

MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE®

ISSUE No. 21

OCTOBER 2008

IN THIS ISSUE: WE CONTINUE OUR EXPLORATION OF HOW OUR PROCESS OF SELF-DEFINITION THROUGH VALIDATION AND DIFFERENTIATION PLAYS AN ACTIVE, AND SOMETIMES DETERMINANT, ROLE IN OUR NATIONAL POLICIES AND HOW WIDELY THESE METHODS ARE SPREAD THROUGH INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS ACADEMIA, THE CLERGY, THE MILITARY AND JUDICIARY. WE CONSIDER THE NATURE AND DUTY OF GOOD GOVERNMENT AND THE PERSISTENT INABILITY OF OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES TO FOLLOW THEIR CALL.

OUR NEXT ISSUE MAY WELL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT WE HAVE UNDERTAKEN. WE WILL TIE TOGETHER MAJOR TOPICS EXPLORED IN PRIOR ISSUES BY IDENTIFYING A SHARED ELEMENT OF LARGELY UNRECOGNIZED RISK THAT THREATENS OUR NATIONAL LIFE. THIS ELEMENT WARNS OF THE LATENESS OF THE HOUR AND THE URGENT NEED FOR ACTION BY OUR NEXT ADMINISTRATION.

INCOGNITO - PART II

THESE TWO LAST ISSUES ARE TITLED INCOGNITO BECAUSE WE HAVE EMBARKED UPON A WAY OF DISGUISED OUR COUNTRY BY ACTIONS AND VALUES THAT ARE OF RECENT ORIGIN AND WHICH STAND IN CONTRAST TO HOW AMERICANS SAW AND CONDUCTED THEMSELVES UNTIL THEY ASSUMED THE AUTHORITY AND TITLE OF SOLE SUPERPOWER.

DISGUISE, LIKE DEFINITION, IS VERY MUCH PART OF THE HUMAN CONDITION WHICH REGULARLY ASSERTS ITSELF IN MATTERS OF HISTORY, GOVERNMENT OR POLITICS. FRAUGHT AS IT IS WITH INCONSISTENCY, FRAILTY AND ERROR, THE HUMAN CONDITION MUST BE RECOGNIZED FOR WHAT IT IS — THE ONLY ONE WE HAVE.

IT DOES NOT REDUCE EASILY TO JINGLES, SLOGANS OR BAR GRAPHS. THESE CAN REVEAL THE RESULTS OF HUMAN NATURE, BUT NOT THE MYSTERIES OF ITS ESSENCE, ITS ORIGINS OR EVEN THE WAY OR THE WHY OF ITS MANY FORMS. THE HUMAN CONDITION CAN CREATE WONDERFUL INSTITUTIONS WHICH SERVE AS CENTERS FOR OUR EXPRESSION OF LANGUAGE, LAW, JUSTICE, RELIGION AND POLITICS AND WHICH IN OUR COUNTRY HAVE MOSTLY SPOKEN WITH ONE VOICE FOR MANY PEOPLE. THIS IS IMPORTANT, FOR SPEAKING IS LANGUAGE IN ACTION, AND LANGUAGE IS ONE OF HUMANITY'S OLDEST AND MOST NECESSARY INSTITUTIONS WITH THE POWER TO UNITE OR TO DIVIDE.

OUR INSTITUTIONS CAN BE FRAGILE. TO SERVE THEIR PURPOSE THEY MUST BE HONORED, ENERGIZED, NOURISHED AND

MAINTAINED. IF THEY ARE ALLOWED TO BECOME CONTAMINATED BY, OR PUT TO, PETTY PURPOSES, THEY WILL FAIL, AND IN DOING SO WILL OFFER A VERY CREDIBLE ANSWER TO "WHO LOST AMERICA?"

IN OUR SOCIETY, HUMAN NATURE AND POLITICS MAKE STRANGE BEDFELLOWS. ONE OR THE OTHER REGULARLY DELIVERS A POKE IN THE EYE, A JAB IN THE RIBS OR SUFFERS A LEG SPASM. THEY SEEM TO HAVE SHARED OUR TIME AND TRUST TOO LONG.

* * *

GOOD GOVERNMENT SHOULD PRODUCE AN ATMOSPHERE OF NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY CREATED FOR THE PEOPLE BY THE COMBINED EFFORTS OF THEIR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES. DIVISIONS WILL ALWAYS EXIST AS TO GOVERNMENT'S DIRECTION, AND DECISIONS MUST BE RESOLVED BY THE OBJECTIVE APPLICATION OF BOTH PERSONAL AND POLITICAL INTEGRITY. THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE FIRM AND OPEN AND SHOULD NOT BE BURDENED BY BECOMING A PROVING GROUND FOR EITHER INDIVIDUAL OR PARTY IDEOLOGY.

MANY PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN POLITICS AND OTHER FORMS OF PUBLIC LIFE, LIKE TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEIR ACTIONS RESULT FROM AN ELABORATE OR NOBLE

CENTER FOR PUBLIC CONSCIENCE

P.O. Box 220722
WEST PALM BEACH,
FL 33422-0722

www.
centerforpublic
conscience.org

Email:
moconscience@aol.com

Bromwell Ault

Editor/Founder
Phone (561) 697-2233
Fax (561) 242-9264

Sandra Beck

Publisher
Phone (561) 784-9444
Fax (561) 784-9052

The Center for Public Conscience has no affiliation with or loyalty to any particular political party or movement and none of its principals has ever held an elective or appointive political office; nor will they in the future. It receives no revenue from advertising or any source other than subscription income and voluntary contributions which are tax deductible under section 501(c)3 of the IRS tax code.

The contents of this report are protected by U.S. copyright law. However, reproduction for non-commercial purposes is permitted if full and prompt attribution of the source is included.

THOUGHT PROCESS. THIS IS USUALLY WRONG, THE TRUTH BEING THAT THEY ARE SUBJECT TO THE SAME SEARCH FOR SELF-DEFINITION AS ANYBODY ELSE. THE MOST NOTABLE DIFFERENCE IS THAT THEIR SELF-DELUDING PERSPECTIVE PROVIDES AN EFFECTIVE DISGUISE OF THEIR TRUE PURPOSE AND CAPABILITY. THEY ARE INCOGNITO.

WE LIVE IN A TIME AND PLACE OF CONTINUING IDEOLOGICAL TRENCH WARFARE IN WHICH POLITICS AND IDENTITY ARE SO JOINED THAT EACH EASILY PASSES FOR THE OTHER AND THEIR TRUE FORM IS UNKNOWABLE. IN THIS WARFARE, AT THE HEART OF OUR GOVERNMENT, BROAD CLAIMS AND ACCUSATIONS SUCH AS “TAX AND SPEND”, “SUPPORT OUR TROOPS”, “THE BEST HEALTH (OR SCHOOL) SYSTEM IN THE WORLD”, “FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY”, ETC. ARE LOBBED BACK AND FORTH BY BOTH PARTIES IN A PUNCH/COUNTER PUNCH PROCESS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE COVER IN CAPSULE FORM. THERE IS NO EFFORT TO DEFINE THE NATIONAL INTEREST, NOR HOW WE, OR THEY, CAN SERVE IT.

NOWHERE IS THIS MORE EVIDENT THAN IN THE COMPLEX ISSUE OF HEALTH CARE WHERE ITS MEANING, AND PERHAPS FUTURE, IS REGULARLY CONDENSED INTO TWO PHRASES, “SOCIALIZED MEDICINE” AND “UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE”, THAT APPEAL TO OPPOSITE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES AND HAVE BECOME FAVORED WEAPONS OF BOTH PARTIES. WHILE THESE PHRASES MAY WELL CATCH THE EMOTIONS OF THE MOMENT, THEY DO NOT CARRY THE FORCE OF TRUTH, FOR REALITY IS THAT IN OUR HEALTH CARE ISSUE THE LINES OF UNYIELDING DIVISION FOLLOW ECONOMIC, NOT MEDICAL OR POLITICAL, CONTOURS.

IT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT OVER THE PAST HALF CENTURY FOR OUR GOVERNMENT AND OUR SOCIETY TO DEFINE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST. FOR INSTANCE, THE REPUBLICAN PARTY HAS STEADFASTLY, IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD, ADVOCATED “LOWER TAXES” IN ANY ELECTION IN WHICH IT PARTICIPATES. AND YET, IN OUR PRESENT, ALMOST THIRTY YEAR, PERIOD OF OVERSPENDING AND GOING INTO A “GUNS AND BUTTER” DEBT, WHAT IS IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST? AND IN PROJECTING REPUBLICAN IDEOLOGY TO GOVERNMENT POLICY, WHICH HAS GREATER RESONANCE AND AUTHORITY — “LOWER TAXES” OR “FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY”?

SIMILARLY, IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT THE DEMOCRATS’ HISTORICAL COMMITMENT TO SPENDING FOR BROAD SOCIAL GOALS SHOULD

BE RESTRAINED IN DEFERENCE TO OUR STEADILY INCREASING DEFICITS AND DEBT. THESE KINDS OF CONFLICT IN MATTERS OF HEALTH AND FINANCE ARE ALL TOO FREQUENT AND CLEAR, AND THE INABILITY OF OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES TO RESOLVE THEM IS KEY TO ANSWERING THE QUESTION “WHO LOST AMERICA?”

RELIGION’S IMPACT ON OUR NEAR EASTERN POLICY WAS ACCORDED SPECIFIC AND PROMINENT MENTION IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE. FREEDOM OF RELIGION IS ONE OF THE MOST BASIC FREEDOMS GUARANTEED BY MEMBERS OF THE FREE WORLD AND WAS ENSHRINED IN THE UN CHARTER AT THE TIME OF ITS FOUNDING. HOWEVER, SIXTY YEARS LATER MUSLIM/CHRISTIAN CONFLICT IS MORE INTENSE AND WIDESPREAD THAN EVER.

OUR FOUNDING FATHERS’ INTENT WAS TO ALLOW EVERY PERSON TO MAKE A RELIGIOUS CHOICE, OR NO CHOICE, THEREBY GRANTING THE INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN THE GREATEST POSSIBLE SPIRITUAL FREEDOM. TODAY THIS FREEDOM IS ATTACKED AND CONFINED BY THOSE ON THE FAR LEFT WHO OPPOSE ALL RELIGION (I.E., SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS) AS WELL AS THOSE MOSTLY CHRISTIAN EVANGELICALS ON THE FAR RIGHT WHO WANT OTHERS TO CONFORM TO THEIR BELIEFS AND WAYS, WITH THE RESULT THAT OUR RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE TODAY IS A FAR MORE TROUBLED ONE THAN OUR FOUNDERS FACED. BUT TRUE FREEDOM OF RELIGION IS NOT MERELY A MATTER OF GOVERNMENT POLICY, AS IT MUST SUCCEED AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL TO REACH BEYOND POLICY AND ACHIEVE REALITY.

AND IT IS AT OUR NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL THAT WE DEFINE OURSELVES RELIGIOUSLY BY VALIDATION AND DIFFERENTIATION. SO FAR, MOST OF THE RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN OUR COUNTRY HAS RESULTED FROM ROMAN CATHOLIC/PROTESTANT DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. IT HAS ILL PREPARED US FOR THE NEW MOSQUE ACROSS TOWN WITH ITS DIFFERENT ARCHITECTURE AND DOGMA, AND THE DRESS AND APPEARANCE OF THOSE WHO WORSHIP THERE. IN THE END, OUR ACCEPTANCE OF THE MUSLIM RELIGIOUS PRESENCE IN AMERICA WILL DEPEND UPON WHETHER THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY ALLOWS ITS MOSQUES TO ACT AS POLITICAL CENTERS AS HAS HAPPENED IN ENGLAND. HERE, AS THERE, IF THEY DO, VIOLENCE WILL LIKELY RESULT.

THE EUROPEAN COLONIAL POWERS AFTER WWII WERE MORALLY COMPELLED TO ACCEPT IMMIGRANTS FROM THEIR COLONIES WHO HAD SERVED IN THE ALLIED FORCES, AND THIS

MORAL ELEMENT WAS POLITICALLY EXPANDED BY THE PRESENCE OF THE UN'S FORUM AND THE DIPLOMATIC CENTER IT PROVIDED TO ITS GROWING POST-COLONIAL MEMBERSHIP. WITHIN A DECADE, THE GRAND-SCALE ECONOMIES IN ENGLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY AND ITALY BEGAN TO SHOW SIGNS THAT THE INFLEX FROM THEIR FORMER COLONIES WAS CREATING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS. THESE HAVE MULTIPLIED AND INTENSIFIED TO THE POINT WHERE DEEP SOCIAL AND JUDICIAL DIVISIONS NOW ARE WIDESPREAD AND HAVE THE ABILITY TO DAMAGE, AND EVEN DOMINATE, THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

WE, OF COURSE, WERE ABLE TO OBSERVE THE EUROPEAN COURSE OF EVENTS WITHOUT LEARNING FROM THEM AND, AS WE HAD NO COLONIAL IMMIGRATION SOURCE, SET OUT TO CONSTRUCT AN IMMIGRANT INFLOW OF OUR OWN WITHOUT BOTHERING TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN LEGAL AND ILLEGAL ARRIVALS. NOT SURPRISINGLY, IN A SHORT TIME WE WERE #1. TODAY BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES AGREE THAT THE SYSTEM IS BROKEN, BUT NOT HOW TO FIX IT. IN THIS INSTANCE "WHO LOST AMERICA?" IS A QUESTION THAT ANSWERS ITSELF.

THROUGHOUT THE SELF-DEFINITION PROCESS, WHETHER BY VALIDATION OR DIFFERENTIATION, WE MAKE DECISIONS WITH ALMOST THE SPEED OF LIGHT THAT PRESENT OURSELVES TO OTHERS IN A WAY THAT INDICATES WE ARE RIGHT, WHAT WE DO IS GOOD AND/OR WE ARE THE BEST. THESE ARE POWERFUL MOTIVATORS ALL OF WHICH CARRY ELEMENTS DESIGNED TO CREATE APPROVAL OF OUR ACTIONS. SOCIETIES DIFFER IN HOW THEY EMPHASIZE THESE VALUES, AND, UNFORTUNATELY, IN PRESENT-DAY AMERICA LAYING CLAIM TO BEING THE BEST, "WE'RE #1", HAS BECOME OUR NATIONAL MANTRA.

RATHER THAN ENHANCE OUR IMAGE, ITS OBVIOUS NOTE OF BRAVADO DIMINISHES IT AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, OBSCURES THE IMMENSE CORRECTIVE EFFORT WE MUST UNDERTAKE TO RECAPTURE OUR ABANDONED PRINCIPLES.

NATIONS DEFINE THEMSELVES, AS INDIVIDUALS DO, AND SEEK THE APPROVAL OF OTHER NATIONS THROUGH FOREIGN POLICY. THIS IS NOT EASY BECAUSE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS THERE ARE ALWAYS GAMES WITHIN GAMES, CIRCLES WITHIN CIRCLES AND MAZES WITHIN MAZES. THE COLD WAR PERMITTED MOST INTERNATIONAL CONFRONTATIONS OF ITS TIME TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH ONE OR THE OTHER SIDE, THEREBY SIMPLIFYING WHAT WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN MORE DIFFICULT POLITICAL AND EMOTIONAL CHOICES. AS THE COLD WAR EXTENDED ITS REACH AND ITS RISK/REWARD, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT BOTH PARTIES RATCHETED UP THEIR ASSERTIONS THAT THEY WOULD BRING TRUTH, STRENGTH AND BENEFITS TO ALL.

SINCE THE COLD WAR'S END, AMERICA HAS EXPERIENCED A GROWING LOSS OF RESPECT IN ITS FOREIGN RELATIONS CULMINATING IN THE MILITARY AND OTHER RELATED CONTRADICTIONS OF OUR PRINCIPLES THAT HAVE RESULTED FROM OUR INVASION/OCCUPATION OF IRAQ. THE FACE THAT WE REVEAL TO OUR FELLOW NATIONS MAY PERMIT US TO WEAR A MASK, TO GO INCOGNITO, FOR A WHILE, BUT IN FOREIGN RELATIONS TRUTH IS ACCELERATED BY THE INTERPLAY OF INTERESTS, AND CAN ONLY BE HELD IN CHECK TEMPORARILY BY THE SPIN, HYPE AND ARTIFICE THAT ARE ON IMMEDIATE CALL TO

THE MODERN STATE.

IN ORDER TO POSITIVELY ALTER OUR IMAGE AND REGAIN OUR CREDIBILITY ABROAD WE MUST DECLARE AND HONOR OUR HISTORICAL PRINCIPLES AT HOME. THIS WILL REQUIRE US TO RECOGNIZE AND RESTORE OUR IMAGE OF OURSELVES AND OUR ORIGINAL VALUES, AND THEN TO RESTRUCTURE GOVERNMENT SO THAT IT SERVES THEM. ONCE THIS IS IN PROCESS, GOVERNMENT CAN AGAIN ACT IN OUR NATIONAL INTEREST.

* * *

OUR JUDICIARY IS AN AREA OF OUR NATIONAL LIFE THAT HAS UNDERGONE SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN RECENT YEARS, INCLUDING SELF-DEFINITION BY JUDGES. WE LIVE IN A TIME THAT HAS WITNESSED A PRONOUNCED ALTERATION OF THE ROLE OF OUR COURTS. SOME VIEW THIS AS JUDICIAL ACTIVISM, WHILE OTHERS REGARD IT AS A CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF NOT ONLY THE LANGUAGE OF THE CONSTITUTION, BUT ALSO ITS INTENT, WHETHER SPECIFIED OR NOT.

WE CAN BOTH DEFINE OURSELVES, AND BE DEFINED, BY OUR CAREERS. NOTABLE EXAMPLES ARE DOCTORS, THE CLERGY AND THE MILITARY AND, OF COURSE, THE JUDICIARY'S ATTACHMENT TO THE LAW. IN THE LATTER, SOMETIMES THE NEED IS SO STRONG THAT JUDGES IGNORE OR CONTRADICT ACTUAL FACT, CITE NON-EXISTENT PRECEDENT OR REFUTE ESTABLISHED LAW, THEREBY INVITING AN APPEAL PROCESS. STILL, IT HAPPENS, AS JUDGES HAVE A UNIQUELY POWERFUL ADVANTAGE IN PUSHING THEIR PERSONAL BELIEFS IN THAT THEY CAN WRITE THEM INTO THE LAW UNDER WHICH WE ALL MUST LIVE.

THERE IS A STRONG BODY OF LEGAL, AND NON-LEGAL, OPINION TODAY THAT VIEWS THE CONSTITUTION AS BEING WRITTEN ON RUBBER THAT CAN BE STRETCHED TO DEAL WITH ALMOST ANY SOCIAL OR HUMAN PROBLEM THAT APPEARS IN COURT. THAT OUR CONSTITUTION WAS NOT DESIGNED TO RESOLVE CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ISSUES WAS CLEARLY STATED BY CHIEF JUSTICE WARREN BURGER IN 1982 WHEN HE WROTE:

"THE CONSTITUTION DOES NOT PROVIDE A CURE FOR EVERY SOCIAL ILL OR VEST JUDGES WITH A MANDATE . . . TO REMEDY EVERY SOCIAL PROBLEM"¹

AND YET, IN THE LANGUAGE OF LOCAL, APPELLATE AND EVEN SUPREME COURT DECISIONS ONE CAN FIND READY ACCEPTANCE OF THIS BROADER PURPOSE.

THIS EXPANSION OF THE COURTS' ROLE MAY WELL BE THE RESULT OF OUR SOCIETY'S VASTLY INCREASED USE OF LITIGATION AS, WITH A GROWING NUMBER OF LAWYERS FILING MORE AND MORE CASES, IT IS ONLY NATURAL THAT THEY WILL REACH OUT FOR WHATEVER THEORIES WILL SUPPORT THEIR REPRESENTATION OF THEIR CLIENTS.

THE SUPREME COURT HAS LONG BEEN SEEN AS THE ULTIMATE ARBITER IN OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT — IN EFFECT, "THE COURT OF LAST RESORT", BUT THAT LOFTY POSITION WAS ATTAINED BY ITS ACTING AS INTERPRETER OF

THE LAW. IF IT FINDS ITSELF ATTRACTED TO MAKING LAW, AS SOME RECENT DECISIONS CAN SEEM TO SUGGEST, AND VEERS OFF IN THAT DIRECTION, IT WILL COME INTO CONFLICT WITH THE CONGRESS WHICH ENJOYS THE SOLE AND SPECIFIC AUTHORITY TO MAKE LAW. IF CONGRESS CONCLUDES THAT THE COURT'S ACTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES THREATEN ITS ASSIGNED ROLE IN GOVERNMENT, IT COULD EITHER LEGISLATE AROUND THE SUPREME COURT OR UNDERTAKE TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION.

OUR PRESENTLY HIGHLY POLARIZED CONGRESS MIGHT FIND THESE ACTIONS BEYOND THEIR REACH, ESPECIALLY AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION WHICH IS USUALLY A LONG AND SLOW PROCESS INVOLVING THE CONCURRENCE OF TWO THIRDS OF BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS AND THEN RATIFICATION BY THREE-FOURTHS OF THE STATES' LEGISLATURES.

OF GREATER CONCERN IS THE EFFECT THAT SUCH A DIVISIVE ISSUE MIGHT HAVE ON THE PUBLIC AT A TIME OF DEEP DIVISION OVER OTHER MAJOR ISSUES SUCH AS HEALTH, DEBT, IMMIGRATION, WAR, THE ECONOMY, ETC. TO ADD A CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS DERIVED FROM ARGUMENT OVER THE FUNCTION AND IDENTITY OF OUR BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT MIGHT JUST BE MORE, IN OUR PRESENT POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCE, THAN OUR GOVERNMENT COULD ENDURE.

THIS IS NOT A TOMORROW'S HEADLINE ISSUE, BUT IT IS REAL AND SERIOUS. THE COURT HAS BEEN INFECTED WITH THE SAME POLITICAL POLARIZATION VIRUS THAT DEMEANS THE CONGRESS, AS EVIDENCED BY THE FREQUENCY OF 5-4 DECISIONS. SHOULD WE CONTINUE IN THIS PATTERN, WE ARE LIABLE TO FIND OURSELVES FACING A STALEMATE AS TO MUCH OF THE WORK AND MANY OF THE ISSUES THAT CONFRONT ALL THREE BRANCHES OF OUR GOVERNMENT. WE MIGHT YEARN FOR THE RETURN OF 7-2 OR 8-1 DECISIONS THAT OFFER MORE HOPE OF CONSENSUS AND STABILITY, BUT AT THE CRUX OF THE MATTER IS BOTH THE COURT'S AND THE GENERAL JUDICIARY'S DEFINING VIEW OF THEMSELVES.

* * *

THERE IS NOTHING MORE PERNICIOUS TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT THAN SELECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT. IT STRIKES AT THE VERY FOUNDATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CONCEPT OF THE RELATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CITIZENS. FOR THE LAST HALF CENTURY THIS DISCREPANCY BETWEEN WHAT GOVERNMENT SAYS AND WHAT IT ACTUALLY DOES IS MOST EVIDENT IN ITS BROAD FAILURE TO ENFORCE THE LETTER OR THE INTENT OF ITS OWN IMMIGRATION LAWS. THIS HAS BEEN EXPLORED IN DETAIL IN PREVIOUS ISSUES AND IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO REVISIT IT HERE.

BUT IMMIGRATION IS NOT THE ONLY AREA OF OUR GOVERNMENT THAT SKILLFULLY FORMS AND ALTERS OUR LAWS. WE NEED LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THE FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION (FEC) TO FIND "THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY" AT WORK. THE GOOD IS ITS INTENDED FUNCTION TO ENFORCE OUR CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAWS AFTER WHICH "THE BAD AND THE UGLY" TAKE OVER.

THE FEC IS A SIX-MEMBER BODY SUPPOSED TO INCLUDE BOTH REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS. TODAY IT HAS ONLY 2 MEMBERS AND, AS 4 VOTES ARE NECESSARY TO HAVE A QUORUM, IT IS UNABLE TO FUNCTION IN A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR WHICH IS CONSIDERED TO BE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT AND IN WHICH ENORMOUS SUMS OF MONEY WILL BE SPENT ON A VARIETY OF TECHNIQUES AND TACTICS, SOME OF WHICH MAY NOT COMPLY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF OUR CAMPAIGN LAWS. AS IT IS, THE FEC CAN NEITHER RENDER DECISIONS NOR IMPOSE FINES AND EXISTS PRETTY MUCH IN NAME ONLY. ENFORCEMENT IS NOT AN OPTION.

THIS HAS COME ABOUT BECAUSE SENATE REPUBLICANS HAVE NOT CONFIRMED PROPOSED NOMINATIONS BY DEMOCRATS AND THE LATTER HAVE OPPOSED A CONTROVERSIAL REPUBLICAN NOMINEE. IF WASHINGTON HOLDS TRUE TO FORM, THEN SOMETIME AFTER THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS THE MATTER MAY BE RESOLVED, BUT UNTIL THAT HAPPENS IT WILL BE "NO HOLDS BARRED" BUSINESS AS USUAL ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL.

IN ADDITION TO THE OBVIOUS WAY IN WHICH THE PUBLIC INTEREST IS BEING IGNORED, THERE IS A GROWING "FOX IN CHARGE OF THE HEN HOUSE" FEELING THAT COMES FROM HAVING MEMBERS OF THE FEC DETERMINED BY A POLITICAL PROCESS CENTERED IN THE CONGRESS!

ANOTHER CAUSE FOR PUBLIC CONCERN IS THAT THE MORE THE CONGRESS TRIES TO REWRITE OUR ELECTION LAW, THE MORE IDEOLOGICAL INTERESTS HAVE TO BE SERVED. THE RESULT IS THAT IT THEN MUST BE SUBJECTED TO JUDICIAL REVIEW AND EXPOSED TO FURTHER RECRAFTING ACCORDING TO THE JUDICIARY'S VIEW OF ITS ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY. THE CHANCES ARE THAT THE END RESULT IS MORE CONFUSING THAN THE EARLIER VERSION AND MAY RESTART THE PROCESS BY OPENING NEW AVENUES OF IDEOLOGICAL ATTACK.

RECENTLY THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION GRANTED PERMISSION TO MEXICAN TRUCK DRIVERS WHO CANNOT READ OR UNDERSTAND ENGLISH TO USE OUR HIGHWAYS. WHILE ACTIONS SUCH AS THIS THAT GIVE PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT TO MEXICAN INTERESTS ARE NOT UNUSUAL IN THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, THE DOT ORDER OPPOSED THE FEDERAL MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY ADMINISTRATION (FMCSA) RULES FOR INTERSTATE MOTOR CARRIERS WHICH REQUIRE DRIVERS TO:

"READ AND SPEAK THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUFFICIENTLY TO CONVERSE WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC, TO UNDERSTAND HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SIGNS AND SIGNALS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, TO RESPOND TO OFFICIAL INQUIRIES AND TO MAKE ENTRIES ON REPORTS AND RECORDS."²

THE DOT'S RULING HAS BEEN PROTESTED BY MEMBERS OF AMERICA'S INDEPENDENT TRUCKER'S ASSOCIATION (AITA) AND THOUSANDS OF OTHER TRUCK DRIVERS WHO CLEARLY RECOGNIZE THE DANGER TO THE PUBLIC AND TO THEMSELVES OF TRACTOR-TRAILER RIGS WEIGHING UP TO 80,000 POUNDS AND MOVING AT HIGH SPEEDS BEING OPERATED BY DRIVERS WHO CAN NEITHER READ NOR UNDERSTAND HIGHWAY SIGNS, VEHICLE

IDENTIFICATION OF LOADS/LIMITS AND OTHER INFORMATION IMPORTANT TO MAXIMIZING HIGHWAY SAFETY.

SELECTIVE ENFORCEMENT BECOMES MORE APPARENT IN THIS MATTER BY DOT SECRETARY MARY PETERS' ADMISION THAT THE MEXICAN DRIVERS COVERED BY THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S BORDER DEMONSTRATION PROJECT ARE CLASSIFIED AS "PROFICIENT IN ENGLISH" EVEN IF THEY NEED TO USE THEIR NATIVE SPANISH TO CONVEY THE MEANING OF OUR TRAFFIC SIGNS.³

ACCIDENTS INVOLVING MULTIPLE FATALITIES THAT WERE DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO LACK OF LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION HAVE OCCURRED IN IL, MA AND PA AND HAVE BEEN CALLED TO THE DOT'S ATTENTION, BUT FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF SELECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT, THE MOST GALLING ASPECT OF THE DOT'S POSITION IS THAT IT PERMITS "MEXICAN DRIVERS TO FLOUT THE VERY SAME SAFETY REGULATIONS THAT IT REQUIRES AMERICAN TRUCK DRIVERS TO FOLLOW."⁴

OUR FOUNDERS CREATED A SYSTEM BASED ON FLUID TENSION — PULL HERE AND SNAP BACK THERE. IT IS CONSTANTLY IN MOTION AND HAS DONE A REASONABLY GOOD JOB OF PROTECTING THE NATION FROM EXCESSES OF ALL KINDS, FROM SUDDEN TRANSFERS OF POWER AND FROM THE DEMAGOGUERY FROM WHICH NO DEMOCRACY IS SPARED. THIS IS NO SMALL ACCOMPLISHMENT AND WE HAVE BEEN VERY FORTUNATE.

IN THE NORMAL STRETCHING AND STRAINING OF OUR SYSTEM REASONABLE MEN WITH THE NATION'S BEST INTEREST AT HEART HAVE STRIVEN FOR AN HISTORIC BALANCE BETWEEN OUR THREE BRANCHES, REALIZING THAT FROM TIME TO TIME ADVANTAGE MAY MOVE FROM ONE TO ANOTHER.

THIS DOES NOT SEEM TO BE THE INTENT OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION WHICH SEEMS TO SEEK NOT JUST AN UNUSUALLY STRONG EXECUTIVE BRANCH, BUT RATHER ITS PERMANENT DOMINANCE OVER THE OTHER TWO. THIS DIRECTION HAS BEEN AIDED BY PRESIDENTIAL POWER EXERTED AGAINST CONGRESS VIA REPUBLICAN CONTROL, BY THE PLACEMENT OF PROPONENTS OF EXECUTIVE DOMINANCE IN KEY POSITIONS AT THE JUSTICE, STATE, DEFENSE AND TREASURY DEPARTMENTS, AND BY INITIATING THE PRACTICE OF SIGNING STATEMENTS BY WHICH, WHEN HE SIGNS A BILL TO WHICH HE OBJECTS, THE PRESIDENT IDENTIFIES THOSE PARTS WHICH FAIL TO MEET HIS GOALS AND WHICH HE WILL, THEREFORE, NOT ENFORCE. THIS IS SELECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT AT THE TOP!

PRESIDENT BUSH FREQUENTLY IDENTIFIES AND REFERS TO HIMSELF AS "THE DECIDER". UNFORTUNATELY FOR OUR GOVERNMENT MUCH OF HIS DECIDING HAS TO DO WITH WHICH LAWS HE WILL OR WILL NOT ENFORCE.

WHILE THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION DETERMINEDLY EXPANDED THE FORCE AND REACH OF THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTION, IT SIMULTANEOUSLY RESTRICTED ACCESS TO A WIDE RANGE OF INFORMATION IN NO WAY TIED TO NATIONAL SECURITY BY THE PUBLIC, THE PRESS, SCHOLARS AND OTHER INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS.

MUCH OF THIS INFORMATION HAD NEVER BEEN

PREVIOUSLY CLASSIFIED AND WAS GENERALLY AVAILABLE BY SIMPLE REQUEST OR UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA). BUT AT THE INCEPTION OF HIS PRESIDENCY, BUSH DECLARED THAT NO EXTERNAL REVIEW OF EXTENSIVE RECORDS OF HIS AND HIS FATHER'S TERMS OF OFFICE WOULD THEREAFTER BE PERMITTED. IN EFFECT, THIS REMOVED THE PRESIDENCY FROM THE SCOPE OF THE FOIA WHICH WAS CERTAINLY NEITHER CONTEMPLATED NOR INTENDED AT THE TIME OF ITS PASSAGE.

THE ELDER BUSH COULD HAVE NEUTRALIZED THE SITUATION AND SUPPORTED OPEN GOVERNMENT HAD HE MADE A QUIET, EVEN CASUAL, STATEMENT THAT HE HAD NO PERSONAL OBJECTION TO HIS RECORDS REMAINING OPEN. SADLY, NO SUCH STATEMENT WAS MADE AND ANOTHER BATTLE WAS WON BY THOSE IN GOVERNMENT WHO FAVOR SELECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT.

ALMOST CERTAINLY, BUSH, CHENEY AND THEIR NEOCON COHORTS VIEW THEIR TRANSFORMATION OF EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY AS A "WIN". FOR OUR NATION AND OUR HISTORIC DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, HOWEVER, IT CONSTITUTES A SERIOUS LOSS AND BREACH OF FAITH.

* * *

IN OUR SOCIETY WE FIND NUMEROUS OCCUPATIONS THAT REQUIRE THEIR PRACTITIONERS TO WEAR UNIFORMS — MERCHANT MARINE, AIRLINES AND PASSENGER SHIPS, POSTAL EMPLOYEES, JUDGES, FIRE AND POLICE, SALVATION ARMY, CONCIERGES AND OTHER HOTEL PERSONNEL, ATHLETIC TEAMS, SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS, ETC. AND, MOST PROMINENTLY, THERE ARE WHAT WE REFER TO AS OUR UNIFORMED SERVICES — ARMY, NAVY, AIR FORCE, COAST GUARD AND MARINES. WHAT THEY ALL HAVE IN COMMON IS THAT, FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER, THEY WANT THEIR MEMBERS TO DRESS THE SAME WAY, TO APPEAR UNIFORM — IN ONE FORM.

THE FIRST USE OF GROUP UNIFORMS PROBABLY DATES BACK TO THE EARLIEST NATIONAL CULTURES THAT EMPLOYED STANDING ARMIES SUCH AS CHINA AND EGYPT. FOR THESE FORCES A UNIFORM PROVIDED COHESIVENESS VIA VISUAL EQUALITY AND A READY MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION THAT WAS CRITICAL IN HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT. IN OUR MISSILE AGE, COHESION/EQUALITY IS THE DOMINANT FACTOR AND IS BASIC TO THE DISCIPLINE STRUCTURE THAT MUST BE DEVELOPED AND MAINTAINED.

BUT, NOT SURPRISINGLY, SOME PEOPLE IN THE MILITARY, AS IN OTHER CALLINGS, ARE MORE "EQUAL" THAN OTHERS. VARIATIONS IN SKILLS, INTELLIGENCE, ATTITUDE AND CHARACTER APPEAR AND ARE NOTED BY PROMOTION IN RANK, PAY AND AUTHORITY. SUCH RECOGNITION IS INSTITUTIONAL, BUT WE ARE NOT INSTITUTES. WE ARE INDIVIDUALS AND WE DEFINE OURSELVES THROUGHOUT OUR LIFETIMES IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THE MOST OBVIOUS AND PERSISTENT OF WHICH IS BY DIFFERENTIATION. AS OUR MODERN MILITARY IS COMMITTED TO THE PLAIN BROWN, BLUE OR OLIVE GREEN COLORS OF ITS BRANCHES' UNIFORMS, THE ONLY WAY TO INDICATE CHANGE OF STATUS, TO DIFFERENTIATE, IS TO ADD TO THE BASIC UNIFORM.

THIS PROCESS HAS ITS ORIGINS IN THE AWARDING OF

MEDALS FOR CONSPICUOUS BATTLE ACTION. IN TIME, AS MORE DECORATIONS WERE CREATED TO REFLECT MORE WARS, BATTLES, AND CASUALTIES, A SMALL PIECE OF RIBBON THAT COULD EASILY BE ATTACHED TO THE UNIFORMS CAME INTO EVERYDAY USE AS EVIDENCE OF AN AWARD. AT THIS POINT EMPHASIS SEEMS TO HAVE SHIFTED FROM INDIVIDUAL RIBBONS TO THEIR ACCUMULATION. TODAY BADGES AND OTHER INSIGNIA REPRESENTING SKILLS SUCH AS MARKSMANSHIP, A GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OF SERVICE, COMPLETION OF A TRAINING COURSE AND OTHERS HAVE BEEN ADDED TO FURTHER DISTINGUISH THE WEARER.

NOT LONG AGO, SHORTLY FOLLOWING GEN. PETRAEUS' APPEARANCE BEFORE CONGRESS, CHIEF OF STAFF ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN APPEARED ON TV. BOTH OF THESE HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS CARRIED AN ARRAY OF PERHAPS TWENTY-FIVE OR MORE RIBBONS ON THEIR CHESTS AND OTHER INSIGNIA ON THEIR SHOULDERS, SLEEVES, COLLARS, ETC. AND ONE CAN WONDER HOW AND HOW FREQUENTLY THEY ARE TRANSFERRED FROM ONE UNIFORM TO ANOTHER.

THE ELEMENT OF DIFFERENTIATION SEEMED PARTICULARLY EVIDENT IN ADMIRAL MULLEN'S CASE. ON EACH SHOULDER HE WORE IN GOLD BRAID THE FOUR STARS OF HIS RANK, AND THEN WITHIN A SPACE OF SIX INCHES OR LESS THE FOUR STAR RANK REAPPEARED ON HIS SHIRT COLLAR TABS IN THE FORM OF A METALLIC BAR.

IN THE MILITARY EVERY POSSIBLE SYMBOL IS DISPLAYED. SOME REFLECT VALOR OR SACRIFICE, BUT OTHERS DON'T. WHY? BUSINESSMEN DON'T WEAR INSIGNIA INDICATING THEIR SALARIES, OR THE NUMBER OF CONTRACTS THEY'VE CLOSED, OR THE NUMBER OF BRIDGES OR BUILDINGS THEY'VE BUILT. IS THE MILITARY'S BROAD USE OF DISTINGUISHING INSIGNIA TIED TO ITS AUTHORITARIANISM? AS INDIVIDUALITY IS SUPPRESSED IN MILITARY LIFE AND DRESS CODE, DOES THE DISPLAY OF INSIGNIA PROVIDE AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO EXPRESS INDIVIDUALITY, TO BE RECOGNIZED, TO ACHIEVE DISTINCTION?

THE MILITARY IS NOT THE ONLY OCCUPATION TO REQUIRE UNIFORM DRESS AND THEN TO OFFER EMBELLISHMENTS THAT DEPART FROM UNIFORMITY AS REWARDS. THE CHRISTIAN CLERGY WEAR MOSTLY BLACK OR, MORE RECENTLY, GRAY DURING THEIR ORDINARY DAILY DUTIES, BUT DURING WORSHIP SERVICES CHANGE TO MOSTLY WHITE WITH THE ADDITION OF OTHER ELEMENTS IN BRIGHT AND RICH COLORS AND FABRICS WHICH ARE KEYED TO THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE CHURCH'S DOGMA AND CALENDAR. ALTHOUGH THE CHURCH MAY SEE ITS VARIETY OF DRESS AS ANOTHER WAY TO CELEBRATE THE GLORY OF GOD, IT ALSO SERVES THE MORE MUNDANE PURPOSE OF INDICATING RELIGIOUS RANK.

ACADEMIA IS ANOTHER AREA OF POWERFUL DISTINCTION, ALTHOUGH, AGAIN LIKE CLERGY, NOT ON A DAILY BASIS. AT ANY OF OUR UNIVERSITIES, PUBLIC OR PRIVATE, THE FACULTY GOES ABOUT ITS DAILY ROUTINE OF LECTURES, LABORATORIES AND CONFERENCES IN THE USUAL CAMPUS DRESS OF JACKET AND TROUSERS. THE TEACHING ROLE CALLS FOR MOST ACADEMICS' TIME TO BE SPENT IN CLASS WITH STUDENTS OR IN RESEARCH, AND THERE IS LITTLE OPPORTUNITY OR REASON FOR DIFFERENTIATION, EVEN THOUGH THERE MAY BE

WIDE DIFFERENCES IN PAY SCALE. BUT ON FORMAL OCCASIONS, MOST EVIDENTLY COMMENCEMENT, WHEN THE ENTIRE FACULTY IS CALLED TOGETHER, THE LONG, BLACK ROBES EMERGE FROM ACADEMIC CLOSETS AND APPEAR IN PUBLIC. WHILE THE BASIC COLOR IS BLACK, IT IS ACCOMPANIED BY MANY OTHER COLORS APPLIED TO COWLS, LININGS AND TRIM. THESE COLORS ARE CLEAR MARKERS OF DISTINCTION THAT PROCLAIM THE WEARER'S RANK, DEGREES AND EVEN HIS/HER PARTICULAR AREA OF STUDY AND EXPERTISE. THE CASUAL OBSERVER IS NOT VERSED IN THIS LANGUAGE, BUT TO THOSE WHO ARE IT OFFERS DRAMATIC PROOF OF SELF-DEFINITION BY DISTINCTION.

IN THE VARIOUS OCCUPATIONS MENTIONED AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS SECTION SUCH AS HOTEL EMPLOYEES OR THE SALVATION ARMY IT IS NECESSARY TO BE ABLE TO READILY IDENTIFY EMPLOYEES FROM THE PEOPLE THAT SURROUND THEM. THE UNIFORM IS A QUICK AND ECONOMIC WAY TO DO THIS, BUT IDENTIFICATION IS NOT ENOUGH, AS THE HUMAN ELEMENT SURFACES IN THE APPEARANCE AND USE OF INSIGNIA THAT INDICATE RANK, LENGTH OF SERVICE AND SPECIFIC ACTIVITY.

AND, FINALLY, A MOST DISCREET, AND YET REVEALING, INSTANCE COMES FROM OUR SUPREME COURT WHERE ITS NINE JUDGES, WHEN IN SESSION, DON THE ELEGANT, BUT SIMPLE, BLACK JUDICIAL ROBE. A FEW YEARS AGO THEN CHIEF JUSTICE REHNQUIST APPEARED AFTER A SUMMER BREAK WITH THE ADDITION TO HIS ROBE OF A MODEST, BUT VERY VISIBLE, LINE OF GOLD THREAD TRIM THAT ENCIrcLED BOTH SLEEVES BETWEEN THE WRIST AND ELBOW. AS THE COURT'S SIZE (9) IS SMALL AND ITS COMPOSITION IS OF MIXED GENDER AND ETHNICITY, IDENTIFICATION BY OTHERS OR AMONG HIS ASSOCIATES IS PRECLUDED AS MOTIVATION. BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT JUSTICE REHNQUIST INTENDED TO LET HIS FELLOW JUDGES AND THOSE OUTSIDE THE COURT KNOW THAT THERE WAS ONLY ONE CHIEF JUSTICE. HE TOOK SOME RIBBING, MOSTLY GOOD-NATURED, FROM THE PRESS, BUT THE GROUND-BREAKING STRIPES STAYED.

THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT A UNIFORM OFFERS ADVANTAGES OF ECONOMY, EFFICIENCY, MORALE, IDENTIFICATION AND COHESION IN MIXED AMOUNTS, BUT HUMAN DISTINCTIONS MUST BE SERVED TOO. ANY TOTALLY BLAND AND PLAIN UNIFORM IMPOSES MORE EQUALITY THAN WE CAN PROBABLY TOLERATE.

THE TWO MAJOR REVOLUTIONS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IMPOSED THE REGIMENTATION OF COMMUNIST THOUGHT AND DRESS ON THE LARGEST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD. THINK BACK TO THE PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS UNDER MAO AND STALIN WHEN THE PARTICIPANTS WORE EITHER THE MILITARY OR THE WORKER'S UNIFORM. TODAY, IMAGES OF PUBLIC LIFE IN THESE COUNTRIES ARE MUCH MORE VARIED IN COSTUME, AS THE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIPS HAVE RECOGNIZED THAT, WHILE STILL MAINTAINING TOTAL CONTROL OF GOVERNMENT, MAKING SOME ROOM FOR INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTIONS CAN RELAX THE TENSION BETWEEN THE PEOPLE AND THE STATE.

SELF-DEFINITION UNDER AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES IS MORE DIFFICULT THAN IT IS IN A DEMOCRACY. THE VALIDATION PROCESS IS ENTIRELY ENGAGED WITH THE STATE APPARATUS,

WITH THE OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENTIATION SEVERELY LIMITED, AND YET IT IS SILENTLY AND SURELY AT WORK — WHILE THE LEADERSHIP SLEEPS, GIVES SPEECHES, TURNS ITS BACK, GOES TO WAR OR ATTENDS WORLD CONFERENCES. IT IS PART OF THE HUMAN CONDITION WHICH WE MUST RECOGNIZE. THANKFULLY, IT IS NOT A MATTER OF POLITICS; IT IS WHAT WE ARE; IT IS FOUND IN EVERYTHING WE ACHIEVE AND MUCH THAT WE DON'T; AND IT IS INSEPARABLE FROM US.

TWO INTERESTING POLITICAL EFFORTS TOWARD UNIFORMITY ARE NOW TAKING PLACE. THE FIRST IS THE EUROPEAN UNION WITH ITS IMMENSE BUREAUCRACY ESTABLISHED IN BRUSSELS TO ADMINISTER ALL OF EUROPE'S COMMERCIAL, JUDICIAL, AND ECONOMIC PROCESSES. OVER THE HALF CENTURY OF ITS GROWING PRESENCE AND ACCEPTANCE IT HAS BEEN MOSTLY SUCCESSFUL IN SIMPLIFYING THE MANY SOCIAL, CURRENCY, TRAVEL AND TRADE PROBLEMS THAT MARKED LIFE IN MULTI-NATIONAL EUROPE, AND YET A SINGLE VOTE BY IRELAND EARLIER THIS YEAR PREVENTED ITS FULL CONFIRMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION.

IRELAND IS AN ISLAND, AS IS ENGLAND WHICH JOINED THE EU BUT HAS REFUSED TO ADOPT THE EURO AS ITS CURRENCY. THESE TWO ISLAND STATES DIFFER IN ONE VERY SIGNIFICANT WAY FROM THE EU'S CONTINENTAL MEMBERSHIP IN THAT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN WASHED OVER BY THE WARS OF TERRITORIAL EXTENSION THAT HAVE FORMED EUROPE'S HISTORY OVER THE PAST MILLENNIUM. EVERY MAJOR POWER — RUSSIA, ROME, AUSTRO-HUNGARY, GERMANY, FRANCE & SPAIN — HAVE SERVED AS INITIATORS OR PARTNERS IN THESE REPETITIVE AND BLOODY ATTEMPTS TO TILT THE BALANCE OF POWER TO THE POINT OF DOMINANCE OVER THE LAND, THE PEOPLE AND THE DESTINY OF THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT, AND BEYOND.

AFTER EACH WAVE HAS BEEN CHALLENGED, BEATEN BACK AND FORCED TO RECEDE, MANY OF THE OLD, SEEMINGLY TIMELESS DISTINCTIONS DRAWN FROM EUROPE'S ORIGINS IN MANY SMALL HEREDITARY ENTITIES HAVE RE-EMERGED TO RECLAIM THEIR PRIDE OF PLACE IN A PROCESS THAT MIGHT GAIN STRENGTH THROUGH REPETITION.

THE MAP OF EUROPE SHOWS FEWER COUNTRIES THAN IT DID TWO, OR EVEN ONE, HUNDRED YEARS AGO. IN THE NEXT ONE OR TWO CENTURIES WILL IT REDUCE ITSELF TO THE ULTIMATE ONE — THE EU? WILL THE EU'S MEMBERS, OVER TIME, SURRENDER THEIR NATIONAL AND CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS AND LOYALTIES TO BRUSSELS' ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER? IN THE PAST, THE MANY EUROPEAN STATES HAVE FOUND THE WAY TO RESTORE THEIR INDIVIDUAL STATUS AFTER EACH CONSOLIDATION. WILL THE WAY OF THE FUTURE BE FROM BARON TO BUREAUCRAT?

THE OTHER INSTANCE OF POLITICAL REGIONALISM IS THE NASCENT NORTH AMERICAN UNION (NAU) THAT WAS INITIATED BY THE LEADERS OF CANADA, MEXICO AND THE US IN 2005. THE NAU IS AN EXAMPLE OF SELECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT ON THE GRANDEST SCALE POSSIBLE, AS IT HAS BEEN SECRETLY PUT IN PLACE ONLY BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, AND HAS BEEN STEALTHILY EXPANDED WITHIN OUR PRESENTLY EXISTING GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE (I.E., MOSTLY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE)

WITHOUT CONGRESSIONAL OR PUBLIC DEBATE. SELECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT COMES INTO PLAY BECAUSE THE NAU CONCEPT AND REGULATIONS CONFLICT WITH OUR HISTORIC SOVEREIGNTY AND EXISTING LAW. BECAUSE THEY DO, THE NAU'S STRUCTURE HAS BEEN DESIGNED SO THAT IT CIRCUMVENTS PRESENT LAW AND OPERATES THROUGH NEWLY FORMED DEPARTMENTS, COMMITTEES AND TRIBUNALS WHOSE IDENTITIES NEED NOT BE MADE PUBLIC.

THE NAU DIFFERS FROM THE EU IN THAT IT LACKS THE LATTER'S GROWING BASE NOW IN EXCESS OF TWENTY-FIVE MEMBERS. THERE WILL ONLY BE 3 MEMBERS OF THE NAU AND TWO OF THEM WILL PROBABLY DRAW VERY SUBSTANTIAL POLITICAL, SECURITY AND ECONOMIC NOURISHMENT FROM THE THIRD. LOSS OF SOVEREIGNTY IS AN OBVIOUS RESULT OF THIS PROJECTED MERGER, BUT JUST AS IMPORTANT TO US AS AMERICANS IS WHETHER WE WILL BE WILLING TO DO AWAY WITH THOSE MANY CULTURAL AND HISTORIC IDENTIFYING DISTINCTIONS WHICH WE HAVE SIMPLY ACCUMULATED OR PASSIONATELY EMBRACED IN THE COURSE OF OUR REMARKABLE JOURNEY.

THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH A MUTUAL COOPERATION AGREEMENT, BUT THE NAU FAR EXCEEDS ANY SUCH FRAMEWORK AND ENVISIONS A MERGER OF OUR TERRITORY AND LAWS. THERE IS AN ENORMOUS LOOPHOLE THAT HANGS OVER A FUTURE UNDER THE NAU. IT REQUIRES THAT ANY NAU-RELATED ISSUE BE RESOLVED IN SPECIAL NAU COURTS PRESIDED OVER BY NAU APPOINTED JUDGES. THIS WOULD ALLOW ALMOST ANY CIVIL OR CRIMINAL MATTER DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH NAU TO BYPASS OUR COURTS AND JURIES. THIS PARALLEL SYSTEM OF SURREAL BUREAUCRACY WOULD SERIOUSLY COMPROMISE OUR OWN JUDICIARY, DILUTE OUR JUSTICE AND DAMAGE THE LEGAL FOUNDATIONS OF MANY PARTS OF OUR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT.

IF ALERTED, IF GIVEN THE CHANCE, ONE MUST ASSUME THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WOULD GATHER THEMSELVES AND TURN THIS THREAT AWAY. BUT THE ALARM HAS ALREADY SOUNDED, THE NIGHT IS LONG AND OUR SENTRIES ARE NOWHERE TO BE SEEN.

* * *

LIKE OTHER MAJOR LEGISLATIVE TOPICS OF HEALTH, IMMIGRATION, AND DEBT, TWO ISSUES OF MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE HAVE BEEN DEVOTED TO THE PROCESS OF SELF-DEFINITION. WHY? IS IT THAT IMPORTANT? THERE ARE REASONS TO THINK IT IS, ALTHOUGH IT WILL NOT IN ANY DIRECT WAY PRODUCE LEGISLATION. AND YET IT INFORMS OUR KNOWLEDGE OF PEOPLE, AND PEOPLE ARE THE ONLY MEANS BY WHICH WE CREATE AND CONDUCT GOVERNMENT.

OUR WORLD IS CROSSED AND RECROSSED BY MANY LINES OF DIFFERENTIATION — GENETIC, ETHNIC, NATIONAL, RACIAL, GEOGRAPHICAL, CLIMATIC, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS, TOPOGRAPHICAL, POLITICAL AND OTHERS. THESE DIFFERENCES ALLOW HUMANS, AND THEIR LIVES, TO TAKE DIFFERENT FORMS IN DIFFERENT PLACES. CONSCIOUSLY

OR UNCONSCIOUSLY, IT IS DIFFICULT TO IGNORE THEM AND IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO ELIMINATE OR SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THEM BECAUSE PEOPLE AND THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES ARE ENGAGED IN A PROCESS OF MULTIPLICATION THAT BRINGS ABOUT MORE CHANGE AND MORE DISTINCTIONS.

AMERICA IS AT A CROSSROADS AND IT MUST REDEFINE ITSELF TO ITS OWN PEOPLE AND TO OTHERS. WE CANNOT LOGICALLY ARGUE THAT THE RESULTS THAT MOST AMERICANS WANT OUR POLICIES TO YIELD CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED BY MORE OF THE SAME — MORE WARS, MORE DEBT, MORE IMMIGRATION, MORE POPULATION, MORE POLLUTION AND MORE RHETORIC, FOR EXAMPLE. THIS MEANS THAT WE MUST CHANGE OUR GOVERNMENT AND ITS WAY OF THINKING.

TODAY BOTH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES FREELY ADMIT AND STATE THAT WASHINGTON IS BROKEN. THIS IS TRUE AND APPEARS TO BE ONE OF VERY FEW THINGS UPON WHICH BOTH PARTIES CAN AGREE. THAT'S ABOUT AS FAR AS THEY GO, HOWEVER, FOR NO REASON IS GIVEN AS TO HOW AND WHY OUR GOVERNMENT CAME TO ITS PRESENT STATE. THE REASON IS THAT OUR TWO-PARTY SYSTEM NOW FUNCTIONS ONLY AS AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM. AFTER THEIR ELECTION OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES ARE UNABLE TO REPRESENT BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO REAL SENSE OF GOVERNMENT AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SERVING THE PUBLIC INTEREST AS FAIRLY, JUSTLY AND EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE.

THERE IS A GLASS CEILING IN THE CONGRESS WHICH LIMITS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT. OPINION IS EXPRESSED TO OR THROUGH OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES, BUT GOES NO FURTHER. IT IS DEFLECTED BY THE INVISIBLE BARRIER AND RELEGATED TO BE USED BY THE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS IN THEIR ENDLESS REPUBLICAN/DEMOCRAT BATTLES FOR POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. THAT THERE ARE MANY PERSONAL "PERKS" INVOLVED ONLY SERVES TO INTENSIFY THEIR EFFORTS TO FURTHER DIMINISH ANY CONCEPT OF THE NATIONAL INTEREST.

WHAT HAS PLAYED OUT IN THE HALLS OF OUR GOVERNMENT OVER THE LAST FIFTY YEARS IS A STRANGE MIX OF HUMAN THOUGHT AND FAILURE OF WHICH WE WERE WARNED BY ORWELL, KAFKA AND BECKETT, BUT WE PAID NO HEED. THE MESS IS SO EXTENSIVE THAT ONLY A "NEW" WAY OF THINKING OFFERS THE POSSIBILITY OF A REMEDY. AND THAT WAY OF THINKING MUST VIEW GOVERNMENT AS A WAY OF EXPRESSING AND ACHIEVING OUR TRULY NATIONAL INTEREST.

BUT WHERE WILL WE FIND THOSE CAPABLE OF THIS NEW PARADIGM? IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THEY WILL EMERGE FROM THE RANKS OF THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES WHO DOMINATE ACCESS TO THE BALLOTS IN MOST STATES AND LOCALITIES. IN OUR SYSTEM THE PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO ELECT, ALTHOUGH THAT RIGHT IS OFTEN CLOUDED BY PARTY CONTROL OF THE LOCAL NOMINATING PROCESS.

STILL, IT IS THE PEOPLE THAT HAVE THE POWER, AND IT WILL ONLY BE THROUGH THEM THAT GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO CHANGE ITSELF SUFFICIENTLY TO RETURN TO A FORM CONSISTENT WITH ITS HISTORIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL VALUES. TODAY, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR HISTORY WE HAVE AVAILABLE TO US A TECHNOLOGY THAT CAN INJECT THE VOX POPULI BACK

INTO OUR GOVERNMENT PROCESS WITHOUT IT BEING HIJACKED AND PUT TO THE USE OF THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES.

THAT TECHNOLOGY IS THE INTERNET. IT CAN PROVIDE A PLATFORM BY WHICH REASONED PEOPLE SEEKING TO DEFINE THE NATIONAL INTEREST BY OBJECTIVE TRUTH AND OPEN REVIEW CAN REACH MILLIONS OF CITIZENS WHO, IN TURN, WILL ENJOY INSTANT ACCESS TO THIS NEW ENTITY. THE INITIATORS OF SUCH AN INTERNET PRESENCE COULD MANAGE ITS GROWTH AND CHANNEL ITS POPULARITY BY KEEPING FAITH WITH THEIR COMMITMENT TO NEW GOVERNMENT. THEIR CONTROL OF THE WEBSITE'S CONTENT CAN REFUSE ACCESS TO IT BY THE WACKO/WAHOO DEMAGOGUE ELEMENT WITH ITS RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF AUDIENCE MANIPULATION AND PERSONAL PUBLICITY.

AS A MATTER OF POLICY, IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO SEVERELY RESTRICT PERSONAL VISUAL IMAGES, BUT RATHER TO OFFER ARTICLES, ANALYSIS, REPORTING, INTERPRETATION, EVALUATION AND CLARIFICATION OF IMPORTANT ISSUES AND HOW THEY CAN BE RESOLVED IN THE NATION'S INTEREST. THIS SHOULD BE THE PRIMARY PURPOSE AFTER WHICH THE NEXT, ASKING FOR COMMENT AND RESPONDING TO IT, SHOULD LOGICALLY FOLLOW. WE ARE AT A MOMENT WHEN TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS SERVES ITS HIGHEST PURPOSE IN BEING ABLE TO REACH INTO AND IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THE NATION'S CITIZENS AT A MODEST COST AND GREAT BENEFIT TO OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT.

NOTHING LESS THAN NEW METHODS AND THINKING CAN REPAIR THE MANY KINDS OF DAMAGE WHICH WE HAVE LEVELLED AGAINST OUR FORM OF GOVERNMENT IN RECENT YEARS. THE OLD WAYS WILL NO LONGER WORK, AS THEY AND THEIR SPONSORS HAVE BECOME MIRED IN THE MUD OF IDEOLOGICAL TRENCH WARFARE. SELF-DEFINITION IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE MEMBERS OF TWO OF OUR THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT DEFINE THEMSELVES BY IDEOLOGY, AND THE THIRD IS NOT FAR BEHIND. ATTITUDES VARY. SOME SEE IT AS A GAME; OTHERS AS A LIFE-OR-DEATH ISSUE; AND SOME SHIFT FROM ONE TO THE OTHER. BUT THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE STRUGGLE NEVER WAVERS. IN WAR, PEACE CANNOT COME UNTIL THE FIGHTING STOPS. THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE THAT POLITICAL PEACE WILL BREAK OUT IN WASHINGTON AND BRING AN END TO OUR WAR OF IDEOLOGY AND POLARIZATION.

THERE WOULD BE ENORMOUS HONOR IN BEING ABLE TO REFORM OUR WAYS OF GOVERNMENT AND REALIGN THEM MORE CLOSELY WITH OUR ORIGINS AND CONSTITUTION. THE TERM "PEACE WITH HONOR" IS USED FREQUENTLY IN REFERRING TO OUR VARIOUS MILITARY VENTURES, BUT IT HAS DIFFERENT MEANINGS FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE. IF WE COULD END OUR IDEOLOGICAL WAR OF ATTRITION AND PROVIDE OUR GOVERNMENT WITH A NEW FORM AND DIRECTION FUELED BY DEDICATED AND BROAD PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, WE COULD ACHIEVE A REAL "PEACE WITH HONOR".

* * *

ELECTION YEAR NOTES

WE ARE ONLY JUST PAST THE POLITICAL CONVENTIONS AT A TIME WHEN A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS NOMINATING PROCESS HAS FINALLY CONCLUDED. IT HAS BEEN AN AGONIZING TWO YEARS SINCE THE FIRST CANDIDACIES AND EXPLORATORY COMMITTEES WERE ANNOUNCED DURING WHICH WE HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO A CONSTANT MIXTURE OF HYPE, CLICHÉ, OPINION, COMMENT, SPECULATION, RUMOR, SUGGESTION, INNUENDO, ETC. THIS MAKES FOR A RUINOUS PROCESS WHICH CAN ANESTHETIZE THE PUBLIC AND DIMINISH THE CREDIBILITY AND STATURE OF THE CANDIDATE. FROM A MARKETING VIEW, IT IS OVEREXPOSURE ON STEROIDS.

MARK SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR OF THE SECRET SERVICE, PUTS THE COST OF PROTECTION FOR OBAMA AND MCCAIN AT \$40,000/DAY AND ESTIMATES THAT THE COST FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS WILL EXCEED \$100 MILLION.⁵ WITH OTHER EXPENSES BY THE TWO MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND OTHER GROUPS CERTAIN TO RUN INTO BILLIONS OF DOLLARS, THE EXCESS AND WASTE OF OUR SYSTEM BECOMES EVER MORE CLEAR.

IT IS TIME TO CHANGE OUR PROCEDURE, TO REDUCE ITS LENGTH TO SOMETHING MORE REASONABLE. BRITISH ELECTIONS ARE CONDUCTED IN A MATTER OF A MONTH OR TWO. ALLOWING FOR OUR LARGER SIZE AND POPULATION, WE SHOULD AIM FOR A FOUR-MONTH NOMINATING PERIOD FOLLOWED BY TWO MONTHS OF ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNING IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER.

BESIDES THE ENNUI AND COST FACTORS, THERE IS THE MATTER OF DIMINISHED JOB PERFORMANCE. MOST OF THE CANDIDATES FOR NOMINATIONS WERE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WHO, FOR ABOUT A YEAR ACCORDED PRIORITY OF THEIR TIME AND EFFORT TO CAMPAIGNING. AS THEY RECEIVE THEIR REGULAR COMPENSATION DURING THIS PERIOD, THE GOVERNMENT IS IN EFFECT SUBSIDIZING THEIR CAMPAIGNS. PREFERABLY, THEY SHOULD RESIGN, BUT THAT WOULD OPEN THE JOB TO A NEW APPOINTMENT WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF ALTERING THE POLITICAL BALANCE. AT THE LEAST, A LEAVE OF ABSENCE WITHOUT COMPENSATION OR RETIREMENT BENEFITS WOULD BE APPROPRIATE.

THE CHANCES ARE ALMOST ASSURED THAT NO SUCH CHANGES WILL TAKE PLACE. THE MEDIA THRIVES ON CAMPAIGN REVENUE MUCH AS POLITICIANS DO ON PUBLIC APPEARANCES AND MEDIA COVERAGE WITH THE RESULT THAT ONLY NEW THINKING WILL BRING ABOUT CHANGE. AND YET, THERE'S SOMETHING TRULY UNCONSCIONABLE ABOUT GOVERNMENT PAYING LEGISLATORS DURING THEIR PROLONGED ABSENCES FOR PERSONAL REASONS AND THEN PAYING AGAIN TO PROTECT THEM WHILE THEY RUN FOR ANOTHER OFFICE. THIS IS DOUBLE DIPPING ON A SCALE AND BY REASON THAT COULD ONLY COME TO US FROM WASHINGTON.

ON THE PLUS SIDE, THE VAST AMOUNT OF MONEY AND PRESS COVERAGE BEING APPLIED TO THIS YEAR'S CAMPAIGNS MAY HAVE THE EFFECT OF REVERSING THE LONGSTANDING TREND IN LOWERED VOTER PARTICIPATION WHICH HAD BEEN PREDICTED

TO DIP BELOW 50% OF THOSE ELIGIBLE. BOTH PARTIES HAVE SPARED NEITHER MONEY NOR EFFORT TO ATTRACT NEW, AND ESPECIALLY YOUNGER, VOTERS, AND IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE WHICH HAS BEEN MORE SUCCESSFUL AND WHAT THE FINAL FIGURES WILL BE.

ANOTHER SERIOUS TREND WITH MOSTLY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES HAS BEEN THE EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH PERCENTAGE, AROUND 90% OF CONGRESSIONAL INCUMBENTS THAT ARE REELECTED. REPUBLICANS ARE NOW EXPERIENCING MORE VACANCIES BY RETIREMENT THAN USUAL WHICH MAY OBSCURE SOMEWHAT THE OVERALL IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL MOOD FOR CHANGE, BUT EVEN WITH DEMOCRATS EXPECTED TO PICK UP SEATS IN BOTH HOUSES, OUR INCUMBENCY REELECTION RATES TESTIFY TO SOMETHING OTHER THAN AN OPEN AND VIBRANT DEMOCRACY.

LASTLY, WE MAY HAVE ARRIVED AT A TIME THAT REPRESENTS THE END OF ONE ERA AND THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER. THROUGHOUT THE LENGTHY NOMINATING PROCESS AND DEBATES BOTH PARTIES SHIFTED THE TIME FRAMES OF THEIR REFERENCES TO FORMER PRESIDENTS. FOR THE DEMOCRATS, THE OLD DESCRIPTION AS BEING THE PARTY OF JACKSON, FDR OR TRUMAN GAVE WAY OVERWHELMINGLY TO ASSOCIATION WITH JFK. SIMILARLY, REPUBLICANS CAST THEMSELVES AS THE PARTY OF RONALD REAGAN FAR MORE FREQUENTLY THAN CALLING UPON LINCOLN OR EISENHOWER.

THIS IS A QUANTUM LEAP IN POLITICAL ROLE MODELING, MADE PERHAPS BECAUSE JFK AND REAGAN HAVE APPEARED AS THE STARS OF THE POST-WWII TV AGE WHO WORKED THE MEDIUM BETTER THAN OTHERS AND WERE, ACCORDINGLY, ABLE TO OBTAIN FROM IT THE BENEFITS OF FAR GREATER COVERAGE AND EXPOSURE. WE WILL MISS FDR, HONEST ABE AND THE OTHERS. THEY WERE WITH US FOR MANY YEARS, NEVER FAILED TO SERVE US WELL AND THEIR LESSENERED VISIBILITY MARKS A MAJOR SHIFT IN OUR POLITICAL CULTURE.

CAN WE BE AT SOME NEW CULTURAL DIVIDE THAT IS SHIFTING EVERYTHING PRE-TELEVISION BACK INTO A MORE DISTANT AND LESS ACCESSIBLE PAST NOW BEGINNING TO BE OUT OF MIND AND BEYOND MEMORY? ANY SUCH PROCESS IS BY ITS NATURE SLOW AND SUBTLE AND ONE OF WHICH WE SHOULD BE AWARE. CHANGES IN OUR POLITICAL, OR EVEN HISTORICAL, PERSPECTIVES SUGGEST THAT OUR HISTORY CAN BE REWRITTEN BY BOTH CONSCIOUS AND UNINTENTIONAL MEANS. IT CAN BE REASONABLY VIEWED THAT PRESIDENTS REAGAN AND KENNEDY ARE FIGURES OF LESSER LEADERSHIP AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAN LINCOLN AND FDR. IF THEY ARE TO BE THE NEW STANDARD OF POLITICAL DESCENT, HAVE WE LOST SOMETHING IN THE EXCHANGE?

AND FINALLY, WE COMBINE THE SELF-DEFINITION AND POLITICAL PROCESSES IN THE STUNNING DISPLAYS OF OUR RECENT POLITICAL CONVENTIONS. AS IF DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR IT, THE CONVENTIONS SERVED AS THE THEATRE IN WHICH TO SHOWCASE OUR SELF-DEFINITION.

FIX YOUR ATTENTION ON THE SPEAKER ON THE PODIUM AS HE DIFFERENTIATES HIS/HER CANDIDATE OR PARTY

BY CREATING AND APPLYING LINES OF DISTINCTION THAT INCLUDE ETHICS, ECONOMICS, VOTING RECORDS, LEADERSHIP, CHARACTER, ORIGINS, MARRIAGE, OFFSPRING, RELIGION, THE PUBLIC WELFARE, DIPLOMACY, AND ON AND ON. NOTHING IS OUT OF BOUNDS BECAUSE THERE ARE NO BOUNDS. THERE IS ONE END AND ALL MEANS ARE JUSTIFIED. NO DIFFERENCE, IT SEEMS, IS SO SMALL THAT IT CAN BE IGNORED AND NONE SO LARGE THAT IT CANNOT BE CLAIMED. INDEED, THE SUCCESS OF THE PARTY, THE ELECTION AND THE NATION WILL BE DETERMINED BY THESE DIFFERENCES AND THE ROLES THEY PLAY IN OUR LIVES.

BUT DIFFERENTIATION IS ONLY PART OF THE PROCESS. THE SPEAKER FACES AND ADDRESSES THOUSANDS OF THE PARTY FAITHFUL WHO HAVE COME FROM ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY. WHY? TO WEAR OUTLANDISH CLOTHES AND TO PARTY? NO, NOT REALLY; THEY CAN DO THOSE AT HOME. THEY HAVE COME TO BOND, TO BE ASSOCIATED IN VERY DEMONSTRABLE WAYS WITH THEIR PARTY, WITH OTHERS LIKE THEMSELVES SO THAT THEY CAN CHEER AND SCREAM AND APPLAUD AND WAVE SIGNS AND NOD THEIR HEADS IN KNOWING AGREEMENT; AND VALIDATE THEMSELVES BY THE INTERACTION OF GROUP PERSONALITIES, CHARACTERISTICS AND GOALS. WATCH CLOSELY. LOOK AT THEIR BODY MOVEMENTS AND LISTEN TO THEIR VOICES. THEY ARE AT A DIFFERENT LEVEL THAN THEY WOULD BE AT HOME LISTENING TO THE SAME SPEECHES. THEY ARE INTENSELY COMMITTED TO SEEING THEMSELVES, AND BEING SEEN, AS BEARERS OF REPUBLICAN AND/OR DEMOCRATIC TRUTH AND VALUES. THEY ARE NO LONGER INDIVIDUALS FROM LOUISVILLE, ALBANY OR TACOMA. HAVING BEEN TRANSFORMED BY TRUTH AS THEY SEE IT, THEY CAN SHARE IT WITH OTHERS WHOM THEY CAN ELEVATE AND ENLIGHTEN. THEY HAVE BECOME LEADERS!

BOTH CONVENTIONS REVEALED THE ART OF AUDIENCE MANIPULATION AT ITS HIGHEST FORM. SMALL NUMBERS OF ORGANIZERS SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE CROWDS WERE ABLE TO START A CHANT, A STOMP, A CHEER, APPLAUSE, SIGN WAVING, MARCHING ETC. AND LITERALLY WITHIN A FEW SECONDS IT WOULD BECOME A MASS MOVEMENT THAT WOULD MOSTLY CONTINUE UNTIL IT WAS TERMINATED FROM THE PODIUM.

APPLAUSE WAS THE MOST FREQUENT AND EVIDENT OBJECT OF MANIPULATION AS IF SUSTAINED LENGTH OR LOUDER VOLUME CONFERRED GREATER VALIDATION ON THOSE WHO COULD OFFER THE MOST. THE EXTENT OF THIS MANIPULATION SHOWED ITSELF REPEATEDLY IN THE AUDIENCE'S INTERJECTION OF APPLAUSE ON DEMAND WHENEVER THE SPEAKER PAUSED FOR EMPHASIS OR EVEN PUNCTUATION.

THERE WAS AN AMUSING INSTANCE AT THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION WHEN THE SPEAKER MOMENTARILY LOST HIS PLACE OR CONCENTRATION AND THEN QUICKLY RESUMED, BUT NOT BEFORE SOME IN THE AUDIENCE WERE ABLE TO MOUNT A ROUND OF INAPPROPRIATE APPLAUSE. ALTHOUGH FLUSTERED, THE SPEAKER HAD THE GOOD SENSE TO CONTINUE AND KEEP CONTROL AT THE PODIUM.

WE ARE NOT AT OUR BEST AT OUR POLITICAL CONVENTIONS. WHAT ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL THEATRE THEY USED TO PROVIDE NOW SEEM MORE LIKE OLD VAUDEVILLE ACTS LACKING IN SUSPENSE AND ORIGINALITY. THEIR FAILURES

EXTEND TO DELEGATES, SPEAKERS, THE MEDIA AND THE PARTIES' LEADERSHIPS. TEDIOUS, PAROCHIALISM AND REPETITION ARE RAMPANT, AND ONE CAN EVEN SYMPATHIZE WITH THE BROADCAST COMMENTATORS WHO HAVE TO BE ON CAMERA FOR MANY HOURS OF CONTINUOUS COVERAGE.

THESE CONVENTIONS SHOULD BE SEEN FOR WHAT THEY ARE — A CONFLUENCE OF POLITICAL AND EMOTIONAL FORCES BY WHICH THE DELEGATES AND THE PARTIES ATTEMPT TO DEFINE THEMSELVES. AT MANY LEVELS BANALITY RULES, AND INSECURITY IS EVERYWHERE. AS A NATION WE DESERVE BETTER, BUT SELF-DEFINITION IS NOT AN EASY PROCESS.

THERE IS AN IMPORTANT HUMAN DYNAMIC VERY VISIBLY AT WORK IN OUR CONVENTIONS. IT IS THE AGE-OLD, SEEMINGLY ENDLESS PROCESS WHEREBY INDIVIDUALS (DELEGATES), SEEKING GREATER STRENGTH, AND ESPECIALLY RECOGNITION, BIND THEMSELVES TOGETHER INTO A GROUP (THE AUDIENCE) AND THEN, BOTH WITHIN AND WITHOUT ITS CONFINES, DRAW DEEPLY EMOTIONAL LINES OF DISTINCTION. IT IS A PROCESS OF HARMONY GAINED AND HARMONY LOST AND HAS PLAYED OUT OVER OUR EVOLUTIONARY MILLENNIA IN THE RECORD OF WAR, RELIGION, POLITICS, ECONOMICS, DIPLOMACY, EMPIRE AND OTHER WAYS IN WHICH OUR HUMAN, AND EVEN ANIMAL, NATURES HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED.

IT CAN ONLY BE CHANGED IF IT IS RECOGNIZED AND IF WE APPLY THE LIGHT OF REASON TO IT. IN ANOTHER TWO YEARS, OUR ELECTORAL MECHANISM WILL CRANK UP, RESTART ITSELF AND AGAIN CLIMAX IN CONVENTIONS. WHILE WE CAN HOPE AND LOOK FOR SOMETHING BETTER, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THEY WILL VARY MUCH FROM OUR PRESENT MODEL. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE, WHICH IS A DOMINANT ELEMENT IN OUR COMMERCIAL LIFE, IS SHUNNED LIKE "THE PLAGUE" IN POLITICS.



END NOTES

- 1) CHIEF JUSTICE WARREN BURGER, DISSIDENTING OPINION, PLYLER V. DOE 457 U.S. 202 (1982)
- 2) K.C. MCALPIN, PRO ENGLISH, 6/20/08 LETTER
- 3) IBID
- 4) IBID
- 5) PARADE MAGAZINE - 8/10/08

EDITOR'S BIO

MR. AULT IS RETIRED FROM BUSINESS, A GRADUATE OF YALE UNIVERSITY, AND THE AUTHOR OF A RETAIL FOOD STUDY (LA ROCHE & Co. NYC, NY 1957) WHICH DESCRIBED THE EMERGENCE AND GROWING DOMINANCE OF THE SUPERMARKET IN AMERICAN FOOD RETAILING.