

Thursday, December 2, 2004
Baton Rouge, LA

FEELING SORRY FOR RUSH, O'REILLY, HANNITY, FOX NEWS AND THE WHOLE GANG?

Of course we are all in withdrawal now. And who could blame us? For some two years now, purveyors of moral truth and wisdom (perhaps with a right-wing slant) have plummeted us over the airwaves with threats, intimidation, visions of disaster, and other dire consequences that would all come about if the President lost the election. Cynics might say that the only thing our conservative caretakers on talk radio had to fear was the end of fear itself.

The problem is simple. They won, and now they really don't have an issue to beat their listeners over the head with every day. The Republicans now control the Presidency, both Houses of Congress, the Supreme Court, and proliferation of federal agencies that oversee our daily lives. How can they continue to be apoplectic when their guys run the show?

And you know what? I'm sure going to miss being lectured to about my "moral values" from our real cultural heroes like Rush Limbaugh (self-gratifying drug consumer), Bill O'Reilly (the accused loofah Fetishist) and William Bennett (as synonymous with Las Vegas as silicone).

Of course there is Fox News, the new voice of the red states. Loyalists to this Rupert Murdoch network seem unperturbed that the Fox Network hosts some of the raciest programming on television. "Married by America" was recently fined \$1.2 million dollars by the Federal Communications Commission due to its sexual content. Other big money-making shows at Fox include Paris Hilton's "The Simple Life," and "Trading Spouses: Meet Your New Mommy."

The issue, of course, is not one of voicing conservatism or advocating "moral values." It is saying one thing and doing another. It is the hypocrisy of espousing a way of life, but not following such prelates in one's own daily living.

And how about the Disney corporate umbrella we all recognize as the countenance of family values (no image tarnishing with Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Belle from Beauty and the Beast). How brave they were to break their contract with Michael Moore and not distribute Fahrenheit 9/11. But the Disney corporate umbrella also includes ABC who apparently had no problem with the steamiest of introductions to the Eagles-Cowboys game last week showing a towel-clad temptress stalking an NFL superstar. She dropped the towel, but, no doubt to show support for faith-based initiatives, Disney had her keep the crucifix around her neck. So where is the moral

outrage over the fact that the creators of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck are trying to have it both ways?

So do the oxymoronic self-contradictions only apply to certain voices on the far right of the political spectrum? Are the Democrats immune from such sanctimonious dissimulation? Of course not.

The Reverend Al Sharpton, Michael Moore, Reverend Jesse Jackson, and even the Raging Cajun James Carville regularly appear on national talk shows offering shrill denunciations of the conservative agenda, but then offer a menu of colorless alternatives often slanted by their own political or personal inconsistencies strung out over decades.

Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11" was entertaining, and at times compelling. But he just had to pile it on, and some allegations just didn't hold water. The Saudi family and the Bushes? Weak allegations undermined the credibility of everything he had to say. And man, look at the guy. Even if you like the message, you wanted to shoot the messenger. Sharpton is incessantly ego-driven. You could almost see his hair stylist standing right by the camera. And Carville is a screamer. He rants, he raves, he waves his arm, and what little hair he has stands up straight. But when all is said and done, what did he say?

Can't we do better? Is consensus out of the question? Are there any coalition builders out there that can keep the right-wing juggernauts at bay, and begin a dialogue that at least quiets down a bit the shriekers on the left? McCain, Giuliani, Bill Bradley reinvigorated. Hey, even the anti-girly man himself. And there is a cadre of younger political voices with potential to grow and help in the effort to do a little bridge building. Just do one thing for us. Whatever your political persuasion might be, just put the hypocrisy aside.

NASTIEST POLITICAL RACE IN AMERICA?

Until I stepped down from public life a little over a year ago, I was one of the longest serving public officials in Louisiana. I have been a part of the political scene as an elected official for almost 30 years. I've watched a number of political figures come and go, many who took off like shooting stars and then were beaten and burnt out as the years progressed. And there has been no shortage of heavy, negative political ads. Oh, you're right. I've run a number of such ads myself in races for Secretary of State and Insurance Commissioner. A negative ad I ran against challenger Sally Nungusser back in 1995 won a national Classic Telly award as one of the most effective political spots of the past twenty years. But I have never, ever seen anything like what is going on in Louisiana's Third Congressional District.

Personal attacks, rumors, innuendos, distortions, half-truths, even outright lies. And not just occasionally. T.V. spots run continually here in Baton Rouge which is on the fringe of the rambling, half moon-shaped district.

Voters in south Louisiana are telling me the whole campaign is an embarrassment, they don't like what they're seeing, and they want the race brought to an end. Who cares who wins? Just get it over with and let us get back to our normal lives again. Isn't that what the rest of the country is doing? Louisiana continues to be an "aberration" by even having an election in December. Every other congressional race in America has been decided, and newly elected congressmen are already in line picking out their new offices. Bobby Jindal has even been elected president of the incoming newly elected congressional class. So whoever wins in the third and seventh districts is missing out building relationships that could be of great help in the years to come. So their constituents are being shortchanged by the Louisiana system.

The Louisiana legislature has a number of options. Abolish the open primary, at least when it comes to federal elections. This would be a tough thing to do, since voters like to be able to cross over party lines. The governor will have to use some major political capital if such a change is going to come about.

Federal campaign finance laws limit what restrictions can be placed on massive out-of-state money flowing into the state. Someone said: "But it's great that all this out-of-state money is being spent in Louisiana." Hogwash. Ninety percent of the money being spent in the third district race is pouring in from out-of-state. This vested interest money will have a direct effect on who represents Louisiana in Congress. The gold pours in from political organizations nationwide, and voters in Louisiana get the shaft. The legislature can find some creative ways to drastically limit this outside influence. There are some old hands in the Louisiana legislature, particularly long-time Rep. Peppi Bruneau, who could wrap a rope around these various outside groups, and make it extremely difficult to pour this out-of-state cash into party coffers.

Projections? A major drop-off in voter participation. Turnout could be less than 40 percent. This favors the two Republicans. But whatever happens, just get it over with. After all, it's Christmas, and it's going to take a little while to get all of the slime cleaned up. Both parties can, with good reason, be labeled as the "Grinch" this year.

I was able to run down my old friend Andy Borowitz this week and get caught up on his thoughts concerning national news. Andy has always been my "most reliable source" when it comes to knowing what really is going on in Washington.

"So Andy, bring me up to date. What was the real reason the Homeland Security czar resigned?"

“Tom Ridge? Oh, I know all about that. He’s totally colorblind. You can imagine how miserable he was when it came time for choosing terror alerts. Yeah, he told me he’s been totally, absolutely colorblind for his entire life. When he looks at the terror alert chart all he sees is one big grey blob.”

“Hmmm. When do you think he knew he was really in trouble?” I asked Andy.

“From day one. I hear he even had to bluff his way through the fabric swatches when he picked out his office furniture. But he thought he could sweat it out.”

“I wonder how he chose all these color alert levels that we kept hearing about over the last several years?” I asked Andy.

“From what I hear,” Andy surmised, “His own system was based on eeny-meeny-miny-mo.”

“Well, I guess you have to give him credit for his courage in coming clean. Anything else going on up your way?” I asked.

“Well, I am hearing some rumors that Dan Rather may be offered a chance to begin a new career at the Central Intelligence Agency. They seem to really have high regard for him there in his ability to gather phony information.”

“He ought to fit right in. Anything else?”

“Well, one final thing. You know, Julia Roberts named her twins Phinnaeus and Hazel. I Hear there are a few congressmen who are talking about a new law preventing celebrities from naming their own children.”

“Makes sense to me,” I said. “Good to talk to you, Andy. Keep me posted.”

“Hell, make ’em cry, or make ’em laugh, make ’em think you’re their weak and erring pal, or make ’em think you’re God-Almighty ... Tell ’em anything. But for Sweet Jesus’ sake don’t try to improve their minds.

- Robert Penn Warren, “All the King’s Men”

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

