201014 OBITER DICTA: APRIL SHOWERS BRING MAY FLOWERS 2010

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http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2010/04/the_next_woman_on_the_lefts_ha.html

Jeannie DeAngelis anticipates "the shape of things to come" for the governor of Arizona, Jan Brewer, for the crime of signing a law that makes illegal immigration... illegal in Arizona.

"Expect to see Governor Brewer portrayed all over the liberal media as both inarticulate and intellectually challenged. Within days it's likely someone will step forward claiming to have overheard Brewer sharing that from the porch of the Governor's mansion, she can see Mexico."

Katherine Harris was successfully taken down by the same sort of mocking condescension a few years ago. Are we prepared to permit the media to bag another scapegoat? The media should be reminded that the FCC does not grant hunting licenses, especially to wolf packs. Perhaps we should send in the game wardens.

Tuesday 27


I would never identify myself as a "neoconservative" as this writer does. But, for whatever it may be worth, I appreciate his mea culpa. A multitude of enablers within the Republican and conservative political establishments were certainly culpable in the spendthrift habits of the most recent Bush Administration. Worst of all is the precedent that it set for what Phil Gramm calls the "unending growth of government" and then the scale of the "Big Government conservatism" it willingly embraced.

Even so, it is evident that we have lately jumped from the frying pan into the fire. How long is this to be abided? Cast your eyes on the utter disregard for rules which is daily being demonstrated in Washington. The inner circle of our leadership is redolent with the sanctified arrogance of Rehoboam's advisers, who counseled their king to say: "'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs... . My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions,'" (1 K 12:10-11).

Wednesday 28


Ever since our country got off the gold standard in 1933, we have been on a double standard. In the absence of a common standard, how may we get an accurate measure of our times? The latest controversy is over how wicked it is to arrest
and deport illegal immigrants. Except, of course, when it is done by the Mexican government.

Thursday 29

http://townhall.com/columnists/GeorgeWill/2010/04/28/a_law_arizona_can_live_with

"A Law Arizona Can Live With" strikes just the right balance in favor of the new law on illegal immigration, which may or may not pass muster in the courts, but which, due to growing consternation with decades of federal incompetence, is long overdue. Its passage will make it even more difficult (but not impossible) for the Democrats to pass a new amnesty law. In the tradition of George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language" and C. S. Lewis's "Men without Chests," George Will, like Michelle Malkin, takes aim at the liberal use of invective for crass political purposes, which is just another abuse of the very language we speak. And, by the way, how is that for a pungent use of that much abused word, "liberal?" All is foul when love becomes war and everything is politicized.

As Will notes: "Some critics say Arizona's law is unconstitutional because the 14th Amendment's guarantee of 'equal protection of the laws' prevents the government from basing action on the basis of race. Liberals, however, cannot comfortably make this argument because they support racial set-asides in government contracting, racial preferences in college admissions, racial gerrymandering of legislative districts, and other aspects of a racial spoils system."

Let's clean up the bile spill that is turning the Tidal Basin into a cesspool: a veritable Davy Jones's Locker for the skeletal and spectral remains of our sunken political garbage scows. How could it be otherwise when, even today, the political animosities of centuries past -- words that once scorned kings, farmers, foreigners, millworkers, and the citizenry itself -- spill innocently out of the mouths of babes so many generations later?


Michael Gerson focuses on the obvious flaws and weaknesses of the Arizona law. But in the end, the real issue is a national one: the failure of the United States government to protect our borders. We have a new Department of Homeland Security whose chief purpose appears to be denying that we have any serious problems with illegal immigration or imported terrorists -- or have they been reclassified as "mischief makers?"

Michael Gerson emphasizes a side of the issue that has too long been neglected. "This is an argument for effective border enforcement. It is also an argument for a guest worker program that permits an orderly, regulated flow of temporary, migrant laborers, allowing border authorities to focus on more urgent crimes than those resulting from the desire to provide for one's family."

Given the fact that our borders are as porous as Swiss cheese (Switzerland, by contrast, exercises better control over its own borders), interdicting illegal
immigration is necessarily an important part of the now anonymous “war on terror.”

One of my former students, who graduated two years ago, told me yesterday how he managed to obtain his travel papers to return for his graduate studies just a few days before the whole process was shut down because of the "Christmas bomber." We also discussed how, a few days ago, just before an assassination attempt on a British ambassador, al-Qaeda released a video of the Christmas bomber at a training camp. I suggested that the bomber, the son of a wealthy Nigerian who has some suspicious connections in East Africa, may have been meant to fail and that the incident was simply a way of taunting American authorities.

These days, Ahmadinejad and Chavez taunt this Administration with impunity. Everybody thinks he's a comedian. Perhaps everybody is right. As Will Rogers put it: "With Congress, every time they make a joke it's a law, and every time they make a law it's a joke."

Saturday, May 1

http://www.danielpipes.org/8293/europe-remorse-turned-masochism

Daniel Pipes's diagnosis of Europe's masochistic strain of remorse reminds me that America has also long been vulnerable to a similar sort of moral posturing within certain intellectual circles. In the immediate aftermath of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the City of Dallas, the State of Texas, and right-wing radicals in particular were singled out for blame by the press. Indeed, a sense of collective guilt was conveyed by our teachers, as well. It was a guilt by association for the sin of being an American, something that might have been more understandable in a postwar European context.

I learned something about what this sense of collective guilt meant in subsequent years through reading some of the literature that came out of the Second World War and the Holocaust, including such works as Max Frisch's The Firebugs, Time of the Guiltless/Time of the Guilty (the plays and the title were in German), The Question of German Guilt, and, of course, Slaughterhouse Five.

The imprint of the events of November 1963 on my consciousness is so strong that I experienced a powerful surge of déjà vu in the late 1990s when my cousin, Peggy Patrick, who was driving in the car ahead of ours, led us through Dealey Plaza. I only realized what had suddenly startled me when I immediately looked back through the rearview mirror.

The Kennedy assassination occurred nearly half a century ago. So it should be clear that Pascal Bruckner's "tyranny of guilt" describes a rather old disease. James Piereson's Camelot and the Cultural Revolution details the deep shock the Kennedy Assassination dealt to the optimistic liberal worldview. In fact, Piereson contends that liberalism succumbed to the sort of conspiracy-mindedness that one liberal historian, Richard Hofstadter, attributed a year later to the political Right in his article, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." By the way, I have posted a study guide to the Piereson book on the Digital Commons and have also recently updated my meditation, “Assassination and the Death of Politics,” which is to be published in a Romanian journal, Geopolitica.
Pascal Bruckner's analysis of this morbid European remorse-complex echoes Pierre Manent's "Current Problems of European Democracy," for which I have also posted a study guide, when Manent contrasts Europe's sick man syndrome with the still reasonably healthy attitude of ordinary Americans.

"Just as 'Europe relieves itself of the crime of the Shoah by blaming Israel, [so] it relieves itself of the sin of colonialism by blaming the United States.' Excommunicating its American child permits Europe to preen. For his part, Bruckner rejects this easy out and himself admires American confidence and pride of country. 'Whereas America asserts itself, Europe questions itself.' He also notes that, in time of need, the wretched of the earth invariably turn to the United States, not the European Union. To him, the United States is 'the last great nation in the West.'"

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704302304575214613784530750.html?mod=WSJ_hpp_sections_opinion

Instead of displaying a remorseful Euro-style "radical chic," the American public is wrestling with a profound alienation from its own government. How could it be otherwise? On one side, we have complaints that elected officials are not listening. On the other side, members of the political establishment respond to their critics with the derision and formulaic accusations of "racism" that are becoming the conversation-stoppers of first resort.

Peggy Noonan believes the problem of illegal immigration must be addressed before anything else. The question of who is a citizen reaches the heart of Samuel P. Huntington’s question: Who Are We? Should our elected representatives be entrusted with the power to redefine who are "We the People?" Just as the power to tax involves the power to destroy, as Justice John Marshall acknowledged, the power to redefine the people involves the power to amend the constitution itself, abolish the liberties it has been written to secure, and substitute a more dependent (and thus more dependable) people to replace those self-governing people in whose name the republic was first constituted. As J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur asked in 1782: "What then is the American, this new man?" C. S. Lewis addressed a similar question -- "what is man that Thou art mindful of him?" (Ps. 8:4) -- in The Abolition of Man.

Noonan observes: "The establishments of the American political parties, and the media, are full of people who think concern about illegal immigration is a mark of racism. If you were Freud you might say, 'How odd that's where their minds so quickly go, how strange they're so eager to point an accusing finger. Could they be projecting onto others their own, heavily defended-against inner emotions.' But let's not do Freud, he's too interesting. Maybe they're just smug and sanctimonious.

"The American president has the power to control America's borders if he wants to, but George W. Bush and Barack Obama did not and do not want to, and for the same reason, and we all know what it is. The fastest-growing demographic in America is the Hispanic vote, and if either party cracks down on illegal immigration, it risks losing that vote for generations."
"But while the Democrats worry about the prospects of the Democrats and the Republicans about the well-being of the Republicans, who worries about America?"

"No one. Which the American people have noticed, and which adds to the dangerous alienation – actually it's at the heart of the alienation – of the age."


Ron Radosh reviews Nick Cohen’s article on Corin Redgrave and the delusional Trotskyite faction to which he and his sister Vanessa devoted their lives. Among the social diseases, Leftism continues to enjoy an unmerited reputation for altruism. Even as the relics of the '60s Left now move into their dotage, Eric Hoffer’s True Believer remains, as ever, a child of our times.

http://corner.nationalreview.com/post/?q=NDZjMjlhN2Q2ZTc0OWRmNWZhNTBiMTk0MzFjODllNjg

Here is a summary of Robert Mundell's analysis of the causes of the 2008 recession and what should be done to strengthen the recovery. “He says the U.S. must extend the Bush tax cuts and should also cut the corporation tax rate from 35 percent to 15 percent, to spur investment and recapitalize banks. Importantly, he says the U.S. should fix the dollar’s value against the yuan and the euro, thus creating an enormous common-currency area free of exchange-rate turbulence, which will prevent future debacles. It should be clear that Mundell sees a low and unstable dollar as culprit Number One in the crisis, and as the Bush administration's biggest mistake.”

Sunday 2

http://townhall.com/columnists/AustinHill/2010/05/02/shakira,_immigration_and_the_pop_culture_politics_of_the_left?page=full&comments=true

May Day, May Day! Let a hundred flowers bloom! The politics of cultural suicide is on full-display this Spring as the harbingers of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution burst into song. As Karl Marx himself put it: “History repeats itself: first as tragedy, second as farce.”

By enlisting the vocal talents of a Latina pop star from Colombia, Hizzoner, the mayor of Phoenix, is locking arms with les rois fainéants (the do-nothing kings) in Washington to protest his state's decision to crack down on illegal immigration. Not only have Congress and the White House failed to see the law enforced but they have also chosen to impute racist motives to those who try to plug the leaky border. Perhaps if British petroleum could be blamed for the spill, the sensitive cultural ecology of our frontier regions would command greater attention from our absentee landlords.

http://www.nypost.com/f/print/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/border_disorder_rfy8ccTuYvAzNeDzP7qmsM

Three days before Cinco de Mayo, Ralph Peters reviews the first of the great 20C revolutions, the Mexican Revolution of 1910, by reminding us that the
disintegration of the rule of law in Mexico is once again right on our doorstep. More than three and a half centuries following the Thirty Years War, what Thomas Hobbes in *De Cive* called the *bellum omnium contra omnes* (the "war of all against all") is returning to a theater near you. As Hobbes added very pointedly: *atque in eo bello jus esse omnibus in omnia* ("and in that war, all have a right to all things").

Unless we are prepared to defend the first of all our civil rights, to be protected from those who would plunder us, we will forfeit all of the others and, along with them, "our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor." Having chosen to permit Peter to rob Paul as a way of "greasing the wheels" of our political commerce, the present regime and its predecessors have shown more inclination to command than to govern, to compel than to persuade, and to plunder than to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Republic for which it stands.


Here is a no-nonsense editorial posted on page one of today's Arizona Republic which publicly chastises various local, state, and federal agencies and officials for demagoguery, dereliction of duty, and political cowardice. Much more could be said on that score with regard to the federal role, but the editorial rightly points out that border control is first and foremost a federal responsibility.

Question: How does border control differ from an unfunded mandate? Answer: It is more like an unfunded guideline.

**Tuesday 4**


In Europe, the PIGS (Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain) are have been pushing to reach the head of the chow line – with Greece getting the first bailout. In San Francisco, public servants similarly enjoy tenure, high salaries, and generous pensions. According to Pete Peterson in *City Journal*, this is a circumstance for which the electorate itself is at least partially to blame.

Now Willie Brown is confessing that politicians tampered with he original contract. In January, Brown admitted in the San Francisco Chronicle that "we politicians, pushed by our friends in labor, gradually expanded pay and benefits to private-sector levels while keeping the job protections and layering on incredibly generous retirement packages that pay ex-workers almost as much as current workers."

But what Brown reveals is just the tip of the iceberg. As Peterson notes: "the current pension crisis pales compared with what the future holds as Baby Boomers retire – a demographic challenge to all public-sector institutions. In San Francisco’s case, half of the city’s workforce will be eligible for retirement in the next five years." Once upon a time, Statutes of Mortmain were instituted to weaken the grip of the Church by requiring authorization of the Crown before the land could be vested perpetually in a corporation.
What sort of default may we expect in the near future when pension obligations outstrip our means to meet them? Every new spending program brings that day of reckoning closer to hand. This time will not be the "dead hand" of the past but a living hand -- the "life tenure" of the pensioner -- that seizes the hand that feeds it and that will require some new form of manumission or novel disseisin to break its grip.

**Wednesday 5**

[http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.com/2010/05/three-further-points-of-interest-on.html#readfurther](http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.com/2010/05/three-further-points-of-interest-on.html#readfurther)

This piece includes the transcript of a Mark Levin interview with a survivor of the oil rig explosion. The culprit in the spill appears to have been a huge bubble of methane gas.

**Friday 7**

[http://townhall.com/columnists/MichaelGerson/2010/05/06/prosperos_ipad](http://townhall.com/columnists/MichaelGerson/2010/05/06/prosperos_ipad)

Michael Gerson, a bibliophile like myself, has written a paean to the iPad that was quickly routed through the ether this morning. I would add a few thoughts drawn from my own experience.

Years ago, the Internet began to dramatically change my reading habits. I consult numerous web pages on a daily basis and pass along articles with commentary. For the last six years a lot of the readings I use in class have been posted through links on my electronic syllabi, many of which I plan to post on the university's Digital Commons. In fact, I have lately been posting dozens of study guides to various books and articles I have read over the last three or four decades. Most of these began humbly as marginalia on the printed page, then as outlines, often with random comments, or simply as a series of questions to provoke thought. Some of these guides have matured into interactive book commentaries that are essentially conversations with the authors, often sprinkled with references to other writers, historical examples, and current events.

The title's reference to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is appropriate. I have twice used that play while teaching a course on the history of western humanities. If, like Prospero, we as a civilization are not to be overwhelmed by the enormity of information and the responsibilities of governing our common life, we must learn how to navigate the ether and draw upon the knowledge, experience, and wisdom of the ages. Thus it is time for us to launch a writing and research methods course to familiarize students with database research to equip them with up-to-date research tools while, at the same time, providing practical instruction in the elements of good writing, including grammar and punctuation, citations styles, note-taking, and tips on how to structure arguments as well as how to pare down sentences.

**Saturday 8**
Shields Fair discusses what life was like growing up in Douglas, Arizona, beginning in the late 1940s. His observations are not that different from those of Victor Davis Hanson who grew up in the San Joaquin Valley a couple of decades later.

I can relate to some of Fair's observations, even though I lived in Denver for a couple of decades after we moved there in 1953. In the late 1950s and early 1960s I would occasionally ride my bicycle from South Meade Street in the Harvey Park area down to the Douglas County line as well as westward into the hogbacks in the Morrison area. I remember when the Fort Restaurant was built not far from where I used to ride and clamber on the rocks.

There was not a rigid town/country divide, at least until South Sheridan began to be built up. The junior high was built after we had lived in the neighborhood for three years. The high school was built three years later and three years before I began attending it. Although there were a handful of gun and knife incidents at the local schools, I was not aware of the emerging drug culture before I got to college. More than any other factor, it is the drug culture that, along with its many outlaw spin-offs, has been the ruin of border towns like Douglas -- not to mention a way of life that has largely disappeared.

While the piece by Shields Fair on growing up in an Arizona border town in the 1950s provoked a nostalgic reverie over a bygone era that I remember well, this article’s harrowing account of a car bombing at Ramstein Air Base in 1981 snapped me back to present reality. Ronald Reagan, who was president at that time, is appropriately allowed the last word on the subject.

Here is an analysis of the Iranian nuclear program by a former CIA agent who has written a book, *A Time to Betray*, under an Iranian pseudonym.

Our president chooses to send the B-team to the WWII ceremony and, as one might have predicted, Russia's A-team vetoes his choice. This incident should be deeply embarrassing to all Americans, but, of course, the American media says nothing about it. Given the Administration's recent treatment of Benjamin Netanyahu, my reaction is simple: What goes around, comes around. The chickens are coming home to roost.

The issue is less a matter of the snub being unmerited and more a revelation of the fraught, even parlous, state of this country's international relations. Never have we been in greater need of an able captain at the helm.
Note from a friend:

Should Specter find himself rejected not only by the GOP but by his new friends, the democrats, will the mainstream media talk about a “purge” as it does when liberals lose out in Republican primaries or conventions?

**PA Tracking: Sestak +5**

The trend remains ominous for Sen. Arlen Specter (D) in the Muhlenberg College tracking poll (5/6-9, 398 LVs, MoE +/- 5%) of the Pennsylvania Senate race. Rep. Joe Sestak (D) leads for the third straight day, having turned a 9-point deficit last week into a 5-point lead.

My reply:

There is an old expression about being neither fish nor fowl. Some of the Blue Dog Democrats, like Chet Edwards of Texas, are in that uncomfortable position at this historic moment. Nobody admires an opportunist or turncoat who is bereft of discernible principles. Aesop knew the type: [http://www.aesops-fables.org.uk/aesop-fable-the-bat-the-bird-and-the-beasts.htm](http://www.aesops-fables.org.uk/aesop-fable-the-bat-the-bird-and-the-beasts.htm)

[http://www.globalpolitician.com/26410-iran](http://www.globalpolitician.com/26410-iran)

Barry Rubin outlines Ahmadinejad's nuclear grand strategy by showing how the acquisition of nuclear weapons may have a primarily defensive purpose against the United States even while supporting his aggressive bid for regional dominance. "Ahmadinejad's apparently pacifist-style, peacenik stance at the UN conference fits into his strategy. Nuclear weapons may well provide the umbrella for him to seek regional hegemony with weapons of mass destruction unused but highly visible in his back pocket."

[http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/david-cameron/7707890/How-David-Cameron-was-outflanked-as-he-prepared-to-enter-No-10.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/david-cameron/7707890/How-David-Cameron-was-outflanked-as-he-prepared-to-enter-No-10.html)

It appears that Gordon Brown has outmaneuvered David Cameron in a bid to form a new coalition government. In the long run, a Tory defeat might serve a constructive purpose, especially as the huge expense of the bailouts becomes more evident and leads to even greater belt-tightening.

The whole fiasco appears to have been a set-up designed so that the Liberal Democrats could see, first, how much the Tories were prepared to concede and then perhaps how much more can be extorted if a deal with Labour is not sealed. The reality is that a coalition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats would still be a minority government and would eventually have to take much of the blame if the debt crisis escalates. The prospect of another election within the next two years appears highly likely. But now a referendum on the European Union, which was unlikely in any case, is an even more distant prospect.

By the way, Winston Churchill first became prime minister seventy years ago today. Who is prepared to exercise that sort of leadership again? A leader who is not only visionary but principled and courageous? Pierre Manent’s analysis of Montesquieu contains a striking phrase that anticipates the more recent “politics
of remorse” described by Pascal Bruckner, as discussed in the first entry for May 1. Manent describes a great failing of modern man: “The man who once sought to expiate his fault now wishes to escape from discomfort and guilt. The supreme discomfort is the one that gives rise to law itself, which afflicts and is hostile to nature. For whoever has changed priorities and who therefore no longer loves the law above all else, the law is among the dead and sad things that constrain, irritate, and perplex him and from which he now turns away. Fleeing from the law is altogether different from disobeying it. Men have always disobeyed the law, but fleeing the law is proper to modern man and sums up his whole experience” (City of Man, p. 48).

This is the flight from law that is merely one aspect of the larger Flight from Humanity. The appeal is to do whatever comes naturally. Thus we are ruled, as C. S. Lewis put it, by “men without chests,” by principals without principles, by scolds without convictions.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/30/AR2010043001109.html

Richard Viguerie offers advice to tea party conservatives on how to maintain their independence and push to restore constitutional limitations. Vasko Kohlmayer’s “They Call Us Leftists,” which was posted on Obiter Dicta for April 27, is also provides a useful assessment of the damage caused by “Big Government conservatism.”