

Hope or Fear?

It is time to decide

More than a month ago I was concerned that if Obama were elected, our nation would risk one of the biggest social evolutionary set backs in its history -- his assassination. Already my fear has begun to materialize with the reckless plans of two young white supremacists from Bells, Tennessee -- a small town located along Highway 40 somewhere between Nashville and Memphis on the way to Little Rock, Arkansas.¹

In 1963 George C. Wallace stood before the Alabama State Legislature and distinguished governors from the States of Mississippi and South Carolina and said: ²

Let us rise to the call of freedom-loving blood that is in us and send our answer to the tyranny that clanks its chains upon the South. In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny . . . and I say . . . segregation today . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever

This nation was never meant to be a unit of one . . . but a united of the many

And so it was meant in our racial lives . . . each race, within its own framework has the freedom to teach . . . to instruct . . . to develop . . . to ask for and receive deserved help from others of separate racial stations. This is the great freedom of our American founding fathers . . . but if we amalgamate into the one unit as advocated by the communist philosophers . . . then the enrichment of our lives . . . the freedom for our development . . . is gone forever. We become, therefore, a mongrel unit of one under a single all powerful government . . . and we stand for everything . . . and for nothing.

Five years later in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Martin Luther was assassinated, and riots broke out in more than 100 US cities.³ By October 1982, while George Wallace was still running for his fourth term as Governor of the State of Alabama, TIME Magazine wrote⁴:

“The poison and paranoia have mostly gone out of the issue of race in Alabama.”

“It is spiritually disorienting to see a black driving a car with Alabama plates and a Wallace bumper sticker.”

“The tragedy of the South was that the honor of the white tribe came to depend upon the subservience of blacks.”

More than two decades later the poison and paranoia of racism are obviously still with us; simply, it has moved northward across a state border. But, what about spiritual disorientation and tribal honor? Are they still with us as well?

¹ <http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5jsCEnrVzDQoU5tg63njLNy0UTDNAD9433E080>

Lara Lakes Jordan. “Feds disrupt skinhead plot to assassinate Obama”. Associated Press, 27 October 2008.

² http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs_list/InauguralSpeech.html

Alabama Department of Archives & History. 2002. Alabama Governor, Inaugural Addresses and Programs, SP194. Governor George C. Wallace, January 14, 1963 Inaugural Address, Montgomery, Alabama

³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/4/newsid_2453000/2453987.stm

A BBC news report including a portion of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s speech in the aftermath of the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

⁴ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,922988-1,00.html>

Lance Morrow, “George Wallace Overcomes: Running for governor with new black friends”, TIME Magazine, 11 October 1982.

SPIRITUAL DISORIENTATION

Although it appears that Christianity has brought African and European Americans together in the South, Christians across our nation appear bent on alienating nearly 20 percent of the world's population against the United States.⁵ The evidence for this is America's silence on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the outspoken steadfast support for the State of Israel during the 2008 presidential campaign. When I told my Jewish friend at Berkeley's 24-Fitness Center that I feared for the death of Obama and thought it better not to vote for him, he replied that I should not let fear dictate my choice. I listened.

Before the US invasion of Iraq the most important issue in the Middle East next to oil was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite the pain and suffering that this conflict continues to bring to the region, however, the Arab and Muslim view of the United States was largely ambivalent. When the Twin Towers fell on September 11, 2001, many Arabs surely applauded. Many more observed the tragedy with the same amazement and horror as did most Americans. After our troops entered into Iraq, however, it became clear to the Muslim world that -- despite US government rhetoric to the contrary -- the United States did not trust Islam, and that the US was bent on its democratic transformation, if not its outright destruction. This did not have to be.

After routing Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan the struggle against *al Qaeda* could have gone underground where, with the exception of the somewhat regular, but still occasional horrific tragedy, most terrorist activity is conducted. Instead, President Bush declared our country at war with an Arab country -- a country that posed no threat to US security. This war has not only turned the majority of Arabs and Muslims against us, but has plunged the US economy into massive debt, destroyed our national image among our allies, allowed a resurgence of *Al Qaeda* and the Taliban in Afghanistan, turned our attention away from Israel's tragic occupation of Palestine, emboldened the government of Iran, and turned our own citizenry against one another. What is worse, we are still blaming the Arab world and others for our misfortune: both Senators Obama and McCain are pledging to free the US of dependence on Middle East oil while "blaming" the Chinese for lending us the money that we need to purchase oil from those "who do not like us very much".⁶



Well, *Al Qaeda* is only a tiny portion of the Arab world, and there is nothing that we have borrowed from China that we ourselves have not purchased in excess of our own gross domestic output -- our ability to pay for what we consume. Indeed, if there was a spiritual disorientation in the American South in 1982, then it has spread to the entire country under a different guise in 2008.

By way of introduction to the next topic, before a newly elected president of the United States enters into office he must take the presidential Oath of Office. He can take this oath by swearing to God or by simply affirming his good faith to his country.⁷ This suggests a clear separation of church and state. In contrast, each American, and

⁵ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/islam.htm>

Religious Tolerance. Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. World Religions. Islam: The second largest world religion...and growing.

⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvdfO0lq4rQ>

This refrain has been repeated over and over throughout the 2008 Presidential campaign. It was even uttered during the 3rd US Presidential Debate -- a debate that was supposed to focus solely on domestic matters.

⁷ http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/pihtml/pi_oaths.html

Presidential Oaths of Office. Presidential Inaugurations. American Memory. The Library of Congress

many overseas, circulate the words "IN GOD WE TRUST" each time they make a purchase. This double standard is indicative of the spiritual malaise in which our society finds itself. To a Buddhist there is little difference between the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian notions of God, and many Christians still argue about the sanctity of the Pope. But what, pray tell, does any of this have to do with the economy? It is not trust in any spiritual deity that makes the dollar go round, rather, it is faith in good government and a sound currency.

TRIBAL CONFLICT

The nominal value of our nation's wealth is tumbling in the US stock markets, and the value of our nation's currency is already in question. In the first instance, our nation's leaders have failed to provide adequate surveillance over our nation's financial markets and permitted the issue, sale, and purchase of an enormous amount of new financial paper whose substance was the foolish hopes, false promises, and crooked dealings of a large number of Americans whose only plea is ignorance, avarice, or criminal behavior. Many innocent, hard-working Americans and non-Americans are now paying the price. In the second instance, these same leaders are now pumping hundreds of billions of additional paper into Wall Street while growth in the production of real goods and services continues to slow. As no one knows the true market worth of the underlying assets of this bad debt, it is also impossible to know how much money should be pumped into the economy to cover it. In effect, the American government is playing Black Jack with the nation's general price index.

So, what does any of this have to do with honor? Not much, it is much more a matter of trust.

Consider the *Almighty Dollar* further. Any trust that we put into our currency, we must also put into our current, less than mighty government. For in the end, it is the government who controls the money supply, and thus the value of the dollar and how we perceive the dollar's future worth. Few people will want to invest in America's future, if they believe that the real return on their investment will be worth very much less than its nominal future value. Trust is about time and our ability to weather it, so that we might keep our promises at some future date. America needs to restore its confidence -- not only for itself, but also for the rest of the world. Barack Obama offers hope, but not his own necessarily; rather, yours and mine, and this brings us to the tribe.

I do not like the word tribe used in any context where it does not imply a known blood relationship, but many people probably like this word because it conjures thoughts of spiritual, even animalistic togetherness. Charles Barkley, a former NBA star and studio sports analyst for TNT who was named Sports Illustrated's 2002 "Personality of the Year"⁸, recently stated in reference to the Republican Party:⁹

The only way they can win this election is make it about race. That's the only way they can win. I wrote a chapter in one of my books about what happens in a race, when things are going bad, everybody kind of goes with their own tribe and the only way the Republican party can make this thing work is they get their tribe to get together and of course they use racial innuendo.

Although Charles Barkley never tells us clearly how he defines a tribe, he does indicate that tribal politics includes an element of race and that he wants to become the governor of the State of Alabama in 2014. During the same interview he also tells us:

I think anybody who is racist is an idiot whether they are black or white.

⁸ <http://www.tnt.tv/title/?oid=447471-3829>

TNT. We know drama. Charles Barkley, Announcer.

⁹ <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/27/brown.barkley/?iref=mpstoryview>

CNNPolitics.Com. Transcript: Charles Barkley tells Brown 'racism is a cancer'. 27 October 2008.

Yes, there is no doubt, this is the United States of America -- the only country in which I have ever lived where you are asked to claim a race, religion, and ethnic origin in addition to your nationality and sex as a precondition for employment.¹⁰ Let's see . . . I was born in Honolulu, my father was a Luo Kenyan, and my mother was from Kansas. I have a Muslim middle name, was once an atheist, and am now a Christian. I was raised in Jakarta Indonesia with my sister, who married a Chinese-Canadian and is a practicing Buddhist. I guess that makes me Other, but if I check Other will I even be considered American? Can I make up my own category? Does it even matter that I attended school in California, New York, and Boston, have degrees from two prestigious American universities, and taught Constitutional Law at the University of Chicago? Would you consider me eligible for work, if I told you that I do not hold a Greencard, but a US Passport. Would it matter to you that I have worked in the Illinois State Legislature and the US Senate -- not as a page, but as an elected Senator.¹¹

Yes, America, we will know that we have overcome tribal conflict when Affirmative Action is no longer an issue!

FAILED FOREIGN POLICY

Since the 2008 Republican National Convention my fondness for Country Western has grown, but my support for John "Wayne" McCain has diminished. No, I am still a federalist, believe in small government and states rights, and find Hank Williams Jr.'s song about "McCain and Palin tradition" down to earth.¹² This said, I have grown weary of empty Republican ideology and the Party's partisan fear tactics. In his September 20, 2001 address to a joint session of Congress and the American people President George W. Bush proclaimed:¹³

Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime.

The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself.

Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.

We will come together to give law enforcement the additional tools it needs to track down terror here at home.

We will come together to take active steps that strengthen America's economy, and put our people back to work.

Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom -- the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time -- now depends on us.

¹⁰ Although it usually states on these forms that you are under no obligation to fill them out, one cannot help but feel that if one does not, then one will be considered anti-establishment and unsuitable for employment.

¹¹ <http://www.biography.com/featured-biography/barack-obama/bio2.jsp>
Biography.com. True Story™ Barack Obama, aka Barack Hussein Obama, Jr..

¹² <http://www.mynorthwest.com/?nid=75&sid=96177>
MYNorthwest.com The Dave Ross Show. KIRO News/Talk. New McCain-Palin song.

¹³ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html>
President George W. Bush. The White House. Presidential News and Speeches. News releases for September 2001 President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear". 20 September 2001.

Rather than conducting a war of stealth against a “fringe form of Islamic extremism” with “global reach” the United States declared open war against a major, oil-rich, Islamic country and invaded Iraq. Although it is surely true that Saddam Hussein was a heinous dictator, who supported terrorist activity, his support for this activity was localized and targeted against the State of Israel -- the Arab world’s most disliked neighbor and a flagrant abuser of many a peace resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly.¹⁴ Alas, what should and could have been a quiet, secret, world-wide police action conducted in cooperation with the secret services of other national governments was turned into a daily televised nightmare of bombs, bravado, humiliation, horror, and tragedy visible to the entire world. As a result, the United States has become the Arab world’s most disliked neighbor in the Middle East, and terrorism has become a way of life. The blame for this lies in Washington, D.C. -- not in Kabul, not in Bagdad, not in Riyadh, not in Istanbul, not in Islamabad, and not even along the Afghan-Pakistani border where Osama bin Laden continues to evade capture.

In order to set this now five-year-long television series into motion President Bush, with the blessing of both Democrats and Republicans in the US Senate, staged a massive missile barrage that was suppose to “shock and awe” the Iraqi people into submission.¹⁵ Similar tactics of fear are now being used by the Republican Party to scare the American voter into four more years of failed Republican policies. Both Senator McCain and Governor Palin have hinted that Senator Obama is a left-wing radical with strong socialist leanings who will weaken the American economy and diminish America’s ability to defend itself overseas.

BORROW AND SPEND

in August 2003, five months after the US invaded Iraq I wrote:¹⁶

“In just two years the US budget has gone from a surplus of 334 billion US dollars to a deficit of 455 billion. Next year the deficit is expected to rise to 475 billion. This 800 billion dollar swing from a positive to negative annual surplus in just three years is a national tragedy of inordinate proportion. Remarkably only a quarter of this amount is attributable to President Bush’s war on terror -- including both the Iraqi and Afghani conflicts, as well as the newly created Office of Homeland Security. The remaining 75 percent, no matter how it is allotted, classified, or apportioned, is attributable to a poorly managed economy. If having mortgaged the future of American children to stoke the greed of America’s

¹⁴ <http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/viewpoint/unsaid.pdf>

Roddy A. Stegemann. Viewpoint. EARTH - East Asian Research and Translation in Hong Kong. It is not what you say, rather what you do not say that counts, 28 September 2003. Also, a sampling of a long series of articles written by the same author between July 2002 and November 2004 in run-up to the 2004 US presidential election:

<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/viewpoint/frank.pdf>

The Frankenstein Monster. Viewpoint. EARTH. 27 July 2002.

<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/viewpoint/barak.pdf>

An Unaccomplished *fait accompli*. Viewpoint. EARTH. 11 September 2002.

<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/viewpoint/innocent.pdf>

There are few innocent victims in a democracy. Viewpoint. EARTH. 8 December 2002.

<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/viewpoint/mazel.pdf>

A failed diplomat and Israel’s failing foreign policy. Viewpoint. EARTH. 28 December 2004.

<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/viewpoint/disconnect.pdf>

The fuel that stokes the fire and America’s enemies from within. Viewpoint. EARTH. 8 June 2004.

<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/viewpoint/extreme.pdf>

New perspective for a new administration. Viewpoint. EARTH. 1 November 2004.

¹⁵ <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/24/eveningnews/main537928.shtml>

CBS News. “Iraq faces massive US missile barrage”, Washington, D.C., 24 January 2003

¹⁶ <http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/viewpoint/badbushgo.pdf>

Roddy A. Stegemann. Bad Bush Go. An essay in which I ask that President Bush step down. Viewpoint. East Asian Research and Translation in Hong Kong. 8 August 2003.

wealthiest individuals were not bad enough, America's over consumption of our world's scarce resources has never been higher and is likely to get worse. In May of this year the United States registered its third largest monthly trade deficit on record -- 42 billion US dollars. If sustained, the US will owe somewhat less than an additional one half trillion US dollars by the end of the year. The US spends somewhat under 5 billion per month on military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan; these expenditures together accounted for only a tenth of the United States' May trade deficit; the rest was over consumption."

Obviously, things have become much worse. It should also be fairly obvious that simply changing the Republican Party's head is not going to pull us out.

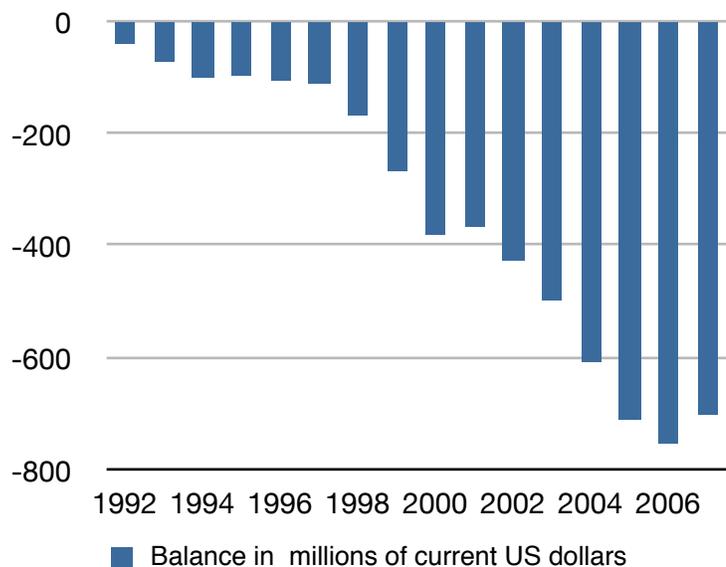
Since President Clinton left office in 2000 the annual US deficit in goods and services (see figure below) more than doubled.¹⁷ This near relentless increase in foreign debt has been brought about by US over consumption. Both as a nation and as individuals we are consuming far beyond our means. This trend must stop.

The US budget deficit (see figure on next page) has followed a similar pattern.¹⁸ From 1998 until 2000 the United States government maintained a rising surplus. By 2003 the government deficit was the highest it had been in US history. The 2008 budget deficit is expected to double this amount.

Indeed, one must ask just what kind of malicious game is being played when Senator John S. McCain and Alaskan Governor Sarah H. Palin claim that the Democrats will tax and spend? The evidence indicates a clear pattern of saving while the Democrats were in office! Under President William J Clinton the federal deficit demonstrated a monotonic decrease from 1992 until 2000. In contrast, under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush (1980 - 1992) and President George W. Bush (2000 - 2008) the federal deficit has nearly always risen.

Whereas our trade deficit represents over consumption with respect to our neighbors, our federal budget deficit represents our domestic trade-off between current and future consumption. In short, rather than investing in our children's future we are consuming it!

US Trade Balance in Goods and Services



If asked to characterize Republican fiscal behavior, could we say anything but borrow and spend. Even if, as the Republicans claim, the Democrats have always been tax and spend, this would be fiscally far more responsible than what we have been experiencing for 20 of the past 28 years.

¹⁷ <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/historical/index.html>
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Foreign Trade Division.

¹⁸ <http://www.bea.gov/national/nipaweb/TableView.asp?SelectedTable=84&Freq=Qtr&FirstYear=2006&LastYear=2008>
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis. National Income and Product Accounts. Table 3.1 - Government Current Receipts and Expenditures. Seasonally Adjusted. Line 39 - Net Lending or Borrowing.

IT IS TIME

I voted for Ronald Reagan and cheered when the Berlin Wall crumbled. I also voted for William Clinton and cheered when he left office with a budget surplus.¹⁹ Under the current Bush administration we tore down Saddam Hussein's statue, rebuilt an ideological wall against 20 percent of the world's population, and have experienced the largest trade and budget deficits in US history. Are we now to invite another Republican into office?

Senator Barack H. Obama did not win the Democratic nomination because he rebels against his party; rather, he got there, because he is intelligent, listens, and looks for consensus.²⁰ Furthermore, he knows how to package and sell that consensus, so that it can be made to appeal to an even larger number of people. These are important leadership qualities. In contrast, President

Bush has been a good manager and steered his course against all odds; simply, he did not listen, or alternatively failed to select well those who have been listening for him. He has failed as a leader. John S. McCain apparently listens better and might even make a good manager, but it is not a maverick shake up in Washington, D.C. that is needed; rather, it is a change in direction. This will require many people tugging at the sails simultaneously in the same direction.



hold his party together.

Frankly, I am tired of the ideological warring, militance, paranoia, and fear mongering of the Republican Party. The Cold War is over, and American competitiveness in the market place cannot be achieved with guns in the battlefield. Like a hollow drum, Republican ideology has turned our nation's attention away from the substance of sound government.

And yes, it is time for a change

¹⁹ AP Photo - Alex Brandon. Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., speaks with former president Bill Clinton at a rally at Osceola Heritage Park in Kissimmee, Fla., Wednesday, Oct. 29, 2008.

²⁰ http://www.ontheissues.org/Audacity_of_Hope.htm

Jesse Gordon. OnTheIssues book review of Senator Obama's book *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*.

