



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE **NEWSLETTER #239 — OCT. 3, 2012**

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Getting Elected Is Only Half the Battle

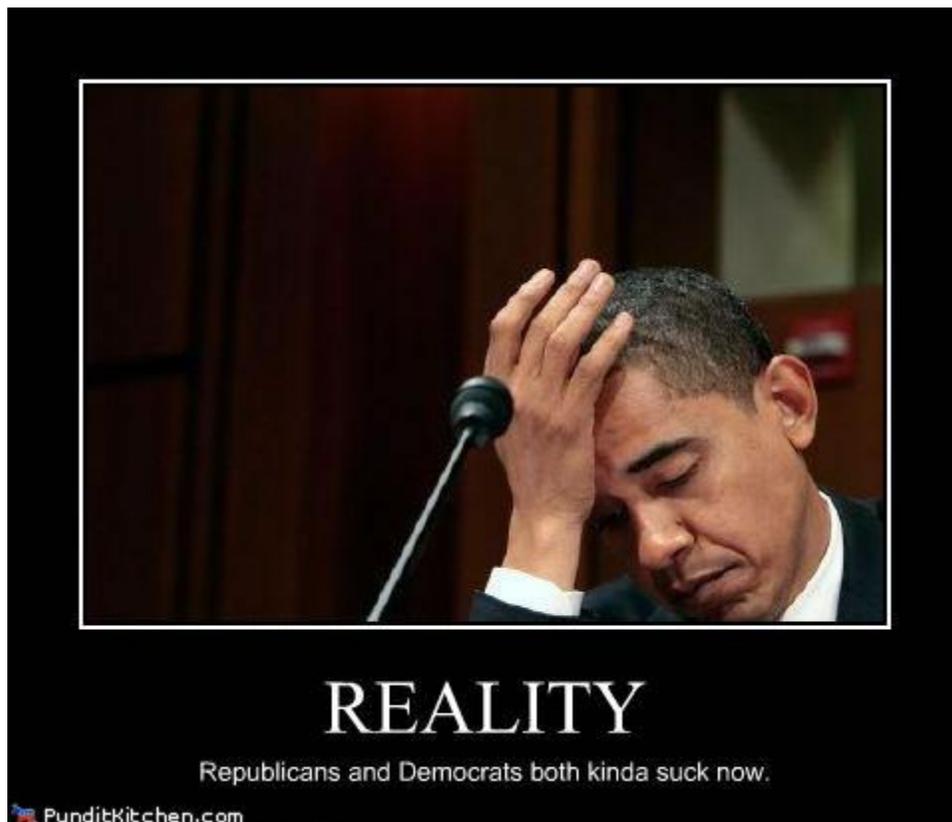
(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Oct. 3, 2012)

Even after R0mney and the Republicans are crushed...

"Why Democrats Still Suck" by Sally Kohn, Salon

Oct. 2, 2012, (http://www.salon.com/2012/10/02/why_democrats_still_suck/)

(They remain the party committed to getting in office and then not doing anything powerful.)



To borrow the old adage, with Democrats like Jerry Brown, who needs Republicans?

After all, the former mayor of the so-called People's Republic of Oakland and now-repeat governor of California, was called "more of a fiscal conservative than Governor Reagan" by *American Conservative* magazine and pilloried in a Dead Kennedy's song as a "hippie-fascist." And now Gov. Brown has vetoed the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights, which would grant basic labor and wage protections to 200,000 nannies, housekeepers and home-health aides in the state.

Across the country, though voters are increasingly divided into increasingly fervent red-versus-blue camps, many Democratic leaders and candidates are little better than Brown. Take Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., who, when he ran for his seat in 2010, cut a TV commercial where he fired a rifle through his party's signature environmental legislation. Or Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., who was the only Democrat in 2011 to vote against a spending bill to keep the government operating until the following fall.

And it was a Democratic mayor in Chicago that tried to crush the teachers' union and push a privatization agenda on public education, and a Democratic governor in New York who gutted public-sector employee pensions.

In other words, while Republicans are stiffening their collective spine and achieving greater (albeit increasingly extreme) ideological cohesion, Democrats remain the party committed to getting in office and not really doing anything powerful once there.

Of course, this is a big part of the reason why progressive voters are frustrated with President Obama. He passed landmark healthcare reform legislation, but his plan relied on strengthening private insurance companies instead of creating a competing, public option. Obama passed a stimulus bill to reenergize the economy, but it was small compared to the scale of need — and most of the spending was on tax cuts, not job creation and public works.

And we can expect, at this week's first presidential debate, focused on domestic policy, that President Obama will be tripping over himself trying to seem more of an anti-deficit hawk than his Republican opponent.

The reality is that, whether it's because we're chronically pessimistic or used to being marginalized or uncomfortable losing in the short term to win down the road, the Democratic rank-and-file continue to let our party stray toward the center. While the Tea Party has exacted revenge even against any Republican who dares work in a bipartisan fashion on mainstream legislation, Democrats can barely get their candidates to stop bashing their own party in public let alone vote in support of a liberal agenda. Yet conservative Republicans have been willing to elect extremist nut jobs in primaries who have no chance of winning in the general election (see, for example, Christine O'Donnell, Sharron Angle, Todd Akin) because they're willing to play the long game. And watching the Republican mainstream move steadily to the right on everything from shutting down the federal government to shutting down Planned Parenthood and, well, shutting down everything in between, the success of that patient but principled strategy is evident.

Earlier this year, two centrist Democratic members of the House of Representatives were defeated by more liberal candidates in Pennsylvania primaries, because the incumbents — Jason Altmire and Tim Holden — had opposed healthcare reform and climate change legislation. And the new, more liberal candidates seem likely to pull off victories (if Pennsylvania's new voter disenfranchisement laws don't stop them). And in Massachusetts, the innovative Progressive Campaign Change Committee effectively drafted Elizabeth Warren to run for the Senate and has been backing her very strong and very progressive campaign. So being both principled and victorious as Democrats is possible. It's just not that common.

While the conservative base's barking against Mitt Romney is so loud you could strap them on the top of a car and still hear the yelling, progressive irritation with President Obama and the likes of McCaskill, Manchin, Brown and many others is often repressed until after the election. Too much is at stake, we reason. We can't risk helping elect Republicans. Which is, of course, always true — and therefore always wielded like a threat above our heads, keeping us compliant. I'm not saying there's anything structural we can do at this point about this election, so let's all get out there and put on our blue shirts and hats and knock on doors and cheer for the Democrats. But on Nov. 7, progressives should do some soul searching about why we don't command respect from the Democratic Party — and how we're going to change that.

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20121002-03	07:01	MarthaH	Re: "Fire Congress, Vote Out Incumbents" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #238)
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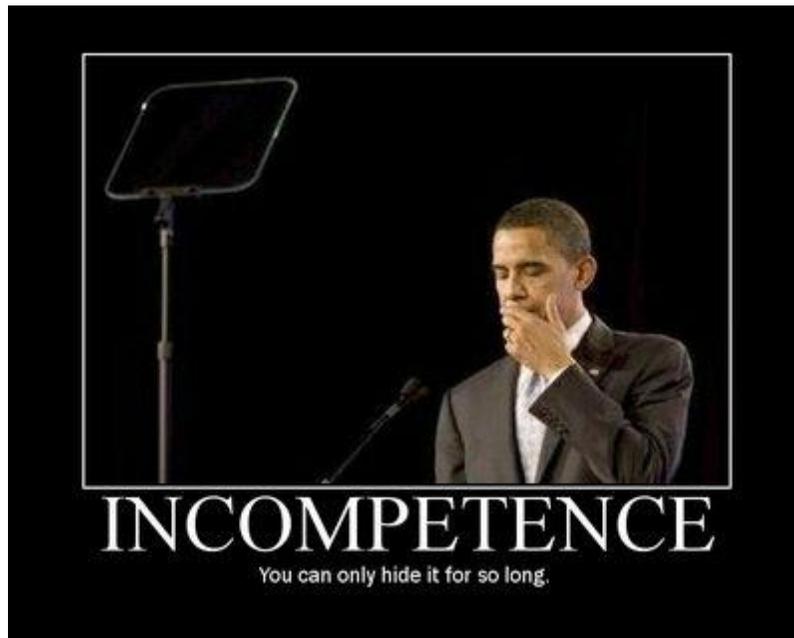
You can also look at the re-elected state and local officials. People think only the presidency is relevant enough for their voter attention--and you can guess why, \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$. The name recognition of the incumbents puts them "out there" to the unknown/often drafted, I presume, challenger who has no money from the higher ups to challenge. Murdock, in Indiana, is an example of how a block vote got him a state job which then got him "tapped" to run for the US Senate. When our majority is "R," blind voting for the ones below governor is rampant. Rarely do we hear a peep from anyone else on the ballot--maybe attorney general when there has been controversy. State treasurer-"Is there one?" most would say. My students were probably among the VERY few who had to learn about state-level and county-level politics! Nothing Murdock did truly got his name before the voters until they faced the ballot. Mitch Daniels worked hard at name recognition when he returned to IN, and I will give him that it was clever. He came on as the "good old boy on a Harley" while now Pence has the verbal ability of a talk show host and looks of charm and dignity. Strangely, he is not saying much about what he will do on the Far Right as an agenda, and no one seems to be asking. Writing off the "D" challenger who has no \$\$\$\$\$\$ to charm...voters seem oblivious. Right now the hype is about football! I always taught the kids that the President of the United States does NOT CARE about the conditions of your roads or local hospital. He has BIG fish...but you live every day with local consequences. Pay is low, fame non-existent, and expertise too often lacking. It's either a second career or a starter job. No one notices the work until a till is entered and that makes headlines. Everyone wants the service to be good, but no one wants to do the labor.

I am thinking/HOPING that the Indiana record of splitting a ticket will prevent Murdock from winning. Gregg doesn't seem to have a chance against Pence, one of the thugs of the Right in the House. Never mind policy differences...WHERE is voter passion???????????????? It's lost in the latest electronics, kids' sports, gimmicks and STUFF. Most voters would, tragically, be flabbergasted to see things away from their own little worlds, let alone live "that" way. Witness Mittens. Underlying it all, I see a disinterest in fixing anything related to government. People don't study issues, just go for a sound bite/lie/ad...and I am back to preaching about the need for EDUCATION of the voters. States finagle over photo ID's to vote, but say nothing about knowledge for wise decisions....hmmmmmm....a little sarcasm to end the rant!

20121002-01	05:17	SteveB	"Republicans Finally Admit Silliness of Obama TelePrompTer Caricature"
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"Republicans Finally Admit Silliness of Obama TelePrompTer Caricature" by Chris Weigant, Huffington Post

Oct. 1, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-weigant/republicans-finally-admit_b_1930814.html?utm_hp_ref=politics)



You'll have to forgive the pundit world of late. Political wonks are all in a collective breath-holding moment, as we all sit nervously awaiting the first presidential debate of the season. We tell each other that it's going to be a big event -- possibly the biggest -- in the race for the White House, whether we actually believe this to be true or not. But because we're all waiting for the main event, there is actually time to sit back and examine how Republicans are proving that one of their own put-downs of President Obama was laughable nonsense from the very get-go. I speak (without notes, to be snarky) of "TelePrompTer Obama" -- the caricature that stated that Barack Obama was nothing more than a good speech-giver, and absolutely could not function speaking in public without the crutch of a prepared speech scrolling past his eyes.

This caricature began approximately the day Obama took office, and has been used scathingly by Republicans over the past four years. Obama was nothing more than a puppet, Republicans sneered, tied by the strings of his TelePrompTer, and unable to form a coherent thought or sentence on his own.

This was all ridiculous nonsense, of course, but that didn't stop the Republican Party from having a field day with it. Politicians have been using these devices since the time they were invented -- yes, even Republican politicians such as (say it softly) Ronald Wilson Reagan. The whole slur made about as much sense in the modern world as denouncing a politician for speaking into a microphone. TelePrompTers are hardly "new-fangled" devices, to put it another way. They've been around and been used for decades (although, as we've noted before, the media still has a major problem with the odd capitalization in the brand name, much the same way they got confused over "Etch A Sketch" and "Chick-fil-A" of late... but I digress).

Republicans had all kinds of fun building their caricature of President Obama as somehow lost without his TelePrompTer crutch, for years. Until this past weekend. Watching the Sunday political chatfests on television meant listening to Republican after Republican extol to the skies President Obama's ability as a standalone debater. Obama was masterful, Obama was best talking off-the-cuff, Obama was one of the greatest political speakers of our time. This was coming from Republicans, mind you.

It's all part of a game, of course, which both sides play. The name of this game is "Lower the Media's Expectations." Surrogates flood the airwaves right before a big debate talking up their opponent's debating abilities. This sets the bar very high for the opponent, and sets it as low as possible for your guy or gal. Here is Mitt Romney's running mate, Paul Ryan, playing this game on Fox News Sunday yesterday:

"Look, President Obama is a very -- he's a very gifted speaker. The man's been on the national stage for many years. He's an experienced debater. He's done these kinds of debates before. This is Mitt's first time on this kind of a stage."

But by doing so, Ryan exposes not only his own doublethink on the issue, but the Republican Party's larger idiocy in perpetuating this "empty chair" caricature of President Obama's speaking abilities. Paul Ryan's own hypocrisy is easy to see, since he regularly cracks TelePrompTer jokes out on the campaign trail. The punchline of the joke remains the same: Obama is so pathetic that he needs a TelePrompTer, but Ryan is so gosh-darned manly that he is able to speak without one. What gives the lie to this hogwash is that not only Mitt Romney, but also virtually every Republican who spoke at the party's recent national convention used this supposed tool of the Devil. Somehow America is expected to believe that TelePrompTers are laughable and proof of ignorance only when used by Democrats (and by one Democrat in particular). The most amusing irony appears when some hapless Republican cracks an Obama TelePrompTer joke while themselves reading from the device which they are mocking.

It would have been nice if any of the Sunday show moderators (who always style themselves "journalists," often with very little to back this assertion up) had pounced this weekend on the Republicans' doublethink. By pumping up Obama's debating skills as high as they could get away with, Republicans were, in essence, admitting that the whole TelePrompTer slam was, at heart, not only wrong but downright silly. So why was the "irony radar" of these well-paid and well-coiffed "journalists" seemingly broken? This was an entirely predictable event, since surrogates always play the expectations game right before a big debate. It wasn't too hard to see this coming.

To put this another way, I would have paid good money to see someone ask: "How can you sit here and tell me Obama is a great debater, when you've been mocking him for four years as a man who is incapable of speaking without a TelePrompTer? **Were you lying to us then, or are you lying to us now?**"



"We have a level 4 Mop Situation, West Wing. Henshaw is screwing with the President's urninal-prompter again."



President Obama reads a prepared statement to members of the press corps inside an elementary school in Falls Church, Virginia*

*Tommy Christopher hardest hit

20121002-02	05:41	SteveB	"My Take: 'I'm Spiritual but Not Religious' Is a Cop-Out"
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"My Take: 'I'm Spiritual but Not Religious' Is a Cop-Out" by Alan Miller, CNN

Sept. 29, 2012, (<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/09/29/my-take-im-spiritual-not-religious-is-a-cop-out/?iref=obinsite>)

(Editor's note: Alan Miller is Director of The New York Salon and Co-Founder of London's Old Truman Brewery. He is speaking at The Battle of Ideas at London's Barbican in October.)

The increasingly common refrain that "I'm spiritual, but not religious," represents some of the most retrogressive aspects of contemporary society. The spiritual but not religious "movement" - an inappropriate term as that would suggest some collective, organizational aspect - highlights the implosion of belief that has struck at the heart of Western society.

Spiritual but not religious people are especially prevalent in the younger population in the United States, although a recent study has argued that it is not so much that people have stopped believing in God, but rather have drifted from formal institutions.

It seems that just being a part of a religious institution is nowadays associated negatively, with everything from the Religious Right to child abuse, back to the Crusades and of course with terrorism today.

Those in the spiritual-but-not-religious camp are peddling the notion that by being independent - by choosing an "individual relationship" to some concept of "higher power", energy, oneness or something-or-other - they are in a deeper, more profound relationship than one that is coerced via a large institution like a church.

That attitude fits with the message we are receiving more and more that "feeling" something somehow is more pure and perhaps, more "true" than having to fit in with the doctrine, practices, rules and observations of a formal institution that are handed down to us.

The trouble is that "spiritual but not religious" offers no positive exposition or understanding or explanation of a body of belief or set of principles of any kind.

What is it, this "spiritual" identity as such? What is practiced? What is believed?

The accusation is often leveled that such questions betray a rigidity of outlook, all a tad doctrinaire and rather old-fashioned.

But when the contemporary fashion is for an abundance of relativist "truths" and what appears to be in the ascendency is how one "feels" and even governments aim to have a "happiness agenda," desperate to fill a gap at the heart of civic society, then being old-fashioned may not be such a terrible accusation.

It is within the context of today's anti-big, anti-discipline, anti-challenging climate - in combination with a therapeutic turn in which everything can be resolved through addressing my inner existential being - that the spiritual but not religious outlook has flourished.

The boom in megachurches merely reflects this sidelining of serious religious study for networking, drop-in centers and positive feelings.

Those that identify themselves, in our multi-cultural, hyphenated-American world often go for a smorgasbord of pick-and-mix choices.

A bit of Yoga here, a Zen idea there, a quote from Taoism and a Kabbalah class, a bit of Sufism and maybe some Feng shui, but not generally a reading and appreciation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Karma Sutra* or the Qur'an, let alone The Old or New Testament.

So what, one may ask?

Christianity has been interwoven and seminal in Western history and culture. As Harold Bloom pointed out in his book on the King James Bible, everything from the visual arts, to Bach and our canon of literature generally would not be possible without this enormously important work.

Indeed, it was through the desire to know and read the Bible that reading became a reality for the masses - an entirely radical moment that had enormous consequences for humanity.

Moreover, the spiritual but not religious reflect the "me" generation of self-obsessed, truth-is-whatever-you-feel-it-to-be thinking, where big, historic, demanding institutions that have expectations about behavior, attitudes and observance and rules are jettisoned yet nothing positive is put in replacement.

The idea of sin has always been accompanied by the sense of what one could do to improve oneself and impact the world.

Yet the spiritual-but-not-religious outlook sees the human as one that simply wants to experience "nice things" and "feel better." There is little of transformation here and nothing that points to any kind of project that can inspire or transform us.

At the heart of the spiritual but not religious attitude is an unwillingness to take a real position. Influenced by the contribution of modern science, there is a reluctance to advocate a literalist translation of the world.

But these people will not abandon their affiliation to the sense that there is "something out there," so they do not go along with a rationalist and materialistic explanation of the world, in which humans are responsible to themselves and one another for their actions - and for the future.

There is a world of fence-sitting, not-knowingness, but not-trying-ness either. Take a stand, I say. Which one is it? A belief in God and Scripture or a commitment to the Enlightenment ideal of human-based knowledge, reason and action? Being spiritual but not religious avoids having to think too hard about having to decide.

from *Guns & Patriots*:

When someone asks you Nov. 7: "How could Romney lose?" What will you say?

I will say that W. Mitt Romney tried to win without conservatives, in particular without the support of pro-lifers, members of the Tea Party and finally, supporters of restoring gun rights.

As President Barack Obama in speeches sets the table for "responsible gun ownership" in his second term, the gun control crowd is fired up. Naturally, gun owners and supporters of restoring gun rights wait for Romney to stand up as their leader against the gun grabbers.

The Romney campaign walked away from Michigan and Pennsylvania in August without the slightest effort to energize the gun owners. Don't they vote? Don't they vote in huge numbers in both states?

Supporters of restoring gun rights vote in huge numbers in Michigan, Pennsylvania--and they can deliver Virginia, Ohio, Florida, three states Romney is willing to lose if it means asking for help from fellow Americans that he and his staff view as nut jobs.

Yes, they do. But, the Romney campaign seems to be playing another game. Yes, they want the White House, but they don't want to share it with regular people the Republican Party relies on to hold signs, make phone calls and give folks a ride to the polls.

—Neil W. McCabe, Editor, *Guns & Patriots*

"Unresolved Fiscal Cliff Could Raise Taxes for 90 Percent of U.S. Families" (w/ video) by Wyatt Andrews, CBS News

Oct. 1, 2012, (http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57524033/unresolved-fiscal-cliff-could-raise-taxes-for-90-percent-of-u.s-families/)

Monday marks the first day of the federal government's new fiscal year, but there is not much to celebrate because we are headed toward what's being called a fiscal cliff.

There were dire new warnings Monday about what will happen to American families unless Congress and the president reach a budget deal by December 31. That is the day that several tax cuts will expire, and big cuts in federal spending will take hold.

Tax experts said 90 percent of American families are facing what they will call "unprecedented tax increases."

According to the non-partisan Tax Policy Center, the U.S. is on the threshold of one of the largest tax increases in history, a tax hike that could average \$3,500 for every American household.

Without actions from Congress, the report says taxes will go up next year by 20 percent, or \$536 billion overall. It will hit Americans at every income level including those living below the poverty line. For a middle income family making \$40,000 per year, the tax increase is \$2,000.

The increases are so large because the nation's biggest tax cuts all expire three months from now on New Year's Day. They include the Bush-era federal income tax cuts, the payroll tax cut that lowered Social Security and Medicare taxes, and several remaining stimulus tax cuts. They all go away January 1 unless Congress and the president reach a deal on the budget.

Many economists are concerned that a tax increase of that size will shock the economy and trigger a recession by reducing the cash taxpayers have to spend. But now, Congress and the president have a firm price tag on what it costs if they don't reach a budget deal after the election.

"Fiscal Cliff Countdown" by U.S. Chamber of Commerce, (http://www.friendsoftheuschamber.com/fiscal-cliff?utm_source=friends&utm_medium=daily_news&utm_campaign=fiscal-cliff)

20121002-06	14:32	Ben	Photo: Today's Lunch at Apple
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Yummy again! Surprise!

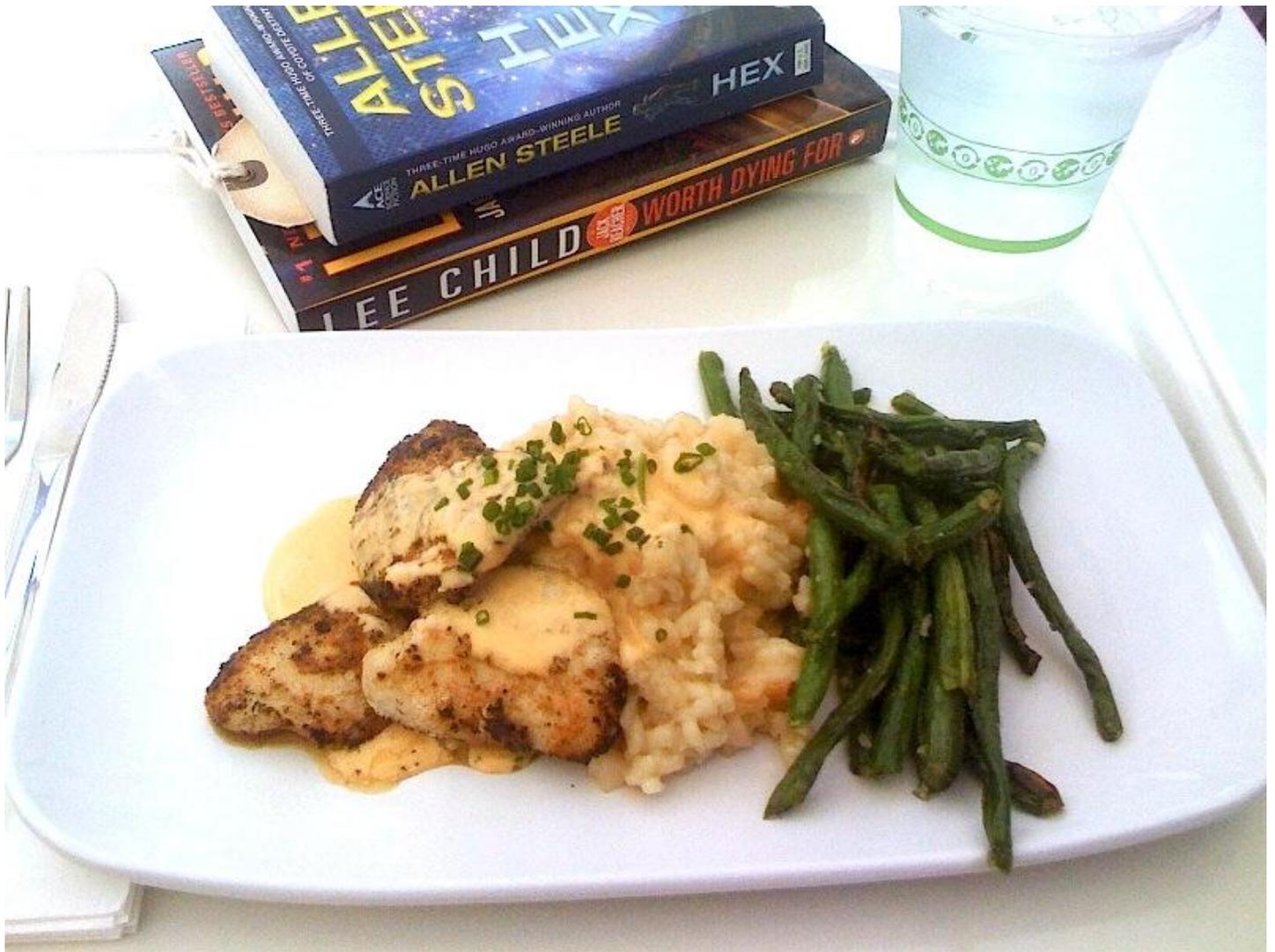
Today's delectable and delightful entrée is a naturally scarce commodity: grouper cheeks. After all, each grouper has only two, and the rest of the fish is most of the fish. So, scarce. Three cheeks comprise a serving; while not huge, they're bigger than they may appear.

In sushi circles, and in much of the world once you get away from North America, fish cheek meat is highly prized. I've had hamachi and tuna cheek, and at least one other kind, but those memories are not recent, so I won't attempt to compare. These tasty triangular tidbits are shaped like tricorn pillows, markedly thicker in the middle bulge, tapering spindle-wise to three rounded tips. The meat is a bit more rich in flavor than grouper body flesh, most but quite firm and quite white. As befits one of the muscles that must be in constant use for the animal to survive, it's resilient, a little springy, and stranded rather than flaky, yet with a grain that forks easily in one direction. Blackened with Cajun seasonings, these delicious line-caught wild Atlantic Ocean fish morsels were a dish you won't see offered just anywhere.

Complementing this fine fare were sauteed green beans, and a show-stealing and sumptuous Parmesan shrimp risotto. This risotto was the real deal, with butter, cream and sharp Parmesan cheese in perfect proportions; the pasta niblets seem to have absorbed their final moisture from the sauce, thickening it so that the dish was cohesive, the pasta al dente, flavored through with pungent cheese and the rich fullness of cream. Generous chunks of big fresh Texas Gulf shrimp, perfectly lightly cooked, made this salad savory -and- luxurious.

It is my understanding that both this and the cheeks were whipped up by the Bistro's new chef, whom I believe to be Kelly. I will need to learn how she spells it.

I look forward to eating more of Kelly's fine work.



Blackened Grouper Cheeks with Parmesa, Shrimp Salad, and Sautéed Green Beans

<http://sweetpollyfood.blogspot.com/2012/09/frenchys-original-cafe-clearwater-beach.html>



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

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