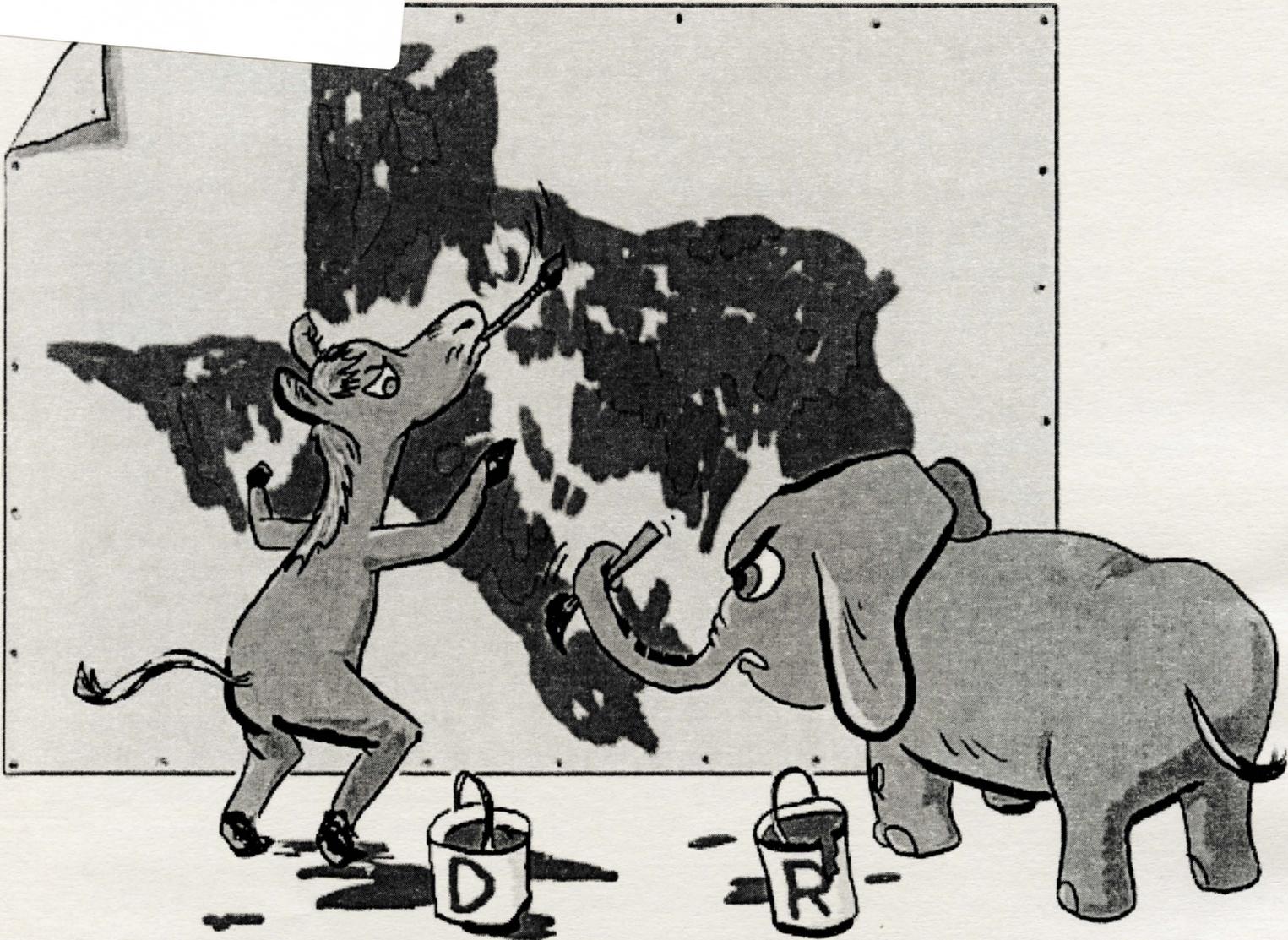


Martin Firestone
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The Challenger

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This Issue's Theme:

- American Politics

Spring, 2008 Challenger Staff:

- Jennifer O'Connor (editor)
- Jessica Chang
- Annie Rohrbacher

Guest Writer:

- Michael Balaban



Harper College

Go Forward[®]

The Struggle of Modern Leadership

By Michael Balaban, Honors Program Student and Guest Writer to *The Challenger*

The year was 1876, and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden was the apparent victor of the presidential election with 4,285,992 popular votes more than those earned by Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, who held 4,033,768 votes. Hayes walked away with 185 electoral votes to Tilden's 184, however, and the presidency as well (Infoplease.com).

In 1888 this situation repeated itself, as Republican candidate Benjamin Harrison fell notably short of his Democratic opponent Grover Cleveland's popular vote count, with only 5,440,216 votes to Cleveland's 5,538,233, a minority by 98,017 total votes. But despite that,

Harrison was awarded 233 electoral votes, and Cleveland only 168, and Harrison assumed the presidency (Infoplease.com).

112 years later, in the 2000 presidential election, Republican George W. Bush took the presidency on his 271 electoral votes to Democratic opponent Al Gore's 266, even though Mr. Gore won the popular vote by 543,895 (half a million!) individual ballots (Infoplease.com).

Finally, on January 10th of 2007, George Bush introduced policy regarding a troop surge in Iraq, and he did so in the face of mounting public disfavor of the war itself, even amongst his own constituency. On July 11th of 2007, Gallup released poll results indicating that 62% of Americans opposed the war in general, while only 36% felt that it was justified in any way (Gallup.com). Still, Mr. Bush pressed on with his most un-favored plan.

What do all of these things have in com-

mon? To me they are all symbols of how the power of the average person in America is diminished in relation to the power of the top 1% of wealthy, corporate-friendly Americans, politicians, and foreign investors. Since we were children, it has been pounded into our heads by teachers, mentors, and loved ones that "You, and just you alone, can make a difference." It sounds good, and it's nice to hear, but is it true? Was it ever true, and will it be true in decades down the road? The people elected Tilden, Cleveland, and Gore, but the "elections" went to Hayes, Harrison, and Bush. The people clamored for less war in Iraq, and Mr. Bush gave them more. In fact, even when banded together as one voice, multitudes of Americans' choices and opinions fall upon deaf ears, making one wonder where our government by the people and for the people has gone.

"... what happens to the unifying power of one that Gandhi, Lincoln, and even Castro once held?"

In my eyes, a major part of this problem is the lack of power in any one person's hands to affect changes in government policy in America,

and this seems true whether he/she serves as a politician or an activist. In our past, social and political movements, whether supported by a majority or a minority of people, often had one charismatic and devoted figurehead at the front of the charge. Many names come to mind when we think of those movements, from Adams and Hamilton in revolutionary times, to Lincoln during the Civil War, to Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy during the American Civil Rights Movement of the turbulent 1960s. I believe that it is, in the current American climate, difficult -- maybe not entirely impossible, but next to impossible -- to be a single character with the ability and opportunity (i.e., resources and money) to sweep the masses toward something like a revolution. Again, I question the power of one.

That lack of leadership is also present globally, not just here in the United States; many countries and governments, too many to list, face the same internal divisions that lead to immobility and inaction on the important issues of today. Genocide in Darfur, armed rebellion in Kenya, assassinations in Pakistan, hotly contested elections in Mexico, and the list goes on. With all of those and other internal religious, political, and social battles being fought all over the world, what happens to the unifying power of one that Gandhi, Lincoln, and even Castro once held?

In other words, I am asking where today's great heroes and leaders of the world are hiding. Even more relevant, why are they hiding? Even more relevant, do they even exist, and if they do not now exist, will they ever? This brings me back to the election statistics that I've listed (see above); to me, those stats are indicative of not only the lack of power we hold as a unified voice but also the more disheartening influences on Americans and citizens of the world, influences that lead us darkly to believe that we have no power as individuals to change things.

If an impassioned soul with a cause looks

at circumstances and events such as those, one wonders how he/she would come to feel able to make a difference, either alone or with the backing of the masses. Like the Whack-A-Mole game at Chuck-E-Cheese, who wants to stick his/her head up to lead when it is a virtual certainty that the mallet of seemingly insurmountable resistance and opposing fanaticism will come down, and not gently?

What other factors contribute to the paralysis in the emergence of world leadership? After much brainstorming, discussion, and research, the following rose to the surface and became apparent. Aside from the climate of repression aforementioned, there is a vast range of issues needing attention. How can one stand up and rally everyone's attentions and passions to end genocide in Darfur half a world away when this same person -- let's call him an American Joe Schmoe -- is just coming off his double-shift at Target or the Jewel Grocery, worrying on his drive home about the economy more than anything else? How can a global leader ask the UN to send troops into Kenya when wars are going on in a dozen other countries, all of which also deserve the very same troops and resources? And how can that same American Joe Schmoe be coaxed to ignite his passion for Kenya (etc.) to action that makes a difference?

Another problem with the emergence of leaders and figureheads is the sense of isolation experienced by world populations today. Contrary to the perceived effects of communications technology expansion (which supposedly brings the world closer together than ever), what actually results is the magnification of the differences between global and even local communities. As information pours in about every possible region of the earth, we begin to realize that our own personal views and priorities are not shared by as many people as we once believed. The result of such perceived isolation of perspective is the tendency to act locally, as opposed to globally, thereby limiting the base of support for any issue, as

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The Times Are (Radically) Changing

By Annie Rohrbacher

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” Therein resounds the famous foundational words of our government, yet we still see minority issues breaking out like those zits you thought cleared up last week.

Feminists in the early 1990s had to fight the quiet-housewife stereotype to give women the essential civil right to vote, while African Americans have cast their ballots under fear of hate crimes as recently as the 1970s. Now, in her battle for the oval office, presidential candidate Hilary Clinton is fighting a reputation of being un-feminine, wooden, and having a “programmed laugh.” Even worse, fears that candidate Barack Obama may be assassinated led to his being assigned Secret Service body guards in 2007. Do we dare call this progress?

This actually is not the first time America has seen female or black presidential candidates; campaigns run by minorities go back to the 1960s. Margaret Chase Smith ran for the Republican nomination in 1964. In 1984, according to the Center for American Women and Politics of Rutgers University, Geraldine Ferraro won the nomination for Vice President. Rev. Jesse Jackson also ran for the Democratic Party in that year, and again in 1988, but he never won the nomination. Another African-American, Al Sharpton, ran in 2004. Not until now, though, has America seen a minority candidate with a real shot at winning. Even more momentous is that two traditional longshots are running at the same time, and against each other! Looking at America’s expansive white-male presidential history, one wouldn’t think that those current Democratic Party candidates would be front runners. However, it is their unorthodox faces that grace the newspaper pages every day.

While the position of the first lady has been occupied by amazing women of influence and motivation, the stereotype is that the ideal first lady should stay home to bake cookies in between volunteer jobs rather than get on the Senate floor with a powerful voice. Obviously, Americans still hold gender expectations that could transcend real political issues, but this election flips those beliefs upside down; now, a woman is getting ready to step into a man’s office.

Along with the pressure of that domestic stereotype, our current female candidate has fought a series of political battles. “There’s a lot of Clinton hatred in this country, and I don’t know why,” said Harper College Political Science professor Richard Krupa. One reason for that hostility is, ironically, her political experience in the Senate. With Senator Obama touting a campaign for a fresh face in Washington, voters are being turned to someone who hasn’t spent much time in the Senate. For the first time ever, a candidate’s experience is working against her.

Krupa, however, praised Clinton’s humility in her Senate position. He remarked that the Senate is normally the “old boys’ club” and that they didn’t even have a women’s bathroom until recently. “She had no problem with the way the Senate works,” he continued, “She didn’t just say ‘Listen to me because of who I am.’” He went on to note that, “You never see her doing anything fun,” and that to win an election “these are images you have to make in people’s eyes.”

Obama, with his campaign focusing on a fresh face in Washington, may have grasped the image needed to win. Krupa noted Obama’s strengths: he is running a campaign based on uniting the country, and in turn he has broken racial boundaries. Obama has done a miraculous job of pushing his race to the sidelines and grabbing both black and white votes. However, Krupa added that “We’ve never really elected someone that hasn’t been a moderate,” and that is a challenge the firmly liberal Obama must address.

Obama is definitely the “golden child” of the Democratic Party and seems to be scoring big points with youth, some of whom appreciate his “common-man” roots and appeal. Residing

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in Hyde Park, he pays \$20 for haircuts and dines with his family at local restaurants, according to a January 24th publication in the *Daily Herald*. His foothold in pop culture is undeniable: he won a Grammy for his audio book, "Dreams from My Father" and "has been mentioned in songs by Neil Young and rapper Common," says the *Daily Herald* article.

"Most voters vote on personality and character," said Krupa, and obviously the pop-culture limelight has won adoration from young people. Say what you will about political parties and the faith of the candidates, most voters are clearly swayed by a level of comfort associated with someone sharing a common creed or culture; the two Democratic hopefuls, Clinton and Obama, are hoping they can win over women and minorities who identify with them. However, enough of those people need to show up on Election Day for this to truly be a history-making election. According to AP writer Allen Breed, "The latest census figures indicate that while 71 percent of voting-eligible whites are registered, the rate drops to 61 percent among blacks."

Recent election primaries have taken a positive road, though. Obama has shown he can win white votes in Iowa and make black votes count in South Carolina and many other states. As almost anyone half awake knows, by now Obama *is* the leading contender for the Democratic nomination. Though, with her recent victories in Ohio and Texas, Ms. Clinton is still very much alive. Perhaps this will be the year where minorities will not only swing the vote but finally have a positive role model and representation as Commander in Chief. This will definitely be the election of the century. Many other countries have put women leaders into place, and even had women presidents. The United States has belatedly stepped up to the challenge of a new, dynamic government and come November, history will be made. ■

OBAMA RISING, BUT WHY? HOW YOUNG VOTERS MATTER IN THIS ELECTION

By Jessica Chang

Politics has long been considered a topic of interest more for the grown-ups. However, the under-30 age group has been voting in numbers not seen since 1972, the year when the voting age was lowered to 18. Recent polls by TIME show that the percentage of 18-to-29-year-olds who say that they've been following the presidential campaigns has risen remarkably from 13% in 2000 to 74% in 2008. Furthermore, and not too surprisingly, when asked which political party they feel understands the needs of people like themselves, 46% of the under-30 set chose the Democratic Party, while 33% chose the Republican party and the remaining 21% responded with "neither," "both," or "don't know."

Why the sudden surge in interest in politics

for young people, especially on the Democratic side? Some believe that the younger generation is just as frustrated as their elders by the incompetence of Washington. However, the younger crowd has more at stake in the coming years. It seems that the typically heated political issues of the past – abortion, crime, and affirmative action – are not the most urgent matters in the minds of today's youths. Instead, according to recent polls, the top three concerns of 18-to-29-year-olds are: being able to afford health care (62% worry about this), how the war in Iraq is being handled (59%), and being able to support themselves with a stable job in today's economy (58%).

Furthermore, young people are dissatisfied with the overall nature of politics, such as the perceived impediments of the system, the scheming of special interest groups, and public biases that are manipulated by the media. When asked if they felt whether things in this country are heading in the right or wrong direction, an overwhelming 72% responded with "wrong." But people being unhappy and pessimistic about politics is nothing

new; such an attitude is usually what gets blamed for apathy in the voting population. Why then is it different this time around, particularly with young voters turning out in unprecedented numbers? It can't just be because a bunch of celebrities told young people to "Vote or Die" during the last elections.

Some believe that the difference is that the kids have found a hero in Barack Obama. As TIME writer David von Drehle notes, "For a group of voters with no memory of a time before Bushes and Clintons, Obama is a fresh face." To an 18-year-old voter today, "there is nothing new about a Clinton replacing a Bush"; the first time it happened, the voter would have been just 2 years old. Therefore, Hillary Clinton can talk about "change," but in his/her frame of reference, the young voter may perceive Obama as a more likely representation of a new direction.

Accordingly, when asked who they would vote for if the primary or caucus in their state if it were held today, Barack Obama was the top choice at 29% for the under-30 set, with Hillary Clinton in second place with 20% and candidates Guiliani, McCain, Huckabee, Edwards, Romney, and "undecided" making up the remaining 51%. Furthermore, 53% of this age group agreed that the word "inspirational" is good description for Obama over the other candidates.

Some believe that for these young voters, Barack Obama personifies real change and a new way. Even beyond his platform, these voters recognize that he does not look like, sound like, or have the background of the historically typical candidate. Those who do not support Obama are quick to point out that he lacks experience; there have even been comments made that the other candidates probably have pairs of socks that have logged in more hours in the Senate. And yet, to the young voter, this newness can actually come across as an asset.

"Obama's inexperience means he comes

in with a fresh look and isn't quite as jaded by the political system as most other candidates are," posits a 26-year-old University of Denver law student in von Drehle's TIME article. A 21-year-old senior at Claremont McKenna College in California agrees: "He's new and modern and breaking with the past." Unlike voters of the past, today's under-30 voters are not impressed by long Washington résumés. On the contrary, they are more likely to feel distrust when it comes to these candidates. Young Democrats who elected a Congress in 2006 based upon promises regarding issues like Iraq and health care are especially likely to be wary, as the gap between what was promised and what the Democratic Congress was actually able to deliver has widened.

Beyond just the "freshness" appeal, Obama speaks the language of the young when he talks about possibility. He has been criticized for speaking too broadly when it comes to changing the dynamics of politics, but some believe that his airiness on the details actually strikes young voters as a different kind of insight. A 21-year-old Washington University senior explains it like this: "What Obama brings to the forefront is the issue of process. It's not just what gets done but how it gets done; the morality of the process matters. Being honest, open, and inclusive is an issue in itself."

In other words, it may be better to worry about the details as they come, but the overall attitude and approach of a candidate matters more. Young voters don't necessarily care to hear the details of fake promises spelled out for them; they want a candidate whose integrity is in the right place. For many, this candidate seems to be Obama. Of course, these views are far from unanimous among the under-30 set, von Drehle points out. As one 21-year-old political-science major at Emory University puts it, "If we were electing someone on the basis of their ability to give great speeches, then Obama would be a great choice. But Hillary Clinton outshines the rest of the field with her experience, and I just don't think

we can afford to let another candidate get on-the-job training.”

But despite his lack of experience, Obama was the first of the candidates who had the insight to tap into the energy of young voters who are hungry for the kind of change he appears to offer. Indeed, the figures in his favor in the polls mentioned earlier did not happen by chance or just because he comes across as charismatic to bright-eyed youths. It was all the result of finding his supporters and getting them to organize and promote. Early on, Obama recognized a specific element about the Iowa caucuses that became an integral part of his campaign strategy. Holding its caucuses earliest in the nation, the state of Iowa allows almost-18-year-olds to vote as long as they will turn 18 before the general elections. This exception makes most high-school seniors eligible.

Most candidates overlooked this group of voters, but Obama took notice and did something unprecedented in politics by making them his priority target group. After his rallies across the state of Iowa, he invited student leaders from nearby schools to his meet-and-greets backstage; such an invitation is generally only extended to local VIPs and fundraisers. Obama also hired the same people who organized Rock the Vote in 2004 as his youth-vote coordinators. They decided to make the mobilization of the student vote a vital, tangible aspect of his campaign, beyond just a gimmicky slogan like “Vote or Die.” Obama put the bulk of his campaigning funds into radio and television ads aimed at students. His team then organized a student-to-student phone tree that reached tens of thousands of dorm rooms and cell phones. Students at colleges across the country met at various Obama headquarters to discuss various person-to-person campaigning strategies for their campuses.

Obama’s intuition was right on. His strategy achieved its first success with the Iowa caucuses, which was supposed to be a cakewalk for Clinton. Enthusiastic Democrats of all ages

turned out for the first caucuses at a 90% increase, but even more remarkably, the turnout for the under-30 group was up by 135%, according to TIME. The young voters gave Obama over 400% more of their votes than the next closest competitor. He won by just under 20,000 votes. This upset over Clinton created what Bill Clinton called a “tidal wave” of surprise and excitement among young voters. Hillary Clinton was quick to respond with her own organizational know-how, forming legions of supporters from the working-class, women, and older Democrats. If it weren’t for his edge among young voters, Obama would have easily fallen out of the running.

In the other state caucuses that followed, he continued to utilize the strategy that worked for him in Iowa, with success. Young voters in New Hampshire favored Obama over other candidates by 3 to 1; it was 2 to 1 in Nevada; and in Michigan, 50,000 voters under age 30 voted “Uncommitted,” as only Clinton’s name appeared on the ballot. According to a national survey by CNN, young voters prefer Obama over Clinton by 3 to 2, but in actual balloting, he is doing significantly better than that figure. His success among under-30 voters has far surpassed any other candidates’ in any party. For example, Obama got more of the young vote in South Carolina than all the Republican candidates combined.

However, it is interesting to note that the bulk of Obama’s success with young voters was among the 18-to-24-year-old subgroup. According to Politico writer Ben Adler, Clinton actually was able to receive 37% of the votes among the 25- to 29-year-olds, while Obama got 35%. One reason for this difference between the younger and older subgroups may be that Clinton appeals more to non-college youths, while Obama is popular on college campuses. Furthermore, while Obama’s head-in-the-clouds idealism strikes a chord with the youngest of the young, Clinton points out that she is “working in the trenches,” and this realism may appeal more to voters in their late twenties. Clinton’s strength is her field operations in urban

“Obama Rising,” continued from page 7

areas, where she is more likely to reach young professionals. On the other hand, support for Obama has become somewhat of a social phenomenon on college campuses, especially with the help of social networking sites like Facebook. Non-college young professionals are more isolated and not nearly as likely to join together as mass supporters for Clinton the way college students rally for Obama.

The truly astonishing thing about Obama’s process is the way that his political attitude, campaign strategy, and base of support all back each other up. Obama emanates change, which attracts the youth audience (the group in society that has always represented change) and inspires them to vote and make a difference – which comes full circle by validating his message that change is possible. A 19-year-old Washington University student noted that the success of the Iowa caucuses was like flipping a switch among the students on his campus: “People see that he can win, and they are moving off the fence.”

If Obama has been able to motivate this kind of change in the young voting population, the example set by his process could potentially alter the politics of a society long conditioned to follow the passions and trends of its youths. Only time will tell. But for now, the feeling that they are a part of making a difference in history is enough for Obama’s young supporters to keep up the momentum of his campaign success. After all, 83% of young voters surveyed believe that this election will have a significant impact on the country that they feel is already heading in the wrong direction. “I am a believer that change can happen,” says a 25-year-old student at St. Louis Community College. “So-called Washington experience has given us an unjustified war, an economy slipping, the dollar losing its value, health care impossible to afford. I’m telling my friends they can make a difference this time. They can vote.”

Voter apathy, especially among the young, has long been considered a problem in this coun-

try. But through one candidate’s insight and strategy of making young voters a priority, the young vote finally, really matters. Furthermore, witnessing this new change is what has inspired confidence in people of all ages that real change on a greater scale is possible. For a country that many agree is on the wrong track, this model for change and the renewed enthusiasm it brings in voters may be just the right thing. In addition, it may open the eyes of people like me who have never previously followed elections because they suspected that politics are skewed and flawed and that one vote would not matter. Of course, no system is flawless, and of course, in the grand picture, one vote does not make a significant impact. But witnessing the recent youth vote phenomenon does inspire a certain amount of faith that perhaps momentum towards change and integrity in the system is possible. ■

“The Struggle,” continued from page 3

well as limiting the willingness of people to take a stand for larger issues that impact more than their own communities.

Last, we live in a world obsessed with compromise. Moderation is viewed as the prudent approach to any issue. Implicit within this is a desire to avoid conflicts, the alienation of opposition, and the at-any-price avoidance of the extremist (or even “hard-line”) label. Extremism in any form is frowned upon and worthy of scorn and ostracism from majorities and support bases due to recent world events. Any position identified as extreme, whether worthy or not of such a label, becomes repulsive to those who wish to distance themselves from that word’s negative baggage. Mr. Reasonable does not wish to be a radical, and this is probably wise, but maybe the lot of us have grown so afraid of disturbing the status quo that we are, finally, nothing at all.

Hostility awaits anyone who would take a solid stance for or against any important issue, a solid stance that is necessary to garner a support

base now generally unwilling to stand up and be associated with anything but moderation. World history shows that it takes strong, outspoken leaders to create the leaps that have characterized human progression in terms of societal evolution and moral advancement. In our present-day world, it will take an outspoken and unafraid person to stand up and make a difference. Not only will this person or these people have to overcome the struggles and circumstances facing similar people in the past, but he or she will also confront the new climate of repression, fear, isolation, and perceived ineffectiveness today.

Where we will find a leader such as that, I do not profess to know, but we need him, or we need her, more and more desperately with every passing day. ■

Nationalism in Reverse

An Editor's Note

The other day I noticed a political poster stuck in somebody's yard and something about it seemed a little strange. I drove by it again the next day and still didn't know why it bothered me, but a few minutes later I realized it must have been the clover. It was an ad to elect Cary Collins, for circuit court judge.... (more on page 12)

The Holy Ballot

By Jennifer O'Connor

This election year, the topic of religion in politics has enjoyed a remarkable revival. Even a year ago, Americans struggled with the knowledge that Barack Obama had attended a Muslim school and debated whether Hillary Clinton, after former President (Bill) Clinton's scandal, would gain enough respect in the eyes of the country

to have her own chance at the presidency. Now Republican candidates are having their turn under the spotlight as Mike Huckabee professes his Christian values and Mitt Romney defends his Mormonism. Publicized political discussions, and interviews with presidential contenders from both parties and their representatives, often include some mention of the candidates' religion. The public is fixated, but perhaps they are directing their attention in the wrong place.

In the past, the often-quoted phrase, "separation of church and state," has sat at the core of religious questions in the United States' political discussions. The expression itself comes from Thomas Jefferson's so-called "Wall of Separation" letter. One rather long sentence from the document reads as follows:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man & his god, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state.

For the most part, religious movements throughout the country's history have been felt on a civic level rather than on one of broad national leadership. Jefferson's wall has thus kept a remarkable degree of integrity through American history. Before the elections captured the spotlight, Great Awakenings and sundry aside, schools had been the focus of a very broad religion-centered debate. Up to that point, state education was the farthest religion had gone concerning the political realm in decades. Largely within the past ten years or so, Jefferson's wall has been besieged by campaigns for the rights of various religions and systems of belief to be recognized, and given equal presence, in both state and federal affairs.

Now, for the first time since Kennedy's campaign in the early 1960s, when some voters feared a regime led by the Pope, the topic of religion has become glaringly prominent in national politics.

Last year, Barack Obama underwent deep scrutiny by the public because of his having attended a Muslim school. As part of the country's reaction to September 11th, many voters showed serious concern over whether it was safe or wise to elect a president with ties to Islam. Until recently, Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney have been the main focus of this year's religious probing, and the fact that a majority of Christians vote Republican has been widely broadcasted. Prior to the current elections, former president Bill Clinton had been criticized for acting immorally, creating a hindrance to Hillary's campaign and initiating a discussion in politics which became inflamed over the course of the next three presidential terms.

During some peacemakers' recent attempts to reconcile the differences between Christianity and Islam, the proclamation that all religions essentially strive for peace within humanity has become nearly as prevalent as the plea for separation of church and state. The electorate and the media continue to fixate on candidates' particular religious ideals as a deciding point on who to vote for; the peacemakers' message enjoys little true support. In limited ways, the public's inquiry into the religious views held by the potential new president may be a good thing.

Because religion is a highly personal matter, voters may seek to key in on the subject when choosing whom to place in the White House and thus soften their doubts. Christians, for instance, should be pro-

A
"By-the-Way":

One might notice a contradiction in the text of Jefferson's letter: If government has legitimate power to control actions, and the exercise of religion is in fact an action, rule over the practice of religion may actually fall within the scope of federal management. Only a man's choice to harbor a given belief or set of beliefs, by virtue of being non-physical, could be barred from government interference. Thomas Jefferson's conclusion, however, says that all facets of religion should be left untouched by legal authority. Also, no provision is made that the issue of religion itself should be barred from politics, or that the practice of religion in schools should be discouraged.

life in following with Jesus' teachings of love and the sixth commandment. A candidate who claims to be a true Christian must hold that value in his heart and be personally determined to support pro-life issues, just as the Christian voter him or herself would. Voters struggle to relate to those they elect to office on a personal level, a connection which might foster stronger confidence.

Certainly, the commander in chief should not be affiliated with a group that America deems dangerous. The country's leader should not be tied to corruptions. Domestic and religious issues should be left to this or that institution, or none at all. Each of the front-running candidates has had to answer to at least one of those public concerns in proving their trustworthiness. In the case of Obama, at least, much of the electorate's anxiety has subsided as his charisma, character, and the promise of a new prospect for the country have risen to the fore.

While a degree of concern over a candidate's religion may offer some benefits, too much of a fixation should probably be avoided. Religion itself is a poor indicator of a person's values because it is followed by human beings who have personal opinions and varying degrees of conviction on many topics. Additionally, many religions

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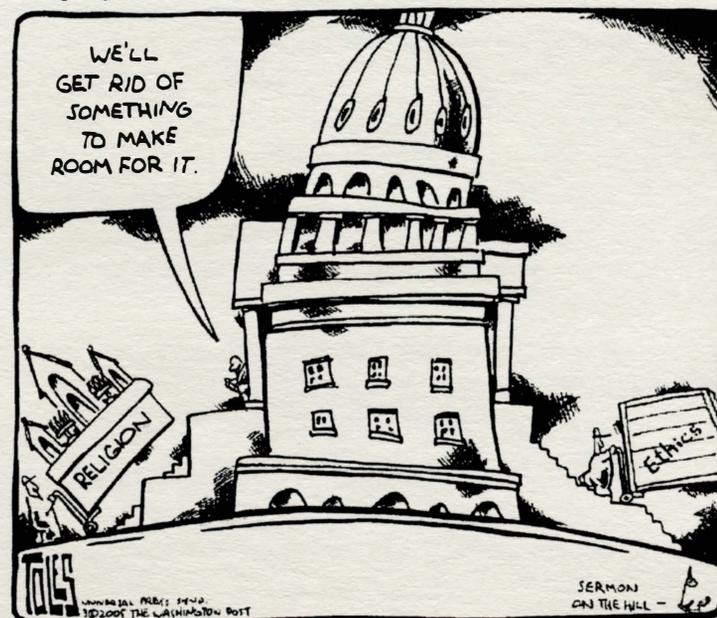
are so foreign to Americans that they may lead to more questions than answers, and may direct inquiries away from the important things a voter needs to know. How steadfast a candidate is in supporting certain causes and how easily he might be persuaded against a cause should be much more important in a political campaign than what god or gods, if any, that candidate believes in. Whether the future president, as commander in chief, can wield the country's military power with competence must override our curiosity over whether his creed calls war right or wrong. Other world leaders may not share in the same points of view as our own leader. In the case of war, moreover, the candidate's personal view will take precedence over his religious dogma.

A sore point with some conservative Americans is that the phrase "In God We Trust" has been relegated to the wearing edge of the new dollar coin, while it was once given a place of prominence on the face of our metal currency. Where a majority of Americans do, in one way or another, consider themselves Christian, the Christian faith seems to have established itself as something of an honorary national religion. For many voters, changing the status quo is a dangerous and frightening prospect, and when a candidate subscribes to a faith beyond the mainstream, voters may feel uncomfortable. As references to God in the public sphere come under attack, many voters are stirred to defend their religions by selecting a leader who claims allegiance to the same system of belief. For the country as a whole, it is difficult to argue for the benefits of such a disposition. While people become angry with the government for involving itself in matters of religion (e.g. prohibiting prayer in schools), the people themselves are attacking Jefferson's proverbial wall by lifting a candidate to office who is representative of popular religion.

The question of religion should be cast aside in politics. If voters want to know where a candidate stands on a certain issue, they should direct their questions accordingly. Comforting but foggy words such as "Christian" should give way

to more concrete concepts such as "no" to abortion of any kind, "yes" to gay marriage, or any number of other quantifiable positions. That our country is engaging in a "holy war" is contradictory enough to the ideal set forth by Thomas Jefferson; let us not also entertain a "holy ballot."

Religion plays a part in American politics, whether it should or not. Voters want to elect someone to office who they perceive to be like them; if the majority of voters are Christian, chances are that the majority will feel more comfortable with a Christian president. People can identify most easily with a system of belief which is well-known, and it is easier to accept the general outline of what goes along with a name like "Christian" or "Islam" than it is to delve into the specifics of an individual's values, convictions, motives, and morals. Religious groups are important swing groups for candidates to win over, and so they welcome the public's faith-related inquiries. An American politician can brandish his religion as a weapon against another, and at the same time use it as a shield against having to divulge anything really specific to his audience. As the United States fights the Jihadist movement (and so also participates in it), the question of religion becomes even more important in the view of the electorate. After the elections, though, discussion on the issue will likely subside to the drone of stale debates over exactly what part religion should play in schools. ■



“Nationalism” (an editor’s note), continued from p. 9

I thought it was strange that there would be a political sign flaunting the fact that Cary Collins is Irish. It was green with a few clovers in the upper right corner, a nice looking sign I suppose. But why should his nationality, or the pride he quite obviously feels in his Irish roots, be displayed in such a fashion, presumably with the intent of influencing our decision to elect him to an American office?

Even if the neighborhood is largely Irish, I’d like to hope that they will look beyond common heritage (which I’m sure involves several generations of removal in most cases anyway) and consider what policies the candidate is standing for.

I noticed a similar problem while attending an international high school in England. Many of the American students there felt inclined to act as if they were from a country other than their own. China, India, Sweden, and Ireland were some of the most common. They would constantly talk about how these other countries were superior to the USA and try to convince others that they were really Chinese at heart (or Indian, Swedish, Irish, etc). Recognizing the good in other cultures (I love Ireland and have always been fascinated by China) is a good thing. But I think these students took it a little too far, and I wonder if, on some level, the same thing is happening here at home. ■

Honors Announcements

* Inspiration Café: On Saturday, May 10, Mr. Wilson will take up to four Honors students to the Inspiration Café, a soup kitchen-ish place in Chicago’s Uptown neighborhood (Wilson and Broadway streets). If you would like to go, please let Mr. Wilson know by email: awilson@harpercollege.edu.

* Do you live in Schaumburg or Hoffman Estates? If so, you may be qualified for the Schaumburg/Hoffman Estates Rotary Club Transfer Scholarship. Please see the “Scholarships” link along the top of the Honors Program website: www.harpercollege.edu/cluborgs/honors/index.html.

* Summer 2008 *and* Fall 2008 Honors courses are already available through the “Courses” link on the Honors Program website. Summer (‘08) Honors courses:

- PSY 101 with Prof. Charles Johnston, Tues./Thurs., 1:10 - 3:45 p.m.
- HUM/HST 105 with Prof. Trygve Thoreson, Mon./Wed., 1:10 - 3:45 p.m.

Summer registration is now open! Please see Mr. Wilson for overrides.

THE KENNY ENDO TAIKO ENSEMBLE

The Honors Program is co-sponsoring a performance by Kenny Endo and his Taiko Drumming Ensemble on Tuesday, April 22, at 12:15 p.m. in the Performing Arts Center. The performance is FREE and open to the public, and it will surely be blood-poundingly thrilling. **Please come!**

