

MOURNING IN AMERICA



BY KATHARINE THAYER

Thanks, Newt, for helping restore my sense of humor. When I heard what you said about men being unsuited for desk work because of their deep biological need to hunt giraffes, I felt an old familiar tickle down in my innards; it bubbled out in a great good laugh and then I was finally able to see the humor in this whole republican thing.

Okay, let me see if I've got this straight:

(1) The party that brought the 103rd Congress to a complete halt is rewarded for its malfeasance in office by being put in charge, and the other party, which actually tried to get some things done in the last Congress, is lectured about gridlock and tossed out with the trash.

(2) Men on their second and third marriages, who left their earlier wives and children to fend for themselves, are considered qualified to lecture to single mothers about morals, family values and responsibility.

(3) Tobacco farmers don't need to get over their "sense of entitlement" to government funds, but welfare mothers do.

(4) Unemployed white male autoworkers and steelworkers who listen to Rush thin the republican Party is going to look out for *their* interests.

(5) The housewives who started Barney the Dinosaur on a shoestring, peddling homemade videotapes to nursery schools should be required to give the taxpayers whatever profits they

have made because Barney was later picked up by PBS which gets 14% of its budget from the government. "It's the public's property and the public should get the return," thunders Senator Pressler.

But try to argue that miners and ranchers and timber companies who make fine profits off public lands should give back something to the public, and see just how far you get. You'll be lucky to be called a Communist and run off your land. (There's an amusing image: A rancher standing on a chunk of National Forest land with his rifle, fending off challenges to his property rights. Talk about a sense of entitlement!)

(6) We can throw more money at the Pentagon, balance the federal budget, and still cut taxes. How soon we forget! That idea, of course, was a cornerstone of Reagan's bankrupt Morning in America program; it turned out to be a mirage, driving the deficit up into the trillions. I can't believe the Reps are still promoting this nonsense! And Star Wars too!

(Isn't it interesting that our unwritten language usage rules allow for "throwing money at" education, but we never talk about "throwing money at" defense?)

(7) Guys who got where they are because of the college education they received free under the GI Bill, who own real estate because of veteran's home loan programs, whose kids got guaranteed student loans, who are now retired on Social Security benefits that will add up to much more than they ever paid in, and who will die of smoking-related illnesses after long periods in Veterans Hospitals at taxpayer expense, think "government programs" should be abolished because the recipients of the benefits take them for granted!

Those are just a few of the amusing and amazing things about this Republican "mandate." That even a thin majority of the few folks who actually voted fell for this snake oil tells me that the American educational system is worse than I'd been willing to concede so far. Remedial work in critical thinking skills is definitely in order!

You need to start paying attention. We need to start paying attention. I know, I know -- we're tired of all this, we have our own lives to live, we don't want people to call us (horrors!) that dread L word. We don't enjoy trying to talk to people who don't think and can't be engaged in rational debate. We abhor ugly campaigns and want to stay clear away from politics after that food fight known as the 1994 election. We find ourselves

getting confused when lies are presented as truth, and we just want to stay home and mind our own business.

Some say don't worry about it -- all we do is wait. When the real motives of the scoundrels begin to surface, or when they shoot themselves in the foot, the public will regain their common sense and throw them out of office. So not to worry.

Isn't this all starting to sound familiar? Germany in 1934?

For evil to triumph, all that is necessary is for good people to do nothing, the man said.

In this post-modernist world, it's considered old fashioned to talk in terms of good and evil, truth and untruth -- and dangerous as well. I don't have room here for a detailed analysis of postmodernist thought, so I'll just say that problem with that argument is that good and evil *do* exist in the world, and we have not only the intellectual capacity to distinguish them, but a moral responsibility to use it.

It gets confusing, that's sure, when people who hold dead opposite points of view all believe that they are in possession of truth and on the side of good. And the problem for liberals, the reason that liberals get accused of being wishy-washy, is that we can entertain the notion that we might be wrong. We can see things from several points of view.

So here is a simple rule of thumb to help keep things straight: evil always appeals to our self-interest and our baser instincts (fear, greed, prejudice) over the common good and over notions of justice, compassion, and fairness. Evil uses a strategy of divide and conquer; it attempts to separate us from others by stigmatizing and marginalizing groups of people. It scapegoats the powerless and benefits the powerful at the expense of the rest of us, not just economically, but spiritually as well. It makes our souls sick.

Katharine Thayer is editor and publisher of The Mist Point Chronicle, from which this has been reprinted. She lives in Astoria, recently moving from Tillamook. The Mist Point Chronicle, she writes, "is also brought to you by the Institute For a Multi-Specific Society (formerly known as Chickens and Other Species United), a nonprofit think tank committed to promoting brotherhood among genders, races and species."

RUBBER CHICKEN AWARDS

"People don't have enough to do if they have time to notice the sufferings of others and commiserate with them."

~RUSH LIMBAUGH

There are so many good candidates for the Rubber Chicken Award for Inane Public Policy this time, it's hard to pick one, especially if we include the proposals in the Contract With America. Should it be the Balanced Budget Amendment (the silliest idea since Dan Quayle)? (No, a balanced budget isn't a silly idea, just the amendment.) Or orphanages for children of poor mothers? Or laptop computers for the poor, *that* was a good one! I'd like one of those, please.

It's dizzying, the speed at which the supporters of "less government" have been coming up with new things for government to do.

I like especially Prick Armeys -- oh, I meant Dick Armeys! Slip the tongue -- suggestion that, instead of having a huge IRS bureaucracy to collect withholding taxes and so forth, we should give people the money and let them send in their taxes every month on a sort of voluntary basis. Can you imagine the mammoth federal collection agency to manage *that* one?

The law in effect takes the teeth out of the Fourth Amendment should be on the list but I can't feel comfortable making fun of that one -- it's beyond inane, it's outright fascist. I can't joke about fascism, I'm sorry.

(Those who know say there's little chance that the Senate will fight off the challenge to the Fourth Amendment posed in the rollback of the Exclusionary Rule. A commentator says, "No one in today's climate wants to be seen as standing up for the rights of criminals." Someone needs to stand up and remind these guys that the Fourth Amendment isn't about the rights of criminals, it's about the rights of innocent citizens not to be treated like criminals.)

So which wins the prize? Instead of singling out one part, the prize goes to the entire Contract, a Trojan horse if I ever saw one. Looks innocent enough on the surface, except that it's such a *big* horse (has it ever seemed odd to you that the people in the Trojan horse story weren't overly alarmed by the size of the horse?) but inside it's full of nasty surprises.

The potential consequences are alarming. We could soon be living in a police state with no protection for individuals and no tolerance for dissent, a place where it could become not only difficult but dangerous to be poor, black, gay, homeless, sick or unemployed.

~KATHARINE THAYER

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The clouds break
And the sun beams through
A hole of blue.
The brightness holds no warmth.
A chill wind cuts the garden.

Down, beneath the rifled heaps of straw,
Below the whining wind
In the dark compost:
A black shiny sphere, a single seed
From a bud let bloom.
Within the seed the next world sleeps:
The leaf, the stalk, the flower.

Recall the tangy taste of earth steamed tender.
Peel off the layers.
Strip away the flesh
Between teeth and tongue.
Eat down to the last translucent bracts.
Scoop out the nest of flowers to be.
Reveal the pale green heart, a shallow bowl
To hold the seeds to come.
Now,
Take a full bite
Of sun.

~JIM DOTT