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201021 OBITER DICTA: EARLY AUGUST 2010

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201021 OBITER DICTA: EARLY AUGUST 2010
Steven Alan Samson

Sunday, August 1

http://townhall.com/columnists/BillOReilly/2010/07/31/no_winning_the_race/page/full

Newt Gingrich has identified what he calls "the secular socialist machine" as one aspect of a threefold threat to western civilization. In its undermining of our culture and economy, it resembles what Roger Scruton calls the "culture of repudiation."

The causes and consequences of "the revolution of mind" that has beset the rise of the "secular socialist machine" in Europe was carefully analyzed by Alexis de Tocqueville in his other great work, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. Subsequently, a number of scholars, among them Werner Sombart and Louis Hartz, argued that socialism failed to take root in America due to its lack of a feudal past. But the flaw in that argument became increasingly evident by the late 1960s. In "No Winning the Race," Bill O'Reilly examines what are perhaps the chief contributing causes of the rise of the secular socialist machine here.

"The essential divide in America right now is this: Does the country owe a debt to those who were wronged throughout history, or should we get past the past and drop the color and ethnic divisions? Opinion on the answer to this question is, of course, divided. And rarely are hearts and minds changed on the matter."

O'Reilly prefaces this conclusion by identifying what might be called "the efficient cause" of Newt Gingrich's secular socialist machine here in America. "Obama . . . well understands that he cannot get caught in the swamp of racial politics and still effectively lead the nation. So he is promoting expensive entitlements and tax-the-rich policies in trying to help poor Americans of all colors, believing African-Americans will benefit most of all." Like Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson before him, both of whom set the permanent administrative state into motion, he is greatly expanding the reach of the national government into every area of life and risks bankrupting the country in the process."

Monday 2

<http://www.bigquestiononline.com/features/in-self-defense>

In *Absence of Mind*, the novelist Marilynne Robinson presents a scholarly attack on the "modern, reductively materialist accounts of human consciousness that systematically exclude the testimony of subjectivity, of inner experience, from their understanding of the sources and impulses of the mind." In the process, according to the theologian David B. Hart, she directly confronts the work of Freud, Pinker, and Dawkins, among others.

"What Robinson's book shows perhaps most clearly is that reductionism is not a philosophy honestly distilled from experience, but a dogma imposed upon it. For

roughly a century and a half, Western culture has been falling ever more thoroughly under the sway of the prejudice that modern empirical science is not only the sole model of genuine truth but also capable of explaining all things. It is a strange belief, but to those who hold it sincerely, nothing is more intolerable than the thought that anything might lie beyond the probative reach of their 'mechanical philosophy.' And so the exclusion of interiority, and of the self's consciousness of itself, from their understanding of our humanity is simply inevitable, no matter how irrational or arbitrary that exclusion may be. 'Subjectivity,' writes Robinson, 'is the ancient haunt of piety and reverence and long, long thoughts. And the literatures that would dispel such things refuse to acknowledge subjectivity, perhaps because inability has evolved into principle and method.'

<http://article.nationalreview.com/print/?q=ODUyMjczZWVhMzY0OWU5YmM1YjkyMjcxZjUzZjEwOWI=>

This case of a religion professor who was fired for teaching the tenets of Catholicism is the sort of thing that could have been predicted decades ago. In fact, I devoted a chapter of my 1984 doctoral dissertation, *Cross Swords: Entanglements Between Church and State in America*, to "Scholastic Politics." Even then in 1984, the winnowing of academe to rid it of inconvenient Christian professors was fully evident. This piece entitled "Facebook Saves a Teacher" reinforces Marilynne Robinson's point about "subjectivity" in her Terry Lectures at Yale.

"'All religion is an essential part of the human story,' [Dr. Kenneth Howell of the University of Illinois] tells me, explaining why he became a religion professor in the first place. 'The humanities are about humanity, and so everyone should study religion to understand humanity. No one's education can be considered complete without the study of religion, whether one is personally religious or not. Further, the three great Abrahamic religions have been major forces in the history of the world and are still vibrant forces across the globe. To be ignorant of religion is to be ignorant of humanity.' Studying humanity, of course, is what university life should be about. After this fight, perhaps the University of Illinois's campus will be a little more aware of its own tendencies toward ignorance. That's a campus awareness trend that could afford to catch on."

"David French, a lawyer with the Alliance Defense Fund, which is representing Howell, underscores an important point: 'Dr. Howell's case illustrates the absolute intolerance that has long been emerging on campus towards any kind of dissent or disagreement against the prevailing sexual orthodoxy. It's as if the university community views traditional Christian ethics as the moral equivalent of racism and treats Christians in the same way it would treat a white-sheeted bigot.'"

"This leads to a simplistic, wrongheaded view of faith. 'Christianity is boxed in,' French argues. According to the caricature, dictated from the ivory tower, 'the 'good' Christian serves the poor, is always nice to everybody, and – above all – never offers any form of moral judgment. The 'bad' Christian may also serve the poor, and may also be exceedingly kind, but if he or she upholds a

biblical standard of sexual morality, then there is the risk of punitive action.'”

“‘The university has become a religious sculptor,’ French continues, ‘chipping away at the elements of Christianity it doesn’t like . . . until we are left with an image that no longer looks much like Jesus.’”

http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2010/08/graph_of_the_day_for_august_2.html

Here is another "hockey stick" graph, which only further underscores Marilynne Robinson's point about the authoritarianism of modern science, and which gives science the appearance of being a wholly-owned subsidiary of the national government.

Note to a Colleague:

The piece that I sent out on Friday (“The Essay Read Round the World”) introduced me to the three pieces linked to the beginning of the article. I plan to use Codevilla's lengthy analysis in Political Theory. It extends Bastiat's idea of legal plunder to virtually a theory of the rise of the New Class in America. This is much better than the pop sociology of a David Brooks (*Bobos in Paradise*) or a Thomas Friedman (*The World Is Flat*). I hope to see a new book from him soon.

Codevilla is good at showing the tragic dilemma with which today's resistance to tyranny must wrestle. "In this clash, the ruling class holds most of the cards: because it has established itself as the fount of authority, its primacy is based on habits of deference. Breaking them, establishing other founts of authority, other ways of doing things, would involve far more than electoral politics. Though the country class had long argued along with Edmund Burke against making revolutionary changes, it faces the uncomfortable question common to all who have had revolutionary changes imposed on them: are we now to accept what was done to us just because it was done? Sweeping away a half century's accretions of bad habits -- taking care to preserve the good among them -- is hard enough. Establishing, even reestablishing, a set of better institutions and habits is much harder, especially as the country class wholly lacks organization. By contrast, the ruling class holds strong defensive positions and is well represented by the Democratic Party. But a two to one numerical disadvantage augurs defeat, while victory would leave it in control of a people whose confidence it cannot regain.”

Tuesday 5

PS: I meant to add that the revolutionary character of the seizure of power described by Codevilla is the very thing Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy would have recognized and analyzed in *Out of Revolution*. I believe that Codevilla is largely correct in what steps must be taken, but reversing such a successful coup requires recognizing its true nature. In many ways Codevilla is bringing Tocqueville's idea of soft tyranny (the subject of Paul Rahe's recent book) and C. S. Lewis' *Abolition of Man* up to date. I also detected elements of *Cry Havoc!* If I recall correctly, Codevilla found a home for the

papers of its author, Ralph de Toledano, at Boston University. Codevilla's own books include *The Character of Nations* and *Advice to War Presidents*. In some ways, his work appears to reflect the efforts of James Burnham, whose *Suicide of the West* still seems deeply relevant half a century later.

Wednesday 4

http://townhall.com/columnists/ThomasSowell/2010/08/04/democrats_bite_democrats_part_ii/page/full

Thomas Sowell has started a series entitled "Democrats Bite Democrats." In Part II, among other things, he discusses the Congressional Budget Office's warnings about our current fiscal irresponsibility. Our "ruling class" is bankrupting the country. As always, its vehicle is legal plunder: subsidies, incentives, and privileges that are delivering the productive middle class into state-peonage.

Friday 6

http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/08/the_death_of_the_dollar.html

Almost thirty years ago, I read a book by Willard Cantelon entitled *The Day the Dollar Dies*. Cantelon, who had worked in banking before becoming a preacher, had a series of books on this theme, including *Money Master of the World*. Reading this reminded me of a saying attributed to Louis XV: After me, the deluge. The rampant inflation under Louis's successor helped trigger the French Revolution. One symbol of that critical moment was the cartoon of a priest and a nobleman riding a peasant. Today it would be a politician and a bureaucrat riding a taxpayer. It should be evident that a storm is brewing. Historically, the storming of the Bastille -- the trigger -- was followed by *La Grande Peur*, the Great Fear.

Saturday 7

<http://www.dianawest.net/Home/tabid/36/EntryId/994/See-No-Islam-Journalism.aspx>

Here is a year-old column by Diana West on the case of Riqfa Bary, the 17-year-old daughter of illegal immigrants from Sri Lanka. Last summer she fled to Florida, saying that she was in fear for her life following her conversion to Christianity.

More than six months ago, the girl was ordered returned to Ohio and placed in protective custody in a bid to reconcile her with her family. Subsequently, she was diagnosed with uterine cancer.

Earlier this week, a juvenile judge in Ohio declared that she will not be forced into a reunion with her family before she turns eighteen next week and that it is not in her best interest to be deported to Sri Lanka. She will now seek special immigration status.

http://www.wral.com/news/national_world/national/story/8093357/

Phyllis Chesler, who campaigned long and hard on her behalf, rejoices at this turn of events. <http://pajamasmedia.com/phyllischesler/2010/08/05/lord-god-free-at-last-rifqa-barys-victory-in-ohio/?singlepage=true>

http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2010/08/lemonade_stands_get_reprieve_m.html

The Multnomah County chairman's apology for the way health inspectors shut down a lemonade stand only further underscores the absurdity of the whole enterprise. Once the administrative state starts making such exemptions, it only demonstrates the intrusive nature of government regulations while illustrating its lack of a serious public safety purpose. If caveat emptor is good enough for kids, then why not for adults? Or is it because we have become such control freaks - regulate it if it moves and tax it if it changes hands - that we cannot see straight anymore?

Sunday 8

<http://pajamasmedia.com/victordavishanson/a-rather-angry-america/?singlepage=true>

Victor Davis Hanson illustrates many of the points Angelo Codevilla made in "America's Ruling Class" through a series of vignettes that describe "A Rather Angry America."

"A class war looms between retirees who want their sweet-heart obligations honored, and strapped, poorer taxpayers who feel about those bloated payouts as they do their underwater mortgages."

Hanson's home state, California, like several other states, faces a debt crisis of nightmarish proportions. In Illinois, East St. Louis plans to lay off 19 of its 62 police officers.

http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/illinois/article_dfb230c2-9bf3-11df-9731-0017a4a78c22.html

Just as Salinas faced the closure of three libraries a few years back, one city in New Jersey, Camden, is preparing to close its libraries and either sell off or destroy its book collection. "Dearth's Holocaust."

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/local/20100806_Camden_preparing_to_close_library_system.html

After decades of empire-building and nest-feathering, the gap between our fiscal means and taxpayers' ability to pay has reached the breaking point. And this time, Ross Perot and his pie charts are nowhere in sight. Is our collective self-loathing making us more fatalistic? It appears that, on the heels of the most recent binge of fiscal irresponsibility, a new social contract is being written out of financial desperation.

"In the age of Obama, there is no real contractual obligation: everything from paying back bondholders to fixing a BP penalty is, well, 'negotiable.' When the money runs out, the law will too. Law? There is no law other than a mandated equality of result."

Under such a lawless regime, Poe's image of a scythe-like pendulum seems apt. Our government has become one of Leonardo's imaginary war engines with whirling scythes designed to lop off the legs of enemies. Have We the People become the enemy, mere subjects fit only to be cowed and buffaloed? Animal Farm Redux.

We are being thrown back to the earliest days of the republic when mounting war debts threatened national bankruptcy. In Federalist, no. 30, Alexander Hamilton wrote: "How is it possible that a government, half supplied and always necessitous, can fulfill the purposes of its institution; can provide for the security, advance the prosperity, or support the reputation of the commonwealth? How can it ever possess either energy or stability, dignity or credit, confidence at home or respectability abroad?"

What Hamilton described 222 years ago is very like the world the Best and Brightest of the 60s and 70s have visited upon us. Who are these people? Codevilla describes them in "America's Ruling Class." Hanson's description of our media elite is even less flattering. "On the Internet recently appeared the pictures of the Journolist bunch, who at least between themselves gave up their usual pretense that the media was unbiased. With all due respect (confession: I was briefly mentioned by the list as someone that the racist card might work on in connection with the illegal immigration debate), they appear to the eye as a sort of nerdish group."

"They remind me of what we used to call the 'wimp table' at a pretty tough Selma High around 1970. It was there that the high school's handful of geeks, toadies, and picked-upon used to eat, under the protective eye of yard-duty teachers. The assumption was that with a few steps further onto the grounds, the entire sorry bunch was fair game for every bully on campus. And that sad outfit filters, disseminates, and arbitrates our news? Most from their writing and appearance seemed either neurotic overachievers or twenty-something bloggers who confuse calling someone something with erudition."

Has America become a high school for oversized adolescents? Our recent presidents seem to embody a number of high school stereotypes: the high school saxophonist, the baseball player/cheerleader, the high school basketball player.

So what comes next, a European-style high school? Codevilla provides some insight on pages 117-18 in *The Character of Nations* (1997):

"The European welfare state has grown mutatis mutandis under every party and ideology that has ruled Europe in this century -- laborism, fascism, Christian democracy, radicalism, and various kinds of conservatism. Regardless of country, it has had pretty much the same components -- pensions for old age and disability, unemployment compensation, health care, schooling and day care for children, and housing benefits, plus progressive taxation meant to pay for it all and to flatten disparities of income." But the bough has broken and the cradle is falling. School is out and Europe is facing demographic winter.

"Given the great number of programs, everyone in society is both a winner and a loser -- both at the same time and during different stages of life. In most circumstances, it is difficult to know whether one is getting more net benefit than one is paying for or vice versa. When the ratio of people who will enter

the workforce in coming decades to currently active workers is inferior to the current ratio of active workers to retirees, pay-as-you-go pension systems are obviously a bad deal for contributors."

That ratio continues to fall as winter approaches. I wrote about it three years ago in "The Grapes of Parnassos: Is Europe Withering on the Vine?" Back in the 1990s when Codevilla wrote these words about "The European Way," our states were complaining about unfunded mandates – and with good reason. Among other things, such mandates have now diverted so much state revenue and so perverted budgetary priorities that what they face today is outright bankruptcy. It is time to divest Congress and the administrative state it created of their power to impose such mandates. It is time to revive the Tenth Amendment and pull the plug on their funding. It is time to restore state governments to the considerable autonomy they enjoyed under the original federal Constitution of 1787.

<http://pajamasmedia.com/zombie/2010/08/05/slave-labor-conditions-at-sherrods-farm/>

Here is an item about Shirley Sherrod that should be filed in the "people who live in glass houses" drawer.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/dominic_lawson/article6814927.ece

A year has passed since the death of Edward Kennedy, who had passed the family torch the previous year to the current president. This piece, entitled "The Needy Little Boy Behind Ted the Titan," was written just after his death and offers a British take on our Citizen Kane. Its analysis could be applied to countless public figures, past and present.

"The most notable exponent of this [disjunction between private vice and public virtue] was the man who almost invented socialism, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He declared, 'I am the friend of mankind', but treated his wife and children with revolting heartlessness: he ordered her to send one after another of the infants she produced to institutions where two-thirds of those committed never reached their first birthday. Rousseau, who was at least honest about his own behaviour, wrote: 'How could I achieve the tranquillity of mind necessary for my work, filled with the domestic cares and noise of children?'"

"He believed the task of improving the lot of humanity absolved him from the need to nurture his own family. Dickens, with his unerring eye, characterized this moral delusion in Bleak House in the person of Mrs Jellyby, so devoted to the cause of starving Africans that she had no time for the care of her own children: the consequent wretchedness of their plight scarcely crossed her mind." [Of course, the author makes no such inference about the late Sen. Kennedy].

[http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/columns/Yale-chose-Shariah-over-U S - Constitution-8365416-63888332.html](http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/columns/Yale-chose-Shariah-over-U-S-Constitution-8365416-63888332.html)

This piece by Diana West, the author of *Death of the Grown-Up*, discusses the absence of a multi-level anti-Shariah strategy in the West. Since its publication last October, more voices have been added to the debate.

Monday 9

http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2009/11/the_liberal_colonization_of_am.html

Adrianna Ramirez discusses the liberal colonization of the Hispanic community in the United States.

"Liberal colonizers reiterate time and time again that Americans must be saved from themselves and told what to do, because they follow the tenets of noblesse oblige, an obligation stemming from a privileged guilt or an arrogant belief that their acts of kindness will make amends to the poor and those who don't know better, and garner them the power of worship. Liberal colonizers love to be worshipped for their good deeds, though it comes at a cost of a loss of freedom, more taxation, and the scarcity of opportunity."

Tuesday 10

<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2010/08/04/phyllis-chesler-rifqa-bary-convert-christianity-ohio-florida-sri-lanka-muslim/>

Today is the day Rifqa Bary turns eighteen. Yesterday, the blogger Dymphna on Gates of Vienna disclosed that, following her surgery and treatments, a recent scan showed no evidence of cancer.

In this piece Phyllis Chesler provided context last week for understanding the significance of her case.

"I can only hope and pray that the magistrate who is hearing Rifqa Bary's case is brave enough to educate herself about the realities of apostasy, the unsettling, unpleasant truth about Islamic religious apartheid and allow Rifqa to remain in state custody, apply for American citizenship or perhaps for political asylum."

"Like Magdi Allam, Rifqa might require many police officers or even a federal witness protection program."

"But in America, where she lives, we take religious freedom seriously. It is why our ancestors came here."

http://townhall.com/columnists/ChuckNorris/2010/08/10/gov_jan_brewer_vs_chuck_norris/page/full

Chuck Norris rises to the defense of Gov. Jan Brewer for taking the cross-border invasion seriously and cites Story's *Commentaries* on her behalf. By comparison, the president has deplored only one "invasion," the BP oil spill, to which he responded rather weakly after several weeks of delay.

Fans of the governor have established a website to honor her willingness to tangle with the political establishment. Norris was especially tickled by some of the local folklore:

--Jan Brewer flosses with barbed wire from the border.

--Jan Brewer eats scorpions for breakfast and burps up rattlesnakes.

--Jan Brewer taught Chuck Norris how to do a roundhouse kick.

Note to a Colleague:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/mar/24/darfurrefugeesinisrael>

I was chasing down reports from 2007 that Israel had admitted hundreds of Darfurian refugees when I ran across this piece in the leftist Guardian. I imagine that the old displaced persons issue (Palestinians were granted special status early in UN history) has much more than a tangential relationship to human trafficking.

http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2010/08/graph_of_the_day_for_august_10.html

Here is a graphic illustration of how narrow the president's base of support was in November 2008 when compared with other "landslide" elections. As Jay Cost noted, "Most of [Obama's] political support comes from the big cities and the inner suburbs. The exurbs, small towns, and rural areas generally voted Republican (with notable exceptions in the Upper Midwest)."

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=40494>

If a clock tower in Mecca sets the international time standard and no one from the West can hear it chime, how will we know the time?

Note to a Colleague:

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/Desperate-stakes-for-women-under-Sharia-1008710-100300154.html>

Time has a cover article on the plight of women under sharia.

Fifty years ago, the feminist Phyllis Chesler went through a period of helplessness when he was brought to Afghanistan as the bride of a young Afghan man. She has become a major voice denouncing Islamic violence against women. She also became the chief defender in the press of Rifqa Bary.

Wednesday 11

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20100811/wl_uk_afp/healthdiseasebacteriaantibioticstravelindiapakistan

Here is an article about a gene that can jump across different strains of bacteria to form superbugs that evidently are being spread from India through cosmetic surgery.

http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/08/coping_with_turkeys_islamist_1.html

What was called the Eastern Question in the nineteenth century is once again returning as the aggressive Islamism of Turkey's ruling party undercuts its secular constitution.

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/middle-east-coexistence-on-aisle-two-next-to-the-cornflakes/?singlepage=true>

It is heartening that Israeli couple in the West Bank can write of a new grocery store, Rami Levy, that is bringing Israelis and Palestinians together in a way not seen since the second Intifada.