

The Procrastinator

the time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time

Special Post-Inauguration Edition

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Politics: President Bush's Legacy of a Legacy of a Legacy

Trey Smith



Former President Bush. No three-word phrase puts a smile on Liberal faces better than that one. In fact, as the former President stepped onto Marine One (which is designated Executive One when anyone other than the current President is on it) and flew out of Washington some of the people behind MSNBC's set started to sing, "na na na na, na na na na, hey hey, goodbye." I submit that President Bush's legacy is slightly more complicated than the ire he draws from critics and in fact has deep historical roots that will resonate far into the future.

President Nixon did many good things during his Presidency. He started the Environmental Protection Agency and opened China just to name two. However, anything good he did was overshadowed and then some by Watergate and the subsequent cover-up. Thus, his legacy upon leaving office was associated almost entirely with disgrace. Despite his personal low standing in terms of legacy, the impact he's had on politicians after his departure has been extremely significant.

While Nixon the man was banished to the political wilderness, the so-called Neocons brought the Nixonian philosophy concerning the Executive Branch to the political forefront. President Bush and his advisors liked Nixon's idea that the Executive needed to be stronger and more influential than the courts or congress. The famous Nixon statement in his David Frost interview in 1977, "if the President does it, it's not illegal," was adopted as a mantra for Neocons. As such, the Presidency from 2001-2008 became an entity with greater powers primarily due to the fact that it was the recipient of intelligence and therefore monopolized information. In truth, the Constitution actually established a balance of power wherein the Executive is the weakest of the three branches of government, but in the age of information the President is the gatekeeper for intelligence and consequently the most powerful person in government. The first President Bush knew this, as he was the former head of the CIA. His advisors were brought on by his son and pushed the monopolization of intelligence to new heights, making the Presidency more powerful than it had even been.


Had President Nixon lived to see this day he most certainly would have been both proud and jealous. If the tapes didn't exist and if he'd enjoyed the same Executive power as President Bush and if he'd utilized the corporate model of management, which compartmentalizes tasks and thereby minimizes accountability and transparency, then he might have made it through his second term. As it was he did not make it through his second term and a great many people greeted his departure from the White House euphorically. His contemporary supporters, on the other hand, viewed him as a victim, a casualty in the war between Liberalism and Conservatism. These contemporaries viewed the Left with the same degree of disgust that the Left felt for Nixon. As these contemporaries began to build the Republican Party back up, they never forgot their hate of the Left who had forced their President out of office. Therein lay the seeds for the 2000 election and politics of division.

At its core, the Bush Presidency was the manifestation of a modern Nixon administration; obsessed with controlling intelligence, despising critics of the administration, and convinced that a 'silent majority' supported them. Therefore, I believe that President Bush's legacy will endure the same fate as Nixon's. When Nixon left office he was despised and President Bush shares his low public approval ratings. Eventually, however, Nixon was seen as a man tormented by his own demons and as a result took his political philosophy too far and sowed the seeds for his own destruction. At no point was the philosophy faulted. Rather, it was Nixon's personal foibles that did him in. Likewise, I think President Bush will find that history will forever associate him with unpopularity and a White House that held information under lock and key, but I imagine these failings will be seen as personal mistakes instead of indications that the larger philosophy the Bush administration espoused was invalid.

President Bush could go to Texas, live out his days watching baseball, and never make another political statement again, but the overarching philosophy he helped create is here to stay. President Nixon suffered the same fate. While he was a pariah on a personal level, his philosophy inspired the Neocons that eventually took up residence in the White House and who pushed that philosophy to new extremes. History repeats itself, but in repetition the magnitude of events increases.

So those people happily chanting as former President Bush was whisked away on Executive One may have successfully vilified and ostracized the former President, but their excitement is shortsighted. The man may have left, but the philosophies he utilized aren't going anywhere. Divisive politics aren't going anywhere. A strong Executive Branch isn't going anywhere. Corporate (mis)management isn't going anywhere. The monopolization of information isn't going anywhere. And the Bush Doctrine most certainly isn't going anywhere (in case you're like Sarah Palin, the Bush Doctrine justifies preemptive wars to topple governments that pose a threat to the US [and actually I kind of agree with it in a broad sense]). So if his philosophy will live on as his legacy regardless of his personal failings, what exactly is the Bush philosophy?

President Bush's legacy is inexorably tied to the war on terrorism. Whether you agree with it or not, the former President's approach to this threat is something that has historical precedence. Since the dawn of free democratic societies, it has been argued that the very freedom and openness of a democracy (or republic) present a weakness to the State's security. Ancient Rome faced this problem as barbarians approached their gates and they decided to suspend their Republic in favor of a supreme leader who would deal with the threat and then give power back to the Senate. That supreme leader, of course, was Caesar and he never returned power to the Senate by arguing that Rome was constantly under threat. President Nixon adhered to a similar philosophy; the Executive has to have the most power. President Bush built upon both Nixon and Caesar. He expanded the Executive Branch even further than Nixon had and argued that in the face of terrorism (modern day barbarians) the quaint ideas held in the Constitution have to sometimes be suspended.

Disagree all you want, but this is a debate that has been going on since Ancient Rome. That, to me, is President Bush's legacy in the larger sense: he modernized the age-old argument that a free and open society has to sacrifice freedom and openness in the face of a foreign threat. 

Trey wrote this knowing that his Liberal friends would say, "et tu Trey, et tu?" and can be stabbed at dantzlsmith@gmail.com

Bonfire of Inanities: 30,000 Needed to Clean Up National Mall

Brad Wright

Mere moments after taking the Oath of Office, Barack Obama delivered on not one, but two campaign promises. In a move certain to please environmentalists and eleven million unemployed Americans, the 44th President of the United States announced the creation of 30,000 new sanitation jobs to deal with the overwhelming amount of trash created by his inauguration.

"Politicians often pledge to clean up Washington," Obama proclaimed, amidst a swirl of trampled Washington Post "Style" sections, "but I stand before you today prepared to act on that promise!"

The throng of over one million people erupted in cheers as the new President issued his first executive order, launching their empty Starbucks cups high in the air, like mortarboards at a high school graduation.

"We have a responsibility to our children to leave the country in the best possible condition," the President continued, "and we might as well start right here today in Washington, D.C. And that, my fellow citizens, means empowering a



mighty custodial work force to clean up this shithole. I mean, seriously, this place looks like Animal House after the Toga party.”

Several green activists, many of whom traveled thousands of miles just to witness the historic occasion, applauded the environmental conscientiousness displayed by Obama.

“To finally have a President to show concern about the environment is so incredibly refreshing,” Colorado Springs native Derek Summers said. Summers, along with eight of his dreadlocked friends, claims that they drove an old school bus the 2,000 plus mile journey from Colorado to the nation’s capital.

“Yeah, we probably had to stop for gas about 30 times, but it was so worth it to be a part of this momentous and historic occasion.”

Congressional Republicans, severely weakened by the departing Bush administration, embraced the new President’s announcement with considerable hesitation. Senator Lindsay Graham (R- SC) said, “I am not 100% convinced that the Capitol has that significant of a garbage problem, and I fear that this program will funnel money into the various pet projects of the Democratic majority.” Despite his skepticism, Graham did say he looked forward to working with the new administration to “avoid career suicide.”

Less enthusiastic was conservative mouthpiece Rush Limbaugh, who decried the entire endeavor as a liberal scheme. “How can Obama justify such spending in the midst of this economic crisis?” Limbaugh shrieked rhetorically. “And can someone show me the scientific consensus that shows that the Capitol even needs cleaning?” Limbaugh continued to lambaste the plan, claiming it was merely an “affirmative action ploy” and that “most of these jobs will probably be given to undocumented immigrants.”

Regardless of public opinion, expectations in the administration are high. Seymour Watkins, head of the recently created Department of Hazardous and Odorous Pollutant Evacuation, or H.O.P.E. for short, expressed optimism and a belief that the program will invigorate the sluggish economy.

“Americans need jobs, and this program is just the start,” Watkins claimed. “Soon President Obama and the Congressional leadership will begin creating more jobs so that no American has to face a life out of doors, like that guy,” he said, pointing to a vagrant poring through an overflowing garbage can looking for food.

When asked his opinion of the new program the vagrant responded, “Got any change?” *PL*

Brad was appalled by the amount of trash on the Mall. Help him clean it up at bwright08@gmail.com

Politics: A League of Their Own: The Ambiguity of Representative Democracy

Rusty Lee

Right now, in 2009, the political landscape is once again pregnant with promise, primed for the rediscovery of supposedly timeless ideals that have, for various reasons, been left by the wayside in recent years. One such value that has proven particularly relevant to the recent political season is the notion of representation – of a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” After eight years under a president whose approval rating resembles a respectable 9-hole golf outing, it’s no surprise that a majority of Americans feels disenchanting, and thus inclined to harp upon the principle of the government being our government.

Implicit in the idea of representative government is the notion of representation itself. It has always been an unstated truth that our representatives – our people who govern – come from our own ranks. In other words, we elect individuals from our cities and neighborhoods to journey to Washington, D.C. with the sacred obligation of promoting and defending our interests. This fact carries profound significance: Our leaders are not divinely appointed monarchs, nor are they aristocrats who have obtained power as a result of esteemed lineage or entitlement. Each uniquely striped individual in our government – from House members with obscure constituencies to our practically fatherless President – is one of us. Although our system has its share of flaws, there is a basic sense in which everyone is, in fact, equal.

This prevailing sentiment has played out in vivid fashion over the past year. During the Obama-McCain campaign season, Americans everywhere were introduced to a seemingly ordinary man who quickly came to symbolize the very

idea of normalcy: one Joe Wurzelbacher, a particularly opinionated plumber from Ohio. In Wurzelbacher's vocal opposition to Barack Obama's proposed tax plan, as well as his overnight climb to fame, we directly witnessed the peculiar relationship between American politics and the everyman. More recently, in the state of New York, Governor David Paterson surprised many onlookers by passing over political heavyweights like Andrew Cuomo and Caroline Kennedy in favor of naming little-known Kirsten Gillibrand to fill the U.S. Senate seat vacated by newly confirmed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Again, such an occurrence bolsters the idea that neither kings nor lords govern the United States; rather, ours is a representative democracy.



One would think that such a premise of commonness should stand to mitigate the American public's strong tendency towards hypercriticism. In other words, if we know that our representatives are our equals, then we ought to be generally understanding – even empathetic – towards their everyday struggles, problems, and shortcomings. In our daily dealings, we encounter complex situations and we often fall short of the perfection we seek; should politicians, plucked from our very ranks, be any different?

As it happens, we, the American public tend to completely abandon the notions of commonness and equality at even the slightest hint of shortcoming or error on the part of our leaders. Take, for instance, the most prominent case of selective morality in recent memory: then-President Bill Clinton's scandalous relationship with Monica Lewinsky. To be clear, the arguments and moral judgments surrounding Mr. Clinton largely took on an air of legal seriousness – opponents were outraged that a sitting president had the gall to lie while under oath. Beneath this veneer of wounded trust, however, could be found the actual root of anti-Clinton sentiment: public disapproval of marital infidelity. That's right – Bill Clinton wasn't lynched for lying; he was singled out for being... well, a sleazebag.

Rather ironically, nearly 50 percent of American marriages end in divorce. That means that a marriage has equal chances of success and failure – hardly evidence enough to warrant our steadfast disdain for all things scandalous and unfaithful. Think about it: Half of our citizens can't make marriage work, yet we throw ourselves up in arms when the President, one of our very own, indulges in behavior that (while perfectly legal) is morally questionable.

For a more recent (and alarming) example, consider the uproar surrounding newly elected Vice President Joe Biden. Shortly after Inauguration Day, during the swearing-in of a group of White House senior staff, Biden made a characteristically witty remark about how his memory is "not as good as that of Chief Justice [John] Roberts." This seemingly harmless comedic remark drew not only widespread criticism from television talking heads, but also a stern dose of disapproving body language from President Obama.

Huh?

Joe Biden is a Senator, elected from his own everyday populace to represent them in Washington... and suddenly we consider him derelict because he finds it humorous that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court had butterflies in his stomach?! I, for one, find it both comforting and refreshing that Justice Roberts stumbled over the exact phrasing of the Presidential oath. He's human, and even in light of his immense wisdom and stature, he was flat-out wowed at the prospect of administering a scared oath to the most important individual in the world. By the same token, VP Joe Biden is a "normal" human too – he couldn't resist the opportunity to deliver a well-timed joke in a primed public setting. (Can you blame him?)

It's high time we embrace the fact that those who govern us are representative of our very masses. We don't suffer under authoritarian tyranny. We aren't ruled by crazed zealots who can in no way understand the environment in which we live. Representative democracy allows us to choose our leaders – to be watched over by individuals who, at least at one point, walked in shoes similar to our own. We lie, cheat, and use humor to build our own egos. We crack jokes, and we curse. The idea that Joe Biden is somehow "not fit" to govern – that he is some kind of gaffe-prone slouch – is ludicrous. It also runs completely counter to the very ideas that shape our notion of government. *P*

The Ways of the World: My Inauguration: A View from the Mall

Brad Wright



I wake up around 9:15 a.m. I flip on the television to see the damage. Jesus tap-dancing Christ, that's a lot of people. I hear that people have been showing up since 4 a.m. Now the doubt starts to creep in, and I wonder if I should even bother going. But then the guilt takes over and I convince myself it would be irresponsible not to see something historic that's occurring a mile from where I live. Knowing space on the Mall is practically gone, I decide on the Washington Monument, hoping I can find a spot there.

I grab a quick shower and a sandwich. I open the door to gauge the weather and I'm promptly met with a freezing wind. This probably isn't going to be much fun. Hopefully the multitude of wool layers will protect me from the bitter cold.

My apartment is about a mile east of the Capitol building, so it shouldn't take me too long to make my way to the Mall. I'm not entirely sure what to expect as I make my way towards the ceremony. Two Marines are standing on the corner of my block, which I can't help but find a bit

unnerving. The first five blocks pass without incident. Very few people are out, which I see as a good sign.

About six blocks from the Capitol I start to notice some people in front of me, but still not nearly as many as I thought I would see. Then, at 2nd and Pennsylvania, a massive stream of people appears in front of me. They are coming from every direction. From Union Station to the North, to the Capitol South and Eastern Market Metro stations to the South and East, respectively, and the fleet of tour buses lining Pennsylvania Avenue. They begin to funnel onto Independence Avenue in their search for decent ground on the National Mall. I am disheartened.

The downside of living east of the Capitol is that to get to a place I can stand and watch, I have to pass all of the prime viewing areas. The lines for ticketed people are hours long. Then there are the rest of the people just trying to get beyond the ticket gates for general standing. The lines for those with tickets and the general crowd become blurred, creating an unholy mass of people who have no idea where to go.

Realizing that I'll be stuck here for hours, I make my way down to the nearby closed-off interstate to see if I can maneuver around the logjam. I start walking into the tunnel, but then overhear people saying the line at the end is hours long. It's odd, even though I know there are thousands of people directly over me; I find it very eerie to walk on an interstate with no traffic. As I come out of the tunnel a lone car drives past. It was a bit frightening.

Finally, I emerge from the interstate at 4th and D Streets. I'm still a good mile from where I want to be but at least things are moving. To my right is the access point for the silver gate, one of the more coveted spots on the Mall. The line is four blocks long.

After much shuffling I get back on Independence and quicken my pace. It's taken me an hour to walk less than a mile and a half. The avenue is wide open, and people are on the move.

It is here that I encounter the gauntlet of cheap Obama merchandise and laugh at the Republicans worried about the downfall of capitalism. The amount of crap being hawked is staggering. T-shirts and calendars seem to be the most popular. Perhaps the oddest was a 2'x3' painting of famous black figures on horseback in the Painted Desert, among them Barack and Michelle, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Tupac. Is it weird that I was surprised Biggie Smalls wasn't shown?

My favorite item and sales pitch of the day: "Obama buttons! One for two dollars or five for ten!" Clearly some children were left behind.

At 13th St., a frozen sea of people meets me. I can see the Washington Monument behind the Department of Agriculture building. Suddenly, I begin to feel a bit panicked. I've never seen this many people in one place before, and I can't move. The crowd hasn't budged in about ten minutes and I can't retreat. I can't help but momentarily envision being trampled to death. Miraculously, people begin moving and I am spared.

At long last I find a place to stop and enjoy the ceremony. I'm about 100 yards south of the monument, with a decent view of the jumbo screen at the end of the mall. The area is like an anthill that's been torn open and the drones are pouring out.

It's about 11:30 a.m., and they begin to introduce the living former Presidents. Jimmy Carter gets a surprisingly loud ovation. Bush the first was met with mostly silence. Clinton was cheered enthusiastically. And then came George W. Bush.


As soon as the chorus of "boos" died down the crowd at the monument began to chant "na na na na, hey hey hey, goodbye." As classless as the chant was, I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy it.

Full disclosure, despite the fact that I voted for Obama and the historic nature of the event, my real reason for attending this event was to be able to experience a million people cheering simultaneously - and I was not disappointed. The roar when Obama was introduced was remarkable and beautiful. And even though his speech was equal parts sobering and inspiring, the people still cheered.

To my left, there's a little African-American kid on his dad's shoulders. He can't be more than 6 or 7 years old. He's shouting "Obama! Obama!" For some reason, I felt that that image pretty much summed up the day.

I begin to make my way home. I've been on my feet for three hours straight and I feel exhausted. I can't say I'm looking forward to the walk home, but it turns out to be a bit easier this time, as some of the blockades have been removed. I pass the Capitol South Metro station. The line is 5 blocks long. As I get closer to my neighborhood I'm astounded at the sheer number of people milling around. I desperately want to stop at my favorite bar for a beer, but the line is out the door.

I finally get back to my apartment around 2:00 p.m. I have never been happier to sit on my cheap Ikea couch. I continue to watch coverage of the event, reflecting on the historic event in which I had just taken part. Estimates vary with some sources say just over a million people were at the ceremony, while others claim as many as two million. Regardless, the crowd was enormous.

The lines were long and the breeze was frigid. Security often closed access points, stranding thousands outside of the Mall. A few of the Metro stations nearest the festivities had to be shut down, leaving many to find an alternate route to the ceremony. Those factors could have led to a truly nasty scene. And yet, throughout the day I heard nothing approaching a negative word. The people were patient, generous and kind. There were no incidents and no arrests. It was a gathering of people who were genuinely happy to be there, and nothing was going to dampen their spirits. Seems like change to me. 

Brad is hoping that the good nature of the crowd extends to the rest of the country, and can be reached at bwright08@gmail.com

The Fifth Column: Brothers and Arms

Jim Hunt

Mikey's screams mingle with Joe's screams. The first yells in anger, the second in horrific pain. I pin Mikey's face against the wall, and the words "I killed the devil, I killed the devil, I killed the devil" reverberate through the thin plywood, echoing throughout the immense room like manic church bells, clinging to the piles of antiques that hide most of the floor. Half of a curved Confederate sword, the ones officers were awarded for excellent service in the war that pitted brother against brother, sticks out of Joe, high in the stomach. He writhes back and forth on his side, unable to turn over, a demented seesaw; sword tip, sword handle, sword tip, sword handle.

Joe is wailing something I can't make out, while Mikey struggles to break my grip. I swing my knee up into Mike's crotch and he collapses to the ground, hands flying to his testicles, whimpering.

In a pool of gathering blood, big as the kiddie pool Joe and I played in as children, Joe is no longer moving, except for a fluttering of lips. I step across the pool, kneel and scoot my lap under Joe's head.

He can barely turn to look at me. "I'm sorry, Frank," he whispers, face draining of color. "You know I never meant to."

I stroke blonde strands out of his eyes. "I know, Joe. I'm sorry, too."

The store clerk at the sprawling antique shop runs from the front, cell phone held to his ear, and promptly vomits all over a mannequin in 1920's gangster garb.

"Oh Jesus!" he says, flapping his hands at his side. "What happened? What happened?"

"Got stabbed," I say, watching the groaning, rocking body, holding the still, silent one.

The clerk crumples into a ball. The phone skids into my leg, face up, and I hear a female's voice talking to the dusty,

stale air. "9-1-1, what's your emergency? Hello? 9-1-1"

"Hello."

"What's the problem, sir?"

"Got a murder. Paris on Ponce, across from City Hall East. Shouldn't take you too long to get here."

I snap the phone closed and look down at my brother's golden hair, his temple damp with my tears.

It wasn't until we were out of high school that people began to realize that Joe and I were not an evenly matched team. From the beginning, the treasure in that tower, the old cliff house, Joe and I shared the credit for all our solved crimes, fifty-fifty, even Steven, we would say. Frank and Joe, sons of the famous private detective Fenton Hardy, formerly of the NYPD. But Joe was smarter, and better looking. Hell, when we weren't solving crimes in our spare time he was scoring touchdowns or knocking down game winning shots. Despite the fact that my kid brother was better than me at most everything, he never hung it over my head, was insufferably gracious. And, I hated myself for it, I still do, I couldn't stand that. It's like he did it just because he knew how much better he was than me at everything. Listen, I can't beat around the bush, I was plain jealous. Even when our fame as young detectives and our relative charm, mostly Joe's charm, led to lots of double dates, resentment bore into me. If the pretty ones didn't go home with Joe, I got the nagging feeling they wanted to be with him. So did the less attractive women. They knew who the harder man was.

I guess that was why everyone was so shocked when Nancy fell for me.

Chip is the first cop on the scene, like usual. Looking up from my brother's hair, I motion him over. He walks up the Moses-parted aisle through the garbage, lowers his gun with each step, tries to take everything in.

"Frank, what the-?"

"Mikey here..." I grab a handful of Joe's blonde locks, tight, gritting my teeth and clenching my eyes before opening them to glare at the bum. "Mikey here snuck into the store. He's been following my brother around. Didn't like Joe talking to him about God," I finish with a snarl.

"Shit, Frank. Shit shit shit... when did this happen? When did he...?"

"Ten, fifteen minutes ago. More, less. I don't know." I lean over my brother, rubbing my three week old black beard against Joe's light five o'clock shadow. Might have been the only thing he envied about me, a darker beard.

Hands still between his legs, Mikey starts to thump his head against the floor, in no rhythm, chanting, "Got stabbed, got stabbed, got stabbed, got stabbed."

Chip's face turns ashen, like a dusting of snow on dirty sidewalks that refuses to stick this far south. Pulling out a softly chewed Cuban cigar, he puts it in his mouth and grips it with white lips. A couple staccato puffs and he seems to come to his senses. "Come on, Frank. You got to get up, when Ox comes..."

On cue, Ox and about twenty other cops burst in, running across the gritty floor. They slam to a halt when they reach Chip, mouths agape, one green rookie vomiting in the exact same spot as the store employee. Men make crosses, mutter to themselves. The sergeant blinks hard, once, twice, then resumes his stock scowl.

"What in the hell is going on here, Chip? What's Frank doing here? Who killed Joe?"

Roused by a lasting anger for the short, stocky man, I pull myself to my feet after carefully laying my brother's lifeless head to the ground. Tears in my eyes and bile boiling in my throat, I walk over to Ox, inches in front of him, and stare down. "This piece of shit just took that sword and..." My face is visibly shaking and my neck tensing and my fists clench as I point back to Mikey. He's quiet now, though he still softly taps his head on the wood. "Look!"

"Mikey? Isn't he the bum..." Ox's miniscule eyebrows draw together in confusion, and Chip fills in. "The crazy old homeless guy sleeps in the alley behind the Hardy's office."

"That's what I was going to say, Chip!" Ox bellows, rounding on him instantly. "And how did you get here so fast? When the hell did you get here?"

"I got here about ten minutes after, after it happened," Chip says, glancing at Ox.

"So this bum just waltzed in here and picked up a sword and stabbed your brother? Is that what you're telling me, Frank?" Ox says, moustache covering his mouth he's frowning so deep.

The store worker sits up, compelled by the rookie's fresh vomit nearly filling his ear cavity. "He does come in here a good bit," the clerk offers, gesturing to Mikey. "I don't know how many times we've had to run him off."

"He might have heard Joe and I talking, across the street, outside the office," I say, voice hollow.

"I thought you quit taking cases months ago," Chip says. I know what else he's saying,; he thought Joe and I hadn't talked since I quit.

"Came to pick up some things," I reply, staring through the mannequin's thin, plastic arms. "Never completely cleaned out my office." I feel my head swaying back and forth, back and forth like Joe was rocking with that sword stuck half through him. "First time we talked since... Since everything."

We used to joke about whom Nancy would go for when we finally met her. It happened when we were all at a forensics conference in the city. Joe and I were slotted as speakers- he did all the speaking- and so was she. At the end of the day we waded through a sea of fans, the two of us shook her hand, and she and Joe arranged for the three of us to meet for drinks that night. We shook hands again, and I imagined her eyes lingered on mine a moment longer than Joe's. Maybe they did.

Joe never came around to the idea of us. Didn't even come to the wedding. I think Nancy put it best when she said, "When he's not the best or most desired, it's like something doesn't fit in his head." She was worried about him.

"He'll be fine," I said, running my white gold band along her shoulder blade.

She had good reason to worry. Joe started drinking. A lot. All the time. Showed up to work drunk. The smell seeped under the door from his office and slithered into mine. I didn't know what to do. Nancy said we had to confront him. The rest of the office was too scared of him, and Joe didn't have too many friends at that point, so Nance and I went it alone.

He went berserk. Charged right at me. I fought back, lashed out with years of pent up rage. Flipped over furniture, broke chairs, crashed into a glass armoire full of souvenirs from years of cracked cases. One of them was an old Confederate sword, a curved officer's blade, sharp as the day it was forged. I don't know who knocked Nancy over. I don't know how the sword came to rest like that. But our animal aggression died before she did, looking down at her rib cage, where the sword poked cleanly through her left lung.

Chip calls me a few weeks later.

"You busy?" he asks. I can see him in his suburban townhouse, wife busy vacuuming, kids panting in the back yard, his feet kicked up on the desk of his tiny study, twiddling an unlit cigarette in his stubby, nightstick fingers.

I sit up and knock the Pomeranian off the couch. "Sorry, Cuddles."

"What are you apologizing for?"

"Nothing, talking to the dog."

"Right. So, you busy?"

High stepping through the clutter, I make it to the bathroom, only to find the dog crapping in the tub. "Goddamn dog!" I yell, and flies from me. "No, Chip, I am not busy. Wanna come over and braid my hair?"

"Or we could grab a beer."

"That's sounds better."

"Trackside?"

I stare at my unshaven reflection, smell three days of body odor mingling with the scent of dog shit. Rub my eyes, cough up a yellow-green laced with red spit wad and shoot it into the sink.

"One hour, Trackside."

Joe went clean after the accident. Went to church, found Jesus. "Born again," he said on my answering machine. Chip told me that he once saw Joe talking to old Mikey in that back alley. Claimed he 'saved' the bum's soul, though Chip says the bum yells about everybody going to hell now, not just cruel cops. Joe continued to leave messages any way he could, always asking for forgiveness. I couldn't have none of that. Couldn't go to work, see him there. Had to stay home.

Chip is already half through with his beer when I slide into the booth across from him. I pull out my pack of Camels, and he pulls out a Black & Mild from his shirt pocket.

"Didn't get that raise?" I ask with a smirk, lighting, coughing, smoking.

"Not yet," he says. He picks up his beer and drinks the rest of it.

“Got somewhere to be?” I say, picking up my own beer and taking down a large gulp.

“No,” he says, looking at the ceiling. “Just got a funny story to tell.”

“I could use a funny story.” I take another gulp, wonder if Chip can see the pulse quickening in my neck.

“That homeless guy, Mikey? Got him on some meds once he was in the asylum.”

I tilt my head and suck in my cheek like I’m clucking a horse along. “Can’t think of a better use for taxpayer’s hard earned money.”

Chip nods but doesn’t comment. He continues. “Got a call from the doctor seeing ole Mikey, says Mikey been relaying some interesting things to him.”

I stab out my cigarette, not before pulling out another one. Light it. Pull. “Go on.”

“Says Mikey swears he remembers talking to you the day Joe was murdered. Swears on his mother’s holy grave that you told him Joe was the devil, Joe was only pretending to be saved. Swears you promised him that killing Joe would shoot him to the front of the line of heaven. Swears that he jumped out of the shadows at that old antique store to attack Joe, and all of a sudden he was on the ground, and you, how did he put it? ‘Ran Joe through.’” Chip’s cigarette has burned out, though he doesn’t notice. He sees my eyes, and places it in the ashtray.

“That’s a pretty interesting story.”


Chip nods again. “Isn’t it now.”

I think about the day I woke up, out of a daydream, in Nancy’s favorite antique store, favorite place in the world. Wandered around the cavernous, cathedral-like place, so different from any other antique store she had ever or would ever see. Tears poured down my face, and I knew I must have been hallucinating when I saw the sword. There it was, same sword killed my wife, under a mound of broken furniture and a stack of moldy Playboys. It was easy convincing Mikey that Joe was evil. Everyone else is a fake when you’re crazy. How Mikey got in, I don’t know. Joe was so desperate to talk to me that he followed me right into the antique store. I like to hope as soon as Joe saw the familiar iron, Mikey pounced. Joe threw him off easily, but threw himself off balance, too. If there was resistance inside Joe to the blade, I didn’t feel it. The Confederate antique slid in like it was finding its home.

“Ox is planning on reopening the investigation,” Chip says, looking me straight in the eye. “Says he wants to talk to you.”

I look down, and realize my own cigarette has burnt out. I frown, finish my beer, and pull out my wallet. “Sooner or later?”

“Don’t ask stupid questions,” Chip says, still in his seat, looking up at me.

Tossing a few bills on the table, I answer myself. “Sooner then.” 

Jim may or may not be a mystery. For beguiling clues, email him at jim.d.hunt@gmail.com

Politics: There is No Moral High Ground

Michael Orr

Many times throughout the presidential campaign of 2008 as well since the election of Barack Obama we’ve heard a refrain about America’s standing in the world today. It was repeated by Democrats and Republicans alike, by pundits, candidates and every day citizens. The phrase includes a reference to ‘restoring America’s moral high ground’ in some form or another. I guess my question is what high ground did this nation ever hold?

What does this moral high ground refer to? Is it when President Roosevelt outwardly said we weren’t getting involved in the Second World War and was secretly sending arms to Britain and France? Was it when Americans held other Americans as slaves and personal property? Was it when Richard Nixon bombed Cambodia while telling the world that America would never enter Cambodia? Or what about when the police officers who beat Rodney King went free in Los Angeles? Or how about when Sherman burned Atlanta and Columbia to the ground or when Native Americans were displaced from their rightful lands? What about picking and choosing which dictators we would like to see running third-world countries?

The moral high ground is something that citizens of this country and their elected officials have concocted to make us



Instead of looking in the mirror, most Americans would rather...

believe that we are the most important, indispensable and moral country in the world. It is used to justify everything from peacekeeping troops and humanitarian aid to so-called nation building and economic sanctions. Some times the things done by this country in the name of morality are genuinely good ideas with kindness and charity as the main tenets. While some could argue about the impact of pharmaceutical companies, the sending of AIDS and malaria medications to Africa are worthy deeds. People are in need and this country is in a position to lend a helping hand.

Other actions are less easily described as moral. The destroying of Iraq is one such case. The argument was that Americans would be freeing the Iraqi people of an evil dictator and giving them a once-in-a-lifetime chance to begin an America-style democracy. Eventually we all learned that the motives for this fiasco were not rooted in morality at all but rather in greed, economics and downright falsehood.

In the past election cycle, Democrats successfully blamed George W. Bush and his cronies for the destruction of America's position on the moral high ground in world affairs. There is some truth to that idea; President Bush probably did more than anyone else to show the world the hypocrisy and political greed that are really at the root of most American foreign policy decisions. But the Bush administration is only the most recent in a long line of Americans claiming they represent the right and true way. Whether it was Manifest Destiny, the Monroe or Bush doctrines, wars with Mexico, Spain, Vietnam, Germany, Iraq or Russia, American policy has always been dictated by what best serves this country. The easiest way to explain to the public at large is to convince us all that what we are doing is sanctioned by God and the only way to truly protect our ideals from the dangerous outside world.

There is no morality in the upper reaches of democracies. Many will argue that the 'just war doctrine' gives America (though not necessarily anyone else) the right to wage war when the grounds include ridding the world of something bad. But so-called just war is just a convenient way of using circumstances outside of this country to pick-and-choose how best to serve our own interests. If America were truly a moral nation in terms of its foreign policies, American troops would currently be in Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe and many other places facing famine, dictators, civil war or natural disasters.

The moral high ground Democrats hope Barack Obama will lead the country back to does not exist. Obama does not mislead them necessarily but by the idea that such a high ground exists in the first place. Simply replacing the leader of this country cannot change the attitudes and opinions so ingrained and socialized into American society. The machismo foreign policy views that America is the best and is an example to all lesser nations (ie, everyone else) is a joke. But through generations now of accepting these principles as fact, the truth has been obscured.

America is no better a country than say France or Brazil or Russia. This country is good at many things and other countries are good at other things. The ideals of American Exceptionalism assert that the way of life in America is the best in the world and that there is a moral high ground that we and we alone occupy are simply an inadequate way to understand the world in which we live. America should of course do many things in the interest of improving the lives of its citizens. But all other nations deserve the exact same right to do so for their own people. This country boasts of self-determination as a key tenet in the search for freedom but we often do not afford that luxury to other countries.

Isolationism is another 'four-letter word' in this country but maybe a few years of staying out of other people's business would give others a reason to look favorably, or at least respectfully, on Americans. *μ*

Michael cannot stand when Americans invoke the 'moral high ground.' If it bothers you too, email him at mikeaorr@gmail.com

Politics: Obama Inauguration Quotes



“Barack Obama’s ascension to the highest office in the land is truly momentous. However, his greatest achievement will probably have nothing to do with any policy-making decision. His election has invigorated the public’s taste for genuine political discourse. After eight years of unilateral governance, a weary public has embraced Obama’s call for thoughtful and respectful collaboration. By galvanizing previously sluggish voting blocks, particularly the youth of America, Obama has ensured that we will have a future with politically educated citizens. While it remains to be seen if his actions will match his lofty rhetoric, Barack Obama’s election to the Presidency proved that Americans prefer a spirit of unity, rather than division.” – Brad Wright

“Unable to channel anything pithy or inspiring, let’s just say I may or may not have stood during the national anthem with my hand over my heart. I most certainly did not cry twice.” – Jim Hunt

“President Obama is going to be a definite force for change as even his Inaugural address clearly showed. His greatest foes may not be the likes of Jim DeMint though, but Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid. If Obama can get the Congressional leadership on board, great things can happen. If not, his honeymoon will be short and his government will grind to a halt.” – Michael Orr

“President Obama’s inauguration is significant because his presidency will, I believe, transcend our erstwhile commitment to the notion of performance-based judgment. The election of a black man is so inspiring to the African-American community that its importance simply cannot be washed away, even if there arises a mass chorus of cynical ‘I told you so’s’ in the event of an unsuccessful administration. In this case -- unlike most others -- the fact that Barack Obama ‘got there’ will be far more vital to history than the specifics of what he does now that he’s in office. (Heck -- even if Jackie Robinson had been a .220 hitter and perennial non-All Star, he’d still merit having his number retired league-wide. Some successes are so counter-institutional that they warrant respect in and of themselves.)” – Rusty Lee

“President Obama may end up as the greatest tragic hero of all time, a man fighting for change while his enemies fight for the ease of entrenchment and his allies simply pay lip service to the idea. He’s trying to change a system that benefits all those who tow the status quo so like Caesar, he’s surrounded by enemies (outright defenders of the status quo) and false friends (tacit supporters of the status quo).” – Trey Smith

• P

“I’d like to hold, just for one instant, the lump of anxious and excited energy President Obama surely felt in his throat on January 20.”

— Darsey Culpepper, www.darseyculpepper.com