

The answer I believe may be found in words this writer spoke at the Republican convention, 12 years ago: "There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself."

Those who hate "The Passion" are, almost all, on the other side in that war. They hate the movie and the messenger, and, as they admit, the "central story" of the Gospels, the Crucifixion of Christ. Why? Because if "The Passion" is true to the Gospels and the Gospels are themselves true, then there is a painful truth to be faced. It is found in John 1:11, inside "The Last Gospel" of the Tridentine mass Mel Gibson attends. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Admittedly, that is a hard message to hear.

Safire quotes Christ (Matthew 10:34) as saying: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." But Christ is using a metaphor here, the meaning of which follows:

For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's enemies shall be they of his own household.

Again and again, Christ refers to this coming divide between those who will follow him and those who will reject him. "He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Luke 11:23).

The venom spewed at "The Passion of the Christ," only testifies to the truth of the Savior's warning, "As the world has hated me, so also it will hate you." Braveheart has led and won a great victory in the crusade that is the culture war that will determine the fate of the civilization that came out of what happened on Calvary and on that first Easter morning. ■

Rumbles on the Right

California's GOP rejects the Bush amnesty plan.

By Steven Greenhut

AFTER WATCHING George W. Bush sign the No Child Left Behind Act, wage a pre-emptive war against a country that had never threatened us, and engage in a spending spree that makes Bill Clinton seem like Grover Cleveland, I was convinced that nothing could possibly redeem the Bush presidency.

I was wrong.

The president's politically inspired plan to create a guest-worker program—amnesty for illegal immigrants on the installment plan, according to one critic—has accomplished something valuable here in California, Ground Zero for the immigration debate.

No, the Bush plan won't do as intended and help the president carry the state in the general election. Despite what myopic GOP leaders say, California will vote overwhelmingly for John Kerry in November. Bush won't win any long-term support for the Republican Party in the state's burgeoning Latino community, which remains an unshakable part of the Democratic coalition.

And the Bush plan will absolutely, positively do nothing to stop the stream of illegal immigration that is quickly turning Southern Californian into a northern outpost of Mexico. If anything, it will encourage even more illegal border crossings.

But the plan has finally shaken California Republicans out of their post-Prop. 187 stupor. That's an unintended consequence, of course. But in the current world of politics, we must be thankful for whatever we can gain, intended or not.

Proposition 187 was the 1994 ballot initiative, passed by 59 percent of Cali-

fornia voters, including 20 percent of Latino voters, that would have banned illegal immigrants from receiving non-emergency public services, including education.

Reasonable people had reservations about whether Prop. 187 would be effective. An ongoing attempt at reviving it—the courts and the previous governor dismantled it—would backfire at this point. Nevertheless, Prop. 187 was not an attack on immigration in general or immigrants in particular, but on those who came to this country in violation of American laws. It was a reflection of genuine concern about illegal immigration and the failure of the federal government to do anything to stop what amounts to an invasion.

But since its passage, Prop. 187 has overshadowed any serious immigration debate in a state that is swamped by immigration. Few politicians have been willing to discuss the issue in any critical way without summoning the "ghosts of Prop. 187."

California Democratic Party Chairman Art Torres captured a general establishment sentiment in 1995 when he called Prop. 187's passage the "last gasp" of white California. When the media covers immigration, they invariably refer to Prop. 187 as a racist effort, "Anglo" California's scapegoating of immigrants in the midst of a recession.

Instead of fighting back and making a case for responsible, legal immigration and standing up for a viewpoint that's popular among the state's electorate (which remains predominantly Anglo),

Republican leaders rolled over. They agreed that discussions about immigration, in a post-Prop. 187 world, were dangerous.

Republicans accepted the story that the state's growing Latino community was up for grabs politically, but then Republican Gov. Pete Wilson rode Prop. 187 to victory by exploiting anti-immigrant sentiment. (One pro-Prop. 187 ad, which showed illegal immigrants lining up at the border with the spoken words "They keep coming," has gone down in California political history the way George H.W. Bush's Willie Horton ads portraying Michael Dukakis as soft on crime have gone down in national political history.)

As a result, the theory goes, the Latino community—not just the new immigrants but the majority of voters of Latino descent—embraced the Democrats and Republican fortunes have declined ever since. To have success in the state, then, Republicans need to appeal (i.e., pander) to Latino voters by assuring them that they are not against legal immigration and will not be too critical of illegal immigration either.

There's no doubt that Republican political hopes have declined in recent years. Before Arnold Schwarzenegger scored an overwhelming gubernatorial recall victory, every state constitutional office was held by Democrats. In the legislature, Democrats are just shy of the crucial two-thirds majority in both houses.

The question is whether support for limiting illegal immigration caused the Republican Party to crumble. I'm skeptical. Prop. 187 energized some previously apathetic Latino voters, but Latinos leaned in the Democratic direction before Prop. 187. With the exception of South Florida and its Cuban population, the Latino population is overwhelmingly Democratic nationwide. Surely, that's not the result of Prop. 187.

There are signs that various radical Islamic terrorist groups that have previously pursued separate agendas might now cooperate on a local level to carry out attacks. The possibility is a nightmare scenario for security experts as it could mean that the single group al-Qaeda has morphed into an international terrorism Hydra. The bombings in Madrid may turn out to be one example of the new terrorism, locally planned and executed using various resources both from Spain and Morocco. Hamas, which has never targeted Westerners and has confined its terrorist actions to Israel and the occupied territories, may be planning similar actions. In the wake of the Yassin assassination, Hamas's new operational leader, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, promised retaliation against Israel and its supporters everywhere. He later retracted his statement and limited retaliation to Israel, but American counter-terrorism experts believe that there are specific indications that Hamas might by proxy strike against U.S. targets for the first time. Its support infrastructure in the U.S., which is not an operational one, could provide logistical assistance for a terrorist act in North America carried out by a cell from another group, possibly North African or Southeast Asian.



The comic opera Pakistani army offensive in South Waziristan, initiated to impress visiting U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, has failed to round up any significant members of al-Qaeda sheltering inside Pakistan. There was never any reliable information suggesting that Ayman al-Zawahiri or sizable numbers of al-Qaeda were located at the village of Kaloosha, though some Mujahedeen from the Afghan war with the Soviet Union did resettle in the area 15 years ago, married local women, and were adopted by the Yargul Khel tribe. The Pakistani military, after hyping to the world media the prospect that Zawahiri was trapped, has now admitted its failure and is facing a growing backlash from the well armed and vengeful tribesmen whose homes have been destroyed by helicopter gunships and artillery fire.



The Bush administration's unfounded pre-war claims of an Iraqi WMD program have come back to haunt the United States in its efforts to halt the Iranian nuclear program. Widespread skepticism in Europe of American claims regarding Iranian intentions has somewhat obscured the undeniable fact that Iran's WMD program and terrorist ties were always a much greater threat than Saddam Hussein. Iran supports terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, helping Hezbollah, for example, to carry out two major terrorist operations in Argentina. General antipathy towards the U.S. and fears that it is seeking a pretext for taking preemptive military action have up until now prevented sharper-edged declarations from the IAEA over the Iranian nuclear program. Iran has meanwhile been playing a clever game with IAEA members, alternately cajoling and threatening. The White House knows it does not have enough support within IAEA for sanctions, so it intends slowly to build a campaign of pressure against Tehran by selective disclosures of its nuclear programs using press leaks to "friendly" major American media outlets. ■

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