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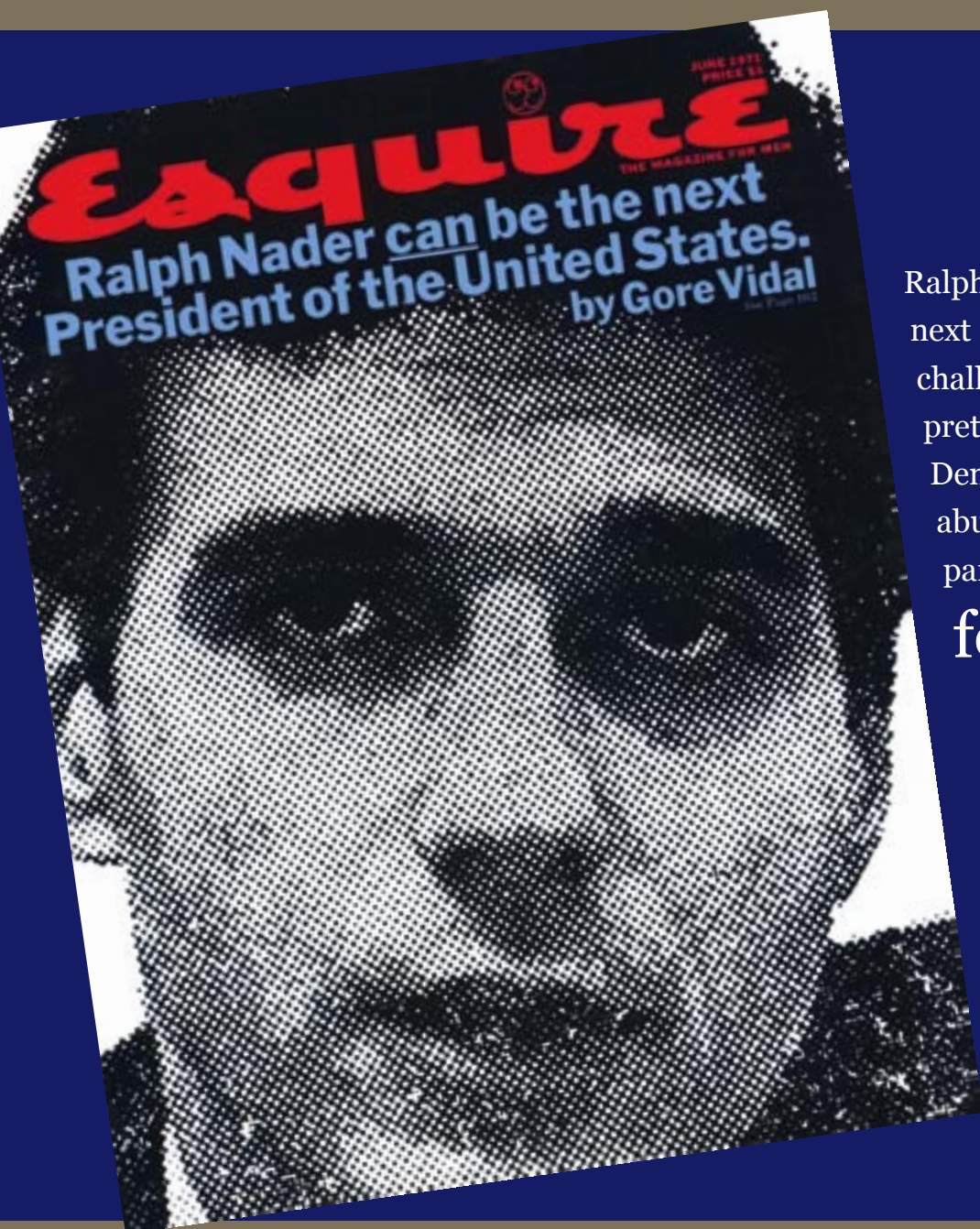
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NEO- INDEPENDENT

T H E P O L I T I C S O F B E C O M I N G



Ralph Nader won't be the next President. But his 2004 challenge is flushing out the pretenders, exposing the Democrats as democracy abusers, and helping non-partisan independents to fortify their base.

INSIDE: NEWMAN, KARP, SALIT, VIDAL and more

neo-independent (nē'ō in də pen'dənt)

adj. 1 of, or pertaining to, the movement of independent voters for political recognition and popular power ___ **n.** an independent voter in the post-Perot era, without traditional ideological attachments, seeking the overthrow of bipartisan political corruption ___ **adj. 2** of, or pertaining to, an independent political force styling itself as a postmodern progressive counterweight to neo-conservatism, or the neo-cons

EDITOR'S NOTE

In 1971, Gore Vidal wrote the cover story for the June issue of *Esquire* magazine, which announced: “Ralph Nader can be the next President of the United States.” In the article, Vidal fantasizes and proposes an independent run for the presidency by Ralph Nader in the 1972 election. At the time Vidal, who was co-chair of the New Party – an early (in contemporary history) experiment in independent politics – saw Nader as a “figure around whom those disgusted with traditional politics can rally, a point of hope, a new beginning in our tangled affairs.”

Nader did not answer Vidal’s clarion call in 1971, though I suspect that today he may wish he had. A lot of Americans would gladly summon back the days when our affairs were merely tangled – not mangled, as they have so disturbingly become.

In reading “Ralph Nader can be the next President of the United States” – having bought an original copy of that 1971 issue of *Esquire* on eBay for \$19 – I was touched both by Vidal’s prescience and his naiveté. In August, I called Vidal at his home in Italy and asked his permission to reprint the article. I told him that I thought it was important to restate the concerns he raised 33 years ago – the corruption of the Democratic Party and the need to create a new political institution that was independent and progressive. He very graciously granted me permission to do so, even though he is not supporting Nader’s 2004 bid.

Vidal’s piece helped me frame an article I’d suggested to Fred Newman, who *is* backing Nader. I asked Newman to share his insights into and experience of the tangled affairs of American progressives since the Vietnam war. Newman, at once a piercing analytic philosopher and an ingenious political renegade, is a chief engineer of an independent political movement not unlike the one Vidal urged be undertaken more than three decades ago. Brought together by a kind of journalistic destiny, the two articles seem to me to speak to one another across 30 years in time and many political capitulations – if there are such things. Read Newman’s “Postmodernism and the Democratic Party Convention of 2004” to find out.

Legal eagle Harry Kresky is currently representing independent voters in federal court, alleging a conspiracy by John Kerry, Democratic National Committee Chair Terry McAuliffe and others to sabotage Nader’s campaign and prevent the emergence of a third party; meanwhile, he is battling partisan election officials on behalf of the Independence Party of

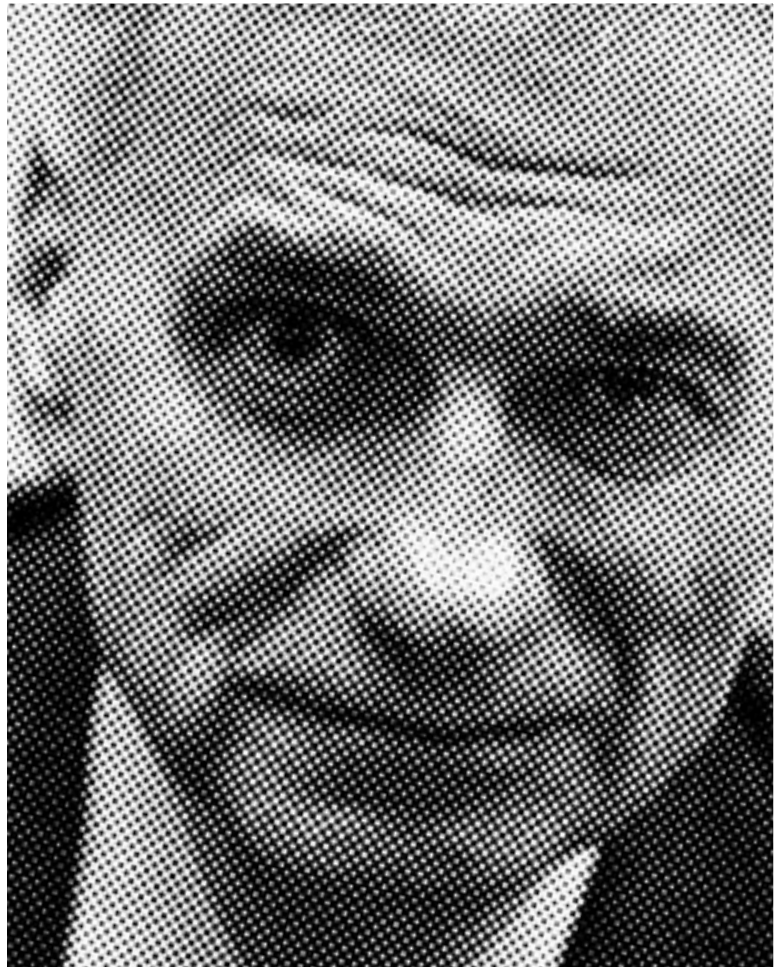
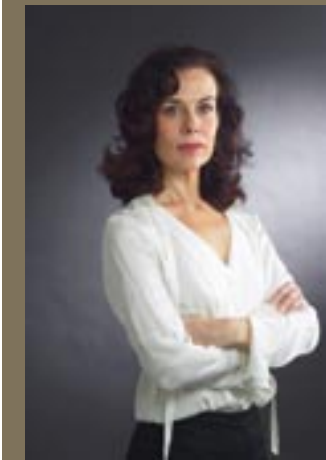


PHOTO BY PETER KRAMER/GETTY IMAGES

Ralph Nader

Continued



Editor's Note *Continued*

New York, the Committee for a Unified Independent Party, and Ralph Nader. Kresky documents these and other seminal confrontations in a provocative essay, "A Constitutional Crisis."

International affairs expert and former political director of the Rainbow Lobby, Inc., Deborah Green, takes us into the foreign policy sphere with "The Congo-Compton Connection," an insider's look at democratic nation-building pre-Iraq. In breaking the "rules of engagement," U.S. independents helped an African democracy movement gain traction in the late 1980s and early '90s. This particular story ended badly, the result of bipartisan collusion to subvert the democratic aspirations of the Congolese. It is, however, a case study of an *independent* political model for influencing U.S. foreign policy.

Guest columnists Mike Murphy and Garry South bring us up to date on Proposition 62, a brash open primary initiative on the ballot in California this November. Murphy, chief strategist for Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and South, chief strategist for Governor Gray Davis in 1998 and 2002, advocate for the nonpartisan elections that Prop 62 would create. With 3 million independent voters who stand to be enfranchised by the passage of Prop 62, we wholeheartedly agree with Murphy and South.

As in our previous issue, we count on the late Walter Karp to keep the anti-hypocrisy meter running. This excerpt about Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson from *Indispensable Enemies: The Politics of Misrule in America* is a helpful reminder that George W. Bush is not the first occupant of the White House to use his status as a "wartime president" for political gain. I wrote "Quotations from Chairman Terry" to highlight a silly side of contemporary political hypocrisy and to shed some light on independent/Republican partnerships.

Finally, as the new kid on the "thought leadership magazine" block, I'm very grateful for the support, subscriptions and salutations that have come our way since we began publication with the previous issue. Thank you all so very much.

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Cover: In 1971, in *Esquire* magazine, Gore Vidal proposed that Ralph Nader run for president of the United States as an independent. Thirty-three years later, it's a story worth re-telling. Page 33.

Go West

I would like to congratulate you in doing what has needed to be done for some time – give a voice to independents.

The articles were a bit too centered on the goings-on in places such as New York. You need to play to locales west of Appalachia (not including California) too. Some of the most exciting independent movements are going on in the west. Give us a voice now and again.

Good luck and Happy Birthday.

David Borden
Austin, Texas

“New” vs. “Neo”

I hadn't really thought a lot about the title “Independent” till I read about your magazine. The word seems to suggest autonomy, individuals, each alone in their own universe. Like “anarchist” and “atheist,” it also seems based on what we're against or don't believe in, instead of what we're for, in this case, against the two-party system, though the name doesn't specify that it's even about politics.

I have to assume “we” (if there is a we) are for proportional representation, ranked voting, getting rid of the Electoral College, “None of the Above” on the ballot (and maybe just “None” as well), campaign reform, as well as more specific issues.

I had to check the meaning of “neo” in my dictionary. Why not just call the magazine *The New Independent*?

Dan Robinson
Eugene, Oregon

To my ear, the “New” Independent sounded old-fashioned. The “Neo”-Independent signals our postmodern perspective. It puts the neo-cons on notice that independents are an emerging political competitor. J.S.

Ego Driven?

Democrats were probably first to accuse Ralph Nader of being ego-driven when he “spoiled” the 2000 election for Al Gore. But now everyone seems to believe it.

The assumption is that no rational reason exists for Nader's candidacy. Of course, if Nader does have a rational reason for running, then the ego theory is out the window.

So why is Nader running? The reason is not that he thinks no difference exists between the Republican and Democratic parties. Of course differences exist – abortion, the environment, and judicial appointments are the usual examples. Nader's objection to the two parties – and the reason he's running – is that both parties depend upon corporate donations to survive. And since corporations have only one purpose – to make money – these “donations” ought to be called what they really are: investments. Nader believes, in short, that corporations have bought and paid for the two major parties. The argument is simple: corporations control the two parties, the two parties control our elections, and therefore corporations control our government.

The two parties have a stranglehold on our democracy, and anyone who breaks it will be lucky to get away with nothing worse than a bruised ego.

Oliver Hall
Boston, Massachusetts

Independent Incentives

Where it seems obviously possible to achieve real reform and kill a few birds with one stone is with the Electoral College, at least on the presidential level.

New York, Pennsylvania, and perhaps even Florida, where the Reform Party achieved a large measure of support when Perot ran, could present very different outcomes with more electors to divvy up. This would more accurately reflect the sentiment of the founders in their design of the constitutional mechanism for choos-

ing a president and perhaps provide the incentive for independents to vote with more consistency as well as the general electorate to vote for more third-party candidates further down the ballot. It seems obvious to me that in the 48 states which embrace a winner-take-all system [unlike Maine and Nebraska] there is no incentive to vote for third-party candidates or independents since, rightly or wrongly, voters see this as “throwing their vote away.”

Christy Woodward Kaupert
San Antonio, Texas

More Than a Few

Belated Happy Birthday!!! I just picked up your exciting publication, an alternative to the extensive moral and intellectual dishonesty that pervades our public spaces. Yes, it's more than a few “disaffected voters” but a sizeable bloc of people who feel, and think, that somehow our government, of the people, for all the people, has been taken away from us.

Charles Witteck
(via e-mail)

Overpaid Bunglers

I am probably an FDR Democrat, but on the national level I began to dislike the Democratic Party in 1992 (voted for Perot) & voted for Nader in '96 & '00. I wish *The Neo-Independent* & ChIP all the best but I am very pessimistic that the Dem & Rep stranglehold on our politics can be broken. What a bunch of overpaid bunglers, the whole lot of them.

Warren W. Woodard
Jamestown, New York

The Neo-Independent welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be concise and must include the writer's name, address and telephone number to verify authorship. We cannot guarantee publication and reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Please send letters to editor@neo-independent.com or Letters, The Neo-Independent, 302A West 12th Street, #140, NY, NY 10014.

Quotations From Chairman Terry

(AND SOME DETAILS ABOUT
INDEPENDENT/REPUBLICAN PARTNERSHIPS)

Jacqueline Salit

FROM PHOTO BY MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES



MORTAL SINS

There are some moments in politics – a craven and disingenuous business to begin with – when you realize that you’ve only seen the tip of the Ridiculous iceberg. Jon Stewart, the host of *The Daily Show*, hit on one of my favorites a while ago when he noted that George W. Bush was reluctant to use the Situation Room for a meeting with his cabinet following the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Stewart’s comment, as I recall, was something like: “If that doesn’t count as a *situation*, I don’t know what does. For God’s sake, take the plastic off the chairs and use the damned place.”

McAuliffe, chairman
of the Democratic
National Committee,
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by Republicans.

Another such Ridiculous moment occurred when corporate dandy Terry McAuliffe, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, morphed into a Maoist/Trotskyist/anti-globalist to condemn Ralph Nader for accepting ballot access petitions gathered for him in Michigan by Republicans. Suddenly McAuliffe, a bulldog of a high-end fundraiser, was outraged that Nader was aligned “with the Republican Party, their corporate supporters and groups like Pat Buchanan’s Reform Party, the kind of right-wing conservatives Nader has spent a lifetime fighting against.” Here Comrade McAuliffe might want to consider a little criticism/self-criticism. Actually, Ralph Nader has not “spent a lifetime fighting against” right-wing conservatives. He’s spent a lifetime fighting corporate domination of public policy – something Terry knows intimately, trading on it, as he does, 20 times before breakfast every day.¹

Anyone who knows politics, including how government works, knows that Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, left and right, do business together all the time. That’s how laws are passed and policy is made in a bipartisan system. The idea that Ralph Nader committed a mortal sin by consorting with Republicans would be laughable if it weren’t being put to such ominous use by the Democrats, who portray George Bush as the Devil Incarnate and are now busy trying to dispatch Nader to his own special circle in hell.

Unfortunately, many on the liberal-left are vulnerable to this sort of canard. Having spent so many years as minions of the Democratic Party, they’ve lost their ability to think clearly. They have been made to believe that the fact that George Bush and the neo-cons manipulated America to go to war is evidence that he is a neo-fascist, somehow forgetting that prior American presidents – Woodrow Wilson, Lyndon Johnson, even, some would argue, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, all Democrats – did the same. According to *The New York Times* (August 2, 2004), Democratic polls of Nader supporters revealed “early clues [that] when Nader supporters learned that Mr. Nader had accepted help and money from Republicans to get on the ballot in various states, they dropped away.” Here McAuliffe and Co. take a page from the Ashcroftian “little red book” of the American Left: What’s the best way to isolate a progressive who’s not playing by orthodox left (i.e. Democratic Party) rules? Brand him (or her) a right-wing sympathizer, a front for the “neo-fascist” Republicans. Then use that to justify suspending all principles of democracy and fairness to take him (or her) out.

PHOTO BY MATTHEW CAVANAUGH/GETTY IMAGES



Howard Dean at the NPR debate with Ralph Nader, July 2004

DR. DEAN'S AMNESIA

The Democrats do not want Ralph Nader on the ballot in Oregon, a swing state where Al Gore won by less than one percentage point (7,000 votes) in 2000 and Nader got 5%. Twenty-three percent of the Oregon electorate – 400,000 voters – are independents.

There are two ways for an independent presidential candidate to get on the ballot in Oregon. One is by petition; 15,306 signatures are required. The other is to hold a convention by bringing 1,000 supporters together under one roof; election officials close the doors, and the attendees sign declarations nominating the candidate. Nader initially chose the latter.

Enter Democrat Howard Dean, who took to the airwaves and opinion pages of major dailies in the state to plead with Oregonians to boycott Nader's convention. Meanwhile, the Multnomah County Democratic organization in Portland secretly recruited anti-Nader Democrats to show up at the convention, enter, wait for election officials to close the doors, and then refuse to sign for Nader, thereby driving him below the requisite number of signatures.

At the Dean-Nader debate moderated by National Public Radio's Margo Adler, the host of *Justice Talking*, Dean denounced this effort to throw Nader off the ballot and denied any connection to it. But his "plausible deniability" defense was rendered less than plausible by Dean's condemnations of Nader for associating with "right-wing anti-gay Republicans."

Dean: I agree with much of what you say but the way to change the country is not to do it with any means to the end. The way to change the country is not to get in bed with right-wing, anti-gay groups to get you on the ballot. That can't work. It can't work. The problem with democracy is that the two major parties have tried to use any means to an end. I think there's a big difference between the Democrats and the Republicans. I'll grant you that there's significant corporate influence that we don't like and I campaigned against in the primary. I'm not running for president right now, not just because I lost in Iowa,

but because I made the calculation that if I did, I would take away votes which otherwise would go to John Kerry and the result was going to be the reelection of George Bush. That is a national emergency, and we cannot have it.

Nader: Well, first of all, I think what you just said about that group, it was a legitimate smear. Do you know what a legitimate smear is, Howard? It's a smear premeditated and knowing. We don't even know this group. Don't try to tar us with this. There have been groups that supported your campaign you wouldn't want to have breakfast with, even if you were starving.

Dean: Then just renounce them. That's all I ask.

Nader: Well, fine. I renounce them. You know what else to renounce? Do you renounce Pfizer and Chevron and other companies who were criminally convicted of crimes by the federal government, giving millions of dollars in the year 2000 to the Democratic Party, and they did not return the money? That's a matter of record.

Dean: Damn right I renounce that. It's exactly why I ran for president. I don't want that stuff anymore. And we're going to have real campaign financing, with public financing of campaigns in this country, but it's not going to happen under George Bush as president.

Nader: OK, so you'll urge John Kerry to return all money coming from corporate executives, who presided over corporations, who either pleaded guilty or were convicted of antitrust, environmental, labor and other crimes?

Dean: I will urge him to do that if you will give back the 10 percent of the \$1,000 contributions that came from people like Richard Egan, the ambassador to Ireland

appointed by George Bush, because you should not be taking that money.

Nader: I wasn't aware that he was a corporate criminal. He's an American citizen who might be – or is – a Republican, who just happens to believe in civil liberties maybe. I don't even know the man.

Adler: Well, let's go on at this point.

Nader: But Republicans are human beings, too.

While the
frontrunner for
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nomination,
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This must have been the most painful part for Dean. While the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination, Dean weathered a political firestorm after remarking that he wanted votes from “guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks.” That was Dean at his maverick best – exploding the myth that Left and Right couldn't make common cause against government policies hurtful to ordinary citizens. When fellow Democrats Al Sharpton and John Edwards – who had been conscripted into the Stop Dean movement by McAuliffe and the Kerry campaign – raised a ruckus about his remarks, Dean tried valiantly to stick to his guns, but the Political Correctness crowd forced him to apologize for “insensitivity.” At that point he hoped to put the matter behind him, but the education of Howard Dean had only just begun.

Dr. Dean was a quick learner. One of the things you learn in the compromised world of Democratic Party politics is how to forget. Forget you exposed John Kerry as a special interest clone. Forget you stood up for bringing people together as Americans, rather than as ideological partisans. Forget that you galvanized the base of the Democratic Party to stand up against the war in Iraq, so effectively that 93% of the delegates to the Democratic National Convention opposed the war (but cheered lustily as they nominated the pro-war ticket of John Kerry and John Edwards). Forget all that. Just tell everyone that Ralph Nader has gotten into bed with the Republicans. Let the Devil (i.e. the orchestrated hysteria over Bush) take care of the rest.

THE INDEPENDENT/ REPUBLICAN PARTNERSHIP

My dream bumper sticker this year is “The Liberal Intelligentsia is Neither.” Liberal Democratic bigwigs from coast to coast have denounced Nader as an ego-maniac who has capitulated to the Right. Christopher Hitchens, writing in the June 2004 issue of *Vanity Fair*, savaged him for allying himself with a “fascist zombie cult” led by Fred Newman (see Newman, p. 20) and Lenora Fulani, America’s best known black independent. What’s Hitchens so worked up about? That Newman and Fulani are influential in the New York State Independence Party, which works with... you guessed it...Republicans!

Here’s what one of the Independence Party’s Republican allies, New York Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno, had to say in a recent article about that relationship and the Democrats’ campaign to throw Nader off the ballot.

This partnership has helped bring some important political issues to the table. Among them was Senate passage of a bill that would have given voters the right to Initiative and Referendum, a bill that would give people the power to bring issues and questions to the election ballot, a right not currently included in the state constitution.

Another was an effort to bring nonpartisan elections to New York City, an effort spearheaded by the Independence Party and Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a Republican who won election with significant support on the Independence Party line.

As the Independence Party continues to grow, it is playing a larger role in local, state and national elections. And it is a role that should be embraced, as the Republican Party has recognized. However, not all political parties have reacted positively to efforts of the Independents.

The Democratic Party has gone to great lengths to attack Independent and minor party presidential candidate Ralph

ERROL ANDERSON



New York Republican Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno with Independence Party leaders Lenora Fulani and Cathy Stewart

Nader, including coordinating legal efforts to prevent Nader from appearing on the November election ballot in states across the nation. Republicans in these states have assisted Independent efforts to help Nader get on the ballot to ensure that voters at least have the right to choose him on Election Day.

While I am a strong supporter of President George Bush and will do all I can to ensure his reelection, I am dismayed by the Democrats’ effort to limit the voters’ choices for President by fighting Nader’s ballot effort. It is partisan and undemocratic. In addition, the Democrats’ charge that Nader is improperly colluding with Republicans is an attack on the coalition being built between the two parties.

TAKE OFF THE PLASTIC

When Lenora Fulani, a black progressive, ran for president as an independent in 1988, becoming the first African American and first woman to gain access to the ballot in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, the official Left cried, “Foul! She’s really on the right!” (Actually, a major Democratic Party donor, Richard Dennis, funded a “research report” from a liberal think

tank, Political Research Associates, Inc., to deliver that verdict.) When Ross Perot ran for president as an independent and 19 million Americans voted for him in 1992, the official Left cried, “Fascist! The brownshirts are coming to America.” When Fulani joined with grassroots Perot leaders to build a left-center-right coalition that evolved into the Reform Party, bringing a strong black and progressive presence to Reform and nearly winning the vice-chairmanship herself in 1999 with 42% of the vote at a delegated national convention, the official Left cried, “Right populism is seducing the Left.” When Nader, who according to the Left’s social register was pure as the driven snow, ran as a Green in 2000, at first the liberal intelligentsia was captivated. But the dalliance evaporated into a frenzy of alarm once it became clear that his independence was a) serious and b) undercutting the Democrats’ monopoly on progressivism.

You would think that the official Left – after years of public agonizing over the nightmare vision of an independent movement in thrall to rightists and wrestlers – would have heaved a huge sigh of relief when Ralph Nader, with progressive credentials beyond reproach, emerged as the movement’s candidate. As it turns out, however, concern for the political character of the independent movement was a fiction. The official Left is hostile to political independence, period. It’s simply out to protect its little piece of the Democratic Party pie.

Ralph Nader, consumer crusader, critic of the Iraq war, spokesman for ordinary people, is a progressive independent. His 2004 candidacy is helping the independent political movement to cleanse itself of pretenders and lay more of a foundation for its future. What are you waiting for? Take the plastic off the chairs and use it. **NEO**

Notes

- 1 McLaughlin’s description of the Reform Party is also inaccurate. Here’s the correction. In 1999, Pat Buchanan left the Republican Party to seek the presidential nomination of the Reform Party. In pursuit of the nomination, he sought and received backing from Reform’s most prominent left leader, Lenora Fulani, who saw his candidacy as an opportunity to further the development of the left/right, black/white independent coalition that the Reform Party was becoming. Buchanan ultimately betrayed Fulani, first by blocking with Ross Perot’s party managers to edge out an insurgency that Fulani and Jesse Ventura had successfully mobilized against Perot’s Dallas clique, and later by abandoning his promise to Fulani that he would not attempt to convert Reform into a social conservative party. Fulani broke with Buchanan before Reform’s nominating convention. The convention split, but following proceedings in court and at the FEC, Buchanan was declared the nominee. After his campaign went belly-up, however, he left politics and returned to television. His remaining supporters, including Reform’s national chairman, were ousted from all party positions at a national convention in 2002 to which Fulani had been invited as a special guest. It is the populist independents who now control the Reform Party and who endorsed Ralph Nader’s presidential campaign this year.

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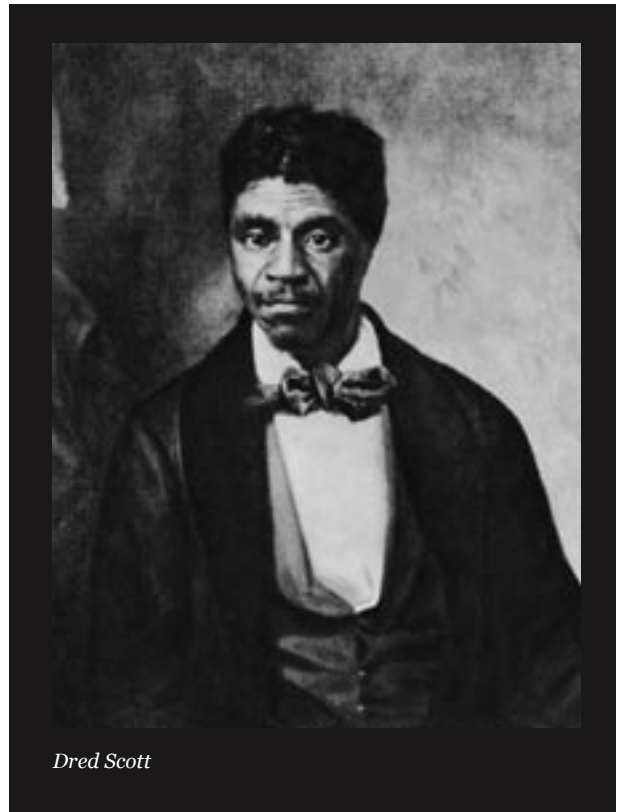


A Constitutional Crisis

Harry Kresky

What is a constitutional crisis? In a democracy a constitutional crisis occurs when the normal mechanisms for resolving social and political conflict are unable to do so. During our country's first 75 years of existence, a variety of constitutional and legislative compromises avoided a showdown over the issue of slavery. Opponents of slavery among the country's founders and leaders hesitated to assert that the institution was incompatible with the nation's founding principle that all men are created equal and that consequently it must be eliminated. Why did they hesitate? Because they believed that the support of the states whose economies depended heavily on slavery was vital to success in the war for independence and in the new nation that followed. They hoped that as the country grew, economically, politically and morally, the "peculiar institution" would wither away.

They were wrong. Slaveholders became more militant in their defense of the institution, while abolitionists – white and black – became more outspoken in their opposition to it. As the United States expanded across the continent, the burning issue was whether or not each newly admitted state would be slave or free and how its admission would affect the political balance on the slavery question. Slaves voted for freedom with their feet, thousands fleeing north to free states and Canada. Slave owners sent bounty hunters to capture and return them to their former masters. In 1856 the U.S. Supreme Court decided the case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1856). It held that Scott, a former slave captured in a state where he was



free, could not legally challenge his forcible return to Missouri. Because he was not, legally speaking, a person, the court claimed it lacked jurisdiction to address his plight. The *Dred Scott* decision made clear that the conflict was irreconcilable. After a bloody civil war the

question was resolved by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution that outlawed slavery.

Obviously not every effort to suppress the rights of another person or group creates a constitutional crisis. Indeed the job of the courts could be described as deciding when such suppression will or will not be permitted. In the case of *Dred Scott*, the Supreme Court decided that his right to freedom could be suppressed by returning him to the slave state from which he fled. A more abhorrent, more morally repugnant, result could hardly be imagined, but that alone does not a crisis make. During WWII the Supreme Court upheld the internment of Americans of Japanese descent in concentration camps on the grounds that they posed a national security risk. (*Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 (1944)). The crisis this created for those interned cannot be denied. But a constitutional crisis did not result. The war was won, the internees released, and Americans of Japanese descent have become a respected and important part of society. That there was no crisis may perhaps be understood by the fact that in 1944 most Americans were sufficiently committed to winning the war at all costs that they could accept the internment of their fellow citizens. Clearly, there is an inverse relationship between the degree of consensus and the existence of a crisis.

The current political situation in the country contains significant elements of a developing constitutional crisis. While a political realignment has been taking place over the past 25 years, the country's political institutions have resisted the process of reorganization necessary to accommodate it. That realignment is, of course, the emergence of the independent voter statistically and as a political force. Thirty-five percent of American voters now consider themselves independents.¹ In 1992, 20 million Americans (19% of those voting) cast their ballots for a political unknown, billionaire Ross Perot, who ran a populist independent campaign against the political establishment. Moreover, 50% of eligible Americans are so discouraged by the current political state of affairs that they don't vote. Just as the pre-Civil War population growth in the western territories and states blew apart the status quo on the issue of slavery, the changing political identity of Americans in the present era has left our political system – oriented toward and controlled by the two parties – at once brittle and destabilized.

While a political realignment has been taking place over the past 25 years, the country's political institutions have resisted the process of reorganization necessary to accommodate it.

With the two major parties at rough parity in their ability to win elections, their efforts to win over swing voters and gain immediate political advantage – even as participation declines and their positions on fundamental issues grow closer – has brought escalating displays of partisanship. An important characteristic of the developing crisis is that the issue at hand is the very functioning of our democracy: namely whether the electoral system can give expression to the will of the people, or whether the two major parties will completely succeed in their goal of turning it into an instrument for their self-perpetuation.

The current manifestation of the crisis is the determined effort by the Democratic Party to keep Ralph Nader's independent candidacy off the ballot in as many states as it can. Democratic Party lawyers and operatives have challenged his nominating petitions in Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.² The Nader campaign reports that in every state where a petition is filed, more lawyers are assigned to eyeball it. Democrats have also organized and funded fierce propaganda efforts to discourage people from signing Nader's petitions in New Mexico, Oregon and Wisconsin – "battleground" states where the election is likely to be close.

The two parties have never been receptive to accommodating, much less empowering, independent voters. In their eyes, independents are simply voters who for the time being have not decided whether they will vote for a Democrat or a Republican. The parties recognize that limiting voter choice in this respect is essential to maintaining their political control. The 1992 Perot breakthrough demonstrated what a well-funded, highly organized, anti-establishment independent candidate can accomplish. It is no accident that Perot was the last independent or third-party candidate to appear in a presidential debate; his standing in the polls jumped from seven percent to 19% after the debates in which he participated.³



Ross Perot with Jim Mangia, the Reform Party's first national secretary, now a champion for the rights of independent voters in California

Even prior to Perot, independent candidates faced institutional barriers that exacerbated their relative lack of power *vis à vis* the major parties. Consider, for example, the effort by Lenora B. Fulani, the first woman and first African American presidential candidate to be on the ballot in all 50 states, to gain entrance into the 1988 presidential debates. In 1980 the League of Women Voters insisted that moderate Republican-turned-independent Congressman John Anderson be included. After the first debate his standing in the polls climbed from 15 to 19%. The two parties responded swiftly to this and other efforts by the League to maintain its independence. First, they organized the bipartisan-controlled Commission on Presidential Debates, securing for it the tax-exempt status required to make it eligible to be a debate sponsor under the guidelines of the Federal Election Commission. Then, with the CPD in place, they moved to have it supplant the League as a debate sponsor by setting conditions for their candidates' participation in League-sponsored debates that the organization would not meet; the CPD, of course, was more accommodating and took over as the "official" debate sponsor.

When the CPD refused to include Fulani in the 1988 debates she sued the Internal Revenue Service, seeking an order that the Commission be deprived of its tax exemption because it was a partisan (albeit bipartisan) and not a nonpartisan organization. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that Fulani, like *Dred Scott*, did not have standing to seek this relief. In a dissenting opinion, however, Chief Judge Abner Mikva stated:

The problems of conducting national elections through the electronic media have become nigh impossible to solve. The "simple" difficulty of reaching voters, the more complicated difficulty of substantively informing them, and the need for huge sums to fund such communications all drive an engine of chaos in the national campaign regimen. Congress and the courts have struggled with this urgent matter, often with frustration. See, e.g., *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 U.S. 1, 96 S.Ct. 612, 46 L.Ed.2d 659 (1976). But whatever its proper role in correcting imbalances and imperfections in the status quo, government certainly must not abandon its posture of nonpartisanship. The government of any democracy, let alone one shaped by the values of our Constitution's First Amendment, must avoid tilting the electoral playing field, lest the democracy itself become tarnished.

Fulani v. Brady, 935 F.2d 1324, 1336-37 (DC Cir. 1991).

Judge Mikva's eloquence and prescience notwithstanding, until Perot anything other than a major-party candidacy was decidedly "fringe" – the domain of ideologically driven third parties (from Socialist Workers to Libertarian), breakaway major-party players like John Anderson and George Wallace, and activists like Lenora Fulani and her supporters, who recognized the need for an independent alternative to the two parties if American ideals of democracy and fairness were to be realized.

As the independent movement grew in prominence, the legal maneuvering to stifle it became more blatant. In 1996 the CPD refused to allow Ross Perot into the presidential debates despite his showing in 1992 that had entitled him to \$29 million in federal funding for his second run – the first time a non-major candidate had received general election public funding. Perot filed a complaint with the FEC claiming that the CPD had violated FEC regulations by failing to use pre-existing objective criteria in its decision to exclude him.⁴ However, the FEC (consisting of six commissioners, three Democrats and three Republicans) delayed ruling on the complaint to run the clock until after the debates. Perot sued in federal court, but the court held that it had no jurisdiction to act until the FEC had made a decision on the complaint. *Perot v. Federal Election Commission*, 97 F.3d 553 (DC Cir. 1996).

In 2000 the CPD again excluded all but the two major-party candidates from the presidential debates. Lawsuits filed by Ralph Nader and the Committee for a Unified Independent Party did not succeed in remedying the situation. But it was the response to the battle raging within Perot's Reform Party over its presidential nomination that displayed the two-party bias of the electoral/legal system most clearly. The nominating convention split in two, with the result that both Pat Buchanan and John Hagelin claimed to be the Reform Party nominee.⁵

They both applied to the FEC for general election funding. The Commission sidestepped the issue of which one was the party's legitimate candidate; instead, it relied on a provision in the Federal Election Campaign Act that sets a different standard for minor parties, namely, gaining ballot access in ten or more states (26 U.S.C. 9002(2)). The Buchanan forces were able to demonstrate that they had accomplished this and were consequently awarded the disputed \$12 million (the amount was based on Perot's showing of 8.4% in 1996). The New York Independence Party delegation to the Reform Party convention protested the FEC's decision on the grounds that in refusing to address the question of who was the nominee it discriminated against minor parties. At the September 12, 2000 hearing on the issue, Commissioner Sandstrom expressed his agreement with the IP's position; in a Memorandum to the Commission dated September 1, FEC General Counsel Larry Noble (now the head of the Center for Responsive Politics) had raised the possibility of splitting the funding between both candidates. For all practical purposes the FEC chose the Reform Party nominee, notwithstanding what had taken place at the convention.

Of course, the main event in the political/legal arena was the electoral deadlock in Florida and the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that put the state in Bush's column, thereby giving him just enough electoral votes to win the presidency. Many commentators have told their version of those events. However, an aspect of the Florida story that did not receive the emphasis it deserved is the extent to which our electoral system is owned and operated by the two parties; in an election as close as the one in Florida, the winner is determined by which party controls the local Boards of

Elections that do the counting; which way the chad is hanging depends on which party you are working for.

The closeness of the 2000 election, and the assumption that the 97,000 votes for Ralph Nader as the Green Party candidate in Florida would have gone to Gore, making him the clear winner there and, in turn, the President of the United States, have introduced a new urgency to the need for the two parties, in particular the Democrats, to keep other candidates from being a factor in the 2004 electoral equation. The May 24, 2004 issue of *Time* magazine reported that Jim Pederson, the Democratic Party state chair in Arizona, a "battleground" state, had "...assembled a team of lawyers to look at every one of the signatures Nader collects. 'Our first objective is to keep him off the ballot,' Pederson says. 'The vote is about George Bush and John Kerry, and we think it distorts the entire electoral process to have his name on the ballot.'" Soon thereafter a lawsuit was filed that resulted in Nader being denied a place on the Arizona ballot.

The ferocity of the effort to obstruct Nader's participation in the election has moved us a step closer to a constitutional crisis. Democratic National Committee chairman Terry McAuliffe has given the green light to party leaders across the country to go after Nader: "We can't afford to have Ralph Nader in the race," he has asserted (*Business Week*, July 29, 2004). At the 2004 Democratic convention in Boston this past July, former Democratic Congressman Toby Moffet led an effort to recruit and train lawyers to keep Nader off the ballot (*The New York Times*, August 2, 2004; UPI, July 29, 2004). According to Moffet, the objective is to impede Nader's ballot access efforts even in non-swing states so as to "drain his resources and force him to spend time and money."

The efforts against Nader have gone beyond the usual petition challenges. In Charleston, West Virginia the county prosecutor, a Democrat, announced an investigation into the activities of Nader signature gatherers (Associated Press, July 18, 2004). Even after Nader's petitions were approved by state election officials, West Virginia's Democratic attorney general, in a highly unusual move, brought legal proceedings to overturn the determination. In Illinois, House Speaker and Democratic Party chair Michael Madigan is reported to have assigned state employees to work on the challenge to the Nader nominating petitions. The Nader campaign, invoking the state's Election Interference Act, has gone to court over this apparent irregularity.⁶

In Portland, Oregon the Multnomah Democratic organization obstructed Nader's effort to meet the state's unique ballot access requirement of a nominating caucus with 1,000 registered voters in attendance who express their support for the candidate. Democratic Party activists were organized to attend the meeting, pack the room and then refuse to support Nader; his organizers ended up with 1,130 people in attendance but fewer than the requisite 1,000 supporting the candidate (*The Oregonian*, July 23, 2004). Defenders of the strategy, ignoring Oregon, West Virginia and Illinois, argue that it is perfectly proper to insist that an opponent's petition meet legal standards. Perhaps – but don't forget that the ballot access laws are already stacked against independents.⁷

Government officials, from election commissioners to the judges who rule on these challenges, are themselves all too often Democratic or Republican partisans. Even the establishment *New York Times* was forced to comment on this structural bias in its July 9, 2004 editorial "An Umpire Taking Sides," although it did so from a decidedly two-party perspective.

In some states, such as New York, petition challenges in local and even statewide races are standard operating procedure. Party operatives go over petitions with a fine-tooth comb and, even if they don't succeed in getting an independent or insurgent candidate removed from the ballot, drain enough of his or her resources to make an effective campaign impossible. Indeed, supporters of President Bush unsuccessful-

fully tried to block delegates pledged to John McCain from running in the 2000 Republican primary. In 1976 and 1980 Jimmy Carter engaged in legal maneuvers designed to impede first Eugene McCarthy and then John Anderson from gaining access to the ballot. But never before in the general election for President of the United States has a major party made it a central element of its campaign for the White House to keep an opponent off the ballot.

Legal proceedings underway in Michigan and Texas illustrate how effective a legal framework that's biased against independents and administered by political partisans can be in limiting democratic options. In Texas an independent candidate such as Nader must collect 65,900 signatures between March 9 and May 10, 2004, an eight-week period; a candidate of a minor party need collect only 45,000 signatures between March 9 and May 24, 2004, a ten-week period. While both independent and minor party candidates have far more onerous burdens than do major-party candidates, who secure an automatic line on the ballot once they secure their party's nomination, the discrimination *between* independent and third-party candidates is striking – particularly given that Anderson, Fulani and Perot, who besides Nader were the most significant non-major presidential candidates since George Wallace in 1968, ran as independents and not as candidates of a minor party.⁸

The experience of the past 15 years shows that Americans – left, right and center – are far more will-

MISTY PATTERSON



Independent Texans and the Nader campaign enlisted a longhorn to deliver petitions to the secretary of state in May 2004.

ing to vote for a candidate who presents himself or herself as a non-ideological independent than as the representative of an ideologically driven third party.

Nader supporters in Texas were able to file more than 80,000 signatures, but not within the permitted time frame for an independent. Furthermore, a line by line review by the Texas secretary of state may well find that he submitted fewer than the required 65,900 signatures, the filing deadline notwithstanding. Nader has brought a federal lawsuit challenging both the number of signatures required and the filing deadline.

In Michigan, the situation is a continuation of the discrimination practiced against the Reform Party in 2000, when the FEC refused to address the issue of which candidate was nominated by the party's convention. The Michigan state organization affiliated with the Reform Party seeks to put Nader on the ballot as the candidate of the national party, which nominated him at its May, 2004 convention. In 2002, however, a rival group also claiming to be the Reform Party was recognized by Michigan's secretary of state, thereby giving the group the right to name a presidential candidate without having to file the 31,000 signatures required of an independent candidate – something the Nader forces would be hard pressed to accomplish, given the drain on their resources from the Democratic Party assault. The Michigan secretary of state is refusing to accord this right to the body affiliated with the national Reform Party. Litigation is likely to follow.⁹

Even something as intense, unprecedented and wrongheaded as the campaign to drive Nader from the ballot does not necessarily tend toward crisis. As in the 1850s, the present potential for crisis has something to do with what is at stake – not simply for Ralph Nader, but for the country and its citizens.

The United States faces an enemy unlike any it has faced before. Osama bin Laden and his followers, with their 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that killed almost 3,000 people, demonstrated a capacity to wreak havoc in a major city and destroy or damage key symbols of America's economic and military might. In the aftermath of 9/11 the U.S. launched a preemptive attack on Iraq although no link between Saddam Hussein and the events of 9/11 had been demonstrated and although he, unlike bin Laden, posed no imminent threat to the U.S. Both major parties supported the attack and the continued conduct

of this war. They, and their respective presidential candidates, still do. However, millions of Americans – indeed, what is now a majority of the people in this country – no longer support it.

Opposition to the war began to propel the relative political outsider Howard Dean toward the Democratic Party presidential nomination until the party establishment – from Al Sharpton to Joe Lieberman to Dick Gephardt – ganged up to shove him out of the way so that the pro-war party insider John Kerry could become the nominee. What was most significant about the Dean campaign, however, was its capacity to connect with independent voters, who now represent 35% of the electorate. (See J. Salit, "How the Democratic Party Sabotaged an Independent Movement to Beat Bush," *The Neo-Independent*, Vol. I, No. 1, Spring 2004.)

Enter Ralph Nader, a genuine American hero, who declared his second successive run for the presidency not, as before, as a candidate of a minor party, but as the independent candidate of all those Americans who believe that the two parties have so aligned themselves that there was no candidate opposed to the war and the policies that led to it. Nader is willing to speak the truth about the extent to which the major parties collude to overdetermine our political agenda consistent with the needs of special interests (from the trade unions to the multinational corporations) to an extent that serious policy dialogue, much less genuine reform, has become impossible.

The two parties, of course, hope that by eliminating or marginalizing the Nader campaign they can return (regardless of who prevails in November) to business as usual. When the question of Nader's candidacy was briefly discussed on NBC's *McLaughlin Report* on July 11, the two liberals, Eleanor Clift and Lawrence O'Donnell, referred to the Democrats' campaign to remove him from the ballot as if it were a perfectly acceptable thing to do and predicted that he will not be a factor in November. The conservatives – including Pat Buchanan, who ran for president on the Reform Party line in 2000 – were silent.¹⁰

However, a return to business as usual cannot occur without solutions to the underlying problems confronting America at home and abroad – the grossly disproportionate distribution of wealth, the challenge of militant Islamic fundamentalism, the extent to which the needs of special interests dominate the policy agenda, the failure of public education in the inner cities, the inability to eliminate or even reduce poverty, the decline in real income and the quality of jobs avail-

able to many Americans, and a less than satisfactory status quo on issues of racial justice. In a functioning democracy, the electoral arena is where the voters choose those best able to develop solutions to such problems and where new political forces gain recognition and inclusion. When this does not or cannot occur the results can be disastrous, as the tortured history of the 20th century demonstrates – fascism on the right and bureaucratic, anti-democratic, non-developmental communism on the left. Both movements, albeit in different ways, mounted an assault (ideological and sometimes physical) on democracy itself.

Those who believe in democracy cannot stand by and allow the crisis to reach the breaking point. We cannot allow our democratic institutions to continue to atrophy, to go on being manipulated by two parties with no respect for the democratic process itself other than as an instrument for their own preservation and

the special interests with which they collude. For one thing, if democracy fails, there is no guarantee of what will follow. More fundamentally, it is only through democracy that change can occur with the social consensus and cohesion necessary for lasting peace, justice, freedom, equality and progress. **NEO**

Harry Kresky, an attorney, has worked in the areas of constitutional, civil rights and election law for the past 30 years. In 2003 he was co-counsel for the Independence Party of New York in State Committee of the Independence Party v. Berman, the federal suit which resulted in a judgment requiring the State Board of Elections to allow unaffiliated voters to participate in Independence Party primaries.

Special thanks to Richard Winger, the editor and publisher of Ballot Access News, for his insightful comments on an early draft of this article.

Notes

- 1 This figure is based on polling data. In states that use a partisan voter enrollment system, roughly 25% of all voters do not align themselves with any party when they register.
- 2 In states that do not have formal challenge procedures, such as Maryland, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia, the Democrats have used their political clout to pressure state election officials to subject the Nader petitions to a higher level of scrutiny than would otherwise be the case. As *The Neo-Independent* goes to press, Nader's status in several states remains unclear because the challenge process is still underway or because litigation is likely to follow.
- 3 George Farah. *No Debate: How the Republican and Democratic Parties Secretly Control the Presidential Debates*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004. p. 54.
- 4 The CPD's rationale for the exclusion was that by accepting federal funding Perot was precluded from spending more than \$50,000 of his own money and that therefore – in contrast to 1992, when he spent millions of it – he had no realistic chance of winning because \$29 million is simply not enough to win the presidency. (See Farah, *No Debate*, pp. 62-64.) The major parties receive a significantly larger amount of federal funding based on their showing in the previous election. Furthermore, their tremendous institutional advantage, including control of the presidential debates, virtually guaranteed that one of their candidates would win. Of course the only chance Perot had of winning was to participate in the debates.
- 5 The split was precipitated by the Reform Party's Presidential Nominating Committee when it questioned the bona fides of Buchanan's submission of voter lists for the vote-by-mail primary and the subsequent steps taken by Buchanan forces to exclude from the convention delegates who opposed his nomination. Having stacked the convention, Buchanan's followers then voted to ignore the primary and nominated him from the floor.
- 6 Socialist Equality Party press release, July 20, 2004. *Socialist Workers Online*. August 6, 2004. pp. 8-9; *The Illinois Leader*, August 28, 2004.
- 7 An independent candidate for president must collect more than 850,000 signatures to gain ballot access in all 50 states. Major-party nominees, on the other hand, gain an automatic place on the ballot. Moreover, the petitioning requirements for a ballot line in Democratic and Republican presidential primaries is minimal, a nationwide total of 82,000 for Democrats and 30,000 for Republicans. In Florida alone an independent candidate needs 93,000 signatures, while in California an independent needs 153,000 signatures to qualify for the ballot.

- 8 In 1988 and 1992 Fulani was the presidential candidate of the New Alliance Party (NAP), at the time the fourth largest national political party. Unlike the Libertarians (ranked third) and later the Greens, however, the NAP tactic was to act as a catalyst for the emergence of a broader independent movement, not as an end (a party) in itself. In 1994, NAP dissolved itself into the Patriot Party, a coalition with leaders of the 1992 Perot movement. Two years later Patriot merged into the national Reform Party.
- 9 Ironically, a group of Republicans filed 55,000 signatures to place Nader's name on the ballot. Democrats have not only challenged the filing, but party operatives are threatening to file a complaint with the FEC against Nader for having accepted an illegal contribution from the Republican Party unless he disavows these signatures. Two FEC complaints have already been filed against Nader by an entity calling itself Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. One of the complaints focuses on Oregon. However, these "ethical citizens" ignore the tactics of the Democrats there and instead go after Nader, claiming that he accepted help from Republican-oriented not-for-profit corporations in his efforts and thereby violated strictures against contributions from corporations. Of course the CPD is a not-for-profit corporation and has undoubtedly been of great assistance to the Democratic and Republican candidates over the years, taking advantage of the loophole created by the FEC's debate regulations.
- 10 Democrats have used concern over constitutionally questionable provisions of the Patriot Act and other anti-terrorism initiatives by the Bush administration to fuel their "Anybody but Bush" campaign. With one hand they frighten Americans by arguing that only the election of John Kerry can prevent the destruction of cherished civil liberties, while with the other they engage in the campaign to deny Nader a place on the ballot and his supporters the opportunity to vote for the candidate of their choice. (So much for their post-Florida mantra, "let every vote count.") The Committee for a Unified Independent Party, its chairperson, Lenora B. Fulani, and a number of independent activists across the country have filed a lawsuit against the Kerry-Edwards campaign, the Democratic National Committee, and assorted Democratic elected officials and operatives for conspiring to deprive Nader and his supporters of these constitutionally protected rights and freedoms. CUIP and Fulani have filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission charging that the publicly funded Democratic Party presidential campaign and nominating convention are misusing government money in furtherance of this conspiracy.

Don't Sideline California's Voters, Proposition 62 is a Vital Reform

Mike Murphy and Garry South

Remember how we all used to snicker when Politburo elections in the old Soviet Union regularly returned margins of 99.9% for the victors? Well, now have a laugh at our own expense: The current elections for the Legislature and Congress in California are barely more competitive.

In 2001, the Legislature adopted and the governor signed a decennial redistricting plan that eliminated even the semblance of competition from most legislative and congressional seats. Democrats, for their part, wanted to lock in their huge legislative majorities for the next decade. Republicans wanted to protect their current congressional majority against any effort to carve out more Democratic seats in California.

They succeeded beyond their wildest hopes. In the 2002 general election, there were only five competitive legislative races worthy of the name in the whole state, one in the 20 Senate seats up and four in the 80 Assembly races. There were none at all in the 53 congressional races. The 2004 election promises to be no better – and, in fact, may be even worse.

What is the practical result for the voters of this bipartisan gerrymander, which has rendered general election match-ups laughable in district after district? If you are a Republican in a strongly Democratic district, you have no effective voice whatsoever in who represents you in Sacramento or Washington, DC. Voters in the Democratic primary – in which you can't vote – pick the almost-certain winner. If you're a

Democrat living in an overwhelmingly Republican district, you also have no real say in who represents you.

So primary elections have become all-important under these circumstances, with which we are stuck until 2012. And that's one reason both of us are supporting a return to the open primary, in which any voter can vote for any candidate, regardless of party.

In 1996, voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 198, which established California's first open primary. Despite the fervent opposition of the two major parties and several of the minor ones, the initiative received nearly 60% of the vote, and carried every single county in the state. The form of open primary elections established thereby was in effect in 1998 and 2000.

But in the summer of 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court threw out our open primary law on constitutional grounds. So in 2002, the state reverted back to the closed primary, in which Democrats could vote only for Democratic candidates, and Republicans could vote only for Republicans.

The open primary plan we support, called the Voter Choice Open Primary Initiative and which will be on the November ballot as Proposition 62, would work in this way: In the primary election, all candidates in each state and congressional race, regardless of their party registration, would appear on the same ballot, just as they did in 1998 and 2000. Independents also could run in the primary.

All voters, regardless of his or her party registration, would be allowed to vote for any candidate, regardless of the candidate's partisan affiliation, just as they were in '98 and '00. Again, voters not registered with any political party could also vote for the candidate of their choice in every race.

Then the top two vote getters in the primary, regardless of their party affiliation, would move forward to a general election runoff. And by the way, don't let anyone tell you this is some radical, untested new method of electing our public officials. The proposed system is very close to the way in which we have elected city and county officials in this state for nearly a century. California voters are very familiar with this process.

As the chief political strategists to California's last two governors, we also have direct personal experience with the open primary – and we believe in it.

Is this proposed new open primary perfect? No, but it has been carefully constructed to avoid the constitutional problems of Prop. 198. In this matter, as in so many others in life, we cannot let the perfect become the enemy of the good. It is a start – and an important one – in the effort to increase voter choices, interest and turnout.

The most important thing is the open primary will benefit the voters. This is not an attempt to stack the system to help one party or another. It is a bipartisan campaign to change the whole system in order to allow the voters back into the process.

After all, real electoral democracy, unlike back in the U.S.S.R., should give voters real choices, not foregone conclusions or rigged results. **NEO**

Mike Murphy was chief strategist for Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's gubernatorial campaign in the recall election and is senior advisor to Schwarzenegger. **Garry South** was chief strategist in Governor Gray Davis' 1998 and 2002 campaigns and served as senior political advisor to Davis. A version of this article originally appeared in The Sacramento Bee.

In 2001, the Legislature adopted and the governor signed a decennial redistricting plan that eliminated even the semblance of competition from most legislative and congressional seats. Democrats, for their part, wanted to lock in their huge legislative majorities for the next decade. Republicans wanted to protect their current congressional majority against any effort to carve out more Democratic seats in California.

Postmodernism and the Democratic



Party Convention of 2004

Fred Newman

For Hazel

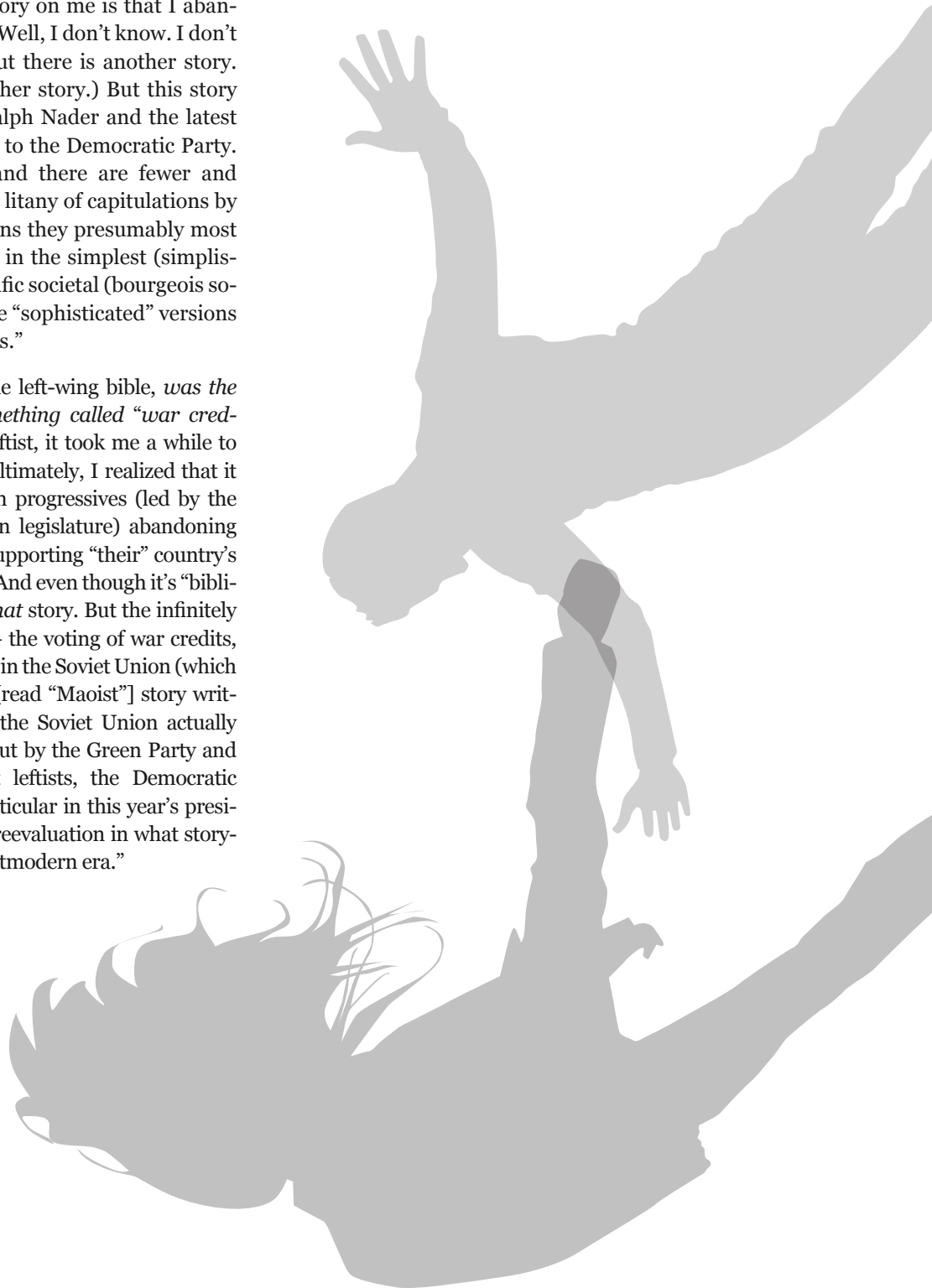


I

PREFACE

The official left-wing story on me is that I abandoned the Left. The truth is? Well, I don't know. I don't believe in truth anymore. But there is another story. (Indeed, there's always another story.) But this story isn't about me. It's about Ralph Nader and the latest sellout by the American Left to the Democratic Party. Every dues-paying leftist (and there are fewer and fewer of them) can recite the litany of capitulations by progressives to the institutions they presumably most abhor: capitalist institutions in the simplest (simplistic) version of the story; specific societal (bourgeois society) institutions in the more "sophisticated" versions created by "political scientists."

In the beginning, reads the left-wing bible, *was the German Left voting for something called "war credits."* When I first became a leftist, it took me a while to figure out what this meant. Ultimately, I realized that it referred to the many German progressives (led by the SPD members of the German legislature) abandoning internationalism in favor of supporting "their" country's participation in World War I. And even though it's "biblical," not all leftists agree on *that* story. But the infinitely varied list of "capitulations" – the voting of war credits, the "restoration of capitalism" in the Soviet Union (which according to many left-wing [read "Maoist"] story writers occurred decades before the Soviet Union actually restored capitalism), the sellout by the Green Party and many so-called independent leftists, the Democratic Party, for decades, and in particular in this year's presidential election – cry out for reevaluation in what storytellers like myself call "the postmodern era."



II

A NOTE FROM MY EDITOR

What follows is a memo from my brilliant editor, Jacqueline Salit. It deserves publication and here in this free fall of an article seems as good a place as any.

July 9, 2004

I have a clearer picture of the essay I want you to write for the Fall issue of The Neo-Independent now that I've read Gore Vidal's 1971 Esquire article "Ralph Nader can be the next President of the United States."

Vidal's piece (reprinted, by kind permission of the author, on pages 33-42) was written at the start of American progressives' contemporary consideration of independent alternatives to the Democratic Party. The Vietnam war had roiled the country, after two successive Democratic presidents entangled us deeply in Southeast Asia. Lyndon Johnson was forced to step aside by an unknown senator from Minnesota and a Dump Johnson movement that had arisen out of ordinary Americans' opposition to the war.

In 1968 Hubert Humphrey became the Democratic nominee and lost the election to Richard Nixon, as George Wallace orchestrated a right split from the Dems and polled 13.5% of the vote. The Black Panthers joined with white anti-war activists to create the Peace and Freedom Party in California and ran Eldridge Cleaver for president. Other independents backed Dick Gregory. Out of these efforts Gore Vidal and Ben Spock founded and became the co-chairs of the New Party, which was to be America's "fourth party." When Vidal wrote his Esquire essay in 1971, he believed that Ed Muskie would beat out George McGovern for the Democratic nod in 1972 and that Wallace would run again as an independent, leaving the field open for a genuine progressive independent. His choice was the "non-politician," the "seat-belts man" – Ralph Nader – "a figure around whom those disgusted with traditional politics can rally."

Nader didn't want to run. In February of 1971 he told The Sunday Times of London: "Most people think there are only two ways to create power in the U.S.: to acquire economic power or to achieve political power. I think it's important to...see if power cannot be developed to work on these institutions (the corporations, the existing federal and state bureaucracies) from nothing but a will, determination and creativity."

Nader then set out to spend another (nearly) 30 years attempting to challenge corporate power without challenging the political infrastructure that protects it. No doubt he believed that the Democratic Party could be counted upon as an ally. He was wrong.

In this he was not alone. In 1972 George McGovern won the Democratic nomination, having headed up the party commission which re-wrote the nominating rules after the debacle of the 1968 convention in Chicago. Wallace did not run again as an independent. In '72 he entered the Democratic presidential primary and was shot and paralyzed in May while campaigning. The Left rode the McGovern bandwagon into the Democratic Party. So did most black activists – some of whom briefly championed Shirley Chisholm but later went for McGovern whole hog after delegates to the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana decided to hitch their political wagon to the Democrats, Mayor Richard Hatcher's appeal for a black-led, multiracial independent party notwithstanding. The uncompromised but mainstream progressive independent party Vidal envisioned was not in the cards.

Eugene McCarthy ran for president again in 1976 – as an independent – garnering over 700,000 votes, but the parade had passed him by. The Vietnam war was over and the anti-poverty movement had become thoroughly institutionalized as Democrats – including, for the first time, black and Latino Democrats – took control of local and municipal governments. By the time we encountered Gene McCarthy in 1992 in New Hampshire, and then put him on the ballot in New York for his last hurrah, the Left's only interest in independent politics was to tar and feather you and Lenora Fulani.

In 1992, 20 years after Gore Vidal implored Ralph to run, Nader stuck his toe in the electoral waters for the first time by allowing his name to be posted as a write-in candidate in New Hampshire. He got 3,257 write-ins on the Republican side and 3,054 on the Democratic side. Four years later he ran as a reluctant Green and four years after that as a crusading Green.

Now he's running as an independent and he's connecting the dots. The corporate power which he once hoped to rein in through "will, determination and creativity" and a vital and progressive Democratic Party has spread like a cancer. The Democratic Party is corrupt and complicit.

For its part, the official progressive movement is apoplectic over the Nader campaign. Why? Because America's leading consumer advocate is telling ordinary Americans that they've been sold a bill of goods by both parties.

The Left is in a frenzy. While it was sleeping, the world turned postmodern. Nixon didn't invade China, as Vidal predicted in 1971. He went there, had tea with Mao, and proved that revisionist communists and capitalists could be friends. The Left joined up with the Democrats, never suspecting that one of their own – Ralph Nader – would ultimately desert them.

The piece I'd like you to write would reflect on this history from your personal as well as political/philosophical perspective: As an anti-war protester when the protests had five people at them. Watching the social political movements of the 1960s misled into the Democratic Party. Creating a pre-movement that fought the blindness and cowardice of the Left by building new anti-institutions rooted in an understanding of the corruption of the parties and the extent to which American democracy was being eaten away from the inside out.

Today America is at war again, not a post-colonial war but a postmodern one. The effort to restore the Democratic Party to its anti-war voice was clubbed to death by the McAuliffe/Kerry machine. With Nader running as the independent anti-war candidate the left-liberal intelligentsia is exposed as having values that are as corrupt as those of the neo-cons.

Is a new progressivism being born? What are its values? What are values in this day and age? And what's the connection between values and voting this November?



DAN FRIEDMAN

*Lenora Fulani and Eugene McCarthy,
New Hampshire, 1992*

III

PHILOSOPHICAL/SOCIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON A POSTMODERN DEMOCRATIC PARTY CONVENTION

For the most part I couldn't bear to watch. Ninety-three percent of the delegates are against the war but the candidates they are about to nominate are for it. Such is the "postmodern" version of the "anti-war movement." Oh well, I guess Dennis Kucinich is "pragmatic." He and his followers (like Richard Rorty) are giving pragmatism a bad name. We progressives were once upon a time told that the justification for working inside the Democratic Party was to gain control – eventually – and then raise the progressive banner. Well, 93% looks like control to me. Where's the banner? What would it say? The postmodern Democratic Party has nothing to say. Self-perpetuating political institutions (especially when there are just two of them) ultimately define themselves wholly in terms of the other ("We are not the Republicans," "We're not the Democrats"). This convention makes it plain that U.S. politics has reached that stage of (mis)development! What stage? Self-perpetuation. The 1960s conservative sociologist Erving Goffman speaks of self-perpetuation in *Asylums* (one of the best books I've ever read). More and more institutions in our society seem to me to have reached this stage. The Democratic Party convention makes more plain than ever that the "duopoly," in Ralph Nader's modernist political language, is really just one self-perpetuating institution called American electoral politics.

What is a self-perpetuating institution? As I talk about it, it is a stage (a moment in a process) that many institutions reach (where, or when) the societal purpose for which the institution was created (its function) becomes less important than the continuation of the institution itself. That this stage has been reached might not be apparent or officially proclaimed. What is characteristically identified when an institution becomes (is becoming) self-perpetuating is a seemingly intractable disfunctionality. Mayor Bloomberg's recent admirable effort at reform notwithstanding, the New York City school system has, to my mind, been self-perpetuating for many years. The primary focus

of the ensemble of people who run the schools is simply to keep them running for another year. (The kids' point of view has won the day.) Educating children is no longer what the schools are trying to do. Who's to blame? The teachers, their union, the children, their parents (or in explicitly right-wing terms, their race), the principals, their miseducation, etc. – some complex combination, no doubt, of these and many other factors. But I am less concerned to say who's to blame (the modernist fixation) than I am to characterize accurately the self-perpetuating nature of the resulting school system or political institution. Why? Because invariably these institutions, once they have reached the self-perpetuating stage, cannot be fixed. Endlessly analyzing who's to blame only serves to reinforce further their self-perpetuation.

Are only American institutions vulnerable to the slow-moving death (or life) of self-perpetuation? Of course not! Consider the Soviet Union as a "total institution." But American-style self-perpetuation seems to have a certain distinct national quality. Different from other societies? European societies, for example?¹ I think so. I believe the difference has to do with very different attitudes toward *tradition*. The European idea of tradition is, like Europe itself, longer term. Tradition is more historical. Older institutions embody something of value to contemporary culture.

In America, older institutions of all sorts become landmarks. But the fundamental "tradition of tradition" in the U.S. is to change things in favor of something new. How is this typically accomplished? By "throwing money at it." Doesn't constantly changing things, given the huge wealth of America, help to prevent self-perpetuation? No. Because "throwing money" at an institution (American-style) and bourgeois political manipulation (bureaucrat-style) do not change anything (in a truly *developmental* sense). The fundamental structure (the essence) of the institution stays the same. An illusion of change is created by the

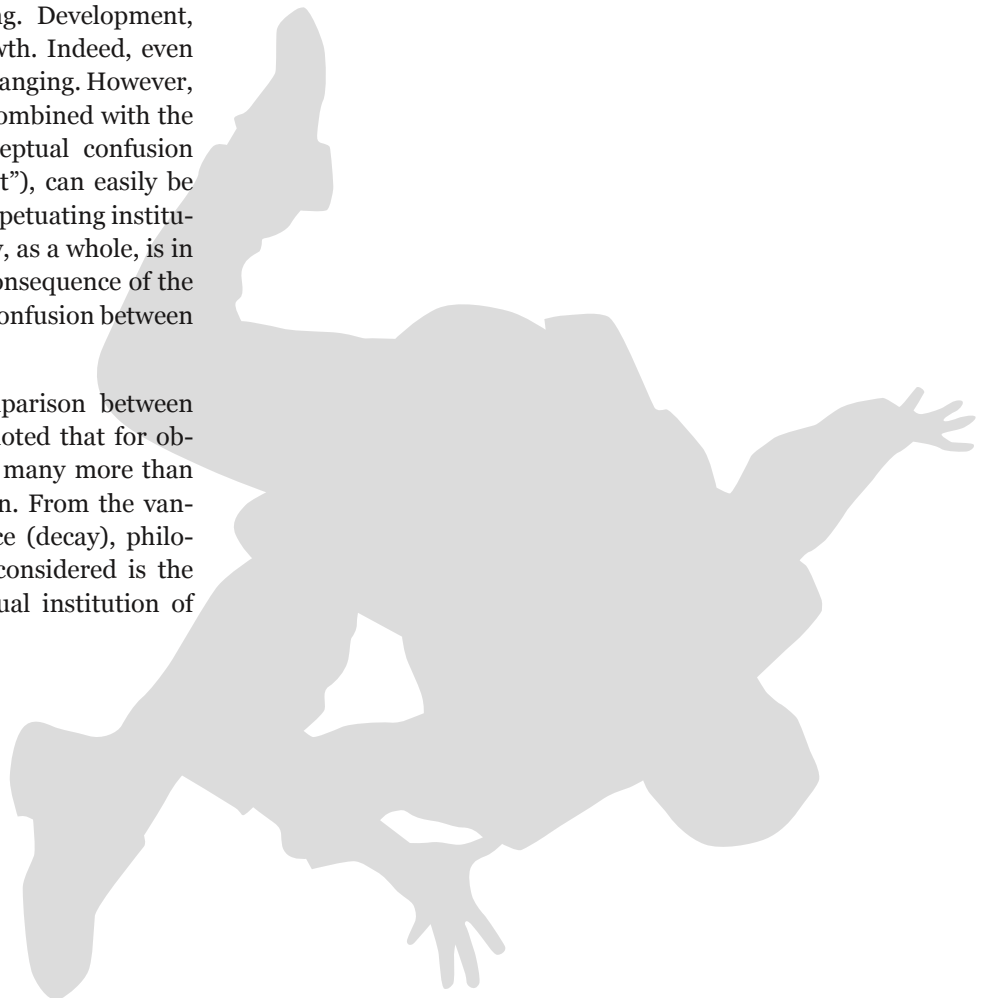
competitive drive for money, and the control that goes with it. But little is truly transformed. Bloomberg is not the first educational transformer. Sadly, he will not be the last. He is, perhaps, personally the wealthiest. And although he is, in my opinion, an honest and caring man, he simply fosters a deeper illusion that his relationship to money will make a difference. Maybe it will at Johns Hopkins. Not in New York City. Because the public school system (in New York and nationally) died long ago. It is still another American self-perpetuating institution.

From the vantage point of a free falling body (as Einstein told us in explaining the general theory of relativity), there is no distinction between acceleration and gravity. By analogy, from the vantage point of a self-perpetuating environment there is no distinction between development and change. As Heraclitus made plain long before the modern Olympics and McDonald's came to Greece, even long before Newton and Einstein, "You can't step in the same river twice." Why? Because it is always and continuously changing. But it is not necessarily developing. Development, however analyzed, is a form of growth. Indeed, even the self-perpetuating institution is changing. However, superficial change (or a paint job), combined with the proper "spin" (and a serious conceptual confusion between "change" and "development"), can easily be mistaken for growth. But the self-perpetuating institution does not grow. American society, as a whole, is in social free fall. Both a cause and a consequence of the American free fall is the conceptual confusion between change and development.

Before leaving our sketchy comparison between Europe and the U.S., it should be noted that for obvious historical reasons the two (or many more than two) cultures have much in common. From the vantage point of their shared decadence (decay), philosophically speaking what must be considered is the dominant (Enlightenment) conceptual institution of self (itself).

Serious postmodern analysis requires a critical reconsideration of the concept of "self" (arguably itself a major example of a self-perpetuating institution). No room for getting into that ball of wax here, but I line up on the radical side of that issue. (Surprised?) In light of that, how are we to understand "self" in the term "self-perpetuating institution?" It is an institution that continues to exist not because it fulfills a societal need (young people need to learn; citizens need to vote in a democracy; etc.) but rather because it fulfills the needs of those who benefit merely from its continued existence.

Enough about public schools and selves. Back to the totally and embarrassingly scripted 2004 Democratic Party convention. So scripted that even Al Sharpton's 14-minute ahistorical commercial break from the script was obviously scripted.² Speaking more broadly, back to the state of America's two-party (duopolistic) political system, no less self-perpetuating for there being two major parties rather than one.



IV

THE POLITICAL “DUOPOLY” AS A SELF-PERPETUATING INSTITUTION

A Personal Philosophical Note

1968. At 33, I am only five years removed from receiving a Ph.D. in philosophy of science from Stanford University. My philosophical considerations of 20th century foundations of science – Einstein’s relativity theory, quantum theory, Heisenberg’s uncertainty, Turing machines, Gödel’s undecideability, Wittgenstein’s rejection of his own *Tractatus*, Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Quine’s final demolition of logical positivism, my mentor Donald Davidson’s brilliant rehabilitation and reconstruction of traditional epistemology – would, after a brief fixation on Jean-Paul Sartre, lead me, although I did not know it at the time, to psychology and postmodernism. Even my dissertation on historical explanation made the point, albeit naively, that I was more interested in the *activity of explaining* than in *explanation* as an abstract concept. My politics, while mainly nonexistent, were somewhere between Rooseveltian liberal (I grew up working class in the Bronx and my middle name is Delano) and anarchistic. At the behest of a socialist (barely) friend, I worked (barely) for Kennedy in 1960. My first teaching job was at a small conservative college in western Illinois, Knox College, where I stumbled into a modest piece of women’s rights organizing which ultimately led to my dismissal and my identification (by both others and myself) as a “radical.”

In ’65, having been fired by Knox, I returned to the City College of New York (CCNY), where I had received my B.A., as an assistant professor of philosophy. Back in New York (the “real world”) after six years of “the idyllic life” in Palo Alto and Galesburg, it was apparent that something big was happening. It was THE SIXTIES. Intellectually, emotionally, and politically I was ready (indeed, overripe) to be organized by history. While a half a generation removed from the students who were leading the way, I dove headlong into

the tidal wave that was the cultural/political phenomenon of the ’60s. Anti-war and civil rights dominated the political scene in New York. But for some of us it was the complicity of the university itself (both in the Vietnam war and in U.S. racism) that most aggrieved. The dramatic climax of the ’60s came in ’68. But for me they began more quietly in ’66, teaching at City College in Harlem. I quickly read some Marx, who was obviously brilliant; and Mao, who obviously wasn’t. And I made an intensely private (anarchistic) decision to help keep my male students out of the draft by giving all my students (male and female) a grade that would



COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR

Newman at Knox College, early 1960s

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Allard K. Lowenstein, 1970

protect the men from flunking out and thereby losing their student deferments. I gave everyone an “A.” It seemed a good way (a personal way) to protest the war *and* the university at the same time. Between ’66 and ’68 I traveled across the country from New York to Cleveland, to California, to Long Island, and back to New York City like Johnny Appleseed, giving all A’s to all my students (and getting fired for it), winding up back in Harlem at CCNY in the spring of 1968 just in time for the deeply tragic murder of Dr. King and the tumultuous uprisings in the black community that followed it.

During my 24-month journey from Harlem to Harlem (giving hundreds of “free A’s” to students at CCNY, Case Western Reserve, San Fernando State, Baruch College, Hunter College and back to CCNY, and being fired by each of those schools in succession for doing so), the personal and the political became one for many, including me. My first marriage and family ended, sadly. I fell in love (from afar) with Janis Joplin, remarried a beautiful, aristocratic Boston Brahmin and wound up in intensive psychotherapy with a loving and caring Freudian named Murray Stahl who, it turned out, was well known as a great teacher of psychology at – you guessed it – CCNY.

The intertwining of the personal and the political grows deeper and deeper. My second marriage (complex in and of itself) made me the brother-in-law (once removed) of the well known Democratic Party maverick Allard K. Lowenstein at the very moment when he was orchestrating his most successful “radical” feat: the “DUMP JOHNSON” movement. That’s Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States, who in early 1968, in response to a national (indeed, worldwide) movement against the outrageous war in Vietnam, declined to run for a second term. In the early months of ’68 Allard K., a Democratic Party insider, played a (perhaps *the*) key organizing role in the presidential primary bid of Eugene McCarthy and later did the same for Bobby Kennedy, whose campaign ended in early June of that extraordinary year with Kennedy’s shocking election night murder in California. A key political distinction to be made here is the one between the “anti-war movement,” a morally honest, grassroots movement (even Dr. King supported it), and the Democratic Party’s attempted cooptation of that movement led by Allard K. Lowenstein (the “Dump Johnson movement”) that ended in Kennedy’s assassination and the vicious police brutality that took place outside the 1968 Democratic Party convention in Chicago on the orders of the city’s Democratic mayor, Richard Daley.

On the night of Robert Kennedy’s murder, I was talking on the air with WBAI’s Bob Fass (a popular talk radio host) about the very modest educational organizing I was starting to do in Harlem (the project was called “If...then”) to help bring the student anti-war movement into the working class community (and out of the Democratic Party). Suddenly we were interrupted by the words *Robert F. Kennedy has been shot*. It was early June, 1968. But it was November, 1963 all over again. On a hot August night in 1968, two months later, Hazel Daren, my wonderful and recently deceased co-organizer (of “If...then” and so many other radical projects that have marvelously succeeded over the last 35 years), and I talked with our tiny group about whether we should travel to Chicago to join others (no one knew how many) protesting outside the Democratic Party convention. “We shouldn’t go,” Hazel and I urged. “It will be brutal and we would be nothing but props for the Democratic Party. This is the Democratic Party movement, not the people’s, not ours.”

Sadly, we were right. When the Democrats take over a genuine (historical) movement of the people, it is characteristically destroyed, often violently.



*President Lyndon Baines Johnson
with General William Westmoreland,
Commander of U.S. forces in
Vietnam, 1968*

But my personal/political story is not quite over. After the massacre in Chicago, I am a fly on the wall in Allard K. Lowenstein's living room in Long Beach. I have been talking to his lovely wife (and my sister-in-law) Jenny in the kitchen as a meeting gathers in the living room of irate Dump Johnson-ites just back from Chicago. Lowenstein, of course, leads the meeting. In case you've forgotten, the Democrats that year nominated Hubert Humphrey (and Richard Nixon was eventually elected president). They were all outraged. "We'll never support Humphrey!" "He's more pro-war than Johnson!" "Daley butchered our people in the streets!" "Never Humphrey!" The chorus, led by Allard himself, went on. I listened. Two weeks later, Lowenstein formally endorsed Hubert Humphrey. (Years later, Lowenstein was assassinated by a crazed former student and follower.) The Democrats have always known how to capitulate. Does capitulation produce self-perpetuation? Or does self-perpetuation produce capitulation? Or, to ask the more postmodern question, does anything *produce* anything? These are my thoughts as I (now approaching 70) fitfully watch the Democratic Party convention of 2004: of Hazel; of "If...then"; of 1968; of Allard; of Kennedy; of all those "A's"; of the Left; of Vietnam and of the anti-war movement.

How alike are '68 and 2004? In '68 the Democrats "made" the war and the Republicans won the election. Was it the Democrats who capitulated in '68 or the Left? Or both? Wasn't it Santayana who made up some modernist cliché to warn that "forgetting the past" leads to "repeating the past"? But in my postmodern experience as a social therapist, it is far more often the "obsessive remembering" of the past that leads to its being repeated again and again.

My mind is back at Stanford. It is 1962 and I am (still? again?) asking "What is history?"

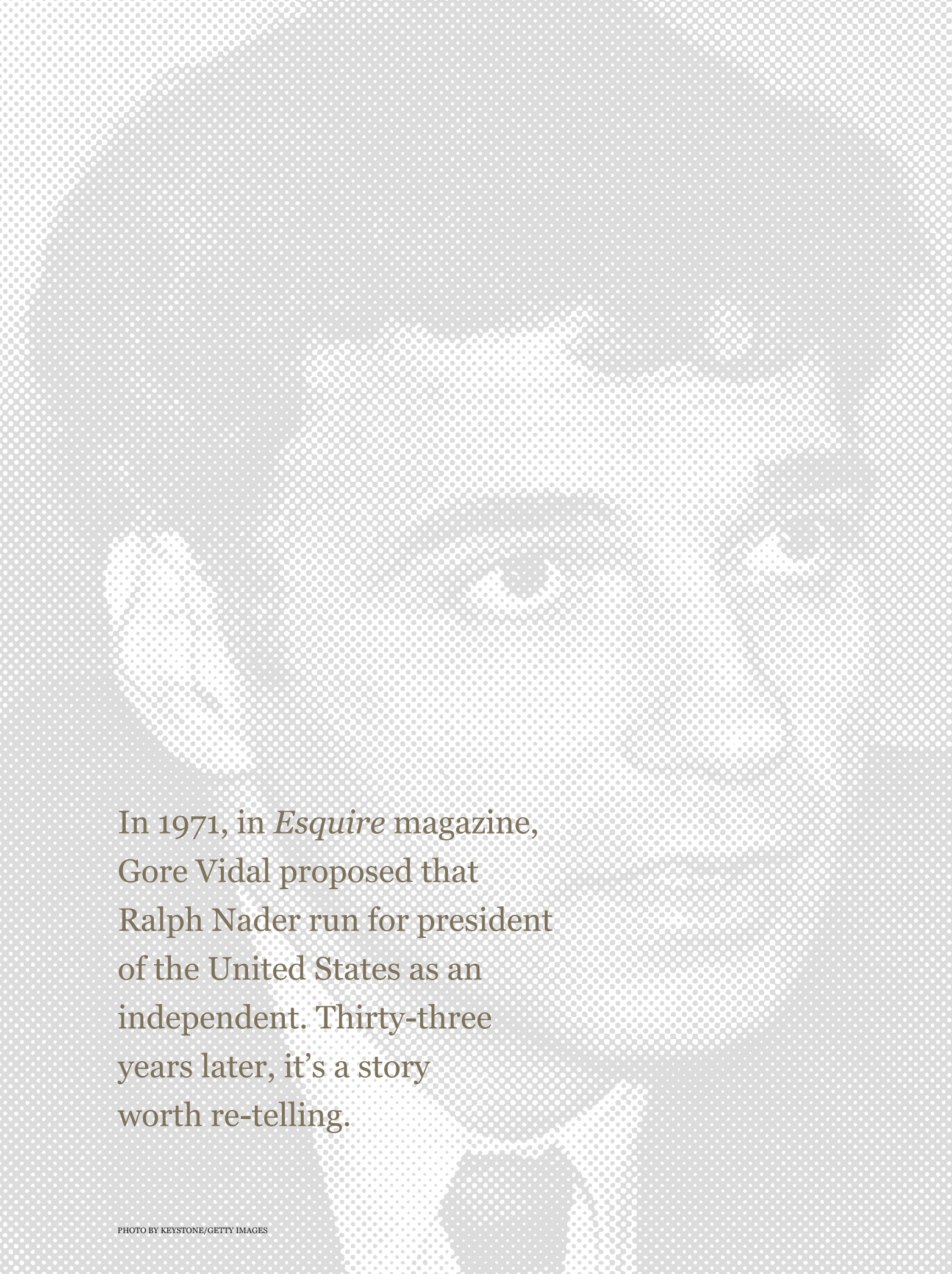
In a free falling world what is the relationship between "capitulation" and "self-perpetuation"? Are there values in a postmodern world? A free falling world? Were there really values in a modernist world?

Kuhn, who lived long enough to deny vehemently that he was a "founder" of postmodernism (I disagree), Wittgenstein, who didn't, and Marx can help us here. Kuhn, I believe, would insist that pointing out the *subjective* factors in the complex evolution of science (in general) and of particular theories does not deny the *objectivity* of scientific discoveries. Wittgenstein (the later) would be more wary of the subjective-objective

dichotomy and, indeed, of the dichotomous (on my reading, modernist) worldview that dominates how we see the world and/or our language for talking and thinking about it. Marx, philosophically creative (in the tradition of Hegel) and, in some of his writings (*The German Ideology*, *The 1844 Manuscripts* and *The Grundrisse*), analytically prescient, develops the activity-theoretic notion of *historical subjectivity* and a method for using it (Marxian dialectics). In a free falling world we cannot see the world as it is because it isn't. Psychological and moral subjectivity (and the Heraclitean notion of change) are of little or no value. Santayana's pious sophistries are, likewise, "puffery." Charles S. Pierce's brilliant title, *Values in a Universe of Chance* (I will not here discuss the content), raises the helpful question: Is there a way of seeing in a post-scientific world after science has transformed the very meaning of seeing? Here we are speaking not only of seeing whatever is on the fringes of the universe. We are speaking as well of the Democratic Party convention of 2004. Is there seeing in a free falling world? I think not. There is only creating and historical subjectivity. Kuhn, Wittgenstein and Marx, creatively combined, teach us not to see; not to interpret; but to create. It is a process – the continuous process of imagining new paradigms (Kuhn), without dualisms or dichotomies (Wittgenstein), that brings us closer to ourselves and history (Marx). Doesn't that make it all a performance? Of course. (See Newman and Holzman.)³ NEO

Notes

- 1 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004. Terry Eagleton. *After Theory*. New York: Basic Books, 2003. Emmanuel Todd. *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- 2 See Alton Maddox' *Amsterdam News* Op Ed. August 5-11, 2004. p.12.
- 3 My colleague, developmental psychologist Lois Holzman, and I have written extensively on how performance in everyday life is essential for personal, socio-cultural and political development, and how performative psychology challenges both modernist and postmodern psychology (e.g., Lois Holzman. *Performing Psychology: A Postmodern Culture of the Mind*. New York: Routledge, 1999; Lois Holzman and John Morss (Eds.). *Postmodern Psychologies, Societal Practice and Political Life*. New York: Routledge, 2000; Fred Newman and Lois Holzman. *The End of Knowing: A New Developmental Way of Learning*. London: Routledge, 1997; Fred Newman and Lois Holzman. *Unscientific Psychology: A Cultural-Performatory Approach to Understanding Human Life*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996.



In 1971, in *Esquire* magazine, Gore Vidal proposed that Ralph Nader run for president of the United States as an independent. Thirty-three years later, it's a story worth re-telling.

Ralph Nader can be the next President of the United States

Gore Vidal

I

Chicago, Illinois. August 29, 1968. Hubert Humphrey has just been nominated for President. The local police are rioting in the streets. “Maybe,” I said to a celebrated leader of the Democratic Party, “the only thing that can save us is a President who isn’t a politician. You know, who’s onto what’s wrong but isn’t part of it.” Not the most tactful thing to say to a pro, but he saw the point. “Yeah.” He bit down hard on his pipe (cigars are bad for the image). “Funny thing, too. I know all these guys pretty well and there isn’t one of ’em who could run a small numbers racket, much less the country. Who you got in mind?” At random, I said, “Ralph Nader.” The professional politician blinked. “The seat-belts man?” Then he shrugged. “Well, forget it. You can’t nominate anybody from outside. The ball game’s rigged.” That was three years ago.



Chicago, 1968

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“Ralph Nader can be the next President of the United States” by Gore Vidal.
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PHOTO BY GARY SETTLE/NEW YORK TIMES CO./GETTY IMAGES



New Party co-chair Dr. Benjamin Spock

II

Grand Forks, North Dakota, a month before the first Tuesday after the first Monday of last November, traditional voting day for the citizens of that great Republic whose borders in the year of our gentle Lord 1970 stretched from the periphery of China in the west to the marches of old Persia in the east, from Arctic Circle to South Pole, an empire whose flag could be seen flapping in such odd places as the island of Diego Garcia (necessary to the security of the Indian Ocean), and offshore Guantánamo.

In Grand Forks, one of the election issues was a classic environmental confrontation between the Army Corps of Engineers and the local conservationists. The Army wanted to change the course of a river, altering disastrously the local ecology (North Dakota is still astonishingly pristine, a rolling wild countryside, seen at its vivid best on that blue-gold October day).

On a windy morning, the advocate in his role as Co-Chairman of the New Party arrived in North Dakota, to be greeted by press, television, and a crowd of literally tens of supporters, re-creating his recent airport arrivals in Iowa, Minnesota, Texas. The bandwagon was rolling.

Crowds had been gratifyingly large, as they say, and interest keen. After all, what *was* the new party, and what do you call it? Oh, it's called the New Party, too, and a slight shadow would pass over certain faces, wanting to see celebrated in a name some future international, some blunt acknowledgment that the Republic was no damned good for most of the people who lived in it and downright hell for those caught in the sweep of its military disasters.

The Co-Chairman had his spiel: "At Chicago, in 1968, the day after Eugene McCarthy was defeated by Humphrey and the party hacks, a thousand of us met at the University of Chicago in order to start a new party which would be just that."

Standing before the television camera at the airport, the Co-Chairman was suddenly aware that his voice was sounding hollow again, a recent and disturbing phenomenon, something to do – he thought nervously – with talking out-of-doors, for he was a product of the cathedral quiet of the television studio (and the loving mother-eye of Camera Two) where, for what now seemed centuries, he had responded contentedly to several generations of television interviewers, their glazed eyes forever on clock, monitor, cue card. Oh,

he was the finest, and knew it – at least, on his own ground. A mug's game maybe (joke on Muggeridge) but all his own.

But at Grand Forks there were only local television, an eager young candidate for the State Legislature, a pleasant cousin not met until now (the Co-Chairman's father was from nearby South Dakota, a fact he was to make much of through the day, though his father had got out early with a West Point appointment).

"Mr. Vidal, your Co-Chairman is Dr. Benjamin Spock, isn't he...."

"That's right. And today he's campaigning in Massachusetts."

"Wasn't he convicted for supporting draft dodgers...."

The Co-Chairman's hearing is that of a lynx, whatever a lynx might be. On the word "convicted," he overlapped his own voice with that of the interviewer, deliberately raising the decibel rate, an old television trick which, done swiftly enough, effectively erases the other person's dialogue. "But we're here to talk about Mark Thornton, our candidate for the Eighteenth Legislative District seat. He is a first-rate environmentalist who's been getting considerable support...."

That evening two thousand students and townsmen were gathered in a college auditorium. Politely they listened as I described the New Party, pondered ways of salvaging the environment, ending the American Empire. Then, deliberately, I played off the audience, let them lead me where *they* wanted to go, which is as good a way as any of finding out what "the people" are thinking, though a way seldom followed by the conventional politician with a set speech. Before Jack Kennedy's nomination in 1960, he delivered at least a thousand times an eloquent twenty-three minute speech to which he himself never listened. Struck by one of the quotations he used (from the "Divine Dante"), I asked him, a year later, for the exact quote. He looked blank. Then he shut his eyes and began the entire speech from the beginning until we finally got to the section containing the Divine Dante's wisdom. It was all on tape.

I unspooled a tape or two, which gave me time to study the audience. They were every bit as handsome as the countryside which sustained them. Blue-eyed

When I attacked
the Democratic and
Republican parties
as two of a kind,
and a kind bad for
the Republic and the
world it was spoiling,
they cheered.

Scandinavians of the sort for whom we Tonio Krögers would give (and come to think of it, did give) the world. Politically they were not liberal. Most were Republicans. Yet there was something tough and practical and reassuring about them, in the old American way. When I attacked the Democratic and Republican parties as two of a kind, and a kind bad for the Republic and the world it was spoiling, they cheered. Incidentally, this was to be my constant experience wherever I went last October. No one liked Nixon. No one liked Humphrey. Muskie was dim. While for every fan McCarthy retained, there were at least a dozen avenging angels ready to burn our poet-philosopher's ass if he ever again picked up his pipe and sought us to leave Hamelin Town.

"It is time for a new party." Yes, it is time all right but is the New Party that party? You ran Dick Gregory for President in 1968. That wasn't such a good idea. "No, but not such a bad one since McCarthy wouldn't make the move." You have no money. "True. Only grass-roots candidates here and there, bucking the system in order to save a local river or stop the mindless military conquest of the earth."

"Are you really the solution?" was the constant question, and since the Co-Chairman cannot lie (but occasionally takes briefs under advisement, suggests changes of venue, has been known to disqualify himself at inconvenient moments ... usually, when the black caucus shouts that zero population growth is genocide, forcing the Co-Chairman to hunker down like Julie Hoffman and to mutter "f---off," and they do), he points out the virtues of a new party whose Presidential candidate would not be supported by those corporations who do the polluting of the atmosphere, who benefit from defense (sic) contracts.

As it is, 1972 will present us with the usual choice: on the one hand Nixon, on the other Muskie (or another like him). And the money each will get to campaign (some \$30,000,000 apiece).... Where will that come from?

The audience knows the answer. Just outside Grand Forks, A.B.M. missiles are being set up by Nixon in order to benefit those industrialists who gave him money in 1968 so that he could buy time on television in order to tell us that he would not continue with a war he had every intention of continuing since that is the deal, gentlemen, the bloody quid for the golden quo, and it is every bit as binding for a Democratic President



George McGovern

PHOTO BY BILL EPPRIDGE/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

as it is for a Republican President, even though that Democrat might be George McGovern, but won't be George McGovern because the party (which is flat broke as of March, 1971) won't get a blessed dime with the kind of peace talk he is prone to, while a Muskie, outspokenly evasive on the war (not unlike Nixon in '68) could pick up some money, particularly if he goes easy on all that clean-up-the-environment talk, as he is bound to do for the excellent reason that a principal source of money for either party comes from the oil men who do so much polluting, directly and indirectly, and have no intention of mending their ways. Why should they? This is America, isn't it?, where we have socialism for the deserving rich, and free enterprise for the undeserving poor.

In the past new American parties have been the result of some real or imagined flaw in national policy (the Republicans in 1856). Today the flaw which makes a new party a necessity is not one of policy but of structure. To put it simply, the wrong people dominate the two parties which in turn dominate our affairs. A familiar cry of Americans both left and right: We never have a choice! The military-industrial-media complex effectively keeps out of electoral politics those who would make substantive changes in the society. Such useful figures as Paul Ehrlich, Cesar Chavez, Nicholas Johnson, Margaret Mead (to name at random four), are each assigned a public niche and expected to stay there. On rare occasions, with luck, they may bring pressure to bear upon those who control the levers of power, but nothing more. Yet they are needed now in a way that most U.S. Senators are not, for they wrestle with actual problems. I stop abruptly.

Dubious looks from the audience. Questions begin. Speeches break out on the floor. Let's reform the Democratic Party. Support McGovern. Work within – all will be well. I listen, and wait (as I've done ever since the tour began) for someone to say something revelatory. And, truth to tell, to enjoy realizing that I am no longer alone. The desperation one has felt for the last five years is being shared at last. Everyone can now see the end of man, swiftly in a cobalt vapor, or slowly through poisoned air, water, earth, people.

The mood is now upon them and, as always when tension builds, jokes get made. Silliness is in the air – a pleasant human safety valve. Can a Fourth Party ever really *do* anything (George Wallace is the third)?

I pounce on that one. Take the environment. There exist solutions to most of our problems, including

incontinent breeding. But they must be worked out, in detail. The New Party would go to the trouble of showing exactly how much it would cost to keep Lake Michigan from dying, and – a big point as more and more people are out of work – how many jobs will be needed to save the country's water.

Parenthetically, the Co-Chairman had once been a Democratic candidate for Congress in upstate New York and got the most votes of any Democrat in fifty years – something he insists upon reminding people of since he is not loved by The Media who serenely maintain that since he ought not to have done well in such an election, he did not do well. As a candidate, he had talked about the pollution of the Hudson River on whose banks he lived, about detergent suds appearing in local streams, about unemployment in Beacon, Hudson, Kingston, and he suggested that the cleaning up of the river would provide jobs ... and so eloquent was he that he put everyone to sleep and didn't get their attention again until he agreed to talk about a movie he once wrote for Elizabeth Taylor, and what Jack Paar was really like.

But 1970 was as different from 1960 as Disneyland is from defoliated Vietnam. Like the rest of us, the North Dakotans know in general what is wrong, and why, and they can even – tentatively – connect themselves with great events ... those Nixon A.B.M. nuclear missiles outside town are plainly bugging them. Wryly they joke about how they'd always counted on surviving a nuclear war (so long, New York City, Chicago, L.A.). *But now we'll get the first attack.* They found this unjust.

Then: O.K. A new political party is a good idea (though some of your ideas sound a bit like socialism but even so ...). Yet could anything *really* be changed? You've already told us you don't have any money, and it takes millions of dollars to elect a President. So what do you do?

I go for blue sky, as the sportswriters say. "You nominate a candidate for President a year before the election. You give him the best possible programs to dramatize. Where the others make themselves absolutely clear they're against war, pollution, the works, he will make it absolutely clear what it's going to cost, and indicate – sadly, of course – that the money can only come from one place, the Pentagon, which currently takes fifty cents of every tax dollar while only seventeen cents go to services for the people. Now if you reverse these statistics...."

Yes. Yes. Yes. The audience is now way ahead of me. Ecological pie-in-the-sky is their daily dessert. So *who* are you going to run for President? Who can be trusted to do what we all agree needs to be done? You can't start with an unknown. Your new party carries no weight. And you've already said you don't want a discredited national politician. You've even turned your back on the sweet singer from Minnesota. So who, in God's name, is there who could run and be elected?

"Ralph Nader." A brief stillness. Then the applause begins. And goes on. And on.

III

The despicable 1970 election came and went, and the New Party candidates all failed to be elected (though the young man in North Dakota did very well) and we are still alive, busily preparing now to get on the ballot in all fifty states in time for the 1972 Presidential election – quite an undertaking since in a free country only certain interests may present themselves for election. All others must be prepared to go through a Byzantine maze of local election requirements, on the order of that lily-white pipe-fitters union which keeps out blacks with a questionnaire that includes, among other recondite requests for information, "Who wrote the 'Divine Comedy'?"

The reaction I got to Ralph Nader in Grand Forks was repeated throughout the Middle West, as well as in the whole country when I proposed him for President on national television.

Nader's image is unique in a way that no politician's can be. Millions think him to be "people-oriented," as they say along Madison Avenue; also, he strikes them as entirely lacking in that lust for personal gain which is what the American way of life is all about. In a land of mangy carnivores, he is true unicorn.

Recently an advertising executive explained to me the state of the union (yes, wisdom may enter at any door). "There is only one issue: the economy." The executive looked at me severely. "People out of work. High prices. Inflation. That's why your idea about Nader is *right on*."

Pause. Then, briskly: "Every week we prepare in-depth surveys of who is buying what and why. That's our business. Our bread and butter." I waited for "our jam, too" but he has just put his house in Westport on the market. "And do you know what we are finding week after week? *That price is everything*." I looked blank: wasn't that always the case? He spelled it out for me. "Some products we sell on sex appeal. Greasy Soap makes you irresistible to chicks. Or Gin with Genuine Juniper Berry Tang will make you the life of the party. Stuff like that. Convince the schmucks that there really is a difference between getting drunk on gin instead of vodka. Well, baby, none of that works today." Pain sat on his brow. "They're looking for *bargains*. They want their money's worth. And if rubbing alcohol is a cheaper drunk than Genuine Juniper Berry Tang, then they buy the rubbing alcohol. As for sex appeal, forget it. They're all grooving alone anyway, the singles. I mean who can afford to go out to dinner, the movies? So this is where your idea about Nader is good thinking. He's identified with the only thing they care about: cost of living and whether or not what they buy is crap. They know he's on their side against the big companies that steal them blind with faulty appliances and super-enriched food with goodness-added you can starve to death on. Of course, they like him, maybe love him. He's the only one there is like him and then – get this! *They've heard of him!* Nader falls, I'd say, in the fifty to sixty percent recognition range."

For those ignorant of demographics, "recognition range" simply means how many Americans have heard of a given person or product. Except for the President, the Kennedys, two or three Presidential candidates, a handful of television and movie personalities, the American public is quite unaware of who – or what – are the Secretary of State, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Maria Callas, Birch Bayh ... you name 'em and they don't know 'em. How this state of affairs could arise in a nation supposedly welded into a single electronic village (Canada's most famous seer probably has an R.R. in the ten-percent range) is one of the diviner mysteries of our declining civilization; the result, perhaps, of an educational system instinctively devised to keep everyone at exactly the same state of democratic ignorance. In any case, over half the adult population will never read a book during their lifetime, and close to twenty-five percent are functionally illiterate. It is a chastening experience for those of us who stare into the bright lights of the media year after year and are known finally to a mere ten percent of the population. After Norman Mailer's highly publicized race for Mayor of

New York, he was, on election day, quite unknown to sixty percent of the voters in that city, and generally unknown to the rest of the country.

Ralph Nader has the distinction (the March, 1971 Gallup survey) of being known to fifty percent of American men and thirty-seven percent of American women among a national sample of 1571 adults. He is well-regarded by the thirty-to-forty-nine-year-olds, who are most likely to vote.

Nader's image is positive while those of Nixon and Muskie are – how shall I put it? – blah. Or in the tactful prose of the Harris Survey (2/18/71): “Basically, Mr. Nixon is viewed as ‘cool-headed’ and ‘sincere’ but not particularly ‘up-to-date’ or ‘exciting.’” Parenthetically, the electorate has a positive genius for missing the point to public men. Demonstrably, Nixon is *not* “cool-headed” (weeping in public on Knowland's shoulder after the little dog Checkers speech, snarling and spitting at the press after his 1962 defeat for governor in California, etc.). While not even Nixon's most devoted associates have ever thought him “sincere” (“now I am a Keynesian,” he told us recently, discarding with five easy words a lifetime's devotion to a *laissez-faire* system of economics that made Adam Smith look like Harry Hopkins). But the people – like the media which shape them – tend to believe that a President's character is what it ought to be; and evidence to the contrary is simply ignored. Just before Jack Kennedy was killed, a cross-section of the electorate was offered a long list of “good,” “bad,” “wishy-washy” adjectives and asked to check off the ones most applicable to the 35th magistrate. Astonishingly, Kennedy's wit (the one thoroughly unique, not to mention obvious thing about him) scored last while a majority agreed that his most positive, attractive trait was excellence as husband and father, hardly the Prince's strongest suit – but let us not anticipate the next generation's favorite reading.

Harris found that Senator Muskie's profile with the people was as dull as Nixon's, with the added “dis-advantage [?] that roughly one in four people simply do not feel they are familiar enough with him to pass judgment.”

Not long ago, an executive of the New Party discussed the Presidential matter with Nader. Nader said he did not want to be a candidate. For one thing, he would lose all usefulness as a consumerist. For another, he would probably split the “liberal” vote and so reelect Nixon.

As a non-politician
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February 28, 1971 in an interview with Henry Brandon of the *London Sunday Times*, he added to his argument: "Most people think there are only two ways to create power in the U.S.: to acquire economic power or to achieve political power. I think it's important to ... see if power cannot be developed to work on these institutions (the corporations, the existing federal and state bureaucracies) from nothing but a will, determination and creativity." Certainly in five years, Nader has made a profound impression on such mighty corporations as General Motors. Yet the automobile industry is still responsible for much of the nation's air pollution, and no matter how many dedicated young lawyers join Nader's various crusades, they will never have sufficient clout to force the indolent magnates of Detroit to produce a non-polluting engine (estimated by Nader to cost \$150,000,000 or seventy-four hours of G.M.'s gross company revenue). But an American President might just be able to do the trick.

Nader's arguments as to why he ought not to run for President are understandable but hardly compelling. As a non-politician running for President on a platform he has himself assembled and made popular over the years, Nader could hardly be mistaken for a professional power-seeker. Incidentally, between now and fall, he will publish eight carefully researched reports on such subjects as water pollution (*The Water Lords*), nursing homes (*Old Age: The Last Segregation*), uses and abuses of paper and pulp in Maine (preface by Senator Muskie?), California land practices, and the impact, Heaven help us, of the Duponts on Delaware. No one can say he is evasive about the issues.

As for reelecting Nixon, Nader might just as easily help make him San Clemente's favorite librarian. After all it will be a four-way race in 1972. Ole George will take the solid South; Muskie (with the support of George Meany and Mayor Daley) will try to hold the center, though things fall apart; and the President – demonstrating his legendary sincerity – will grab onto whatever looks like a winning issue, probably an

invasion of China (to protect, naturally, our withdrawal from Indochina) on the ground that, historically, the American people never change horses in midstream ... preferring, in this case, to drown with mad Phaeton at the reins. Against such a trio, fourth-party candidate Nader would look like Lincoln.

More to the point, in a four-way race, with a President no one particularly likes, a failing economy, an Army on the point of mutiny in the field, there is no reason why a non-politician who said he would curb the Pentagon and meant it, said he would clean up the environment and meant it, might not sweep to victory. There are no rules in American politics today. The thing is there to be put together by anyone shrewd enough and – let us pray – noble enough to take on the job.

I told the New Party not to be discouraged by Nader's no. "How becoming," I noted, "to find a man who does *not* want the office. Not to mention traditional." In the old days politicians always feigned reluctance. Now they open an office eight years in advance of election day. Meanwhile an associate of Nader told me: "You want cold turkey? Well, Ralph might want to be President some day. Why not? All the reasons you think he's right for it, he does too – to make a drastic change in the whole style of the country. But he doesn't want to be a fourth-party candidate, and he thinks 1972 is too soon."

This sounded more like it. I sent back word (to this day I have not met Ralph Nader: Platonic essence is sufficient for the moment) that it was 1972 or never. Time is running out for us. The United States is fast becoming the sort of society our ancestors fled. Tell Nader, I said, that since neither the Democrats nor the Republicans will nominate him he ought to run as a fourth-party candidate.

That was that. In January I went to Japan. Nader was also there. For five days what he did and said filled the front pages of every newspaper in the country. "Nader's arrival here," said a Japanese journalist, "has had the most extraordinary effect. You know, we are governed by a very stupid consortium of politicians and industrialists, interested only in profits. As a result, our islands are being wrecked environmentally. Now Nader comes and talks about real problems. Shows us solutions. No foreigner has had such an impact on Japan since MacArthur...."

It may of course be too
late to reverse a world
trend toward
authoritarianism.

My friend was impressed. I was, too: this thirty-seven-year-old American lawyer, with nothing going for him except intelligence and will, was able to command the attention of two hundred million Japanese who have for some time regarded the United States as an imbecilic power, deservedly on the skids. It was an extraordinary display, and one felt better about being an American. Incidentally, the Japanese were most impressed by Nader's prowess as a linguist. He is fluent in Arabic and has a working knowledge of Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and Chinese. I told the Japanese that I was even more impressed by his mastery of English, a language many of our recent Presidents have found difficult.

I came back to America in February to learn that something very odd had just happened in Chicago (after the convention of '68, I thought it doubtful that the Second City would ever surprise anyone again, but it has). On November 23, Mike Royko, a columnist for the Chicago *Daily News*, put a coupon at the foot of his column with five names and room for write-ins. The names were Muskie, Kennedy, McGovern, Humphrey and Nader. In his column of December 1, Royko wrote that "political popularity polls don't really reflect public sentiment because the citizens are offered a limited selection of politicians by the pollsters." He then gave the coupon tally. "So far 2067 people have responded. This is how they voted: Nader 1614, Muskie 148, Kennedy 42, McGovern 41, Humphrey 11. Another 211 votes were scattered among scores of other individuals, none receiving enough to itemize."

Most impressive, Royko found, were "the accompanying letters. I've never received that much mail about any political figure I've written about except when the readers suggested that one of them be put behind bars.... Throughout the letters ran a common theme: Nader is honest; Nader cares about ordinary people; Nader won't sell out the people for the good of a political party."

The Royko poll has been much discussed privately by politicians of every party. One Democratic leader allowed himself a daydream. "Okay, Muskie doesn't catch fire. Teddy never gets dried off after that midnight swim. McGovern scares away the money and Jackson scares away the voters. There is a real grass-roots sentiment for Nader. It's 1940 all over again when honest Wendell Willkie, the simple Hoosier Wall Street lawyer, goes to the convention at Philadelphia and knocks off the pros, like Dewey, Vandenberg, Taft. Oh, it's possible, no doubt of that." The Democratic

PHOTO BY LEE BALTMAN/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES



George Wallace

leader puffed on his cigarette. "Why, the kid's already got the makings of an organization. Out in Minnesota. Oregon. Those college kids who kick in a dollar or whatever it is to hire lawyers to give big business hell." Some sixth sense (can I be psychic?) told me that the Democratic leader might not at heart approve of Nader's lifework. But it didn't matter. The subject was winning an election. "So we nominate him. People's choice. The party that denied you Gene McCarthy, because we were ignorant blue meanies, now gives you Ralph. Go to it, kids! Yes. There's mileage there." Slow happy smile – an artist getting an effect right. "Then we nominate a Vice-President for the grown-ups. And that'd be Scoop Jackson. Good liberal domestically but strong on the war, strong on defense. Nader and Jackson versus Nixon and Agnew." Eyes opened very wide. "You know we'd win."

I hope "we" don't, I thought to myself. The whole point to a Nader candidacy would be *not* making an accommodation with someone like Jackson ... after all, the country that gave us Lee Harvey Oswald would dearly love another go at making a fool of history. But I was satisfied. A professional politician, known for his nuts-and-bolts practicality, could at least *imagine* a major party endorsing and nominating Nader.

Are the American people sufficiently alert to their true interest to realize the value of rejecting the conventional politicians in favor of someone like Nader who might actually do something? Evidence is confused. On the one hand, a Gallup survey shows that only eleven percent would be willing to make the plunge....on the ground that the top political job should go to someone who has won his spurs as a professional politician, et cetera. This is a natural response to a certain kind of question. Yet recent Harris polls reveal a general indifference to – and often dislike of – all the known Presidential candidates, and suburbia is currently looking for a hero.

For Nader to be the Democratic nominee for President there must, first, be a grass-roots movement on every campus, in every old-age ghetto (thirty-five percent of the electorate is over fifty-five ... and he's their man), among conservationists, consumerists, zero-population growthers, and (second) an all-out attempt to win the Democratic primary in California, a long shot but by no means an impossibility in the light of Eugene McCarthy's experiment four years ago; known to hardly anyone outside Minnesota, he won New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Oregon and only lost California to the fully marshalled ranks of a tardy

revival of Camelot. It is more likely, however, that the Democrats will continue in their usual folly at convention time and allow the usual power brokers to nominate Hubert Humphrey. At that point all those concerned with the future of our sad Republic will have to face up to the inadequacies of the present three party system which is really one and a half – the Democrat-Republicans versus George Wallace – and the need for a fourth party to spell out what is wrong and how it can be fixed. For that reason alone, Nader is the ideal new-party candidate for 1972: a figure around whom those disgusted with traditional politics can rally, a point of hope, a new beginning in our tangled affairs. As for those of moderate disposition who say with horror: but you'll only split the liberal vote and reelect Nixon! The plain answer is that between a Nixon and a Muskie there is but a smile's difference. Besides, is it not of far greater urgency for at least one Presidential candidate to say the unsayable, to propose drastic measures which our masters may not like but the governed, in time, will respond to? Certainly the alternative is a revolutionary situation which the powers that govern us are eager to exploit since to them, not the weather people (their best weapon), goes the victory. Already the secret police are everywhere, the means of repression are at hand, and the will to use those means is not lacking in high places.

It may of course be too late to reverse a world trend toward authoritarianism. It may be too late to educate an electorate from whom the media have kept all reality (for a superb analysis of how this is done, read the book, *Don't Blame the People*, by Robert Cirino). But for those willing to make one last effort, the creation of a new party is the start of an answer. Finally, as a unique symbol of our present necessities made vivid we have the curiously inspiring figure of Ralph Nader, whose candidacy – not to mention administration! – would be something new under our smog-filtered imperial sun. **NEO**



GETTY IMAGES

Gore Vidal is a social critic and the author of plays, novels and film scripts, as well as many works of non-fiction. His most recent book is *Imperial America: Reflections on the United States of Amnesia*.



KARP'S CORNER

This corner of *The Neo-Independent* is reserved for the writings of Walter Karp (1934-1989), a contributing editor to *Harper's Magazine* for ten years and the author of eight books on American politics. Walter Karp subjected the inner workings of our bipartisan system to scrutiny without relying on ideological lenses of any sort; he saw, and reported on what he had seen, with unusual clarity and honesty.

Indispensable Enemies: The Politics of Misrule in America, first published in 1974, refers to the systematic collusion between the Republican and Democratic parties; in pursuit of what Mr. Karp argues is their fundamental purpose, which is to perpetuate and protect their respective organizations, they depend heavily on one another. Moreover, both parties will do whatever is required – from losing elections to declaring war – to further their partisan purposes.

In Chapter 6 of *Indispensable Enemies*, “Roosevelt Packs in the New Deal,” from which the following excerpt is taken, Mr. Karp seeks to separate fact from fiction regarding the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. First elected in 1932, while the Great Depression was ravaging the country (and the world), then reelected three more times, Roosevelt was neither the first president nor the last to find war a useful tool for controlling and stifling demands for reform.

Roosevelt Packs In The New Deal

Walter Karp

The history of Roosevelt's New Deal constitutes, therefore, the largest and most detailed confirmation of the proposition I have already set forth: first, that party organizations constantly endeavor to block reform and blast untoward hope in order to maintain themselves and their power; second, that they are powerful enough to choose for high office those who are willing to serve their interests. From 1933 to 1938 the fate of the party oligarchs rested entirely in Roosevelt's hands. Without his determination to protect party power and his extraordinary skill in doing so, it would have disintegrated rapidly – it *was* disintegrating rapidly. With one push from Roosevelt, the party oligarchs would have toppled to the ground. That Roosevelt chose to save them should not be surprising. The Democratic bosses knew very well to whom they had entrusted their power when they nominated Roosevelt in 1932. Had Roosevelt betrayed their trust instead of betraying the people's, the evidence of that betrayal would have been swiftly forthcoming. The 1936 Democratic convention would have been a bloodbath; instead it was a celebration.

That Roosevelt employed extraordinary means – notably the court-packing scheme – to protect party power should not be surprising either.* In the larger context of the world's political history, his court-packing maneuver is merely a humdrum example of duplicity. The annals of politics are crammed with acts of the bloodiest villainy taken to gain and hold power. As Gibbon famously remarked, political history is a register of little else. It is not the business of free citizens, however, to judge their public men by any standard other than those of this Republic. By that standard, Roosevelt's duplicity was a heinous act of bad faith and betrayal. There is no doubt that Roosevelt saved the prevailing system of oli-

garchic power at some sacrifice to himself. It is no small thing for any President to accept a humiliating public rebuff as Roosevelt did in 1937. Such is the stuff of heroes, however, though Roosevelt was not a hero of the Republic, its citizens and its liberties. He was the champion of the party system, a very different matter. In any event the party bosses repaid him well for his sacrifice by letting him seek an unprecedented third term and play a very satisfying role, that of a "wartime leader."

Perhaps the most revealing remark ever publicly made about Franklin Roosevelt was made by Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1964. It was a remark which looked back to Roosevelt's 1937 duplicity and forward to Johnson's own, providing a dramatic link between them. The occasion, as Tom Wicker recounts it in *JFK and LBJ*, was a luncheon for reporters at the White House to discuss Johnson's landslide election victory over Barry Goldwater. Johnson quickly dimmed the reporters' spirits. He reminded them that landslide victories are tricky affairs, as indeed they are to the party oligarchs. "Roosevelt," he told the reporters, "was never President after 1937 until the war came along." Knowing that his task, like Roosevelt's, would be to block reform in 1965, Johnson was virtually telling the reporters that *he* was not going to thwart it by suffering rebuffs until "a war came along." He would kill reform by starting a war – and that is precisely what he did.

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* In 1937, at the beginning of his second term in office, Roosevelt sought the consent of Congress to appoint as many as six additional judges to the Supreme Court; Karp argues that the highly unpopular plan, which was finally buried after a "deliberately prolonged" battle, was not a "blunder" on Roosevelt's part but a ruse undertaken by the wily president "...to tie up and virtually kill the first session of an unruly, reform-minded Congress" and "to prove that Congress could defy him..." – Ed.



The Sovereign National Conference, Kinshasa, Zaire, 1992

The Congo-Compton Connection

Deborah A. Green

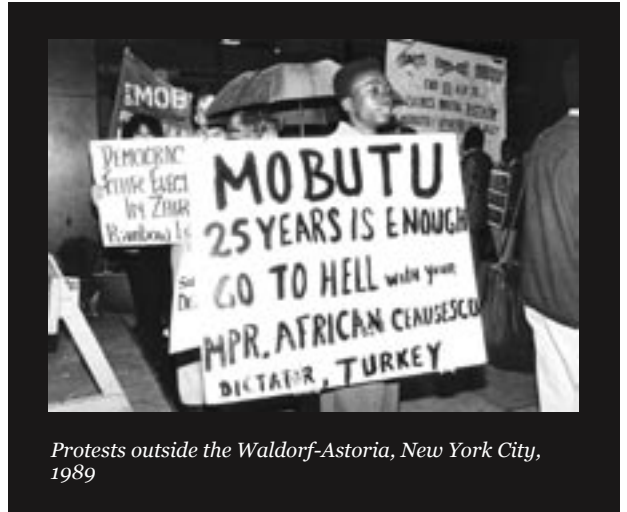
The U.S. has officially committed itself to spreading democracy throughout the world. History will eventually reveal what consequences the Bush administration's nation-building experiment will have for the future of democracy in Iraq. But we can already see the consequences for American democracy. According to a recent poll by the Pew Research Center, foreign policy concerns have become a major factor in the presidential election for the first time since 1972.

In making a long-unchallenged foreign policy controversial, American independents introduced, however subtly, an element of doubt about the plausibility of future U.S. support for the dictatorship. And in that moment of doubt there was, for Congolese democrats under fire, a moment of opportunity.

The prospect of an indefinite engagement in Iraq, at tremendous cost in lives and resources, has inspired a passionate dialogue among Americans on the role our country should be playing in the world. And it has simultaneously exposed how shockingly inadequate American political institutions – in particular, the Democratic and Republican parties – are to the task of mediating that diverse dialogue.

For a poignant illustration of this institutional inadequacy, look no further than the *Boston Globe* poll of delegates to the Democratic National Convention last July: 80% of those polled said they opposed the decision to go to war against Iraq at the time it began, and 95% said they now oppose the war. As citizens, these Americans are against the war. As Democratic Party members, however, they nominated Senator John Kerry, who voted for the October 2002 war resolution.

RAINBOW LOBBY ARCHIVES



Protests outside the Waldorf-Astoria, New York City, 1989

While the two major parties display tactical differences on domestic economic and social policy issues, they have shared, since the start of the Cold War, a remarkable consensus on most strategic issues, especially foreign policy. This consensus reflects the reality that the elites that control the two parties have strategic interests – in markets or oil, for instance – that are similarly aligned. The practical effect of this consensus is that it is impossible to change the strategic direction of our foreign policy without first dislodging major party control over policymaking.

Americans who believe the war was justified to liberate Iraqis from the dictator Saddam Hussein should be equally concerned about this bipartisan lock on policy. For there is good reason to question the quality of democracy dished out by the bipartisan foreign policy establishment to Iraqis. Can a bureaucratic elite that cares so little for the opinions of its own citizens teach Iraqis about democratic participation? When your corporate sponsors are reaping millions of dollars in reconstruction projects, can you be entrusted with “nation-building”?

Even some neo-conservatives, the architects of the war in Iraq, have begun to see the downside of a foreign policy that has legitimacy for neither the American people nor the Iraqis. Francis Fukuyama, in the Summer 2004 issue of *The National Interest*, describes the potential impact of such a policy: “The poorly executed nation-building strategy in Iraq will poison the well for future such exercises, undercutting domestic political support for a generous and visionary internationalism, just as Vietnam did.”¹

What is the track record of Democratic and Republican administrations on democratization and nation building? To begin to answer that question, it is useful to look at another of the world's disaster areas: the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). Since 1998, civil war and war-induced diseases and starvation have killed 3.3 million Congolese. The conflict and instability suffered by the country today can be blamed in large measure on the devastation wrought by the dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, a Cold War ally of the United States. In exchange for stopping the spread of communism on the African continent, and preserving access to his country's wealth of strategic minerals for the United States, Mobutu enjoyed continuous support from both Democratic and Republican administrations for almost four decades. When the Cold War ended in 1989, the Congolese people organized a peaceful democracy movement; it produced a democratically elected transitional government that challenged Mobutu's vise-like grip on power. But instead of recognizing and assisting this new government, and taking firm measures to isolate Mobutu, presidents George Bush, Sr. and Bill Clinton intervened at key moments to sideline the most independent leadership and shore up Mobutu's waning influence.

The example of the Congo is worth examining for another reason: although the Congolese democrats were marginalized and undermined by the U.S. government, and were ultimately defeated, they did not go down without generating a crisis in Mobutu's relationship with the bipartisan foreign policy establishment in Washington. They were able to do this because they were accompanied and assisted by *independent* organizations of American citizens, outside the sway of partisan attachment and influence.

From 1986 to 1994, three grassroots organizations – the U.S.-Congo Friendship Committee, the Rainbow Lobby, Inc., and Americans United with the Congolese People – along with African American independent leader Dr. Lenora Fulani, built a partnership with the Congolese democratic movement. In some respects, the three organizations resembled the many other “solidarity organizations” formed at the time to mobilize American support for various foreign policy goals – the struggle against apartheid in South Africa being the most well known example. The U.S.-Congo Friendship Committee connected exiled Congolese activists and American progressives, and raised hu-

manitarian assistance for the movement in Zaire. The Rainbow Lobby was a 50,000-member citizens lobby headquartered in Washington, DC that specialized in democracy issues at home and abroad, and became the lobbyist for the U.S.-based anti-Mobutu movement. Americans United with the Congolese People raised funds from thousands of individual Americans to support this lobbying effort.

But these independent organizations differed from other solidarity groups in this important respect: they neither sought nor found a home in the Democratic Party, the partisan alignment of choice for such groups. The anti-apartheid movement located itself within the Democratic Party and the array of non-governmental organizations – think tanks, foundations, etc. – that were associated with it financially and politically. Given the strong identification of the African American community with the struggle against the racist white regime in South Africa, it became almost *de rigueur* for Democratic politicians with black constituencies to embrace this cause as their own, and offer themselves up for arrest in civil disobedience actions at South Africa's Washington embassy. But taking on a *black* African dictator like Mobutu required a political vision that went beyond opportunistic ethnic politics.

PHOTO BY DIRCK HALSTEAD/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES



President for Life Mobutu Sese Seko with President George H. W. Bush, 1989

Mobutu and his U.S. lobbyists understood the racial dynamic of American politics, and knew how controversial it would be for a primarily “white liberal” organization like the Rainbow Lobby to target the black president of a sovereign African state. After the Rainbow Lobby's grassroots campaign convinced the black mayors of Washington, DC and Baltimore



Etienne Tshisekedi with Dr. Lenora Fulani and the author

to scuttle luncheons planned for him during his 1989 state visit, Mobutu stepped up his charm offensive toward the African American community. He invited the National Conference of Black Mayors to come to Zaire on an all expense-paid tour. He sent a Zairian state choir on a tour of African American churches. Fulani, backed up by the “white” Rainbow Lobby, stepped in to break up these “cultural exchanges,” earning a torrent of abuse from an assortment of Democrats (and the gratitude of the more thoughtful mayors and ministers, who were glad to avoid the embarrassment of being duped by a human rights abuser).

But the most bruising fight began in 1987, when an influential member of the House Subcommittee on Africa emerged as Mobutu’s chief advocate on Capitol Hill. While most of the Congressional Black Caucus agreed to co-sponsor the Rainbow Lobby’s bill cutting off aid to Mobutu, Rep. Mervyn Dymally (D-CA), the African American congressman from the Compton district of Los Angeles, refused. Then, when Rainbow Lobby executive director Nancy Ross arranged a congressional tour in 1987 for the leader of the Congolese democratic opposition, Etienne Tshisekedi, Dymally refused to meet with him.

Back in Zaire, in January of 1988 Tshisekedi was brutally attacked by Mobutu’s security forces while addressing a peaceful rally in the capital, Kinshasa. Two people were killed and dozens wounded in the incident, which occurred when Dymally himself was there. At the Rainbow Lobby’s initiative, 48 members of Congress wrote to Mobutu expressing their concern. Dymally, however, issued an alternative version of the event that denied the death and injury toll and justi-

fied Mobutu’s repression of the rally: Tshisekedi was demonstrating without a permit!

Why was Dymally sticking his neck out for Mobutu? A Rainbow Lobby probe uncovered a pattern of gifts and business opportunities awarded by Mobutu to Dymally’s personal associates. This research was picked up by reporters at the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Journal of Commerce*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*. For instance, Michele Fuetsch reported for the *LA Times* that:

Dymally split with his colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus in 1987 and refused to support a move to cut U.S. aid to Mobutu, whose luxurious lifestyle – complete with palaces and private jets – stands in stark contrast to the impoverished existence of most Zairians.

Since the ’87 split, Dymally has become known as a leading Mobutu defender in Congress. The congressman has traveled in Africa at Zairian government expense, written a book about the African president and sits on the advisory board of an organization that received \$250,000 from Mobutu.²

The Rainbow Lobby’s challenge to a black Democratic congressman was profoundly unsettling to the community of Africa’s advocates in DC, even – and perhaps especially – to black congressmen who *had* come out against Mobutu. The Rainbow Lobby had violated the norms of Democratic Party politics. Dymally himself entered nine separate attacks on the Rainbow Lobby into the *Congressional Record*, accusing its leadership of being communists. Liberal publications that should have known better, from Washington’s *City Paper* to *The Nation* magazine, sided with Dymally and condemned Congo’s independent advocates.

But even as the controversy on Capitol Hill grew more and more inflamed, the Congolese held onto their connection to the Rainbow Lobby and declined to go with more traditional advocates. In a 1988 letter to Ross, Tshisekedi described how Congressman Dymally visited him while he was still Mobutu’s prisoner “to pressure me in the name of the Black Caucus to accept what he, with insistence, called ‘national reconciliation’ and which in Zaire means...joining the Popular Movement of the Revolution, Mobutu’s state party.”³

Tshisekedi resisted the Democrat's pressure; he chose instead to cement his relationship with independent forces. He wrote: "If that is the official policy of the Black Caucus, I ask you, my dear Nancy, to be my interpreter with the Honorable Members of Congress, so they would change this political vision."

When Dymally traveled to Kinshasa again in 1991, he was picketed by Congolese demonstrators at the U.S. Embassy, just as he was picketed by his own constituents back home in Compton. This tandem of Congolese and American protesters came to be known as the "Congo-Compton Connection."

The willingness of the Zairian opposition to stand by the Rainbow Lobby was absolutely critical to legitimizing the American independent campaign to change U.S. policy on Mobutu. Mervyn Dymally's fight was not just with the Rainbow Lobby, but with the "Congo-Compton Connection," a new social force operating in an enlarged political space – bounded neither by Mobutu's ability to brutalize the democracy movement nor by the Democratic Party's ability to marginalize it.

This new social force won some victories: Congress cut off aid to Mobutu in 1990, and in 1991 Dymally, by then the chairman of the Africa Subcommittee, allowed H.Con.Res. 238 calling on Mobutu to step down to pass through his committee without opposition. His change of heart was noted by Rep. Steven Solarz (D-NY), who stated for the record: "It surely could not have been easy

for the distinguished gentleman from California to bring to the floor a resolution calling for the resignation of a man whom he had gotten to know well over the years and whom he had seen on many occasions during the course of his frequent visits to Zaire..."⁴

In making a long unchallenged foreign policy controversial, American independents introduced, however subtly, an element of doubt about the plausibility of future U.S. support for the dictatorship. And in that moment of doubt there was, for Congolese democrats under fire, a moment of opportunity.

In 1991 the Congolese democracy movement convened a Sovereign National Conference, a remarkable assembly of 2,840 representatives from all political parties and social sectors in Zaire. The purpose of this conference was to draft a new constitution and design new, democratic institutions of governance for the post-Mobutu era. With this unexpected challenge to U.S. influence in Zaire, the Bush administration's commitment to Mobutu seemed stronger than ever. In testimony for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in November of 1991, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, insisted that President Mobutu still "had a role to play in Zaire."

A street in Kinshasa



Conceding that Mobutu had “lost legitimacy to govern Zaire during the transition to democracy,” Cohen nevertheless insisted that Zaire’s best hope for the future was “genuine power-sharing” with the illegitimate ruler. While admitting that Mobutu could “no longer pay or consistently control his own military,” Cohen argued for a continued role for him in the new government because “if he left the scene, the unknown of what the military would do is something we would have to really worry about.”⁵

Other testimony presented at the hearing, including that submitted by the Rainbow Lobby, recited the horrors of the regime and concluded that “Mobutu must go” to prevent a full-fledged African crisis. Cohen, however, started from the premise that “Mobutu must stay,” and all the scenarios he evolved for his testimony seemed designed to rationalize this premise.

Even as the Congolese democrats and their American allies worked to enlarge the political space for democratic change, the bipartisan foreign policy establishment was preparing to cordon it off.

By August of 1992 the Sovereign National Conference was completing work on the institutions that would govern Zaire for a projected two-year transition pe-

riod leading up to elections. These included a parliament with an elected prime minister, and a national electoral commission. In spite of constant violent attacks by the dictator’s security forces, the Sovereign National Conference bravely relegated the “President” to a minor role in the transition, a role Mobutu and his entourage refused to accept. To break the impasse, the Bush administration brokered a “power-sharing” arrangement, which permitted Mobutu to remain president of the Republic during the transition period but required him to “collaborate” with the prime minister and the parliament in the key areas of defense and foreign affairs.

In practice, Mobutu maintained exclusive control over his 20,000-man Special Presidential Division – the only regularly paid and well-equipped element of the armed forces – and used them to paralyze the newly elected prime minister, Etienne Tshisekedi, and terrorize the population. In 1993, Americans United with the Congolese People helped fund a visit to the United States for Tshisekedi’s Minister of Communication, who presented these statistics to the United Nations: 9,000 lives lost and 500,000 people displaced as a result of Mobutu’s “ethnic cleansing” operations intended to undermine support for the new government.

RAINBOW LOBBY ARCHIVES



Lambert Mende Omalanga, Lenora B. Fulani, George Nzongola-Ntalaja, Nancy Ross, Etienne Tshisekedi, Deborah Green, Marthe Tshisekedi in Washington, DC, 1990

Congolese hopes were raised when Bill Clinton was elected president in November of 1992. During his campaign, Clinton had promised to put African dictators on notice that U.S. complaisance was a thing of the past. But like every U.S. president since John F. Kennedy, Clinton too would weigh in on the side of Mobutu. While issuing occasional criticism of Mobutu's murderous sabotage, the Clinton State Department refrained from implementing meaningful sanctions against him. Lobbyists for Americans United with the Congolese People succeeded in getting the House Africa Subcommittee to pass H.Res. 128, calling on the president to freeze Mobutu's assets, deny visas to his cronies, expel his ambassador, impose an arms embargo and raise the issue of Mobutu's violence in the United Nations Security Council, but the administration did not respond to these demands. Clinton did issue an Executive Proclamation on June 21, 1993, forbidding the issuance of visas to "persons who...impede Zaire's transition to democracy."⁶ But he rendered the order meaningless when he allowed Ngbanda Nzambo-Ko-Atumba, Mobutu's head of security (known as "the Terminator" on the streets of Kinshasa) into the country less than a month later.

Far from sanctioning Mobutu, Clinton's chief policy objective seemed to be to dislodge Prime Minister Tshisekedi – the Congolese people's choice. The Clinton administration never hid its preference for a "neutral" technocrat, insisting that someone without a political base of support was more suitable for leading the transitional government. Spokesmen for Tshisekedi bitterly complained of overt politicking by the U.S. Embassy on behalf of such a candidate – Leon Kengo wa Dondo, a former prime minister under Mobutu who was trusted by the IMF.

In June of 1994, the U.S. government got what it wanted in Zaire. The "technocrat" Kengo won an illegal election orchestrated by Mobutu and boycotted by the entire democratic opposition.

The "Congo-Compton Connection" had been effective in destabilizing the U.S. government's unqualified support for the dictator Mobutu. But it was not strong enough to force the United States to support democracy in Congo, nor to prevent it from denaturing the democratic institutions so painstakingly created by the Congolese themselves. Under the unpopular Kengo, those institutions devolved into instruments for the suppression of democracy, and Congo began its de-

scent into the tragic chaos that still prevails today.

By failing to legitimize and assist a non-violent democracy movement that enjoyed demonstrable support across diverse ethnic groups and constituencies, the U.S. government squandered a precious opportunity to promote democracy in the underdeveloped world. Both Democratic and Republican administrations viewed the democratic aspirations of the Congolese not as a hopeful sign of progress in one of the world's more ravaged places, but as a source of instability, and a threat to the continuity of existing economic and political relationships best left undisturbed. This history should dispel any illusion that either major party is willing to allow the future of a country as strategically important as Iraq to be decided by its own people.

But this history also suggests the potential for groups of political independents to have an impact on foreign policy. By enlarging the "political space" for dialogue and action, independents create a forum for citizens to debate the wisdom or decency of past policies, and propose new policies more responsive to the interests of ordinary people. More importantly, as they chip away at the paralyzing constraints of the two major parties, independents create an environment in which citizens can reignite the development of democracy itself. If Americans can accomplish this, we may then have something worthwhile to teach the world about democracy. **NEO**

Deborah Green was the political director of the Washington, DC-based Rainbow Lobby, Inc., which advocated on behalf of U.S. and international democracy causes on Capitol Hill between 1985 and 1992. She subsequently became a partner in Ross & Green, which represented Americans United with the Congolese People from 1993 to 1995.

Notes

- 1 Francis Fukuyama. "The Neo-Conservative Moment," *The National Interest*. Number 76, Summer 2004. pp. 57-68.
- 2 "Local Elections; 31st Congressional District; Dymally Criticized for Supporting Mobutu," *Los Angeles Times*. May 31, 1990. p. B-3.
- 3 Translated by D. Green.
- 4 "Regarding Democratic Changes and Violations of Human Rights in Zaire," *Congressional Record – House*. 102nd Congress, 1st Session. Vol. 137, No. 171. November 19, 1991.
- 5 United States Senate, Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations. Hearing on the Current Situation in Zaire. 102nd Congress, 1st Session. November 6, 1991.
- 6 *Public Papers of the President: William J. Clinton – 1993*. Vol. 1, p. 1294.

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becoming (bē kum'in)

vi. **1** coming to be **2** growing to be; changing or developing into by growth