

That Person Should Be the Next President Who...

This is the third in a series of comments. Previous contributors include Robert Coles, Theodore Hesburgh, Herbert Scoville, Jr., Shirley Chisholm, Richard Mouw, and John C. Bennett.

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER Says

The question mark over the American political system is this: whether those women and men who best understand the crises of the times and the directions that are needed in American and world policy could even remotely hope to be elected President, Congresspersons, mayors, or to any other public office. This question has several layers. First, we have seen that popular elective offices have become so captive to the financial power of great corporations that critical and independent thinkers are almost automatically excluded. We come almost full circle in democracy to preferring those with inherited wealth and leadership tradition as the least corruptible, since at least they and their "interests" coincide. The efforts to create reforms that would publicly finance political campaigns produce such contradictions that we have the spectacle of Eugene McCarthy and James Buckley teaming up against them on the grounds that they would underwrite only the incumbents.

The second barrier to election of candidates who understand the needs of the times is that American political rhetoric has become so thoroughly mystified that it can be used much of the time to mean its very opposite to the majority of Americans. Presidents Nixon and Ford, tools of great corporate interests and creators of the greatest budget deficits in U.S. history, continually budget to maintain favors for the rich while trimming the needs of the ordinary people. Yet they employ a political rhetoric that depicts them as the representatives of the "little man" and champions of fiscal responsibility. Democrats are in total confusion about what they represent. The very meaning of "liberal" and "conservative" shifted drastically in the 1960's.

The United States and the world face in the next decade what may well be apocalyptic prospects for human survival—in the areas of nuclear war, world famine, energy, rising expectations of minorities and of former colonized nations in the face of dwindling resources, at least as those resources are used and distrib-

uted by present international capitalism. The ecological costs of mismanagement of the resources of the globe for the benefits of the rich mount daily until they threaten the organic structure of life itself. Yet the leaders of the country most strategic to changes in this system have become such mediocrities that they can barely put together two grammatical sentences. The substance of thought has evaporated from their discourses.



The next generation of people who seek to influence public life must be people who realize the character of this social crisis, who are able to lift their eyes from the business of power getting to seek new ways of organizing the fundamental links between peoples, politically and economically, for greater social justice, and who can break through the current political rhetoric to convey to Americans these needs and options in language that names them by their real names. *The next President, in short, must be an educator. The President and the whole coming generation of politicians must be persons of wisdom of a type few politicians have been (or can be) in the present electoral system.* As educators of the public they must dissolve the mystifications that conceal the realities of danger and power. They must transform political consciousness and will to that spirit of solidarity, with all groups among our citizens and with peoples of other nations as our allies, in a common enterprise to create a new human order. This spirit of solidarity is one, unfortunately, that seldom exists except in wartime, when a nation has been whipped up by intense hatred of a "foe." Today we have no foe but ourselves, and the stakes are whether this nation and this humanity, so constituted, can long endure.

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PETER P. WITONSKI Says

That person should be the next President who...." Egad! The mind quite literally boggles over the opportunities for cant and ideological humbuggery afforded by this rather unctious fragment. It inspires a kind of *furor scribendi*—not unlike the well-known syndrome that was once identified as Lippmann's Complaint—that sends the respondent into a fit of Restonian prattle as he endeavors to ejaculate the final words of this sentence. Suddenly Hubert Humphrey begins to make sense as one searches one's battered edition of Bartlett's for the appropriate *bon mot* that will somehow render one's conclusions less Pecksniffian.

But the irresistible spirit of the Bicentennial year, which will surely witness many more such ventures in oracular folly, is upon us, and so the writer quickly succumbs to the occasion and begins to shed ink. In my case acquiescence was instant. As a political conservative I had long since concluded that our next President should be a conservative—*any* conservative! More important, I have long known what I *don't* want to see in our next President. I do not pine for a *great* leader possessing a great vision of what America should be, for I have learned to fear such messianic leaders; and I do not want to see us saddled with yet another economic tinkerer full of Jacobinical zeal and populist rodomontade, or a trendy *aficionado* of détente and peaceful coexistence.

As a political conservative I believe that the art of governing is a specific and limited activity. Unlike the progressive, who views government as an instrument of passion, I understand the business of government to be the deflation of the passionate and immoderate strain in human nature. Like Michael Oakeshott I consider the ideal conservative "governor" to be one who confines himself to governing: one who understands that governing is an activity that is easily corrupted once it moves beyond its own specific limits. *My ideal conservative President would, therefore, be a politician who predicated his conduct upon his faith in the workability of our admittedly imperfect form of government.* He would function (again to borrow from Oakeshott) rather like an umpire or referee in a sporting contest, that is, as one whose job it is to administer the rules of the game without actually participating in it himself.

When I said earlier that I would be happy with *any* conservative President, I meant just that. I was not endeavoring to be cavalier—however tempting that might be; I was simply suggesting that *any* President willing to limit himself to enforcing the rules of the game, the laws of our Republic, would be performing a vital function that is profoundly necessary if America is to survive as a free country. Since 1932 American politics has been dominated by the collectivist policies of

the liberal ideologues, and conservatism has not fared well as a political movement. The New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontier, and Great Society have transformed the texture of American society. And despite the many failures of liberal public policy—failures that threatened to tear the country apart during the 1960's—Americans continue to vote for liberal candidates. It is clearly far easier to succeed in American politics as a progressive than as a conservative, especially in hard times (like the present moment in our history) when the majority of Americans hanker after political leaders who promise to be more than mere umpires. Hence, when I spoke of *any* conservative, I was speaking of a relatively rare breed of political animal, a breed that may even be near extinction in a land where liberalism has held sway for so long a time. Nevertheless, I remain convinced—largely because of the long liberal hegemony—that we need conservative leadership in 1976 more than at almost any time since 1776.



Like most of my fellows, my faith in the political system we inherited from that great generation of eighteenth-century conservatives we call our Founding Fathers is such that I am not completely devoid of hope. I continue to believe that it is possible to chuck much of the collectivist trappings that have been appended to our society since 1932 and return to the individualistic roots of our political order. Of course, when I survey the problems afflicting our society today, I do not wish to confine myself to politics alone. In recent years we have witnessed the rise of the so-called counterculture, a phenomenon that strikes at the very heart of the values and traditions that civilized men and women in America and the rest of the world have always cherished. The *terrible simplificateurs*, with their penchant for the ephemeral and deciduous, have ravaged our civilizational landscape with their heady gnosticism, endangering those "permanent things" (as T.S. Eliot called them) that are the foundations of our culture.

Under liberal domination America has descended, as Robert Nisbet has recently noted, into a kind of twilight age—an age that has been marked not only by the sterilization of cultural diversity and the decline of true politics, but also by the rise of big government and the egalitarian welfare state, the erosion of religious values, the family, personal discipline, the whole private sector, and our traditional preference for localism. The conser-

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vative's struggle against the coming of twilight has often struck people as being ambivalent, largely because conservative policies result as much from their opposition to liberal policies as they do from their affirmation of America's basic values and traditions. Unlike their liberal brothers, conservatives have traditionally refused to view the political struggle as the most important thing in life. As Quinton Hogg once remarked anent his fellow British conservatives, "The simplest among them prefer fox-hunting—the wisest religion."

As we move into this year's Presidential campaign I would of course prefer to see us elect an extraordinary conservative as opposed to simply *any* conservative. But I recognize that there are not many extraordinary figures in American politics today on either side of the ideological spectrum, and for that reason I would gladly settle for a fox-hunter (or even an ex-movie actor) rather than see our Republic wasted by another four years (and quite possibly longer) of liberal rule. Should we elect a solid fox-hunter, I would hope that he would pursue the goals of our free society with the same zeal he applied to

chasing foxes in the field. When Disraeli described his ideal conservative government as made up of Tory men with Whig measures, I fancy he was thinking of the kind of conservatives I would settle for as Presidential candidates.

While my position may strike the readers of this journal as a lonely one, I do not believe it to be so. I do not consider myself to be "an obsolete worshiper of freedom"—as Tocqueville described himself during the first bourgeois monarchy in France—for I know that my position has been made far less lonely and not at all obsolete by the growing trend toward conservatism that is manifesting itself in the land as we celebrate our nation's two hundredth birthday. As I listen to the bold promises being made by the progressive candidates for President this year, I am reminded of Glendower's boast in *Henry IV* (Part I, Act III, Scene I). "I can call spirits from the vasty deep," Glendower declared, only to be answered by the wise Hotspur, who noted, "Why, so can I; or so can any man; but will they come when you do call them?" Hotspur, as I recall, was a fox-hunter.

RICHARD A. FALK Says

That person should be the next President who can begin the process of coping with the world order crisis in a positive manner. As yet, no political leader of national stature has done more than merely acknowledge the dangers generated by the interplay of such trends as population growth, mass poverty, ecological decay, political repression, and spreading technologies of mass destruction. But to concede that a crisis of such fundamental character exists, without offering any positive image of how to overcome it, is only to deepen the national mood of despair. We desperately need leadership that can awaken the American people to the magnitude of the challenge without generating a sense of anxiety and helplessness.

We need, in other words, a President who can begin the process of adjustment that involves a series of difficult moral and political choices about the direction of national development. This process must begin with an appreciation of the dimensions and historical uniqueness of the challenge facing not just Americans, but everyone, followed by a massive effort at public education. Such an educational emphasis is critical at the outset both to create a climate of understanding and to bypass the vested bureaucratic and economic interests that are likely to be intractably opposed to constructive patterns of adjustment. Big government and big business represent the social forces most deeply dependent upon outmoded conceptions that arise from the logic of state

sovereignty in the world arena and the logic of maximum economic growth as measured by such materialist measures as Gross National Product (GNP) in the national arena. As matters now stand, only a visionary leader with widespread support among the people can realistically expect to circumvent these interest groups.

The effort to reorient national development should proceed within a far wider framework of global reform. Such efforts would begin with a convincing assessment, from a national perspective, of current trends and dangers. *Second*, this assessment must be accompanied by an acknowledgment that no easy solutions are available, that the adjustment process will be painful and slow, but that nevertheless its initiation is vital for the well-being and even the survival of America, and that, oddly enough, once it is undertaken, a mood of national excitement could quite possibly emerge. *Third*, this positive national mood could evolve only if the Presidential leadership can project an image of a new political order organized around a set of positive values—peace, economic well-being for all, widespread realization of human rights, ecological balance—anchored finally in a cohering new pattern of identity and loyalty that is expansive as to both time and space. This pattern of identity and loyalty depends on seeing the planet from afar as a whole and upon a sense of destiny that extends concerns forward to future generations. It is, in other words, a call for a spiritual or religious underpinning to guide and sustain the new focus of political energy.

Fourth, the new political leadership should present a rough outline of the sort of world system capable of realizing these values in about fifty years, or by the year 2025. In this context it would be crucial to correct the popular notion that a viable future world is synonymous with world government. Our political imagination is distorted by the dependence on governmental solutions to human challenges, and by the persisting American conviction that whatever is bigger is both inevitable and

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better. My image of global reform is premised on the deconcentration of wealth and power *within* the state as the essential national precondition for change *beyond* the state. Hence, I envisage the process of adjustment as a dialectical one, characterized by decentralization on the domestic level, and on the global level by increasing supranational authority and coordination of specific tasks (managing the oceans, distributing food and capital, overseeing the disarmament process, protecting the environment).



Fifth, it is essential to have a credible concept of how to get from here to there. Such an image cannot be too detailed or it becomes absurd, but without serious attention to the question of transition the entire reorientation of emphasis might remain at the level of utopian rhetoric and thereby placate anxieties about the future without beginning to shape the process of actual response. I envision three stages in the transition process—first, winning public support for a set of world order values; second, mobilizing a transnational movement behind these values; third, making the necessary behavioral and institutional modifications. The essence of this conception of transition is to encourage simultaneously national decentralization and global integration.

The Chinese are fond of saying that even the longest journey begins with a single step. The journey to a new world order may seem exotic, as well as especially difficult and dangerous from our present vantage point, but in an odd sense it is inevitable. The open question is whether human ingenuity can shape the currents of change in a positive direction. The alternative to planned transition will be traumatic transition, under the pressure of catastrophe and amid awesome misery.

This nation's Bicentennial provides an apt occasion for raising sights and renewing our national purpose in a genuine manner. To be relevant to the lives of our people, such a renewal must be radical, in the sense of going to fundamentals; it must also be exhilarating, in the sense of restoring hope in the future.

Of course, any President must also attend to present

concerns. My conviction is that it is possible for a new American President to cope with immediate issues in ways that reflect the long-range values and goals of global reform, enabling small measures in many separate political arenas to build up a new kind of positive momentum that will spread across our borders. The agenda for immediate national action provides numerous opportunities for a President determined to lead the American people toward wider horizons of change and willing to rest the case for American world leadership on a basis other than force and wealth.

One such opportunity is presented, for example, by national energy policy. Nothing could be more educational and beneficial, for the nation and the world, than for the new American President to forgo the Faustian bargain proposed by advocates of large-scale dependence on nuclear fission. Such a program is wedded to a mindless cult of prosperity through growth, and obscures the immense social, economic, political, and environmental costs of distributing nuclear reactors around the country and the world, each being susceptible to accident and disruption. We now face the dismal prospect of a plutonium society, annually accumulating thousands of tons of radioactive wastes that remain toxic for hundreds of thousands of years, and permanently placing fantastic quantities of weapons-grade fissionable material within easy reach of terrorist groups or of organized crime. There are already many indications that Americans who know better don't want a nuclear future; a President able to counter this prospect with a credible program of energy conservation and accelerated development of benign energy sources would soon be a national and world hero. Indeed, my point is that a President can no longer cope successfully on a national scale unless he joins a movement for global reform.

On many other national issues long-term values and goals of global reform can direct short-term national policy choices, whether the question at hand be welfare, housing, security and surveillance, or the entire array of foreign policy questions.

As we alter national priorities it is essential to put the burden of adjustment where it belongs—on the overdeveloped segments of our own society and on the overdeveloped sectors of international society. Issues of distributive justice must become paramount as we seek to forge a planetary politics capable of giving our grandchildren a safer, a more decent, and even a more inspiring world. Unless concerns of equity are embodied in a movement for ecological equilibrium (in the broadest sense of resources, people, and biospheric capacity), the outcome could well entail austerity without freedom or equality, a lifeboat ethic imposed from above by a totalitarian bureaucracy. Indeed, such a prospect is implicit in both doomsday prophecy and complacent reassurance from those who counsel too much too soon and from those who advise too little too late. *That man or woman should be the next President who can chart a prudent course that mixes empathy for present victims of hardship with a deep commitment to a viable future for all of us, whose vision for humanity is made manifest in his/her programs and policies for America.*