

Liberty University

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200912 OBITER DICTA: END OF THE YEAR

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<http://corner.nationalreview.com/post/?q=MGY3MTI4YTRjZmYwMGU1ZjZhOGJmNmQ0NmJiZDNmMDY=>

Some of the restrictions President Reagan placed on Interpol through executive order have now been deleted from the original -- by executive order. The link at the bottom of this short piece spells out in some detail the importance of this recent order. It is yet another attack on our national sovereignty and openly invites what could amount to a fifth column. Such undermining of American sovereignty by treaty, judicial review, and executive order should be made a political issue. Unfortunately, the leadership of both parties is heavily invested in the internationalist agenda.

http://www.americanthinker.com/2009/12/the_liberal_plot_against_ameri.html

My friend Bob Weissberg is that rare political scientist who has the sensibilities of a satirist and a warrior's instinct to reach for the jugular. We need a squadron of men like him.

As I noted just a few days ago, yesterday's satire, such as Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, has become today's reality. Back in the early 70s, Mike Cummings had our class compare Ken Kesey's book with Erving Goffman's *Asylums*. In the last four decades, we've come a long way. Why have we consented to institutionalize Kafka's nightmares?

This sentence from Yoram Hazony's *The Dawn* sums up our problem: "The flaw lies not in the idolater's willingness to accept falsehood, but in his unwillingness to consider causes and effects ("truths") other than the most local ones visible to him within his perspective." This is a common problem when we shut out the spiritual dimension. The true iconoclast must be prepared to break through the blinders that narrow our focus to immediate circumstances and incremental change. We fail to grasp that we are already being carried away by a political and cultural tsunami.

It is no use assuming that our decision-makers are well-intentioned but wrong. There is no mistaking it: the attacks on our constitutional system are made with malice aforethought. Ezekiel once wrote of similar circumstances: "Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravaging the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain" (Ezek. 22:27). Unless true-minded and true-hearted leaders stand in the gap, a calamitous outcome can hardly be doubted.

Even many of those on the Left is getting unhappy with Obama. It is well that they should. They are the ones whose socialist mindset, wedded with schoolmarmish Progressive humanitarianism, has given us something straight out of Kafka's nightmares.

I plan to use Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* in class next term. Hayek has a chapter entitled "Why the Worst Get on Top." James Bryce had a similar chapter in *The American Commonwealth*. And I am sure that Bryce was inspired by a comparable chapter in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. We have been warned seemingly forever.

<http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/articles.aspx?article=944&theme=home&loc=b>

Another of my Lieber pieces has been posted on-line. I originally wrote it for a still-born *Encyclopedia of the American Right* in 1991. Three of the four pieces I wrote were folded over into *American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia* in 2006.

Tuesday 29

http://townhall.com/columnists/ChuckNorris/2009/12/29/obamas_most_important_message?page=full&comments=true

At Christmas time, the president delivers a rather unconvincing, watered-down liberation theology version of the Christmas story to school children. His message? Be nice to other people, stay in school, and study hard. Horace Mann, the patron saint of public education, at least had the children learn to read the Bible -- in a "nonsectarian" sort of way. But the only opportunity these children have to hear about Christmas during the president's visit is in unscripted moments from the children themselves. The president's awkwardness with the specificity of their responses is palpable. So he takes charge and brings everything back to empty platitudes: the secular equivalent of pious gush. But his choice of words raises a question: How does somebody who says "you guys" repeatedly earn a reputation for eloquence?

Wednesday 30

http://townhall.com/columnists/JonahGoldberg/2009/12/30/avatar_and_the_faith_instinct?page=full&comments=true

Jonah Goldberg applies Nicholas Wade's "The Faith Instinct" thesis to the film *Avatar*, seeing it as yet another salvo in the culture war between Right and Left. In this age of what Kuehnelt-Leddihn called "the terrible simplifiers," one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. So, likewise, in this age of ideological idolatry, we may observe that one man's idol is another man's Gaia.

Goddess worship has an ancient provenance -- with Ishtar (Astarte) being the best known. The more animistic forms of modern feminism and modern environmentalism are two of the avatars of such goddess worship. Their common foe is patriarchy with its andro-/anthropo-centrism that allegedly corrupts the imperial heart of Western civilization. Hence the idea of Androgenic Global Warming (AGW) to which world leaders are becoming increasingly, even devoutly, devoted. Deep ecologists look upon mankind as a cancerous tumor which needs to be controlled if not excised.

The Internet age appears to have brought us a great Gathering of the old chthonic spirits, much as the annual Rendezvous was a great gathering for the hunters and trappers of the Old West. The literature of "cosmic consciousness" has been the

common stock of college bookstores since at least the late 1960s. Such titles as Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East* and Charles Reich's *The Greening of America* were campus bestsellers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But so were more clearly Christian works, such as J.R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and C. S. Lewis's Space Trilogy, that condemned the atheistic rationalism of their day. Similarly, *Go East, Young Man* is the title of the memoir of Justice William O. Douglas, a transplanted Ecotopian. We seek inspiration if not salvation from the Other.

Another recent review sees in *Avatar* a potential left-wing rival of a right-wing icon, *Atlas Shrugged*: a communitarian rebuttal to that earlier individualistic fantasy. "Can't we all just get along?" is our prevailing response. Indeed, the "pernicious tolerance" (Robert Weissberg's phrase) of the pantheistic culture of the Na'vi is the very embodiment of communitarianism. Even so, true tolerance is not extended to anything that threatens either Paradise or the ideological narrative.

The landscape architecture of *Avatar* with its gorgeous Eden imagery is, for me, the most striking element of the film. Like Tolkien's fantasy of Middle Earth, *Avatar* depicts an alternative universe gleaned and reconstructed from countless artifacts of our popular culture.

Pandora itself brings to mind C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra* with its pervasive Eden imagery. *Avatar*'s version of the Garden, however, is already corrupted by death, which may be seen as a natural part of the great circle of life. The great tree where the Na'vi live is akin to the tree blessed and guarded by tree spirits in Hayao Miyazaki's "My Neighbor Totoro." The peril posed by attacking earthships recalls the Death Star of the Star Wars series but the chief airship also resembles the flying island of Laputa, populated by scientists, as imagined by Jonathan Swift and then re-imagined by Miyazaki in "Castle in the Sky."

Why this Eden-like setting for James Cameron's *Avatar* is named after the mythical Pandora is not made clear. Perhaps we are meant to consider the high price of trying to seize its "unobtainium" or the imminent demise of Earth. Cameron is certainly very ham-handed in his use of symbolism. His message appears to be that we have become too corrupt and must be repelled as a contaminant. Borrowing from a device used by C. S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*, Cameron portrays humans as morally unfit to obtain the spiritual treasure of an uncorrupted utopia, perhaps (as certain scenes suggest) because their earthen vessels are too small and fragile. But I am also reminded of what Samuel Goldwyn told his writers: "Wanna send a message? Use Western Union."

Thursday 31

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704254604574614540488450188.html>

"Of the making of many books, there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (Eccl. 12:12). Ever since Sigmund Freud posthumously placed Woodrow Wilson on the analyst's couch, the making of psychobiographies of political leaders has become a cottage industry. Edmund Morris, while struggling to write an official biography of Ronald Reagan, ended up fictionalizing much of his work

because he despaired of breaking through to the core of the man. In the end, he could not answer the question: Who was Ronald Reagan?

Now Shelby Steele enters the lists and gives an excellent thumbnail sketch of two of our recent presidents. One of them, Ronald Reagan, may have been so singularly driven by his vision that any posthumous raking through biographical detail may easily miss the point of his whole career. Concerning the other, Steele updates Hans Christian Andersen's fabled emperor and gives Jerzy Kosinski's *Chance the Gardener* a new name: Obama. Steele, a black conservative, portrays Barack Obama as an empty suit: a projection of white (liberal) fantasies about a "post-racial" America. His personal narrative and the resonance of his rhetoric are what attracted attention at the Democratic National Convention in 2004, in much the way Alex Haley's *Roots* became one of the great cultural narratives of the 1970s. But Obama lacks a clear political identity. His has been the life of a political chameleon rather than of a leader molded in the heat of controversy, fully individuated through carefully deliberated and determined responses to pressing challenges.

If some men are more than the sum of their parts, others may be less than all the hopes and dreams that are projected upon them. Ronald Reagan was widely regarded as a trigger-happy cowboy and B-level Hollywood actor. But the four decades of his intense fight with Communism -- as a union president, political commentator, governor, and finally president -- shaped the leadership qualities he demonstrated while striving to defeat the Soviet Union and end the Cold War. The film "In the Face of Evil" may be the best single treatment of the subject. Few presidents have had a more distinguished career before their election to the Oval Office. Calvin Coolidge came as close as any to following the old Roman *cursus honorum*. But prior to taking office, Ronald Reagan had more executive leadership experience than any other twentieth century president except, perhaps, Dwight David Eisenhower.

By comparison, what did the current president have to offer as a candidate? Promises, promises. Will the rapidly mounting "buyer's remorse" now challenge him to reach beyond the constituency politics of the Chicago machine? Or must he be relegated to lame duck status after a single year? Given the president's own ideological background and narcissistic proclivities, the latter may be the least disastrous option -- except that a rapidly plunging barometer may create the conditions for a "perfect storm." It has been strange to witness the urgency and eager willingness of congressional Democrats to fall on their swords for the sake of their much-cherished vision: a political cornucopia at the end of the Ponzi rainbow. But let us take such suicidal behavior as a warning. We must quickly swerve off the Democrats' yellow-brick road before we end up barreling onto the bridge to nowhere.

In these dangerous times, the prospect of three more years of a caretaker presidency is sobering. But a year after the electorate fell off the wagon and drank the Kool-Aid, we must collectively jump back onto the bandwagon before we are able to move forward in a more deliberative, sober, and determined fashion. Let us hope that we Americans are still capable of producing and electing old-fashioned, battle-hardened leaders whose experiences have steeled them for the tremendous challenges that face our country and the world.

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For the year 2009: That's a wrap. -30-