

MINORITY REPORT.

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Way back in the swamps and wallows of the election campaign, a friend of mine was curious enough to put the following challenge to a Clinton booster. Don't keep telling me why you like Bill, was the gravamen of this interrogatory, tell me why you like him so *much*. The response was brisk, honest and down to earth.

"Don't you get it?" said the hardened idealist. "It's our turn."

This was supposed to be the year of "getting it," and though I often didn't and still apparently don't, I mastered the above point with almost no difficulty at all. Now, as the turrets of a new Camelot burgeon above the landscape of Washington, I get it more clearly still. The telephone has become a daily oppression, with excited calls about the "head hunting" of some freedom-fighter or other onto the transition team—usually a person who led a life of blameless bipartisan complicity during the Reagan/Bush years. The most routine and mediocre political operatives are the subject of adoring and ethereal profiles, sometimes in courage. It's enough to make a cat laugh. And the demand to stay "on message" and "on the team" seems if anything to have intensified. It was inspiring to read an Op-Ed from Hamilton Jordan, now respectfully identified as Jimmy Carter's former Chief of Staff rather than as the recent shill for a barking Czarlet, and to learn that "message discipline" had been, and should remain, "the central element" in Clintonism. Jordan also recommended that the newcomers "pay more attention than we did to those 'old hands' who had direct experience in top government positions." Snatches from Capital conversation tend to cover the following bases, with the freshly "empowered" booster or boosterette invariably speaking as if he or she thought up the idea alone.

First, what about the Supreme Court? Surely all can agree that blah blah blah. You would never know that it was the Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee who made Clarence Thomas a Justice. You would never know that it was George Bush who made David Souter a Justice and who thus came as close to the disinterested and fastidious jurist as we were likely to get. Against this we can set the two hottest tips of the Clintonistas for the most elevated court in the land. One, Mario Cuomo, is a failed Governor of a large state who is a Roman Catholic without the cowardice of his convictions. Not only has this man maintained that there is no such thing as the Cosa Nostra; he has further maintained that those who assert the contrary are guilty of an ethnic slur. Another, Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, was the candidate of William F. Buckley in his long campaign to rid the Senate of the brave and decent Republican Lowell Weicker. So there



could even be some skepticism about upcoming appointments—not that skepticism is of any use in a climate of uncritical enthusiasm.

Whether or not you believe that the tenancy of the womb is the "litmus test" for everything, you may still rightly think that the law and its application is the determining issue. I propose an easy examination here. What will the new Justice Department do about the ruling-class crime wave through which the country has been passing? George Bush is under some pressure to announce pardons and amnesties, and so to leave the office he has desecrated and profaned "with all his imperfections on his head." Perhaps he will do this, or perhaps some rag of rectitude will adhere to him in defeat. If he tries for a pastiche of the Nixon-Ford transition, at least his motives will be plain. But if he doesn't dare, then watch out for a "wound healing," "put this behind us" initiative from the newcomers. The Iraq and Iran scandals, which, for illegal profit, applied divide-and-rule to the Middle East in order to involve this republic in war and to emaciate its remaining democratic procedures, *are* the litmus test. Lenience here will mean lenience, corruption and drift everywhere else. If the cover-up and shredding is put into reverse, and if we are not treated to a national unity, no-recriminations binge, I will eat this copy of *The Nation* in Macy's window or its nearest equivalent.

One has to learn to be a sore winner. One has to resign oneself to being a bore on innumerable subjects. (Yes, I do realize that careful readers knew that already.) The fact remains that throughout the past dozen years in which the locust fed to exhaustion, the Democrats were *in power*. They were in power on the Hill when the savings and loan outrage was devised. They were in power when Tip O'Neill and Jim Wright signed off on Lebanon, Grenada, the MX and, most disgracefully, "humanitarian aid" to the *contras*. They were in power when the go-ahead for Desert Storm was given. Look at the faces of Lloyd Bentsen, Sam Nunn, Dan Rostenkowski; every line on their features is the incision of some "power sharing" collusion. Do Clinton and Gore belong to them, as they seemed to in the course of the campaign? And why do people persistently say that Clinton likes to please everybody? He took care to please the Bentsens of this world but three times went well out of his way to give public offense to Jesse Jackson.

The *Zeitgeist* itself seemed to intone a call for "change" (the least novel term in the vocabulary of novelty). So what's changed and what's new? Without a shift to "our turn," the whole Democratic clientele would have become unsettlingly malcontent. Don't tell me Clark Clifford would not have been on the transition team if it were not for his recent unhappy entanglement with B.C.C.I. And any permanent disaffection of the Democratic elite is held, in Op-Ed quarters that forgave Bush for everything until last summer, to be bad for an orderly and smooth Administration by consensus. So let it not be overlooked, as the jobs and perks and glittering reputations are handed out, that the two-party consensus was and is the problem in the first place.

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