the Muslim world.

The president makes a lousy Muslim Manchurian candidate, for he has disappointed his imagined Muslim handlers at virtually every turn. In an election in which racist slogans are off the table, however, the Islamophobic accusation of "acting Muslim" remains a politically acceptable chauvinism. Given the deep anti-Islamic currents in American culture, such accusations might unfortunately prove effective as well.

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"Study Tracks How Conservatives Lost Their Faith in Science" by Alan Boyle, MSNBC

Mar. 29, 2012 (http://cosmiclog.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/03/29/10911111-study-tracks-how-conservatives-lost-their-faith-in-science)

(How do liberals and conservatives differ in their attitudes toward science? Statistics indicate that conservatives' confidence in science as an institution has declined dramatically since 1974.)

An analysis of 36 years' worth of polling data indicates that confidence in science as an institution has steadily declined among Americans who consider themselves conservatives, while confidence levels have been at steadier levels for other ideological groups.

The study, published in the April issue of the *American Sociological Review*, provides fresh ammunition for those who complain that conservative views on issues such as climate change are at odds with the scientific consensus.

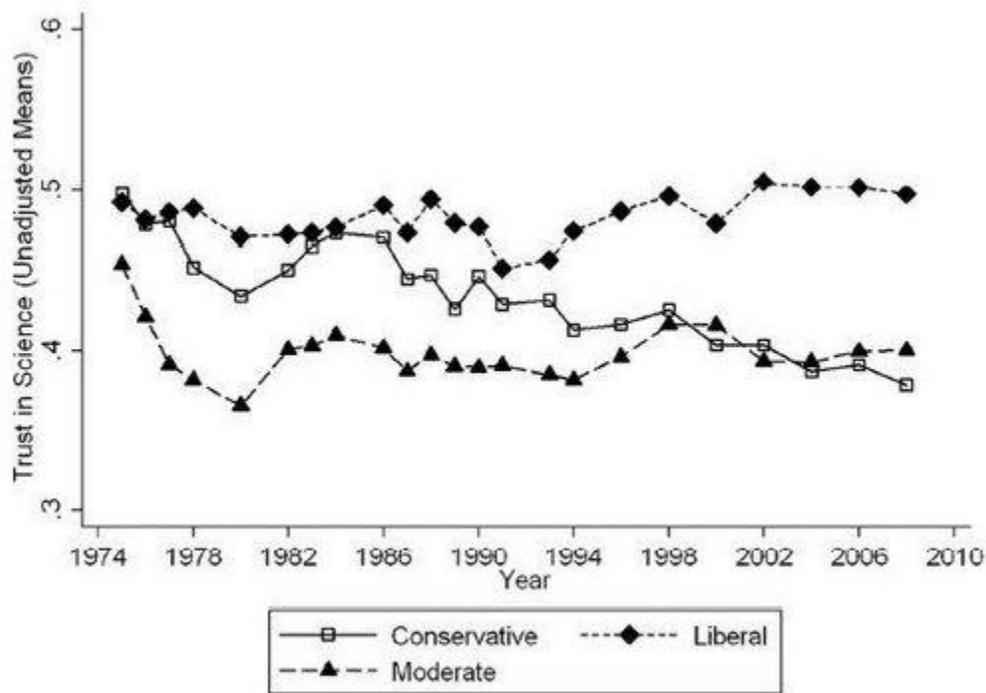
"You can see this distrust in science among conservatives reflected in the current Republican primary campaign," Gordon Gauchat, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Sheps Center for Health Services Research, said in a news release from the American Sociological Association. "When people want to define themselves as conservatives relative to moderates and liberals, you often hear them raising questions about the validity of global warming and evolution, and talking about how 'intellectual elites' and scientists don't necessarily have the whole truth."

It's not clear how much impact Gauchat's study will have on the debate over politics and science: Liberals are likely to see it as confirmation of what they already believe, while conservatives who are skeptical about the scientific elite are likely to greet these scientific claims with skepticism as well.

But the analysis represents a serious effort to flesh out political attitudes toward science with real data. Gauchat bases his findings on a statistical analysis of survey results from the General Social Survey, a long-running project

that has weighed public confidence in social institutions since 1974. The GSS has been conducted annually or semiannually by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center, or NORC, with an annual average of 1,500 Americans taking part.

Gauchat cross-referenced attitudes toward the scientific community with various demographic categories, and found that two categories showed a significant erosion of trust in science: conservatives and frequent churchgoers. People who identified themselves as conservatives voiced more confidence in science than moderates or liberals in 1974, but by 2010, that level had fallen by more than 25 percent.



This graph shows the unadjusted mean values for public trust in science, classified by self-reported political ideology between 1974 and 2010. The figures are derived from the General Social Survey.

Why the drop? Gauchat suggested that the character of the conservative movement has changed over the past three and a half decades — and so has the character of the scientific establishment.

"Over the last several decades, there's been an effort among those who define themselves as conservatives to clearly identify what it means to be a conservative," he said. "For whatever reason, this appears to involve opposing science and universities, and what is perceived as the 'liberal culture.' So, self-identified conservatives seem to lump these groups together and rally around the notion that what makes 'us' conservatives is that we don't agree with 'them.'"

Meanwhile, the perception of science's role in society has shifted as well.

"In the past, the scientific community was viewed as concerned primarily with macro structural matters such as winning the space race," Gauchat said. "Today, conservatives perceive the scientific community as more focused on regulatory matters such as stopping industry from producing too much carbon dioxide."

Gauchat's findings run counter to at least one liberal stereotype about conservatives: that right-wingers are distrustful of scientists because they have less education. The figures do support a link between more education and more trust in science, but they also show that more highly educated conservatives are, if anything, more distrustful.

That trend fits best with the concept that "educated or high-information conservatives will hold hyper-opinions about science, because they have a more sophisticated grasp about what types of knowledge will conform with or contradict their ideological positions, and they will prefer to believe what supports their ideology," Gauchat wrote.

So what does this mean for the role of science in setting national policy? "In a political climate in which all sides do not share a basic trust in science, scientific evidence no longer is viewed as a politically neutral factor in judging whether a public policy is good or bad," Gauchat said. Heightened distrust could turn young people away from careers in science and engineering, and in the long run, that could hurt America's standing in a global economy that is becoming increasingly competitive on the technological front.

Vanderbilt University's Jonathan Metzl and Northwestern University's Jennifer Richeson explain the science behind how the brain weighs decisions and forms political beliefs.

Gauchat took on this project to assess the claims made by science journalist Chris Mooney in his 2005 book, *The Republican War on Science* — and Mooney, who reviewed the paper before publication, said the findings confirmed those claims.

"It's certainly gratifying to see this study come out," Mooney told me. "I appreciate that the author actually undertook to use data. I'm glad I wasn't just whistling in the wind when it came to Republicans and science."

Now Mooney is coming out with another book, titled *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Don't Believe in Science*.

"In the book, I'm really careful to say there's what we call 'nature' and what we call 'nurture,' and you can't explain anything in politics without both of them," he said. "Whenever you see change in a group over time, that's probably 'nurture.'"

Mooney said the factors Gauchat mentioned would fit in the nurture category, along with the GOP's "Southern strategy" to bring what were once traditionally Democratic states into the Republican fold. "This is tapping into the power of nurture, but I also say we've ignored nature for too long," he said.

In *The Republican Brain*, Mooney weaves his case for "nature" in politics from a variety of studies tracing the brain-based differences between liberal and conservative views of reality.

"You're starting to find things about fixity of belief, desire to have certainty, and you see that these things are also associated with conservatism," he said. "These traits are content-neutral. You could take today's conservatives, stick them in [Soviet] Russia, and they can be very pro-science."

Mooney said people may be born with brains that predispose them either to liberal-leaning traits such as "openness to experience," or conservative-leaning traits such as "conscientiousness."

"The research suggests that people are born with a predisposition, but it's only a predisposition," Mooney said. "'Just born that way' is a phrase that makes me uncomfortable, because it implies some sort of hard wiring. Genes aren't destiny."

If you haven't figured it out by now, Mooney considers himself a liberal, and he's doubtful that any amount of "nurture" could turn him into a conservative. But he said liberals could learn a lot from conservatives, specifically about loyalty to leaders and to their cause. Like conservatives, some liberals may find themselves at odds with the scientific consensus on some issues. Which issues, specifically? Mooney pointed to hard-line stands against hydraulic fracturing (a.k.a. fracking), nuclear power, childhood vaccination and genetically modified organisms.

"Liberals have wanted to believe that if the system were just fair, then everybody would agree with us," he said. "That's a liberal fantasy. Actually, it turns out that liberalism is not the only way of being. ... Liberals should realize that not everybody's like them, and liberals' instincts in politics could be exactly what you don't want to do."

I'm imagining there's a lot to disagree with here, whether you're a liberal or a conservative. Good thing there's a comment section below. To paraphrase Monty Python, this is the right room for an argument.

More about politics and science:

Conservative or liberal? It may be in the genes:

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15534009/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/conservative-or-liberal-it-may-be-genes/.

Scientists say they've found the 'liberal gene':

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39891927/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/scientists-say-theyve-found-liberal-gene/

Brain scans show whether you lean left or right:

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42475322/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/politics-brain-scans-show-whether-you-lean-left-or-right/

Study finds that political bias affects brain activity:

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11009379/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/political-bias-affects-brain-activity-study-finds/

(Alan Boyle is msnbc.com's science editor. You can also check out *The Case for Pluto*, my book about the controversial dwarf planet and the search for other worlds.)

20120329-02 09:11 Pam Re: ...And Justice for All? (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #105)

Thank you, SteveB, not only for posting my comments but also for finding all that good additional material. I've done a fair amount of research on the subject of the Baby Scoop, but these sources were new to me. Some poor soul in the last item, a blog, is very, very angry at his birth mother--and by extension all birth mothers. I don't think his reaction is typical, but I'd still like to address it, not to change his mind--I doubt I could do that--but to present another point of view.

I was not FORCED to give up my son. I wasn't threatened, lied to, or rejected by my family (not exactly anyway). What I was, was surrounded by my parents' distress, a social worker's assurances that giving up my child would be the best thing I could do for him, and my doctor's stated assumption that unwed mothers gave up their babies "out of love for the child." At the time I made this irrevocable decision I was young, frightened, and all too aware of the toll my pregnancy was taking on my parents. I couldn't stop crying during the days we tried to figure out what to do with me, but I didn't believe I was in as much pain as my parents, especially my mother, were. I was heartbroken at the thought of losing my child--I wanted to stay pregnant forever--but I knew that deep down I was strong. I could do what I believed should be done. I would, as they say, suck it up.

I love that poem by W. H. Auden that begins, "About suffering they were never wrong/ the Old Masters."

I know now that there are losses you never get over. "Recovery" is what we call "learning to hide your feelings." Forty-four years of persistent grief has taught me that, if nothing else. But I am one of the lucky ones from my generation of birth mothers. I have found my son, and while I am seldom at a loss for words (in writing at least) I cannot find words adequate to express my feelings of joy. "Joy" is the least of it.

What that bitter, angry "anonymous" in the blog fails to realize is that 99% (maybe more) of birth mothers love their babies and want what is best for them. If an unmarried girl in 1968 truly believed she was acting in the best interests of her baby and gave him to a family who could provide a "richer" life, she should receive sympathy, not blame. For some weird reason (books have been written) western culture finds sex problematic. It must be controlled, contained, limited, repressed. "It is better to marry than to burn." --St. Paul. I was not married when I conceived my son, but he was conceived with love, and, once I knew he was on his way, he was definitely wanted. I didn't give him up because I wanted to or because I took the easy way out. I did the hardest thing a woman can do, and I have paid for that decision for forty-four years. I am not religious and don't have much sense of the mystical, but I can't help feeling that my finding my son is the universe sending me a message: I have paid, and I

am forgiven. I am not a bad person, I deserve this happiness before my life is over, and I am justly proud of ALL my children.

[And we are all with you, Pam. This is such a black and white issue, so steeped in the repressive, paranoid sexuality of the past, that hurt families and, thanks largely to the party of "family values" still hurts families by not letting them be together after all this time, even when both concerned parties choose. I thought it was interesting that this problem has been most pronounced in the U.S., Canada, Australia, Ireland, and the U.K. What is it about that British prudishness or Puritanism or whatever the hell it is that would have sacrificed so many of our young women and their babies for the sake, in some cases, of mere appearance of propriety? The damage can never be repaired, though solace can be reached, but we must never allow those days to be forced upon us again. The frightened sexuality of the past must be left behind, with the family front and center as the surest source of human happiness. Give us our babies and our mummies back, stand up for the family, a*s-holes! -SteveB]

20120329-03	11:05	SteveB	The Paradox of Our Times
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The Paradox of Our Times: Republicans want to return America to the glories of its past (I guess this would have to be the post-WWII era, prior to the start of the decline.). But, inexplicably, they do not want to return to the high income taxes, protectionism, fair elections, honest politicians, and government interventionism that led to and nurtured that "golden age" so etched into the brains of conservatives. It's just a tragedy that the whole reality of the history of those times has so conveniently been forgotten in the name of conservative dogma by those same "brains".

20120329-04	12:59	Dennis	"The Truth About \$6 Gas, \$200 Oil & the Quest for Energy Independence"
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Here's what an expert on energy has to say about U.S. energy independence including the truth about the T. Boone Pickens Plan. Get ready to pay more.

"The Truth About \$6 Gas, \$200 Oil, and the Quest for Energy Independence" by Jason Simpkins, Money Morning

March 29, 2012, (<http://moneymorning.com/2012/03/29/truth-about-6-gas-200-oil-and-quest-for-energy-independence/>)

No one needs to tell the average American about the impact of oil and gas prices. If they don't feel it in their wallets every day, they hear about it on the news every night.

But surprisingly, amid all the rhetoric, there have been no real answers to some of the key questions driving the energy debate... until now.

Is President Obama truly responsible for high gas prices, and can his opponents really bring them back down?

What role has Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke's loose monetary policy played in soaring energy costs?

Is more domestic drilling the answer?

Renowned energy expert Dr. Kent Moors answers all of these questions - and more - below.

Dr. Moors, an adviser to six of the world's top 10 oil companies and a consultant to governments around the world, also talks about the effect political turmoil in the Middle East could have on energy prices in the immediate term and how North America will gain energy independence in 15-20 years.

Here's what else Moors - a bona-fide energy expert - had to say...

Can a U.S. President actually impact gas prices- at least enough to get gasoline back to \$2.50 a gallon? Or is this just talk? I don't know whom to believe anymore...

Presidents have limited ability to affect the gas prices. They can, of course, release crude oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserves and that has an impact for short-term problems (such as the heating fuel shortage in the Northeastern U.S. a few years ago). However, that would not offset more endemic problems (such as the one we have been moving into). And frankly, gas at \$2.50 a gallon is a pipe dream - unless there is a major recession or worse. A collapse in demand is the only factor that could drive down prices that far and that is hardly the outside element we would prefer to deal with the rising prices.

How is the U.S. Federal Reserve's zero interest rate policy affecting oil and gasoline prices? What's going to happen when the Fed starts to raise rates in late 2014 and after?

This has only a very indirect effect. Increasing productivity and economic recovery generates a greater demand for energy. To the extent that the Fed policy improves employment and business investment that is the extent to which it will affect demand, and increasing demand increases energy prices.

How much of U.S. refining capacity is there available even if we do up U.S. oil production? Couldn't this be a serious bottleneck, helping to keep gas prices high?

Yes. We currently have about 8% surplus capacity, providing there are not unscheduled major interruptions in processing. One approach we will see more of is tolling. American crude, especially heavy oil and discounted grades, will be exported for refining and the oil products will then be brought back into the country.

Is there a formula that translates the price of crude (WTI and Brent) into the price of gas at the pump? And is there a profit margin component we can look at to compare the potential profit of integrated oil companies vs. refiners?

A \$1.00 rise in crude price per barrel on average produces a 3.6-cent a gallon rise at the pump (for regular). The primary cost to a refiner is still the crude oil as raw material, but their primary profit comes from the refinery margin (the difference between cost of processing and wholesale price obtained). Refinery margins are considered proprietary secrets and are not released by refineries. General levels discussed in the media are estimates (and usually not very good ones). However, those margins can be recreated, with the most detailed study done being mine. Check out my book "The Vega Factor," p.128ff and related footnotes, as well as the appendices on pages 209-303.

How much relief from high oil prices could we get by domestic drilling, fracking, building pipelines, and freeing up the permitting process, and how quickly? Wouldn't we be better off if Uncle Sam got out of the way?

The relief we'd gain from domestic resources would be limited at best. Domestic drilling will improve the national security issue, but unconventional oil and remaining traditional oil are more expensive to extract, process, and transmit. We will have sufficient volume but at a higher overall price.

How would you evaluate China's strategy of perusing the globe and doing all it can to lock up long-term energy sources?

I see it as essential for its domestic needs and further industrial expansion. The strategy of acquiring upstream assets abroad combined with expanded pipeline capacity is thus far working. Exploitation of its own internal unconventional gas resources (shale and coal bed methane) remains a very high new priority.

Do you believe in Peak Oil? If so, how much time do we have before the "cheap oil" economy blows up?

No, not as originally formulated. With the rise of unconventional oil (shale, tight, heavy oil; bitumen, oil sands), we do not have a lack of reserves into the foreseeable future. However, we have lost light sweet crude - i.e. cheaper oil. The "cheap oil" economy was over by 2008. The only reason we had a decline in prices between August 2008 and September 2009 was because of the subprime mortgage blowup, credit crunch and recession. In other words, without exogenous factors depressing demand, "cheap" becomes a very relative term.

What's the geopolitical risk premium on a barrel of oil? If world peace broke out tomorrow what would the cost be?

This, of course, depends upon the current crisis du jour and the risk premium resulting. At the moment, Iran probably costs about \$10 a barrel (but will be rising). Arab Spring if it flares up again will add another \$10. Here's an interesting result several weeks ago from our sessions at Windsor Castle. The GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council - Persian Gulf minus Iran) ambassadors told us the following: The Arab Spring has required that they dramatically increase expenditures for social programs and added expenses have been incurred via the unofficial support for various groups (such as the opposition in Syria). The high price of crude oil assures their economies will remain undiversified - always a dangerous situation with effective unemployment reaching 40% or more in these countries and the average age below 25. The ambassadors said that to maintain the current drain on their budgets, average crude prices must exceed \$85 a barrel (which they are). But that level will need to be about \$120 by 2014 and more than \$130 by 2016. In other words, prices will be going up because of what the producers need, regardless of demand considerations in the consuming countries.

Dr. Moors on Natural Gas

With the glut of natural gas available, how realistic is it that we will see a large migration to natural gas powered vehicles, and how long would it take to build the infrastructure to support that? Will the Pickens Plan work?

Considerable additional demand will be coming on line for gas over the next several years:

1. Significant increase in the use of gas for electricity generation.
2. Continued increasing industrial use.
3. Accelerated use over crude oil as feeder stock for petrochemicals.
4. Dramatic additions in liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports beginning in 2014.
5. Vehicle fuel.

Now on this last one, the move takes place first in high-end truck traffic, replacing even higher priced diesel. The retrofitting of entire fleets is taking place in Canada and to a more limited extent in the United States. Compressed natural gas (CNG) and LNG fueling terminals are already appearing, with increasing proprietary locations being established near interstate highways by companies to fuel their own vehicles. A number of municipalities are moving buses to natural gas. New York City has passed an ordinance preventing any new taxis from being registered in the city that are not either natural gas driven or hybrids. Passenger vehicle usage will take longer and require a more detailed infrastructure. Still, we did a study two years ago concluding that the average service station would need to spend only \$84,000 to provide upwards to 20% of its fueling capacity as CNG or LNG. The Pickens Plan is self-serving to Mr. Pickens' assets and acquisitions. It cannot provide pricing that make sense without significant government subsidies, a somewhat paradoxical position from where he started with this two years ago.

What will it take for natural gas prices to find their footing?

Three years, as the new demand segments mentioned below come on line.

How mired in politics is the Keystone Pipeline and it is a viable oil initiative for the future of America?

The Keystone XL will be built. Already, the section between Cushing, OK and the Gulf is moving forward. It does not need approval from Washington. The addition crossing the Canadian-U.S. border does, however. The pipeline will be redirected out of the environmentally sensitive area in Nebraska (the previous route had it stretching over the primary aquifer for the Midwest). Republicans tried to turn this into a campaign issue by forcing an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in six months. But since you can't legally do it that quickly, they gave Obama a political way out. Virtually the only U.S. oil imports in 15-20 years will be from Canada, so the pipeline is central.

Dr. Moors on Energy Independence

Is energy independence a myth or a real possibility?

It's a real possibility, achievable in 15-20 years. First, the national security argument can be settled. At our meeting at Windsor, the international consensus was unanimous that North America will be energy independent within two decades, given the largess of unconventional oil and gas. According to the projections, by the time we reach this level, we will still need about 30% of our daily supply of oil from imports, but that will all be coming from Canada. However, the second issue is price. A full Keystone pipeline system and related pipelines south from Canada will actually add an average of 4-8 cents a gallon at the pump. More to the point, however, the emphasis of more expensive unconventional production will actually raise the price since it is more expensive to extract, process, upgrade and deliver. We may, therefore, finally meet our hydrocarbon needs but will find the price rising nonetheless. Alternative sources will not cut the price. And remember, the energy segment remains "driven" by the cost of vehicle fuel.

20120329-05	13:18	SteveG	"How Religion Has Been Used to Promote Slavery"
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A documentary coming on CNN – might be worth watching.

"How Religion Has Been Used to Promote Slavery" by John Blake, CNN

Mar. 29th, 2012, (http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/29/how-religion-has-been-used-to-promote-slavery/?hpt=hp_c1)

(Moses led the Israelites out of slavery, but he and other religious giants accepted slavery for others, scholars say.)

(Editor's note: The CNN documentary 'Slavery's Last Stronghold' airs on CNN International TV March 29, 30, 31 and April 22. Check local listings for times.)

Which revered religious figure - Moses, Jesus, or the Prophet Mohammad - spoke out boldly and unambiguously against slavery?

Answer: None of them.

One of these men owned slaves, another created laws to regulate - but not ban – slavery. The third's chief spokesman even ordered slaves to obey their masters, religious scholars say.

Most modern people of faith see slavery as a great evil. Though the three great Western religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – disagree on many matters, most of their contemporary followers condemn slavery.

Yet there was a time when Jews, Christians and Muslims routinely cited the words and deeds of their founders to justify human bondage, scholars say.

At times, religion was deployed more to promote the spread of slavery than to prevent it.

"The lesson in all this is we need historical humility," says Daniel C. Peterson, author of "Muhammad, Prophet of God." "It's stunning for us to look back now and say, how can people face themselves in the mirror after doing what they did, but they did."

But what did the founders of the three great Western religions do? Did they have slaves and did they condemn the practice? Or were they, at least on this issue, squarely men of their times?

The answers to these questions are as murky and contradictory as history itself.

What's a slave?

Part of the problem is historical context. Most contemporary people think of slaves as people condemned to a lifetime of bondage, working on plantations and being whipped like oxen.

That kind of slavery did exist during the lives of Moses, Jesus and the Prophet Mohammad. Many slaves were prisoners of war; concubines, gladiators, laborers in salt mines. They could be killed, raped and discarded at any moment.

Yet there were layers of slavery in the ancient world. Many slaves would be seen today as indentured servants, or people trying to pay off debts; royal bodyguards and entrepreneurs, historians say.

Sometimes the slaves became masters. In medieval Egypt, Muslim rulers trained and educated slaves to be their bodyguards. One group of slaves grew so powerful that they overthrew the rulers of Egypt and established their own dynasty, says Ali Asani, a professor of Indo-Muslim and Islamic Languages and Culture at Harvard University.

"Slavery meant different things in different cultures," Asani says. "There wasn't always this sense of powerlessness and oppression. In certain forms, it became an access to power."

In other forms, it became access to freedom, says John Dominic Crossan, one of world's leading scholars on the life and times of Jesus.

That was the case in the world of Jesus. The Roman Empire was the dominant power of Jesus' day, and it survived on the backs of millions of slaves. Yet there was only one mass slave revolt against Rome, which was led by Spartacus, a gladiatorial slave, Crossan says.

The reason there were so few massive slave rebellions against Rome was because some of its slaves had avenues for advancement, dim though they may seem to modern sensibilities.

Slaves could buy their freedom. They ran businesses for their masters or tutored their children. Greek slaves, in particular, were often valued because of their education and culture, he says.

Roman slavery was cruel and capricious, but not all Romans saw slaves as subhuman.

"One of the most extraordinary aspects of Roman slavery," says Crossan, author of "The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus became Fiction about Jesus," was that the Romans ended up with a huge number of slaves who were smarter than their masters."

The uncomfortable historical record

It's been said that great religious figures transcend history. They rise above the peculiar customs of their day to show a new path forward.

It's a matter of debate if Moses, Jesus and the Prophet Mohammad did that with slavery. All three seemed to either ignore or tolerate some forms of slavery, some scholars say.

The parables of Jesus, for example, were full of references to slaves. Terms like “servants” or “stewards” are what we would call slaves today. Yet Jesus doesn’t seem to make any moral judgments about slavery in his parables, Crossan says.

The subject may have been irrelevant to him or his audience, says Crossan, the Jesus scholar. Jesus didn’t own any slaves. Neither did his disciples or the crowds Jesus addressed. They were all too poor and lived under desperate economic circumstances.

“It may well be that the people he talked to were small farmers who would not have the luxury of slaves,” Crossan says. “He [Jesus] doesn’t say anything for or against it.”

Still, Crossan says that he believes that Jesus would have opposed slavery, given the nature of his teachings. Scholars aren’t so certain about Jesus’ most influential disciple, the Apostle Paul.

The man whose writings make up most of the New Testament had to deal with slavery. As Christianity spread through the Roman Empire, many slaves joined the church.

At various parts of the New Testament, Paul seems to accept slavery. He tells slaves to obey their masters. At other times, Paul seems to challenge the morality of slavery. In one New Testament letter, Paul intercedes on behalf of a runaway slave and chides the master for calling himself a Christian and holding a slave.

Crossan, along with some other biblical scholars, says there are actually two versions of Paul in the New Testament: the authentic, “radical” Paul who opposed slavery and a “Pseudo-Paul” inserted into the texts by early church leaders who were afraid of antagonizing Rome.

“It’s one thing to say that Jesus is Lord,” Crossan says. “Now if you’re saying a Christian can’t have slaves, then something must be wrong with slaves. So now you’re attacking the Roman system, which is a slave economy.”

Jesus’ apparent silence on slavery and Paul’s ambiguous statements on the issue had dreadful historical consequences. It helped ensure that slavery would survive well into the 19th century in the U.S., some scholars say.

American Christians who owned slaves had a simple but powerful defense in the run-up to the Civil War. The Old and New Testament sanctioned slavery and, since the Bible is infallible, slavery is part of God’s order, says Mark Noll, author “The Civil War as a Theological Crisis.”

“The defenders of slavery said Jesus condemned quite a few things that were standard in the Old Testament,” Noll says. “He condemned polygamy, violence, easy divorce, but he never condemned slavery.”

Let my people go, but keep the others

Neither did Moses, the founder of Judaism, say other scholars.

There’s no record of Moses owning slaves, but the Mosaic laws permitted and regulated slavery, says Peterson, the author of “Muhammad, Prophet of God” and a religious scholar at Brigham Young University in Utah.

Still, under Mosaic law, a master was encouraged to free slaves and forgive debts after a certain period of time that was called the year of jubilee, Peterson says.

“They were not trying to create a permanent underclass of slaves that went from parents to child and child and grandchildren,” Peterson says of the ancient Israelites.

But how could ancient Israelites sanction any form of slavery given their exodus from Egyptian captivity? Didn’t their God explicitly condemn slavery when he ordered Moses to tell Pharaoh to “let my people go?”

The text is not clear on that question, says Brannon Wheeler, a religious scholar.

He says the Exodus stories suggest that the God of Israel was angry at Pharaoh not for enslaving a group of people, but for unjustly enslaving the "Chosen People" - the people God had promised to give their own homeland.

"In order to make that promise stick, He [God] has to get them out of Egypt," says Wheeler, director of the Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at the United States Naval Academy in Maryland.

"It's not like He [God] says slavery is bad and I want to abolish it."

The Prophet Mohammad never explicitly condemned slavery, and actually owned slaves, some scholars say.

Yet he recognized the humanity of slaves, teaching followers that freeing slaves was an act of piety. He allowed slaves to buy their freedom and demanded that they should be treated with love and respect, says Asani, author of "Celebrating Muhammad: Images of the Prophet in Popular Muslim Poetry."

"He himself did own slaves but he treated them as family," Asani says. "One called Zayd he treated like an adopted son and one of his wives was a Coptic Christian slave."

The followers of men like the Prophet Mohammad, though, would take a harsher attitude toward slaves.

By the time of the crusades, Christians and Muslims were enslaving one another by the thousands. They cited their faith as justification, says Robert C. Davis, author of "Holy War and Human Bondage."

"Religion was the defining principle of slavery—this person is another faith and can be enslaved," Davis says.

Some church leaders preached that enslaving others was an act of evangelism, Davis says.

"One pope said that the justification for slavery was that it was important for spreading the faith," Davis says. "Once they were enslaved, they would more readily take to Christianity."

Those kinds of actions may now seem barbaric, but the texts and stories that were used to justify slavery still exist in the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Few, though, would quote those scriptures today, and many don't even know they exist.

"We shouldn't be surprised," says Jonathan Brockopp, a religion professor at Pennsylvania State University. "Religions redefine themselves and people draw on different stories and underplay other stories. This happens constantly."

It happened with slavery, and, who knows, perhaps it's happening again in our time. There may be a religious practice accepted today that future generations will look upon and ask the same question we ask about people who enslaved others in the name of God:

How could they?

20120329-06	14:36	Pam	Re: Photo: Near Greencastle, Indiana (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #105)
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I love the picture of the covered bridge.

20120329-07	17:28	Art	Re: "Zimmerman Was on the Ground Being Punched When He Shot Trayvon Martin" (reply to Dick & SteveB, FotM newsletter #105)
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Good articles. Found the one on the shooting of young Martin interesting. Think the writer does make a point. For me it has not been about race from the beginning. It is the issue of a grown man armed with a gun shooting a kid

armed with Skittles, and the police saw no reason to investigate beyond a cursory look. That is not right. For the record I also think Rivera had a point. Many, if not most, of the night time 7-11 robberies do show a young, all too often black, young man wearing a hoodie. Stop walking around a neighborhood at night wearing a hoodie. My God, it is Florida after all.

You might enjoy the attached, sage advice by Chris Rock.

"How Not to Get Your A*s Kicked by the Police" video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s61cL6b3hws>

20120329-08	18:05	Pam	Re: "Zimmerman Was on the Ground Being Punched When He Shot Trayvon Martin" (reply to Art, above)
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I always worry about rushing to judgment when I hear a disturbing story like Trayvon's. But the fact that one was armed and the other wasn't is pretty compelling evidence that Zimmerman over-reacted. He should not have been following Trayvon, especially after being told not to. I heard today that the police video shows Zimmerman without blood, scratches, or grass stains. I can't imagine a 17 yr. old kid, even a rascalion, getting aggressive with an armed man. It does not compute. And if Z. did have to defend himself, why not aim low?

20120329-09	18:57	Art	Re: "Zimmerman Was on the Ground Being Punched When He Shot Trayvon Martin" (reply to Pam, above)
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"Rascalion"? Really now Pam, only you and I and maybe SteveB even know what that means. It was murder, plain and simple.

Since 50% of the participants are conveniently dead, we'll probably never know the full details, but gun versus Skittles?? That's enough for me to arrest the shooter pending a full investigation, which is not what the Sanford Police Dept. did.

20120329-10	22:04	SteveG	Fw: 1950's Car Test
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I got 94% - let me know how you do!

[Source of original email unknown. -SteveB]

50's Car Test

Alright you young & older whip per-snappers, let's see how you do. Be honest & no cheating.

The average score is 73% This will really rattle the cobwebs in the 'old brain.

"Car Show Game - 1950s", AmericanTorque.com: <http://www.americantorque.com/game/car-show-50s/>

20120329-11	23:00	SteveB	Re: 1950's Car Test (reply to SteveG, above)
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Damn, you're good, SteveG. I only got 75%. :-)

I couldn't get those Chrysler products. GM is much easier for me because my Dad worked at Allison Div. and always drove GM cars.

I can't wait to hear some other scores! I bet I beat Pam...well, maybe...

<http://indianapublicmedia.org/arts/sculpture-trails-solsberrys-international-melting-pot/>

<http://www.sculpturetrails.com/>

Sculpture Trails Outdoor Museum



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

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