

In the Wake of November

George W. Bush's electoral victory stunned pundits and pollsters. I was more surprised by the preelection polls than by the President's margin of victory, which I had been correctly predicting for several months. When the Zogby numbers were brought to me at the end of the day, predicting a Kerry victory by 100 electoral votes, my confidence in my own judgment was shaken for a moment, but then I reflected. Which is more likely, that Zogby should have made a mistake—or let his ethnic (Arab) prejudice against Bush bias his interpretation—or that the American people had suddenly lurched either to the left or into conservative sanity?

Even before the nomination of John Kerry, I was offering odds on the Republican candidate. It was not that President Bush was a particularly strong candidate; but he, at least, looked and talked like a normal American, albeit not a very well-educated one. For many conservatives and all leftists, "anybody but Bush" was preferable; anybodies, however, do not win elections. The Democrats needed *somebody*, and what I doubted was the Democratic Party's ability to come up even with the half-a-man who could defeat the President. As it turned out, there was no probable candidate running in the Democratic primaries.

At the start of the campaign, there were just two major issues: the war in Iraq and the economy. In order for a Democrat to win, the war could not simply go from bad to worse, as it did: There would have to be a calamity. That did not happen. The other possible opportunity was an economic meltdown. Instead, several sectors of the economy showed improvement. Predictably, Bush lost many industrial sections, because of the continued deterioration of manufacturing; overall, however, there was no reason for a majority of voters to unseat a sitting president during the "War on Terror."

The nomination of John Kerry gave the Republicans a third issue, though it took some time for them to realize it: the—do not say the words or you are a bigot—Culture War. Who knows how many voters turned out to reject "gay marriage"? Anecdotally (and this in-

cludes exit-poll data, which is only a quantified version of anecdotes), a significant minority, composed especially of evangelicals but including many Mexican-Americans, viewed the election as a referendum on the homosexualist agenda, and, while Karl Rove now pooh-poohs the mere 22 percent that voted on the basis of the social issues, any significant loss of those voters would have given the election to Kerry. There is some evidence that Serbs and other Orthodox Christians may have turned the tide in Ohio, when they discovered that Kerry had openly consorted with KLA terrorists from Kosovo. At least the Serbs have something to celebrate.

Considering the assets enjoyed by an incumbent president during a war, President Bush's margin in the popular vote might be interpreted as a defeat. What the President and his advisors should note is that the moral and social issues they tried to run away from are the issues that secured his reelection.

In voting for George W. Bush, "Red State Americans" were rejecting the Democratic Party, which, in its current form, is enough to scare any normal person into voting straight-ticket Republican. The old party of labor bosses, white ethnics, and Southerners—Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion, as the Republicans used to call it—has turned into the party of criminals and pervers: immoral single girls and mothers who want to kill their babies; cross-dressing fags in bridal veils; and Hollywood stars who want to make themselves immortal by eating someone else's dead baby. (Stripped of humanitarian and scientific rhetoric, that is really the point of fetal stem-cell research.)

It is unlikely that the Republican bosses, Karl Rove and Dick Cheney, are paying much attention to their electoral base. In fact, their first postelection moves might be interpreted as a slap in the face to their most important supporters: conservative evangelicals. The pro-life John Ashcroft—admittedly a kook of the first water—is out, replaced by the pro-infanticide Alberto Gonzales. As a judge, Mr. Gonzales took the extreme position by ruling against parental notification in cases of underage girls seeking

abortions. When a Supreme Court vacancy opens up, it will be Gonzales and Arlen Specter, as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, who will have the most to say about replacements. There was the usual shadow-boxing over Specter's election, but I never had any doubt. Neither the President nor the Senate Republicans care anything about the sanctity of human life except as a stick to beat the Democrats with.

Many conservatives hoped against hope—and common sense—that Colin Powell, despite his ineffective record as Secretary of State, would stay and that the incompetents who mismanaged the war in Iraq—Rice, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Feith—would go. But the worst has happened. The neoconservatives—men of, at best, doubtful loyalty to this country—remain and Condoleezza (I hope I have the correct number of e's and z's) Rice has replaced General Powell as Secretary of State. It hardly matters what Mrs Rice thinks: Her lack of ability and strange public performances ensure that she will play a negligible role in making foreign policy. Those decisions will be left up to a cynical and bungling team of Bush foreign-policy advisors—Vice President Cheney and his neoconservatives, Secretary Rumsfeld and his—who make us long for the pragmatic Machiavellians of the first George Bush.

Conservatives can take some consolation from the election results. In most respects, John Kerry would probably have made a worse President than George W. Bush, and the turnout of Red State Americans against homosexuality is a healthy sign. They should not, however, expect much from Bush's second term, and it is not too early to think about how to block whatever candidate GOP leaders are already grooming.

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PROPOSITION 200, a measure requiring that applicants for state benefits and state suffrage show proof of eligibility for these privileges, was adopted in Arizona on November 2, 2004, by 56 percent of the total vote and 47 percent of the Hispanic portion of it. This happened in the face of opposition from the Democratic governor of the state; Arizona's mostly Republican congressional delegation; its two GOP Senators; and the Arizona Chamber of Commerce. In Colorado, Mr. Immigration Reform—Rep. Tom Tancredo—easily won election to a fourth congressional term by taking 60 percent of the vote. A few days after the election, the Bush administration, claiming to have won 44 percent of the Hispanic vote (up from 35 percent in 2000, spokesmen insisted), announced that it was set to hoist its long-de-railed amnesty plan back onto the tracks and open the throttle.

"Fate leads the willing but drives the stubborn," said Seneca. The more psephologists study the election returns, the less likely it appears that exit polls were actually correct in the 44-percent estimate. Even if, in the end, they prove to have been correct, however, the import of what they have to tell us is that 56 percent of Hispanic voters voted *against* George W. Bush—the same percentage, exactly, of all voters who voted for Proposition 200 in Arizona. A bird in the hand is supposed to be worth two in the bush; so why can't Karl Rove be content with the constituency he has? Why doesn't he set, as the goal in 2008, taking 76 percent of Arizona's total vote for the national ticket by pressing Congress for immigration restriction? The paradoxical answer—flabbergasting as the suggestion sounds—may be that his boss received 88 percent of the white vote nationally last November.

Very clearly, the Republican strategists, from the President himself on down, believe that, over the next several decades, brown voters must increase and white ones must decrease. The imperative, of course, is unconvincing; indeed, it is false (beyond a few percentage points, at least). The brown electorate will only add to its numbers if white politicians in Washington let more brown people into the country; and there is, currently, no majoritarian political force demanding that they do so. If amnesty prevails, and if immigration (legal and illegal) is not curtailed, it will only be because Washington wished to do as it did—for ab-

solutely no good or coherent reason.

The Republicans would defend their actions by explaining that a vicious circle holds: More browns coming into the country mean more brown votes cast, while more brown voters mean more voters angered by restrictionist voters to vote for Democratic candidates. In fact, they are subject to no such pressure, since 47 percent of Hispanic voters are opposed to further Hispanic (and other) immigration to the United States. In short, there is no vicious circle, since the circle in question can be broken into at any point and reversed—or smashed altogether. The demographic-psephological "problem" Bush-Rove identify for their party is, in fact, no problem at all, and fixing nonexistent problems is almost the definition of a senseless enterprise. Thousands of tons of printer's ink have been spilled by thousands of writers frustratedly trying to make sense of the Republicans' Hispanic voter strategy and feeling defeated and humiliated when they cannot square the circle. But there is no circle to square: only the vain and vacant tangle of human irrationality, vanity, and self-delusion.

And yet, there remains something further to be said on the subject of the politics of immigration. When confronted by the will of the native majoritarian electorate of their country where it conflicts with the desires of the foreign-born non-electorate, politicians are willing to risk the present solid support of the former for hypothetical future ballots cast by the latter. What their motives are in this matter, only their consciences can say for certain. As for the rest of us, we are at liberty to speculate. And we do.

—Chilton Williamson, Jr.

YASSER ARAFAT, the president of the Palestinian Authority, is dead. While he was alive, he was an obstacle to any fresh vision for peace in the Middle East. Vain-glorious and shift (he changed his mind about his place of birth thrice), he was unattractive as the "icon" of Palestinian aspirations. His ineffectiveness as an administrator was exceeded only by his insatiable avarice. As a negotiator, he was unable to close a deal, to make compromises, or to state his bottom-line position coherently and honestly. The best that can be said of Arafat is that, in all this, he was true to the Arab political tradition.

Born in 1929 as Rahman Abdul Rauf al-Qudwa al-Husseini, Yasser Arafat was the nephew of the grand mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, an ardent Nazi collaborator during World War II. This pedigree helped "Abu Ammar"—another pseudonym—to cofound Fatah (Victory), an underground organization for the liberation of Palestine that postulated the destruction of Israel, in 1958. A few years later, he became leader of the PLO and started building up the image of a leftist anti-imperialist revolutionary. In that role, Arafat peaked in 1974 when he addressed the U.N. General Assembly—the *kaffiyeh* (Palestinian headscarf), uniform, and holster included—and the world body passed a resolution condemning Zionism as a form of racism and supporting the right of Palestinians to self-determination.

Grandstanding before an assortment of Third World and communist despots may have suited Arafat's vanity, but it did nothing for the Palestinian cause, which went downhill over the ensuing two decades. Arafat's opposition to Israel depended for support on the pan-Arab sentiment, notably embodied in Egypt's Nasserism. Soon after the Arab defeat in October 1973, though, the pan-Arabist dream died when Anwar Sadat compromised with Israel. Arafat's Lebanese fiefdom, built on the ruins of a decent and multiconfessional polity, collapsed nine years later, shattered by Israel and Syria acting together in fact, if not in name. Arafat's subsequent exile in Tunisia was comfortable but degrading.

The United States and Israel resurrected Arafat as the lesser evil with the Oslo Accords of 1993. He did play along at first; once enthroned as a "head of state" in the West Bank and Gaza, however, Arafat tried to wear two incompatible hats. One day, he was president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), bringing "hard-line" dissidents to heel, indulging his vanity with kitschy head-of-state decorum, and amassing plundered international assistance funds. The next, as chairman of the PLO, he was abetting radicals and seeking to turn up the heat on Israel.

Then came Arafat's greatest blunder: his rejection of the deal Bill Clinton presented at Camp David in the closing months of his presidency. This event, more than any other, proves Arafat's ineptitude. Clinton was desperate to score a foreign-policy triumph that would atone for his many scan-