

Flashback

TO KNOW NOTHING OF WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE YOU WERE BORN
IS TO REMAIN EVER A CHILD—*Cicero*

The Elector Defector

The Electoral College has shut down for another four years. Gore-y fantasies of “faithless electors” escaping their ironclad lockboxes and bolting from Bush to Prince Albert have come to naught. Apparently the Republicans have learned something about vetting electors since 1972, when a GOP elector deserted—and did so quite predictably. For the ’72 renegade, Roger Lea MacBride, had written a book 20 years earlier in which he praised the conscience-driven elector as a vital, if all too rare, feature of the Electoral College. Sometimes authors mean what they write.

As a lad of 16, Roger MacBride, a Coke-bottle spectacled son of a *Reader’s Digest* editor, fell under the spell of a family friend, Rose Wilder Lane, daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder of *Little House on the Prairie* fame. Rose, a libertarian globetrotter and popular journalist who once rejected a marriage proposal from King Zog of Albania, had become a *cause célèbre* when she refused to accept a Social Security number. (“I will have nothing to do with that Ponzi fraud because it is treason; it will wreck this country as it wrecked Germany. I won’t have it; you can’t make me,” she declared.)

The childless Lane made MacBride her “adopted grandson,” a winning lottery ticket if ever there were one. He became heir to the *Little House* fortune, which is ample enough to build big houses from one end of South Dakota to the other.

As a young lawyer, MacBride wrote a little book titled *The American Electoral College* (1953) in which he proposed a “district system” similar to that now in use in Nebraska and Maine; electors would be awarded by congressional district, with two bonus electors given to the winner of the state. “The district mode was mostly, if not exclusively, in view when the

Constitution was framed and adopted,” explained James Madison, but largely abandoned as states sought to maximize their relative influence by delivering their electors as a bloc to the victor.

MacBride deplored deviations from the Founders’ intent, for instance the fact that “Electors almost never exercis[e] independent judgment.” They had become mere “mechanical men,” drones who in some states are forbidden by law from voting their conscience.

MacBride urged an “attempt to restore to the members of the Electoral College some of the function of independent thinking and action assigned to them by the Federal Convention.” In this he was echoing Madison, who in 1823 had endorsed the independence of electors: “altho’ generally the mere mouths of their Constituents, they may be intentionally left sometimes to their own judgment, guided by further information.”

MacBride’s book disappeared without a trace, and in 1972 the champion of the faithless elector was chosen by the Virginia Republican Party as a Nixon-Agnew elector. It would seem that the fabled Nixon intelligence team, otherwise occupied at the Watergate, failed to do the necessary background check.

Meanwhile, at a much less pricey (if bug-less) hotel 2,000 miles westward—the Denver Radisson—the Libertarian Party was born. In that Watergate June of 1972, 100 devotees of *laissez-faire*—Ayn Rand readers, free marketeers disgusted by the Nixon administration’s imposition of wage and price controls, and congenial rebels—nominated for President John Hospers, an eminent philosopher from USC who once almost flunked a football-swing but classroom-slow jock named O.J. Simpson. “Humbled, dubious, and a bit

MACBRIDE’S FAITHLESSNESS EARNED HIM THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY’S NOMINATION.

frightened,” Hospers ran a thoughtful and low-key campaign; his name appeared on the ballot in just two states. When he told a colleague at USC that he was running for President, the impressed pedant replied, “President of the Faculty Council?”

But Hospers had a secret. Roger MacBride had phoned the philosopher to tell him that he intended to cast his electoral vote for Hospers and running mate Tonie Nathan, thus ensuring that the first woman to receive a vote in the Electoral College had no familial ties to organized crime.

The Hospers-Nathan ticket received just 3,673 votes, but the big surprise came one month after election day, when Vice President Spiro Agnew announced to a befuddled nation that one electoral vote had been cast for John Hospers of California, placing him just 16 electoral votes behind George McGovern.

Roger MacBride’s faithlessness—or was it fealty to a higher principle?—earned him the Libertarian Party’s 1976 presidential nomination, but this time around there were no refractory libertarians lurking on the greensward of old Electoral College.

MacBride’s bolt invigorated the newborn Libertarian Party, and it taught the older parties a valuable lesson: When appointing electors, stick with hacks. And never choose a man who has written in praise of the faithless elector.

—Bill Kauffman

Beat the Press

THE HAND THAT RULES THE PRESS...RULES THE COUNTRY—*Judge Learned Hand*

The Soft Bigotry of Double Standards

Here's one thing we learned from the post-election Florida folderol: Black "leaders" can say anything, and the mainstream press will take it seriously.

"This is a replay of Selma all over again," Jesse Jackson declared. He yelled that "Holocaust survivors have been disenfranchised" deliberately. He repeatedly spoke of the "blood of blacks and Jews." Amidst calls from all sides to cool down the rhetoric, Jackson saw nothing wrong, factually or morally, with telling actual Holocaust survivors that, in effect, it was happening all over again. With not a single Bull Connor night stick, German shepherd, or even a nasty word in evidence, Jackson told blacks Jim Crow was back.

And this was all during the first week after the election. It's hard to imagine what—short of declaring a nuclear attack is minutes away, or perhaps that Filene's is having a clearance sale—could be more inflammatory to Palm Beach voters. Good thing the sober, truth-squading *New York Times* was there to cut through the hyperbole: "Mr. Jackson has been careful not to be inflammatory," *Times* correspondent Lynette Holloway wrote on November 13, "which may be one reason the Democratic National Committee has changed its mind about his involvement."

Not one allegation by Jackson & Co.—about blocked polling places, "targeted" blacks and Jews, harassed immigrants—was ever brought before an actual judge because they were all lies. But the press simply turned a blind eye. Is it conceivable that a white Republican could invent lies about blacks or gays or, well, anyone who could lay claim to being a victim, without the *New York Times* and Dan Rather unleashing hordes of truth-squaders?

Some years back Al Sharpton attempted to frame innocent men for a non-existent crime, ruining the lives of the accused and damaging race relations for years. Yet he's treated like Gandhi with a Jerri-curl by many reporters because he's the "authentic voice" of a "disenfranchised constituency." Yawn. He's a con man. Louis Farrakhan gets a wonderful megaphone on shows like "Meet the Press." Nice liberal reporters feel compelled to earn their merit badges by challenging Farrakhan's comments about Judaism (the "Synagogue of Satan") or what some of his lieutenants have uttered about, say, the Catholic Church (the Vatican is run by "a lot of white faggot boys").

But this just plays into his hands by allowing him to "stand up" to whitey. Few interviewers—Ted Koppel excluded—are willing to embarrass Farrakhan by asking about his numerous loopy claims: that he's flown around in a space ship talking to the late Elijah Muhammed (the ship dropped Lou off outside Washington); that the sci-fi movie *Independence Day* is more or less a true story; and that the number 19 provides the secret to everything from the Book of Revelation to how to get your VCR to stop flashing "12:00 am."

If absolute power corrupts absolutely, so does absolute unaccountability. But when the once revered NAACP ran ads this year suggesting Bush favored racist murder, the media agonized about offering any criticism. Except for Fox News, no network examined the ad's propriety, but several did go ballistic over some Republican ads they imagined to be racist.

Any institution or community would go off the deep end if it received such wildly favorable press. If you kept spouting your every crackpot theory and the media

either applauded you or saluted your assertions with uncritical silence, wouldn't you start to believe everything you said, or at least think there's no down side to saying outlandish things? Most significantly, wouldn't you start to wonder—if you're the dashboard saint of Dan Rather and the *New York Times*' editorial board—why the government isn't doing what you demand?

Let's pick on Jesse again. For the overwhelming majority of his opponents, the problem with Jackson has nothing to do with the fact that he's black; it has to do with the fact that he's red, for want of a better adjective. Jackson and his colleagues in the civil rights leadership regularly claim racism explains all opposition to them, but in truth Jackson is simply on the leftist fringe. His economics are the sort taught in the very best French universities. In the '80s he hugged dictators Castro and Ortega, not as a dove but as a capitulationist. When he ran for President, he probably did better, not worse, than a white candidate with the same agenda would have.

Unfortunately, it's almost impossible to exaggerate the degree to which the media have adopted the left-wing propaganda that (a) being black means being left wing and (b) opposing left-wing blacks is racist (alas, this propaganda has also worked nicely among rank and file blacks). Peter Jennings of ABC, for instance, asked Colin Powell if he isn't a GOP Uncle Tom: "Do you ever feel that maybe this is the professional wing of the party trying to use you?"

Call it the soft bigotry of double standards: Clarence Thomas and Colin Powell get a hard time because they are insufficiently black; Jackson and Sharpton and Farrakhan get a free ride because they are *sufficiently* black.

—Jonah Goldberg