

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Unsolicited Solitude



Perhaps the liberal Democrats are justified in the exalted view they have of their own moral heft. No other political point of view spends so much of its time self-

lessly lecturing the opposition on how to improve itself. Liberals are forever telling us how we conservatives can better our electoral chances and be more true to our highest conservative ideals in general. The columnist E.J. Dionne is particularly selfless in advising us on how to be true conservatives.

Of course, conservatives have reason to grow suspicious when those liberals, advising us on how to improve our electability, counsel us to nominate candidates who are liberals. And that almost always is their advice. Remember how they warned us against our suicidal impulse to nominate Ronald Reagan?

Our liberal friends are also very helpful in advising conservatives on tactics. When conservative politicians make the mistake of soliciting votes from staunchly conservative supporters, liberals speak right up, admonishing against such reckless imprudence. When George W. Bush set foot on the campus of South Carolina's Bob Jones University, you can be sure that E.J. foresaw Bush's imminent doom. (By the way, what happened to Ronald Reagan's presidential possibilities when he visited the Bob Jones campus in 1980?)

Interestingly, our liberal prelectors never think it politically dangerous for liberal politicians to solicit votes from

.....
Adapted from RET's weekly Washington Times column syndicated by Creators Syndicate.

the staunchly liberal. The other day, when Bill Bradley and Al Gore went on stage before an audience of black political leaders and did contortions before them, I heard no liberal commentator admonishing against the reckless pandering that ensued.

Viewing the spectacle, one would have thought that Bradley and Gore were running for election in South Africa. The excellent Bill Sammon, reporting in the *Washington Times*, recorded that "The vice president and the former New Jersey senator talked of reparations for descendants of the slaves, promised 'info stamps' that the poor could use to buy computers and harshly scolded white Americans for not holding similar views on how to unify the races."

Now the Democrats are showing themselves to be even more energetic in helping the conservatives to victory. In the Republican primary in Michigan, the liberals went beyond advising us of the best presidential nominee we could choose. They actually pulled on their boots, buttoned up their winter coats, and went out and voted for him. They tried to save us from George W. Bush, the candidate from Bob Jones U. Their choice was Senator John McCain. Fifty-one percent of those voting in the Republican primary admitted to being independents or Democrats. Thanks, fellows.

But Senator McCain is really not much of a liberal. His rating from the right-wing American Conservative Union was 77 in 1999. He is against regulation, big spending, excess pork. He is a friend of the military, the tax cutters, and limited government. Are his stands on campaign finance and tobacco the desiderata that make him a true blue liberal? Has liberalism come down to this?

Thus far Campaign 2000 qualifies as one of the Republic's most bizarre presidential elections. Democrats are decid-

ing the presidential nominees of both parties. The party bosses have been banished. Sectional interests are history. The new king makers are the primary voters of New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Michigan. By the end of March the nominees of both parties will have been chosen by nine or ten percent of the electorate. There are only two candidates in the Democratic primary. In the Republican primary there are three, the last one being Alan Keyes.

Something is indeed wrong. The major issue in the Republican primary is that rich people and rich corporations are actually paying for the cost of elections. The major issue in the Democratic Party is which candidate is more

25 YEARS AGO IN The American Spectator

Richard Nixon's announcement of his impending resignation was not the only event that made August 8, 1974 a crucial date in the history of the American Presidency. On that same day, the House of Representatives, after long uncertainty and delay, approved legislation providing for the public financing of all future Presidential elections. (The Senate had already passed similar legislation in April.) The combination of the House vote and the Nixon resignation made it all but certain that public financing would become law. Nixon had made perfectly clear his own strong opposition to such a measure, and until his departure, the threat of a Presidential veto could not be discounted. His successor was also reportedly opposed to public financing, but the prospect of a Ford veto never seemed very credible; especially after the Nixon pardon, the political costs of such a move would have been too great. On October 15 President Ford signed the bill.

—Marc F. Plattner
"A Campaign Reform for Yesteryear"
APRIL 1975

ardent for abortion. Bring back the smoke-filled room.

The party bosses, of course, have been the targets of liberal reformers for years. They gave the Republic the likes of Roo-

sevelt and Eisenhower. Now the blessings of three generations of reform politics are upon us. Perhaps by Campaign 2004 Alan Keyes will win. The liberals might tell us he is the true liberal. ❧

Party of generations past and the Reform Party of recent years might more appropriately be called the Vanity Party. They are the parties of loud-mouthed egotists such as Ross Perot, Jesse Ventura, and Donald Trump. They inspire hope in many of the political connoisseurs until their loud-mouthed supporters gather in one convention too many and self-destruct as the American Reform Party is doing. Note, the Reform Party is self-destructing over the assembled egotists' failure to compromise. Call it a matter of principle if you will, but I see it as personal vanity. Compromise is a valued principle in democratic politics. Perhaps the Republicans and Democrats deserve a little more respect.

Our Debt to Forbes

One of my lewd pleasures during this presidential primary season is to tune in C-Span on the morning after a debate among the Republican candidates. C-Span is the public affairs network that attracts many of the country's most ardent political connoisseurs. Their phoned-in pronunciamientos on the morning after tell us much about some of the country's political junkies. A disproportionate number of them say the office once held by Roosevelt and Eisenhower should now go to Keyes, Alan Keyes.

Ha, ha, ha. Vanity once again makes the morally earnest a laughingstock. A few weeks back I watched a uniquely self-righteous editor from a uniquely self-important "progressive" political journal weathering the Keyes *fantasia*. If I could possibly feel sorry for such a pompous ass I would, but his pomposity could turn Mother Teresa's heart to stone. Then C-Span's host, Brian Lamb, asked his perspiring guest to explain why probably two-thirds of the political sophisticates calling in avowed that "Forsooth, the honey-tongued Keyes is my candidate for possession of the nuclear football." C-Span's matutinal oracle blubbered. He bloviated. He ducked. Somewhere off-stage I heard Mother Teresa laughing.

What was Brian Lamb's distinguished guest to do, admit that the civic-minded audience was composed of a large number of fools? This progressive editor's whole career has been devoted to advocating such false pieties from the public discourse as "political independence," "telling it like it is," "principled politics," withal: the power of high intelligence. Well, the callers obviously shared these pieties; and their candidate was a mercurial gadfly, intelligent, principled

(admirably conservative), and utterly devoid of any sense of responsibility for anything save getting to the next debate with his shoes on. C-Span is not unrepresentative. After a debate in mid-February, ABC's Clinton-flack-turned-journalist George Stephanopoulos visited a focus group that was equally swept away by Keyes.

What are we to conclude from the political connoisseurs' weakness for the Keyes *fantasia*? My conclusion is that vanity plays a very large role in political enthusiasms, particularly the enthusiasms of the politically independent. The politically independent usually envisage themselves as superior to the hum of Republicans and the drum of Democrats. It is their conceit that they are too intelligent, too principled, and too busy to work with either party. They watch television. They listen to radio. They do not otherwise participate until election day, and maybe not then. After all, how many elections feature an Alan Keyes?

Most likely, the independently minded political connoisseur does not even contribute to campaigns. Only two to three percent of the population contributes money to politics. Here is another reason for scoffing at the media's claim that campaign finance reform is a burning national issue. Of course, campaign finance reform is another of the noble causes of the political independent. Yet, as I suggest, few of them contribute financially to politics. Again, is it because there are not enough Alan Keyeses to fetch their enthusiasm?

Doubtless the alibi is that neither party is sufficiently intelligent or principled to deserve financial support. Again, vanity plays its role in political enthusiasms. Third parties such as the Progressive

There are some outsiders who enter politics free of vanity and goaded mainly by principle and public spirit. They sacrifice time and money to advance policies they believe will improve the commonweal. Steve Forbes has spent five years and tens of millions of his own dollars to advance ideas that even some Democrats now find compelling. That not many of the political connoisseurs in C-Span's audience telephoned in their support for him again casts doubt on their seriousness. Forbes may have been long on ideas but he was not long on theater. As he put it the day before he left the race, "Some of us do well on the television screen and some don't, which is why I'm in the print business."

Forbes's failure was not solely a matter of his inability to provide political theater. He also had the problem that the Republican frontrunners profited from his years of tirelessly advocating tax reform, school choice, medical savings accounts, and privatization of some of Social Security. Forbes made these policies staples of Campaign 2000. Republicans and even some Democrats nationwide have taken up Forbes's issues.

Quite possibly, Forbes is to the future of American politics what the Socialist Norman Thomas was to the decades of Liberal welfarism that crested in the 1970's, an intellectual exemplar. Perhaps that is why the editorial page of the backward-looking *New York Times* greeted his retirement from the presidential race with graceless derision. Alan Keyes is a more commanding presence. ❧



Inventing An Epidemic

The traditional diseases of Africa are called AIDS.

Hype about AIDS in Africa has reached new heights. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Vice President Al Gore (at the U.N. Security Council) have declared it to be an international security threat. AIDS is now called the leading cause of death in Africa, with over two million deaths last year, and the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa is spreading “nearly unabated.” Seventy percent of all AIDS cases are said to be African. On *Newsweek*’s cover we read of “10 Million Orphans.” Meanwhile, in a “Tour of Light,” a troupe of orphans from “devastated Uganda” performs on the Kennedy Center stage. There are calls for a new Marshall Plan.

Skepticism about what governments say—always scarce among journalists—vanishes completely when it comes to “plagues” and epidemics. At the mention of AIDS, newspaper stories are virtually dictated by public health officials. The *New York Times* is the pre-eminent example, with other publications trotting behind uncritically. A rare exception is the science journalist Michael Fumento, now with the Hudson Institute. Another is Charles Geshekter, a professor of African history at California State University at Chico. He has made 15 trips to Africa and has written widely about AIDS in that continent.

The author of *The Myth of Heterosexual AIDS*, Fumento told me that he found the recent reports of HIV infection rates of 25 percent in some African countries to be not believable. The alarmist predic-

tions about the progress of AIDS in this country have not been borne out, he said. African AIDS is an attempt to find the bad news elsewhere. Here, AIDS has not spread into the general population, and never will. It has remained confined to the major “risk groups,” mainly intravenous drug users and fast-lane homosexuals. But in Africa, more women than men are said to be infected with the virus. Prof. Geshekter, too, sees African AIDS as a prolongation of the gravy train for public health experts. “AIDS is dwindling away in this country,” he told me. “The numbers are down. What are the AIDS educators to do? Africa beckons.”

Here is an “African AIDS” primer. Over the years AIDS American-style was redefined more and more expansively. In 1993, for example, the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta added cervical cancer to the list of AIDS-defining diseases, with the unacknowledged goal of increasing the numbers of women. The overwhelming preponderance of males was an embarrassment to infectious-disease epidemiology, given that the viral agent was supposed to be sexually transmitted. AIDS is a name for 30-odd diseases found in conjunction with a positive test for antibodies to the human immunodeficiency virus. Being “HIV positive,” then, is the unifying requirement for an AIDS case. Here is the key point that the newspapers won’t tell you. To diagnose AIDS in Africa, no HIV test is needed. The presence of the unifying agent that supposedly causes the immune deficiency, the ID of AIDS, does not have to be established.

This was decided by public health officials at an AIDS conference in Bangui, a

city in the Central African Republic, in October 1985. This meeting was engineered by an official from the CDC, Joseph McCormick. He wanted to establish a diagnostic definition of AIDS to be used in poor countries that lacked the equipment to do blood tests. He also succeeded in persuading representatives from the World Health Organization in Geneva to set up its own AIDS program. The appearance of sick people in Zaire hospitals had persuaded McCormick and others that AIDS now existed in Africa—this before HIV tests had even been conducted. And here was something important to write home about: Slightly more women than men were affected. Back in America, as Laurie Garrett wrote in *The Coming Plague* (1994), McCormick told an assistant secretary of Health and Human Services that “there’s a one to one sex ratio of AIDS cases in Zaire.” Heterosexual transmission had been established. Now we were all at risk! AIDS budgets would soar.

The CDC had an “urgent need to begin to estimate the size of the AIDS problem in Africa,” McCormick wrote in his book, *Level 4: Virus Hunters of the CDC*.

Only then could we figure out what needed to be done—and where. This is what is known as surveillance. It involves counting the number of cases of AIDS. But we had a peculiar problem with AIDS. Few AIDS cases in Africa receive any medical attention at all. No diagnostic tests, suited to widespread use, yet existed. . . . We needed a clinical case definition—that is to say, a set of guidelines a clinician could follow in order to decide whether a certain person had AIDS or not. This was my major goal: if I could get everyone at the WHO meeting in Bangui to agree on a single, simple definition of what an AIDS case was in Africa, then, imperfect as the definition might be, we could actually start to count the cases, and we would all be counting roughly the same thing.

TOM BETHELL is TAS’s *Washington correspondent*. His latest book is *The Noblest Triumph* (St. Martin’s Press).