

September 1, 2010

Toby Harnden comments on the Ground Zero mosque controversy and interviews a Muslim man who is against the building location. Ahmed Sharif is an amazing example, though, for the positive attitude he has of America despite having been the victim of an anti-Muslim attack.

It took a Manhattan taxi driver called Ahmed Sharif to speak out for America, which is being vilified as bigoted and Islamophobic because of the controversy generated by opposition to the so-called "Ground Zero mosque".

The United States was his dream country, he enthused, and he loved New York City. "I feel like I belong here. This is the city actually [for] all colours, races, religion, everyone. We live here side by side peacefully." ...

...Ahmed Sharif, a victim of real anti-Muslim bigotry, stated that the attack on him was an aberration and that America is a land of tolerance and opportunity. What a shame that Obama, despite his much-vaunted gift with words, appears unable to speak about such things with similar eloquence.

Roger Simon responds with logic to the name-calling from the Left.

...With very minor exceptions, I have seen little irrational fear of Islam in our society. What I have seen is a lot of serious and justifiable dislike of the religion for its ideology — notably its heinous treatment of women and homosexuals and its opposition to the separation of church and state, all codified by its all-encompassing Sharia law that seeks to legislate all facets of existence while instituting a global caliphate.

Nevertheless, soi-disant liberals and progressives or whatever they want to call themselves accuse those who dislike Islam for those reasons of irrational fear. ...

... Today there are 1.5 billion adherents of Islam, 21% of the world's population. Achieving a global caliphate is not entirely unlikely. Irrational fear or ideological battle?

Mark Helprin writes an eloquent explanation why the mosque should not be built near Ground Zero.

...Building close to Ground Zero disregards the passions, grief and preferences not only of most of the families of September 11th but, because we are all the families of September 11th, those of the American people as well, even if not the whole of the American people. If the project is to promote moderate Islam, why have its sponsors so relentlessly, without the slightest compromise, insisted upon such a sensitive and inflammatory setting? That is not moderate. It is aggressively militant.

Disregarding pleas to build it at a sufficient remove so as not to be linked to an abomination committed, widely praised, and throughout the world seldom condemned in the name of Islam, the militant proponents of the World Trade Center mosque are guilty of a poorly concealed provocation. They dare Americans to appear anti-Islamic and intolerant or just to roll over.

But the opposition to what they propose is no more anti-Islamic or intolerant than to protest a Shinto shrine at Pearl Harbor or Nanjing would be anti-Shinto or even anti-Japanese. How about a statue of

Wagner at Auschwitz, a Russian war memorial in the Katyn Forest, or a monument to British and American air power at Dresden? The indecency of such things would be neither camouflaged nor burned away by the freedoms of expression and religion. And that is what the controversy is about, decency and indecency, not the freedom to worship, which no one denies. ...

David Warren theorizes about some of the pressures that Islamist radicals are placing, directly and indirectly, on moderate Muslim communities.

...Reasonable Muslims and their children -- trying to get on with their lives... -- are the targets of a very sick propaganda, designed to persuade the psychologically unstable that Allah loves to kill infidels gratuitously. And over the world at large, Muslims are by far the most numerous victims of Islamist acts of carnage: quite literally tens of thousands killed and maimed in the time we've been counting since 9/11.

But when they look outside the community, they feel themselves being held responsible for a murderer's creed. ...

...Moreover, the very strategy of the Islamists is to isolate Muslim emigrant communities; to prevent their assimilation into the West and its (truly corrupted) values. In other words, to put every Muslim in a position where he is either with the Islamists, or against every aspect of his own identity. ...

...The mosque insistence on distinctive Islamic dress contributes more to this separation, day by day, than isolated acts of terrorism.

Our media insistence on publicizing the more radical Islamic spokesmen, at the expense of the more reasonable, also contributes mightily to this by enhancing and promoting the radicals' prestige. ...

The president walked into this one. **Peter Wehner** comments with polling numbers on Obama's response to the oil spill.

In his [interview](#) from New Orleans yesterday with NBC's Brian Williams, commemorating the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, President Obama assured the world that his handling of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was not his administration's Hurricane Katrina.

The president is right, if the people of Louisiana are to be believed. Mr. Obama's handling of the BP oil spill is judged by them to be considerably worse than how Bush reacted to Katrina.

A Public Policy Polling survey reports [this](#):

The oil spill in the Gulf may be mostly out of the headlines now but Louisiana voters aren't getting any less mad at Barack Obama about his handling of it. Only 32% give Obama good marks for his actions in the aftermath of the spill, while 61% disapprove.

Louisianans are feeling more and more that George W. Bush's leadership on Katrina was better than Obama's on the spill. 54% think Bush did the superior job of helping the state through a crisis to 33% who pick Obama. ...

[Peter Wehner](#) also blogs on the president's good work spreading conservative ideas. Here's the latest from [Gallup](#):

"Republicans lead by 51% to 41% among registered voters in Gallup weekly tracking of 2010 congressional voting preferences. The 10-percentage-point lead is the GOP's largest so far this year and is its largest in Gallup's history of tracking the midterm generic ballot for Congress."

What Barack Obama is doing for the fortunes of the GOP is nearly unmatched by anyone in modern political history.

[Michael Barone](#) looks at the anti-liberal mood in two places minimally affected by the recession.

...In Alaska, Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski was expected to be easily renominated over Fairbanks lawyer and political newcomer Joe Miller. But the voters had other ideas.

In Alaska, Miller's narrow lead of 1,668 votes may vanish as at least 7,600 absentee and mail ballots are counted.

...Whatever the final outcomes, there are lessons to be learned. One is that the current unpopularity of leftist parties in the Anglosphere (Republicans lead Democrats by a record margin in polls on voting for the U.S. House) are not just a reaction to bad economic times.

...Murkowski was hurt by her assertion in debate that the Constitution put no limits on Congress's ability to make laws. She won votes from Alaska insiders and Alaska Natives for supporting spending on local programs, but not as many as local pundits expected. ...

In the [WSJ](#), Kelly Evans reports on the reintroduction of the Austrian school of economics, and the man, [Peter J. Boettke](#), who is leading the charge. Evans also pinpoints the challenge for these economists: how to scale back government intervention and allow the needed market corrections to occur.

Peter J. Boettke, shuffling around in a maroon velour track suit or faux-leather rubber shoes he calls "dress Crocs," hardly seems like the type to lead a revolution.

But the 50-year-old professor of economics at George Mason University in Virginia is emerging as the intellectual standard-bearer for the Austrian school of economics that opposes government intervention in markets and decries federal spending to prop up demand during times of crisis. Mr. Boettke, whose latest research explores people's ability to self-regulate, also is minting a new generation of disciples who are spreading the Austrian approach throughout academia, where it had long been left for dead. ...

...It wasn't a lack of government oversight that led to the crisis, as some economists argue, but too much of it, Mr. Boettke says. ...

...But as much as the Austrian diagnosis may resonate now, it doesn't provide a playbook for what to do next, which could limit its current resurgence. ...

In Forbes, [Paul Johnson](#) asks whether a college education is worth the investment. ...*The quality of higher education received seems to bear no relation to the success or failure of most Presidents. The two greatest, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, had to learn the hard way. On the other hand, another distinguished President, Woodrow Wilson, first attracted notice as president of Princeton.*

It is striking how much or how little great inventors and scientists learned at university. Thomas Edison never attended one, discovering his genius instead while working as a teenage telegraph operator. Charles Darwin went to Cambridge to study for the church but derived the greatest benefit to his career during long rambles with J.S. Henslow, a professor of botany. Darwin was known in his student days as "the man who walks with Henslow." What Cambridge did give Darwin was the opportunity to reinforce his capacity to work hard and systematically and to expand the range of his enquiring mind.

Indeed, the study of universities and the great men and women who have attended them leads me to think that the best of these schools are characterized not so much by what they teach and how they teach it but by the extent they provide opportunities and encouragement for students to teach themselves. The best also help to instill certain intellectual virtues in young minds, including respect for the indispensable foundation of democracy, the rule of law; the need to back up opinions with clear arguments, empirical evidence and hard work; the varying importance of resolute conviction and friendly compromise, when appropriate; open-mindedness at all times; and the perpetual need for courage in the pursuit of truth. ...

Telegraph, UK

[Why can't Barack Obama tell the world about American tolerance?](#)

The controversy over the 'Ground Zero mosque' has portrayed the United States as a land of bigots. Toby Harnden wonders why the US President has helped fuel this myth.

by Toby Harnden

It took a Manhattan taxi driver called Ahmed Sharif to speak out for America, which is being vilified as bigoted and Islamophobic because of the controversy generated by opposition to the so-called "Ground Zero mosque".

The United States was his dream country, he enthused, and he loved New York City. "I feel like I belong here. This is the city actually [for] all colours, races, religion, everyone. We live here side by side peacefully."

Which was a pretty noble sentiment coming from a man whose throat had been slashed by a drunken, deranged passenger who had inquired whether he was a Muslim before pulling out a knife and shouting "Peace be upon you" in Arabic.

As the whole world knows, there is a furore raging over the proposed building of a 15-storey Islamic community centre, containing a mosque, two blocks from Ground Zero, site of the 9/11 terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda.

America's liberal elites have been falling over themselves to denounce their country and fellow citizens as anti-Muslim xenophobes who don't understand that it was not all followers of Islam who were responsible for the atrocities of 2001.

Certainly, some Americans opposed to what is now known as the Park51 centre (its previous name of Cordoba centre, a reference to a mosque built in Spain on the site of a Christian church to symbolise a Muslim victory, did not quite strike the right public relations note) are motivated by bigotry.

But it was the centre's Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf himself who linked its purpose to its proximity to the Ground Zero site. It is entirely valid to question whether this is the right approach to building interfaith bridges.

Rauf, who once described the US policies as "an accessory to the crime" of 9/11, stated in Bahrain last week that all the "attention is a sign of the success of our efforts" – an utterance that shows he is stupid, mischievous or worse.

Even if the aim of building the centre there was to encourage religious understanding, that is clearly no longer a possible outcome. So what kind of success was Rauf referring to?

To want to debate such matters, however, is judged as beyond the pale. Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York tried to shut down discussion by saying that opponents of Rauf's initiative "ought to be ashamed of themselves". Presumably, that includes Bangladeshi-born Sharif, who doesn't support the Park51 centre.

President Barack Obama said that the US constitution guarantees religious freedom (which no one disputes). The American mainstream media and commentariat has stridently and almost uniformly championed Rauf's cause. In doing so, they've happily trashed their fellow Americans, stating they're motivated only by intolerance.

In fact, most evidence points to the US being one of the most tolerant countries in the world. A poll from you won't see cited much because it doesn't fit the prevailing narrative was recently conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute.

It found that 76 per cent of Americans would support Muslims in their community building an Islamic centre or mosque provided they followed the same rules and regulations required of other religious groups. But the 9/11 site is seen as different. After the 9/11 attacks there was no anti-Muslim backlash in the US.

Obama's ill-judged intervention, and the shrill outrage of his allies in the intelligentsia, has damaged America's standing in the world by fuelling anti-American stereotypes.

Aides to General David Petraeus, commanding troops in Afghanistan, say he is livid about the portrayal of the US as a hotbed of anti-Muslim bigotry and fears it may undermine the war effort, which is based on partnership with an Islamic regime.

Many Americans are incensed by the way that legitimate protest and questioning of Obama's policies is routinely branded as racist or ignorant. They are tired of being told what to think and when to think it.

During the 2008 campaign, for instance, you were a bigot if you mentioned Obama's middle name or his Muslim background. Yet once he was elected, he went to Ankara and Cairo to proclaim that his full name was "Barack Hussein Obama".

Ahmed Sharif, a victim of real anti-Muslim bigotry, stated that the attack on him was an aberration and that America is a land of tolerance and opportunity. What a shame that Obama, despite his much-vaunted gift with words, appears unable to speak about such things with similar eloquence.

Roger L. Simon Islamophobiaphobia

Along with “progressive” (a word that should be restricted to poker), “Islamophobia” is one of the more maddening propaganda constructs of our time. Orwell could not have done better.

Of course we all know what a phobia is — an irrational fear. It comes from the Greek *phobos*, meaning “fear” or “morbid fear.” Common ones are acrophobia (heights) and agoraphobia (crowds).

With very minor exceptions, I have seen little irrational fear of Islam in our society. What I have seen is a lot of serious and justifiable dislike of the religion for its ideology — notably its heinous treatment of women and homosexuals and its opposition to the separation of church and state, all codified by its all-encompassing Sharia law that seeks to legislate all facets of existence while instituting a global caliphate.

Nevertheless, *soi-disant* liberals and progressives or whatever they want to call themselves accuse those who dislike Islam for those reasons of irrational fear. That’s like having an irrational fear of totalitarianism. Ironically, it could also be construed, according to those same progressives, as an irrational fear of their own professed liberal values.

Crazy, no? *La vie a l’envers*. Life upside down.

We are back in the days of the ACLU defending the Nazis marching in Skokie, except the situation is quite different. In those times, the number of Nazis in Illinois was minuscule and the likelihood of a return to the Third Reich remote. Today there are 1.5 billion adherents of Islam, 21% of the world’s population. Achieving a global caliphate is not entirely unlikely. Irrational fear or ideological battle?

Clearly I see it as ideological battle with the word “Islamophobia” itself a weapon in that battle. It is an obvious way of avoiding debate by tarnishing the opposition.

Only it is not working very well anymore. It’s become too obvious. With 70% of the country opposing the Ground Zero mosque, a huge number of people aren’t buying it. Or don’t care. How many times can you attack someone before we’re back in grammar school and it becomes a case of “Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me”?

Okay, I’m an Islamophobe. Bleh.

But I propose a new term for something I suffer from much more acutely — ***Islamophobiaphobia***. It’s an irrational fear of ideological nitwits.

There are many examples but some recent ones are [Fareed Zakaria](#) — who has informed us that GZM critics are worse than Hezbollah — and the *New York Times*’ [Timothy Egan](#) — who thinks most Republicans are dopes. Talk about projection. (Note to Egan: As one who was once a Democrat and now hangs out, relatively speaking, with Republicans, intelligence and ideology do not correlate.)

So now you can call me Islamophobiaphobic. But I am not the only one. My suspicion is that we are many. How do you know us?

Well, not just because we break out in a rash when touching the editorial page of the *New York Times* or get migraine headaches in the presence of Christiane Amanpour. There are subtler indications. One of the key ones is the ability to differentiate. For example: just because you oppose a mosque being built at Ground Zero doesn't mean you oppose mosques in general.

And finally, as you know these are difficult times, so I have some special advice to you, in the tradition of that great [Dos Equis ad](#): Wherever you go and whatever you do — stay Islamophobiaphobic, my friends.

WSJ

The World Trade Center Mosque and the Constitution

by Mark Helprin

The plan to erect a mosque of major proportions in what would have been the shadow of the World Trade Center involves not just the indisputable constitutional rights that sanction it, but, providentially, others that may frustrate it.

Mosques have commemoratively been established upon the ruins or in the shells of the sacred buildings of other religions—most notably but not exclusively in Cordoba, Jerusalem, Istanbul, and India. When sited in this fashion they are monuments to victory, and the chief objection to this one is not to its existence but that it would be near the site of atrocities—not just one—closely associated with mosques because they were planned and at times celebrated in them.

Building close to Ground Zero disregards the passions, grief and preferences not only of most of the families of September 11th but, because we are all the families of September 11th, those of the American people as well, even if not the whole of the American people. If the project is to promote moderate Islam, why have its sponsors so relentlessly, without the slightest compromise, insisted upon such a sensitive and inflammatory setting? That is not moderate. It is aggressively militant.

Disregarding pleas to build it at a sufficient remove so as not to be linked to an abomination committed, widely praised, and throughout the world seldom condemned in the name of Islam, the militant proponents of the World Trade Center mosque are guilty of a poorly concealed provocation. They dare Americans to appear anti-Islamic and intolerant or just to roll over.

But the opposition to what they propose is no more anti-Islamic or intolerant than to protest a Shinto shrine at Pearl Harbor or Nanjing would be anti-Shinto or even anti-Japanese. How about a statue of Wagner at Auschwitz, a Russian war memorial in the Katyn Forest, or a monument to British and American air power at Dresden? The indecency of such things would be neither camouflaged nor burned away by the freedoms of expression and religion. And that is what the controversy is about, decency and indecency, not the freedom to worship, which no one denies.

Although there is of course no question of reciprocity—no question whatever of a church in Mecca or anything even vaguely like it—constitutionally and if local codes applied without bias allow, there is unquestionably a right to build. Reciprocity or not, we have principles that we value highly and will not abandon. The difficulty is that the principles of equal treatment and freedom of religion have, so to

speak, been taken hostage by the provocation. As in many hostage situations, the choice seems to be between injuring what we hold dear or accepting defeat. This, anyway, is how it has played out so far.

The proponents of the mosque know that Americans will not and cannot betray our constitutional liberties. Knowing that we would not rip the foundation from the more than 200 years of our history that it underpins, they may imagine that they have achieved a kind of checkmate.

Their knowledge of the Constitution, however, does not penetrate very far, and perhaps they are not as clever as they think. The Constitution is a marvelous document, and a reasonable interpretation of it means as well that no American can be forced to pour concrete. No American can be forced to deliver materials. No American can be forced to bid on a contract, to run conduit, dig a foundation, or join steel.

And a reasonable interpretation of the Constitution means that the firemen's, police, and restaurant workers' unions, among others, and the families of the September 11th dead, and anyone who would protect, sympathize with and honor them, are free to assemble, protest and picket at the site of the mosque that under the Constitution is free to be built.

A reasonable interpretation of the Constitution means that no American can be forced to cross a picket line in violation of conscience or even of mere preference. Who, in all decency, would cross a picket line manned by those whose kin were slaughtered—by the thousands—so terribly nearby? And who in all decency would cross such a line manned by the firemen, police and other emergency personnel who know every day that they may be called upon to give their lives in a second act?

Michael Bloomberg, the mayor of New York, says of those who with heartbreaking bravery went into the towers: "We do not honor their lives by denying the very constitutional rights they died protecting."

Mr. Mayor, the firemen, the police, the EMTs and the paramedics who rushed into those buildings, many of them knowing that they would die there, did not do so to protect constitutional rights. They went often knowingly to their deaths to protect what the Constitution itself protects: people, flesh and blood, men and women, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers. Although you yourself may not know this, they did.

The choice is not between abandoning them or abandoning the Constitution, for although the liberties the Constitution guarantees sometimes put us at a disadvantage even of self-preservation, they also make it possible for 300 million Americans to prevail—reasonably, peacefully, and within the limits of the law—against provocations such as this.

They make it possible to prevent the construction of the mosque at this general location—with no objection whatsoever to, but rather warm encouragement of, its construction elsewhere—not by force or decree but by argument, persuasion, and peaceable assembly. These are rights that the Constitution guarantees as well, and clearly it is one's constitutional right to oppose the mosque, not to participate in the building of it, and to convince others of the same.

This small and symbolic crisis is not a test of constitutional liberties, for in regard to the question at hand the Constitution allows discretion. It is rather a test of how far America can be pushed, and America is not at all as powerless as it has been portrayed.

That is because the street in front of the mosque that the Constitution says can be built can be filled with people who can effectively protest it because the Constitution says that they are free. Those who

do not fear to do so need only go there and stand upon their convictions, their beliefs, their reason, their laws, their history, and what is in their hearts.

Mr. Helprin, a senior fellow at the Claremont Institute, is the author of, among other works, "Winter's Tale" (Harcourt), "A Soldier of the Great War" (Harcourt) and, most recently, "Digital Barbarism" (HarperCollins).

Ottawa Citizen Radical temptations

by David Warren

The problem with a problem that isn't going away -- that is going to get worse before it doesn't get better -- is that it won't go away.

Tautology seems as good a place to start as any, in dealing with the security problem presented by "Islamism," of which we have all been reminded by the arrest of more alleged, semi-home-grown bomb plotters in Ottawa this week. If, as wags have suggested, even the flat-footed Mounties could capture these guys, think what else is out there.

To be fair to the police, who necessarily start from a position of no knowledge, and work within the tight constraints of political correctness -- so that the spontaneous arrest of a known

Islamist ideologue merely "suspected" of being up to no good, would be a career-ending move -- they are doing their best.

My impression is that their outwardly naive-looking schemes of "outreach" to Muslim communities are, modestly, paying off; that they do find help from "moderate Muslims" when they ask for it.

Reasonable Muslims and their children -- trying to get on with their lives; who often came to Canada to escape this sort of violent nonsense -- are the targets of a very sick propaganda, designed to persuade the psychologically unstable that Allah loves to kill infidels gratuitously. And over the world at large, Muslims are by far the most numerous victims of Islamist acts of carnage: quite literally tens of thousands killed and maimed in the time we've been counting since 9/11.

But when they look outside the community, they feel themselves being held responsible for a murderer's creed. And this is the case whether or not outsiders admit to the "prejudice." Ask the right poll questions, and you will find that a great majority of people in the West have "had it up to here" with Islam generally, even if they are outwardly maintaining the smiley-face of universal multicultural tolerance.

This is how things are, and as we can see from such European constituencies as Holland, that tolerance finally wears thin. Nor is it clear what the way is heading forward, when it does wear thin.

Actually, the problem is worse than this. For reasons, both material and spiritual, too deep to be adequately conveyed through conventional journalism -- intensely political, ideological, "Islamist" interpretations of Islam are advancing almost everywhere that Muslim communities exist. Perhaps the biggest single exception is Iraq: but there the reverse tide may not be sustainable.

The chief material cause is Saudi Arabia, and the extraordinary funding that has gone, internationally, into promoting a Wahabi, "puritanical," strictly Shariah-based, fanaticism. That's where most foreign money for mosques and imams comes from, and the oil wealth behind it shows no sign of evaporating. Nor have our statesmen (or their electors) the guts to confront this issue, and express Western revulsion for a polity abhorrent to every Western principle of freedom.

The chief spiritual cause is the disappearance, on nearly a planetary scale, of sane and effective religious authority. Muslims are responding in their own way to the apparent triumph of atheism, manifest almost everywhere in a tawdry and meaningless consumerism. It is no coincidence that the terrorists recruit almost exclusively from Muslim households with all the material advantages.

Their appeal is to the young, who have had that material advantage, and know it is nothing. If we think they can be bought off with more consumer goods, we are fools indeed.

Compounding this is the universal fact of "us/them." Put yourself in a Muslim's shoes and ask: Who are "we" and who are "they"? It is human nature to identify with one's own, even when one's own are behaving reprehensibly.

Moreover, the very strategy of the Islamists is to isolate Muslim emigrant communities; to prevent their assimilation into the West and its (truly corrupted) values. In other words, to put every Muslim in a position where he is either with the Islamists, or against every aspect of his own identity.

This strategy is working. In both Europe and America, the trend is towards less, rather than more interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The mosque insistence on distinctive Islamic dress contributes more to this separation, day by day, than isolated acts of terrorism.

Our media insistence on publicizing the more radical Islamic spokesmen, at the expense of the more reasonable, also contributes mightily to this by enhancing and promoting the radicals' prestige.

It would be a different story if Muslims emigrating to the West encountered a society that was still overwhelmingly and confidently Christian in its beliefs, culture, and instincts. There would then be, for better and worse, reciprocal influence, and a "dialogue between civilizations."

Instead Muslim immigrants find a dialogue with the deaf: with a society that still says terrorism is wrong, but can't even explain why.

Contentions

[Not Obama's Katrina](#)

by Peter Wehner

In his [interview](#) from New Orleans yesterday with NBC's Brian Williams, commemorating the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, President Obama assured the world that his handling of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was not his administration's Hurricane Katrina.

The president is right, if the people of Louisiana are to be believed. Mr. Obama's handling of the BP oil spill is judged by them to be considerably worse than how Bush reacted to Katrina.

A Public Policy Polling survey reports [this](#):

The oil spill in the Gulf may be mostly out of the headlines now but Louisiana voters aren't getting any less mad at Barack Obama about his handling of it. Only 32% give Obama good marks for his actions in the aftermath of the spill, while 61% disapprove.

Louisianans are feeling more and more that George W. Bush's leadership on Katrina was better than Obama's on the spill. 54% think Bush did the superior job of helping the state through a crisis to 33% who pick Obama. That 21 point margin represents a widening since PPP asked the same question in June and found Bush ahead by a 15 point margin. Bush beats Obama 87-2 on that score with Republicans and 42-30 with independents, while Obama has just a 65-24 advantage with Democrats.

Louisianans are generally softening with time in their feelings about how Bush handled Katrina. Almost as many, 44%, now approve of his actions on it as the 47% who disapprove.

President Obama casts his response to the oil spill, like his response to everything, as textbook perfect. Yet the silly people of Louisiana, like so much of the nation, just don't appreciate how extraordinarily able and competent Obama is. How difficult it must be for The One We've Been Waiting For to go through his presidency without the public appreciating the magnitude of his greatness. For the president, it seems, no good deed goes unpunished, no great achievement gets its proper due, not enough villains (Bush, Republicans, members of the Tea Party, conservative bloggers, Fox News, etc.) get nearly enough blame.

When will the scales finally fall from our eyes?

Contentions

[Gallup and the GOP](#)

by Peter Wehner

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Republicans lead by 51% to 41% among registered voters in Gallup weekly tracking of 2010 congressional voting preferences. The 10-percentage-point lead is the GOP's largest so far this year and is its largest in Gallup's history of tracking the midterm generic ballot for Congress.

What Barack Obama is doing for the fortunes of the GOP is nearly unmatched by anyone in modern political history.

Washington Examiner

[From Alaska to Australia, voters surprise the establishment](#)

by Michael Barone



In this tumultuous political year, the latest sharp surprises come from the far reaches of the Anglosphere, Alaska and Australia.

These were lands to which Capt. James Cook voyaged even as the seaboard Atlantic colonists were rebelling against king and Parliament in London. Cook's charts of the southern coast of Australia are still in use and he sailed from there to Hawaii and then through the Bering Strait to the ice-choked Arctic Sea. You can see splendid murals of his voyages in the Captain Cook Hotel in Anchorage.

Australia joined the Anglosphere when the British established a convict settlement there in 1788, and Alaska joined when Secretary of State William Seward purchased it from Russia in 1867.

Today they are commonwealths with economies thriving on mining and oil. Australia's 22 million people have a massive export trade with China; Alaska's 700,000 people, as Sarah Palin accurately noted, live in a state that has boundaries with Canada and Russia.

Both the Aug. 21 federal election in Australia and the Aug. 24 primary in Alaska were not supposed to produce surprises. One reason: Both have economies relatively untroubled by the financial crisis and recession.

In Australia the Labor government headed by Julia Gillard (after the intraparty ouster two months before of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd) was expected to cruise to victory, as Australian parties have after one term in government since 1930. The new leader of the conservative Liberal party, Tony Abbott, was considered too extremist to win.

In Alaska, Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski was expected to be easily renominated over Fairbanks lawyer and political newcomer Joe Miller. But the voters had other ideas.

In Australia the Liberals and Labor are both short of the 76-seat majority in Parliament. Postal and provisional ballots are still being counted, as both parties seek the votes of five Independents while Labor has the support of the one Green candidate elected.

In Alaska, Miller's narrow lead of 1,668 votes may vanish as at least 7,600 absentee and mail ballots are counted.

Whatever the final outcomes, there are lessons to be learned. One is that the current unpopularity of leftist parties in the Anglosphere (Republicans lead Democrats by a record margin in polls on voting for the U.S. House) are not just a reaction to bad economic times.

Australia's Labor party was hurt by its attempt to slap a 30 percent tax on the mining industry. Voters evidently understood that soaking the rich would hurt just about everyone.

And Labor's attempt to put burdens on carbon use, rejected in the Australian Senate, was a liability, even in the country with the world's highest incidence of skin cancer.

Murkowski was hurt by her assertion in debate that the Constitution put no limits on Congress's ability to make laws. She won votes from Alaska insiders and Alaska Natives for supporting spending on local programs, but not as many as local pundits expected.

The key votes against Labor in Australia and against Murkowski were cast in fast-growing areas — in semitropical Queensland in Australia, in the Matanuska and Susitna Valley (including Sarah Palin's Wasilla) in Alaska.

We see there what we saw in the Massachusetts special Senate election in the suburban rings around Boston that depend on the private sector rather than government and universities: a massive repudiation of the liberal policies of what New York Times columnist David Brooks calls “the educated class.”

And we did not see any sign in Australia or Alaska of the cultural issue card can trumping other issues. Australia's Abbott was supposed to be unelectable because of his opposition to abortion; turns out that wasn't a problem. In Alaska a ballot proposal putting restrictions on abortion brought out voters for whom Murkowski's pro-choice stance was a liability.

The results in Australia and Alaska are congruent with developments elsewhere in the Anglosphere. The British coalition government headed by David Cameron since the election in May is getting wide approval for its 25 percent cuts in most departments' spending. The Canadian government headed by Conservative Stephen Harper seems firmly in power in a country that has long seemed well to the left of the United States.

“The educated class” in Sydney, Melbourne and Washington, at a loss to understand this, is furiously denouncing fellow citizens as bigots. That makes no more sense, and wins no more votes, than blaming Captain Cook.

WSJ

Spreading Hayek, Spurning Keynes

Professor Leads an Austrian Revival

by Kelly Evans

Peter J. Boettke, shuffling around in a maroon velour track suit or faux-leather rubber shoes he calls "dress Crocs," hardly seems like the type to lead a revolution.



Peter J. Boettke of George Mason University is the emerging standardbearer for a revived Austrian school of economics.

But the 50-year-old professor of economics at George Mason University in Virginia is emerging as the intellectual standard-bearer for the Austrian school of economics that opposes government intervention in markets and decries federal spending to prop up demand during times of crisis. Mr. Boettke, whose latest research explores people's ability to self-regulate, also is minting a new generation of disciples who are spreading the Austrian approach throughout academia, where it had long been left for dead.

To these free-market economists, government intrusion ultimately sows the seeds of the next crisis. It hampers what one famous Austrian, Joseph Schumpeter, called the process of "creative destruction."

Governments that spend money they don't have to cushion downturns, they say, lead nations down the path of large debts and runaway inflation.

Eight decades ago, in the midst of the Great Depression, the Austrian school and its leading scholar, Friedrich A. von Hayek, fell out of favor relative to the more activist theories of John Maynard Keynes. The British economist's ideas, which called for aggressive government spending during recessions, triumphed then and in the decades since, reflected most recently in measures like the \$814 billion stimulus package. Austrian adherents were marginalized, losing influence in prominent journals and among policy makers.

But as the economy flounders, debt mounts and growth—revised downward Friday—flags, Mr. Hayek and his Austrian-school adherents like Mr. Boettke are resurgent as their views resonate with more people.

"What I'm really worried about is an endless cycle of deficits, debt, and debasement of currency," Mr. Boettke says. "What we've done is engage in a set of policies that's turned a market correction into an economy-wide crisis."



Mr. Boettke got hooked on economics as a student at Grove City College. His commitment to economics is "always on," says his wife.

Others seem to agree. Mr. Hayek's 1944 classic, "The Road to Serfdom," became the top-selling book in June on Amazon.com. The Austrian think tank Foundation for Economic Education had to turn students away this summer from its overflowing seminars.

Of course, economic theory ebbs and flows. The Austrian school surged along with inflation and unemployment in the 1970s. By the 1980s, free-market ideas ushered in the Reagan Revolution. But the success faded as inflation was successfully controlled by central bankers and government spending actually rose during the Reagan years. Besides, no one figure emerged as the leader of a fractious group of economists averse to central planning.

Mr. Boettke has come as close as anyone in recent years. In the last decade at George Mason, he has helped recruit the Austrian school's leading scholars and drawn students from around the world. Roughly 75% of his students have gone on to teach economics at the college or graduate level.

Mr. Boettke "has done more for Austrian economics, I'd say, than any individual in the last decade," says Bruce Caldwell, an editor of Mr. Hayek's collected works.

The resurgence of Austrian economics does have its hazards, Mr. Boettke says. The antigovernment fervor on cable-television shows and the Internet may have popularized its theories, but it also "reinforces the idea to critics that these are crackpot ideas," he said. He has tried to distance himself

from conspiracy theorists and even dropped "Austrian" from the name of his blog. But he hasn't yet thought of a better term.

'Always On'

Still, Mr. Boettke isn't too concerned with matters of style. More folksy than formal, his commitment to economics, as his wife Rosemary says, is "always on."

He has a tendency to ramble, interrupt and use salty language. In between the dozen books and over 100 articles he has written, he spends hours debating with students around his backyard barbecue grill.

Often, when Mrs. Boettke needs him to run errands, he makes students pile in the car with him to finish the debate. He also has trouble closing down his inner economist.

"He refuses to recycle," Mrs. Boettke says. "Something about how it actually uses more resources." He's not exactly a handyman either. "If his 'opportunity cost' is too great, he'll hire someone."

Growing up in Clark, N.J., Mr. Boettke was a mediocre student in high school. His dreams of landing a basketball coaching job led him to Grove City College in Pennsylvania in 1979. A series of injuries ended that career, but an introductory economics course started another.

It was taught by the renowned Austrian economist Hans Sennholz, who explained why government policies resulted in gas shortages, forcing Mr. Boettke to siphon gas. "I was hooked."

Mr. Boettke went on to GMU because it was one of the few places that offered a Ph.D. program in Austrian economics. There, he focused his research on the organizational problems of the Soviet economy. It solidified his belief that any central planning of an economy, including by a central bank like the Federal Reserve, would damage the market.

Tenure Denied

In 1990, Mr. Boettke landed a job at New York University. "It was a dream come true," he says. Economics at NYU had legendary Austrian roots, but the school started to move toward a more standard mathematical approach, former colleagues say. Mr. Boettke was denied tenure in 1997, a blow to his personal ambitions.

The period also marked a low point for the Austrian field. Its philosophical approach looked old-fashioned amid the mathematical models dominating modern economics.

And the tenures of Paul Volcker and [Alan Greenspan](#) at the Federal Reserve seemed to quell doubts about the central bank's ability to manage the U.S. economy.

But all along, the Austrians weren't so sure. Economics, they feared, was increasingly narrow and technical but not necessarily wise. They also remained skeptical of the Fed's approach to targeting stability in consumer prices.

That shouldn't be the Fed's goal, says Mr. Boettke, who a friend lured back to George Mason a year after he was denied tenure. The Fed, he says, should be to make money "as neutral as possible, like the rule of law, which never favors one party over the other."

That sometimes means letting prices fall. There's little to fear in deflation, he adds, when it accompanies periods of strong productivity growth. However, "anytime you saw the price level starting to fall, the Fed flooded the economy with cash," he says. "And that resulted in asset-price inflation, which set us up for these crises."

Back From Serfdom

It wasn't a lack of government oversight that led to the crisis, as some economists argue, but too much of it, Mr. Boettke says. Specifically, low interest rates and policies that subsidized homeownership "gave people the crazy juice," he says.

But as much as the Austrian diagnosis may resonate now, it doesn't provide a playbook for what to do next, which could limit its current resurgence.

Mr. Hayek rightly warned of the dangers of central planning, Mr. Boettke says, but "he didn't give a prescription for how to move from 'serfdom' back."

Forbes

Are Universities Worth It?

by Paul Johnson

A new academic year is about to start. At this time every year I find myself asking these questions: What ought universities to be doing? And are they doing it? After all, to take four years out of a young adult's life is a major investment, and we ought to be clear whether or not it's bringing in a worthwhile return. However, our societies seldom produce clear replies to these fundamental questions. The universal assumption is that higher education is valuable, and all governments are pledged to ensure that more and more people receive it.

Plato founded the first center of higher studies in a suburb of Athens in the early 4th century B.C. He called it the Academy, and its object was the pursuit of wisdom, to which he had been introduced by his mentor, Socrates. But remember that Socrates was sentenced to death by a jury of 501 Athenian citizens because he had been teaching young people that wisdom was best obtained by learning to think clearly for oneself.

Aristotle, Plato's pupil, founded a second college in Athens, called the Lyceum, and taught there for 12 years. But he left it to go into voluntary exile, lest, as he put it, the Athenians should "sin twice against philosophy"--that is, order his execution.

These facts are worth recalling, as they show that the most civilized city of the ancient world was also confused about what higher education was supposed to achieve.

Universities, as such, were first created in the Middle Ages to train the clergy, and they began assuming their modern form in 18th-century Germany. For two centuries Germany was home to the best universities in the world, leading the field in philosophy, theology, philology and most of the sciences. But this was the same Germany that under Otto von Bismarck became a militaristic state and under Adolf Hitler a totalitarian one. Germany led the world into the two most destructive wars in history. Hitler always received higher ratings from students than from any other group in society, his views being strongly supported by a majority of German academics, with the world-famous philosopher Martin Heidegger setting the pattern.

So universities, and the education they provide, do not necessarily impart wisdom. What they do convey, in general terms, is not so easily defined. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin of Russia received a routine dose of higher education in the twilight of the Soviet Union as a prelude to entering the U.S.S.R.'s secret police community, an intellectual culture in which he still remains.

President Barack Obama found Harvard Law School to be invaluable in providing patrons and a fast-track entry into politics. There he absorbed the left-liberal culture that is Harvard's hallmark, which he is now applying to governing the U.S. and leading the Western World.

Prime Minister David Cameron had three years at England's oldest and most prestigious university, Oxford. Cameron's sojourn there was notable for his belonging (along with other members of his cabinet) to the Bullingdon, a club with a vague connection to horses and a more specific activity of consuming large quantities of champagne.

Such frivolities are not unknown in the U.S. The greatest disappointment in the life of Franklin Delano Roosevelt was his failure to get elected to the Porcellian, the club occupying the same position at Harvard as the Bullingdon at Oxford. FDR went on to win four terms in the White House to general but by no means universal applause.

More Than One Path to Success

The quality of higher education received seems to bear no relation to the success or failure of most Presidents. The two greatest, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, had to learn the hard way. On the other hand, another distinguished President, Woodrow Wilson, first attracted notice as president of Princeton.

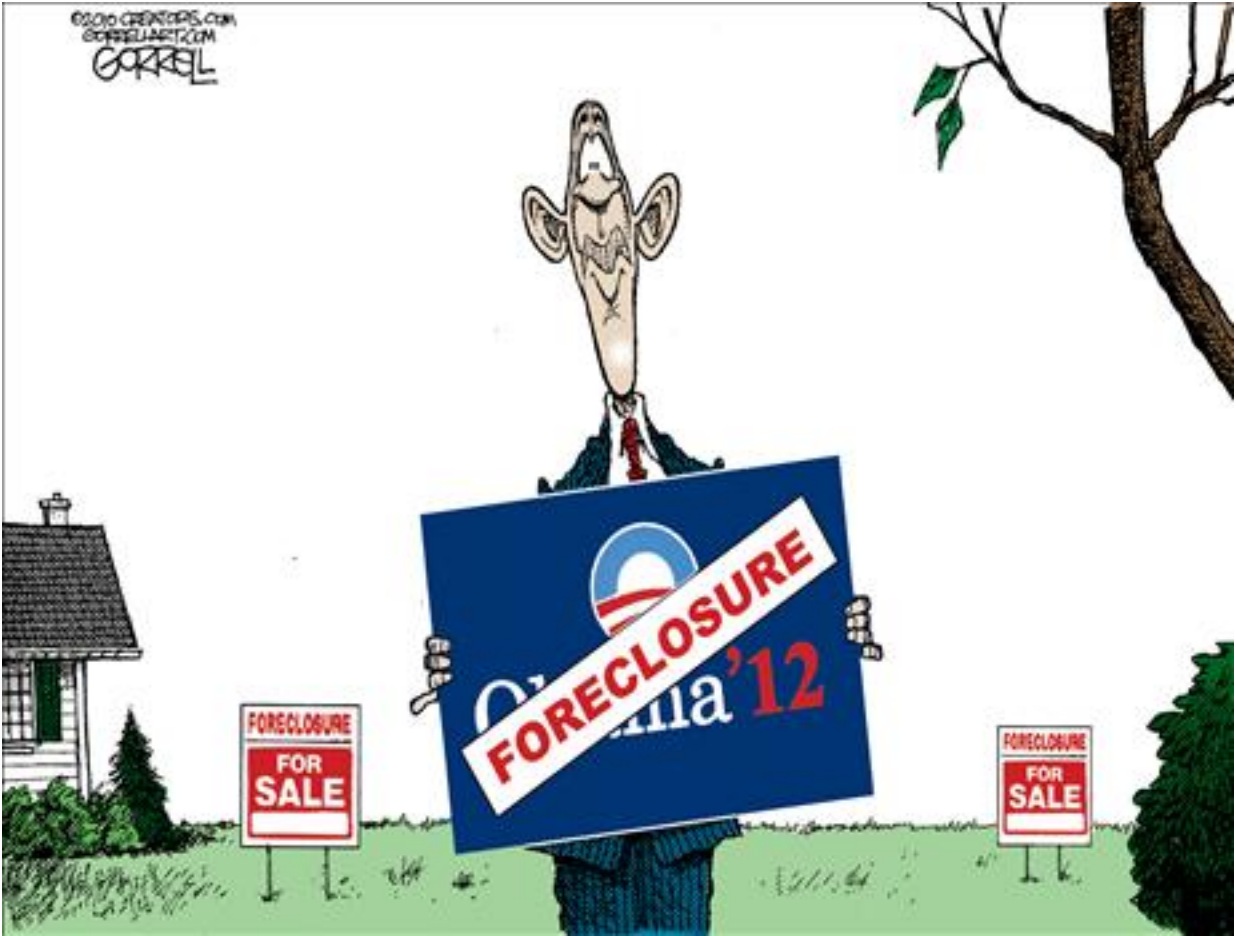
It is striking how much or how little great inventors and scientists learned at university. Thomas Edison never attended one, discovering his genius instead while working as a teenage telegraph operator. Charles Darwin went to Cambridge to study for the church but derived the greatest benefit to his career during long rambles with J.S. Henslow, a professor of botany. Darwin was known in his student days as "the man who walks with Henslow." What Cambridge did give Darwin was the opportunity to reinforce his capacity to work hard and systematically and to expand the range of his enquiring mind.

Indeed, the study of universities and the great men and women who have attended them leads me to think that the best of these schools are characterized not so much by what they teach and how they teach it but by the extent they provide opportunities and encouragement for students to teach themselves. The best also help to instill certain intellectual virtues in young minds, including respect for the indispensable foundation of democracy, the rule of law; the need to back up opinions with clear arguments, empirical evidence and hard work; the varying importance of resolute conviction and friendly compromise, when appropriate; open-mindedness at all times; and the perpetual need for courage in the pursuit of truth.

These are essentially moral qualities, which must form the basis of any university education. College presidents and trustees must satisfy themselves that this is precisely what their institutions are providing, as must corporate and individual benefactors. In the long run this is the only way we can ensure that universities justify the resources and time they consume.

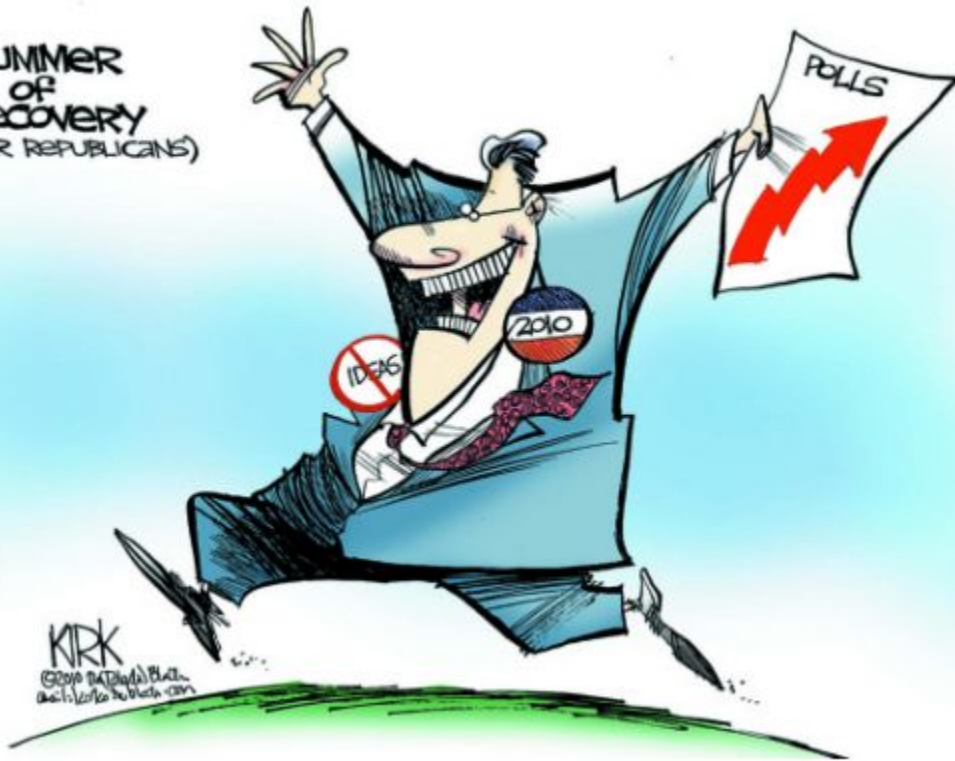


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