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## 201104 OBITER DICTA: MID-FEBRUARY 2011

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**201104 OBITER DICTA: MID-FEBRUARY 2011**  
**Steven Alan Samson**

**Tuesday, February 8**

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/how-to-understand-rush-limbaugh-15634?search=1>

In "How to Understand Rush Limbaugh," Wilfred M. McClay, a professor of American culture, reviews the career of the disc jockey who has spun the talk radio format into a formidable political voice.

"Occasionally, Limbaugh will talk on his show about radio, past, present, and future, and you understand that his great success is no accident. Able to draw with minuteness on more than four decades of work experience, he has achieved a comprehensive and detailed grasp of the technical, performing, and business dimensions of the industry, all of which give him an unmatched understanding of the medium and its possibilities. But it is more than a wonk's understanding. He has a deep-in-the-bones feeling for what is magical about radio at its best—its immediacy, its simplicity, its ability to create the richness of imagined places and moments with just a few well-placed elements of sound, its incomparable advantages as a medium for storytelling with the pride of place that it gives to the spoken word and the individual human voice, abstracted from all other considerations. He probably also understands why he himself is not nearly so good on TV, faced as he is with the classic McLuhanesque problem of a hot personality in a cool medium.

"He also understood why predictions of radio's demise have repeatedly been proved wrong, why AM radio has lent itself particularly well to the kind of simple and easy interactivity on which talk thrives, and why the movement of talk radio into the AM band would have the same revitalizing effect there as an urban homesteader turning a decrepit old townhouse into a place of elegance and commodity. AM radio was supposed to have died off years ago due to its weak and tinny sound. But the takeover by talk in the early 1990s, primarily due to Limbaugh, managed to transform a decaying and outdated infrastructure into the perfect vehicle for the medium's own aspirations.

"It could not have happened without the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987. Interactive talk of one sort or another had been around since the earliest days of radio, and there had been, of course, plenty of local talk shows, mostly conservative in flavor, on many stations. But the Fairness Doctrine kept them within bounds, obliging stations holding broadcast licenses to offer equal representation to all sides of a controversial issue and to provide coverage to issues of local importance. They imposed these requirements on the ground that channels were limited and so it was necessary to ensure that they served the larger public interest.

"But with the vast and rapid growth of cable and satellite television and radio and other new media, this requirement no longer made any sense. The doctrine was abolished, and the way was opened for a show like Limbaugh's to go into national syndication. His show could never have been sustained with the doctrine in

place, a fact that has helped fuel the occasional expressions of Democratic interest – most recently coming from Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois – in its reinstatement.

"It would be hard, though, to accomplish that without sparking something like an actual revolt in this country. Talk radio is, implicitly, talk-back radio—a medium tuned into during times of frustration, exasperation, even desperation, by people who do not find that their thoughts, sentiments, values, and loyalties are fairly or even minimally represented in the 'official' media. Such feelings may be justified or unjustified, wholesome or noxious; but in any event they are likely to fester and curdle in the absence of some outlet in which they can be expressed. Talk radio is a place where people can go to hear opinions freely expressed that they will not hear elsewhere, and where they can come away with a sense of confirmation that they are not alone, are not crazy, and are not wrong to think and feel such things. The existence of such frustrations and fears are the sine qua non of talk radio; it would not exist without them."

Talk radio has come to be the preeminent retort by the Country Party to the imperial pretensions of the Ruling Class. For more than two decades it has helped galvanize conservative resistance to the ever-grasping overreach of the political empire-builders who aspire to build the city of the Great Oz.

## **Wednesday 9**

The demonstrations may have been provoked in part by a rising wheat prices but now they are threatening to scuttle the economy. The clock is ticking and the Obama Administration persists in giving Mubarak the bum's rush.

## **Friday 11**

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/a-letter-from-a-fearfully-concerned-muslim/?singlepage=true>

A Canadian political scientist, like the Canadian poet, David Solway, clearly understands the nature of the battle. As Pogo once said: "We have met the enemy and he is us."

"The fault, as Cassius reminds Brutus, is in ourselves, a decaying civilization that will be saved (if it will be) not by the snobs in Washington and New York, London and Paris, Rome and Berlin, but by our version of the unsophisticated children of truckers who are now waking up from the drug-induced stupor of their parents' and grandparents' generation. I have hope, the eternal hope of a fearful heart, that the West will survive and yet again gather speed, but how sad are the losses and tears that have piled up – with more to come. They could have been avoided if we, as a people, were not so irresponsible or unfaithful to our history as to place at the head of our societies leaders so unworthy and clueless as the one who so unfittingly occupies the seat of Washington and Lincoln, at the head of this great republic."

Yesterday the coach of the Utah Jazz suddenly resigned. One member of Congress suddenly quit earlier. Another announced he would not seek re-election. If this

is some new virus, it can render us a great public service if we permit it to scour the Tidal Basin in the city of the Great Oz.

## **Saturday 12**

<http://wdsi.wordpress.com/2011/02/08/from-berlin-to-bin-laden/>

This review by Christopher Hitchens, "From Berlin to bin Laden," examines the contribution of the German-Ottoman alliance to the politicization of Islam, which reached a fever pitch under the Mufti of Jerusalem beginning in the 1920s.

<http://rubinreports.blogspot.com/2011/02/egypt-scoopnew-government-has-no.html>

Barry Rubin provides a best-case scenario for what develops in Egypt, particularly with regard to the Muslim Brotherhood.

## **Sunday 13**

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/mubarak-slammed-u-s-in-phone-call-with-israeli-mk-before-resignation-1.342831>

Mubarak's words echo those of an Israeli I spoke with last week. We Americans must attend to our immense problems at home rather than interfere where we can only do harm. We must collectively repudiate this Administration's Wilsonian idealism-on-steroids. Like past revolutionaries, our president scrambles to get ahead of the mob he claims to lead. Once our meddler-in-chief exhausts the public's good will, I hope there will be enough pieces left of an adult foreign policy to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

[http://www.voegelinview.com/ev/gnosticism3\\_alien\\_world%20.html](http://www.voegelinview.com/ev/gnosticism3_alien_world%20.html)

Eric Voegelin's discussion of the rise of Gnosticism during the breakdown of ancient civilization shows resemblances to what has been happening during the breakdown of Christianity in the West. His discussion here refers to false philosophies and revolutionary movements that claim to repair or overcome the dislocations or alienation that separate us from the true cosmic order. As Voegelin put it, such Gnostics seek to bring heaven down to earth: "immanentize the Eschaton."

In this Sensate culture of ours, people seek transcendence through all sorts of faith substitutes. Os Guinness, a disciple of Francis Schaeffer, did a good job of describing them in his book *The Dust of Death*. What do they all have in common? They entrain and entrap our desires and lead into fantasies of wish-fulfillment. If Biblical Christianity planted and nurtured the seeds of true liberty, what is being sown today is confusion and servitude. Modern politics seesaws between idol-worship and cynicism. We fling ourselves at heroic images of our ideal selves and then, when the images in the mirror shatter, we fling ourselves away from them in disgust. Idolatry is both cyclical and immanent in nature. It cannot overcome the world. Instead, the cycle must be broken and transcended.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ideas\\_Have\\_Consequences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ideas_Have_Consequences)

Note to a Student: You should read this summarization of Richard Weaver's Ideas Have Consequences to see whether it can help you reformulate your thesis. The book addresses the larger civilizational context, which, in turn, has implications for liberty. Without the book in front of me (my copy is at the office), I cannot say how accurate this article summarizes the book, but it provides the basics. "The Great Stereopticon" captures the shattered, fragmentary character of our culture today. Russell Kirk made an analogy with the flotsam and jetsam of used bookstores. Even earlier, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote a poem about a "Chambered Nautilus."

The medieval Battle of the Universals, realism vs. nominalism, which is the center of attention by both Benedict XVI and Richard Weaver, is also part of the back story to a recent piece on mathematics and religion, "Can We Know What We Know?," by David P. Goldman (Spengler) in the March 2011 issue of First Things.

Although the mathematical revolution to which Goldman refers occurred in the seventeenth rather than sixteenth century, he provides insights into the battle over the knowability of truth and what is at stake. In the end, the question of faith is inescapable.

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/apocalypse-imminent/?singlepage=true>

"Iranium" is scheduled to be shown on campus later this week. We forget that the Iranian Revolution began in the name of ending a tyranny and replacing it with democracy: the typical sort of "one man, one vote, one time" version that our progressives confuse with Jeffersonian democracy.

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/is-academic-bias-against-conservatives-real-an-amazing-admission-48940/>

Jonathan Haidt demonstrates the degree of academic bias with his profession at a recent annual meeting of academic psychologists. In fact, it is the same sort of bias revealed in regular columns by Robin of Berkeley and Mike Adams. Three decades ago, Edward Rozek complained against discrimination because he was a Republican and a conservative. The ideological climate on American campuses has not generally improved since that time, even though there have always been exceptions.

Perhaps what we have here is a variation of Pareto's Law: That 20% of the population controls 80% of the wealth. What is needed to redress this descent into an insulated academic priesthood, similar to but different in ideology from the Treason of the Intellectuals lamented by Julien Benda, is a restoration of what Pareto called "the circulation of elites." As Lewis Coser has noted, Pareto favored a truly open society with perfect social mobility, a condition of liberty, in the hope that the most able would rise to the positions for which they were best suited. "He saw the danger that elite positions that were once occupied by men of real talent would in the course of time be preempted by men devoid of such talent."

More than a century ago, Lord Bryce already knew why the best men do not become president. Most of them have lacked even a middling ability to steer us through treacherous ideological currents in this age of permanent revolution.

[http://www.ehow.com/list\\_7596931\\_differences-between-pareto-michels.html](http://www.ehow.com/list_7596931_differences-between-pareto-michels.html)

Robert Michels, another of James Burnham's *Machiavellians*, also provides insight into the Egyptian Revolution. The real question is whether it will be a revolution prevented, as in the case of Peter F. Drucker's American counter-revolution, or whether it will be an all-out social revolution of the French, Russian, Chinese, and Iranian varieties.

As Pareto noted:

"In the beginning, military, religious, and commercial aristocracies and plutocracies . . . must have constituted parts of the governing elite and sometimes made up the whole of it. The victorious warrior, the prosperous merchant, the opulent plutocrat, were men of such parts, each in his own field, as to be superior to the average individual. Under those circumstances the label corresponded to an actual capacity. But as time goes by, considerable, sometimes very considerable, differences arise between the capacity and the label. . . . Aristocracies do not last. . . . History is a graveyard of aristocracies. . . . They decay not in numbers only. They decay also in quality, in the sense that they lose their vigor, that there is a decline in the proportions of the residues which enabled them to win their power and hold it. The governing class is restored not only in numbers, but . . . in quality, by families rising from the lower classes and bringing with them the vigor and the proportions of residues necessary for keeping themselves in power. . . . Potent cause of disturbance in the equilibrium is the accumulation of superior elements in the lower classes and, conversely, of inferior elements in the higher classes."

In his commentary on Pareto, Lewis Coser adds the following: "When governing or nongoverning elites attempt to close themselves to the influx of newer and more capable elements from the underlying population, when the circulation of elites is impeded, social equilibrium is upset and the social order will decay. Pareto argued that if the governing elite does not 'find ways to assimilate the exceptional individuals who come to the front in the subject classes,' an imbalance is created in the body politic and the body social until this condition is rectified, either through a new opening of channels of mobility or through violent overthrow of an old ineffectual governing elite by a new one that is capable of governing."

Abraham Lincoln anticipated this problem in his early *Lyceum Address* by envisioning the rise of an American Napoleon. To date, ironically, Lincoln himself may have come closest to cutting such a figure. Other aspirants perhaps ended up in the churchyard of Gray's *Elegy*:

"Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast  
The little tyrant of his fields  
withstood, Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,  
Some Cromwell, guiltless of  
his country's blood."

Despite all of its eccentricities and idealistic delusions, our country has enjoyed a good run but the bill is coming due. Today the mediocrity of our mediocracy is bearing us to some more violent denouement unless we can summon up the kind of leadership that brought us through the terminal phase of the Cold War. By referring to himself as the Gipper, our current president recalls a great line by Karl Marx: "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce."

May this regime of farcicality be as short-lived as the attention span of our entertainment-addled electorate. Let us invite our parasitic permanent bureaucracy with its hothouse verdancy and its ideology of permanent revolution to depart gracefully before the gravy train derails. Otherwise, it will soon, but not soon enough, feel the blade of a terrible swift sword. Our euphemistic talk about budgetary shortfalls and belt-tightening does not square with the reality of bankruptcy and the budgetary meat axe that will lay it out. As John the Baptist put it in another but similar context: "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees." It will be soon enough when our Wonderful One-Hoss Shay begins to shake -- "First a shiver, and then a thrill, Then something decidedly like a spill" - and then we must again decide whether to heed Lincoln's warning and preserve what Russell Kirk called "the roots of American order."

[http://www.bolender.com/Sociological%20Theory/Sorokin,%20Pitirim%20A/sorokin\\_pitirim\\_a.htm](http://www.bolender.com/Sociological%20Theory/Sorokin,%20Pitirim%20A/sorokin_pitirim_a.htm)

To a Student: Here is a critique of Sorokin by Lewis Coser excerpted from *Masters of Sociological Thought*. Although I believe that the distinction between ideational and sensate cultures is a useful one, Coser criticizes it toward the end of this selection. Sorokin apparently saw the High Middle Ages as a logically integrated form of a mixture of the two other systems. He describes a period of Ideational dominance that preceded and a period of Sensate dominance followed it. Yet, historically, the Idealistic falls into the middle. How would you account for that? Are there other models you have studied in your research that give you some critical distance? Could you compare and contrast, for example, Sorokin with Benedict, Acton, Evans, or others?

*The Crisis of Our Age* was originally a distillation of the four-volume *Social and Cultural Dynamics*. I have an abridged, one-volume version in my library. I'm sure our library has one or another or both. In his book, *A Common Law*, Ruben Alvarado focused on the liberating role of the development of a Germanic common law in the Holy Roman Empire. This is an example of the kind of creative research and application that is currently being done. Donald Lutz and Daniel Dreisbach have done similar things with regard to the influence of American Christianity.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Erik-von-Kuehnelt-Leddihn/45305577011>

Let me call your attention to the Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn page on Facebook. Enjoy.

**Monday 14**

[http://townhall.com/columnists/michaelbarone/2011/02/14/the\\_risk\\_that\\_21111\\_will\\_end\\_up\\_like\\_irans\\_21179/page/full/](http://townhall.com/columnists/michaelbarone/2011/02/14/the_risk_that_21111_will_end_up_like_irans_21179/page/full/)

Michael Barone recognizes the dangers in the Middle East but ends on a somewhat hopeful note. Mark Steyn, on the other hand, has good strategic instincts. "This is not a happy ending but the beginning of something potentially very dark. The end of the Mubarak regime is the biggest shift in the region in 60 years, since Nasser overthrew King Farouk's dissolute monarchy and diminished London's influence in Cairo." As Steyn notes in "The Superpower as Spectator" posted last Friday on his website: "Iran is nuclearizing, Turkey is Islamizing." He takes a very sober view of the diminishing influence of the United States over the region.

"Amidst all this flowering of democracy, you'll notice that it's only the pro-American dictatorships on the ropes: In Libya and Syria, Gaddafi and Assad sleep soundly in their beds. [But not for long, as it turned out soon enough]. On the other hand, if you were either of the two King Abdullahs, in Jordan or Saudi Arabia, and you looked at the Obama Administration's very public abandonment of their Cairo strongman, what would you conclude about the value of being an American ally? For the last three weeks, the superpower has sent the consistent message to the world that (as Bernard Lewis feared some years ago) America is harmless as an enemy and treacherous as a friend."

<http://www.steynonline.com/content/view/3716/28>

Mark Steyn's is the best single synopsis I have yet seen of the strategic rippling effect America's Middle East policy of the sound of falling dominos. This piece puts in a very small nutshell much of the argument he made in America Alone. America's one-time allies and clients may soon be gone with the wind. In the third year of our leadership vacuum, two more years is apt to weigh on us like an eternity. Happy talk is no substitute for a foreign policy.

## **Tuesday 15**

<http://www.aolnews.com/2011/02/12/chase-britton-boy-without-a-cerebellum-baffles-doctors/>

This boy lacks large parts of the brain. His family keeps a weblog.

## **Wednesday 16**

[http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/02/time\\_to\\_defend\\_the\\_west.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/02/time_to_defend_the_west.html)

Robert Weissberg gets to the very heart of the mentality of "moral equivalence" that pervades the multi-culti ideology. The West's export of this "culture of repudiation" ("Kick me! I am the child of imperialists, bigots, and slave drivers!") is also its most damaging virus at home, affecting some immigrants with a sense of superiority over their host countries and a sense of entitlement to all the riches allegedly stolen by the West from their ancestors. Weissberg contends that recent criticisms of multiculturalism by Merkel, Cameron, and Sarkozy are too anemic and that Cameron seems to believe that assimilation is a

sufficient answer to the problem. It is no answer at all if the assimilation is only to a multi-culti ideology that perpetually blames the host.

"So, if assimilation campaigns are incomplete answers, where does the counter-attack begin? It begins by identifying the toxin that lies at the heart of multiculturalism -- the dogmatic belief that all cultures are equally 'valid' and worthy for believers, a view construing culture as a choice no different than preferring vanilla over pistachio at the local Baskin Robbins. Rejecting this equivalence of cultures is a change for us, not them -- Islamic fanatics hardly embrace cultural relativism. It is this woolly-headed cultural relativism permeating the west that permits the triumph of zealots against those who barely lift a finger to protect their own culture. The battle is a mismatch if one side refuses to defend forcefully its own heritage. Multiculturalism is political AIDS -- nobody dies of AIDS, they die of something else since AIDS 'only' destroys the immunity system."

Weissberg is refreshingly blunt and anti-PC as always. We live in Wonderland now. The label on Alice's bottle now says: "Read me, heed me."

[http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/02/liberalism\\_and\\_the\\_fear\\_of\\_dea.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/02/liberalism_and_the_fear_of_dea.html)

Robin of Berkeley believes that progressivism is premised on a denial of death. A similar, almost Freudian insight, occurred to me decades ago when I noticed that Alex Comfort, M.D., seemed to have switched his focus from the Joy of Sex to the extension of life. In Eros and Civilization, Herbert Marcuse put Freud to radical political use in his discussion of Eros and Thanatos. Woody Allen recognized his same dichotomy in the title of one of his films: Love and Death.

I read a piece a few days ago that predicts we will achieve immortality around 2045, but I am not sure what of "immortality" would be a boon at the age of 97. I suspect that the Progressives' flight from death is becoming a rush to embrace it. Prince Hans-Adam II of Liechtenstein is certainly under no illusions about the long-term survival of the Bismarckian welfare state.

Igor Shafarevich studied the phenomenon of socialism down through history and concluded that has always been fixated on and leads to death. I lectured on the origins of the First World War this morning but it is evident that the war has never ceased. Indeed, the French Revolution continues to leave destruction wherever it advances as it is doing in parts of the Middle East. Folly is ever on the march. As my friend Erik put it in his cartoon: "Stupidity Roams the World (or Stupidity Races through the World)."

So what is the antidote? The Bible is a handbook of wisdom from which I continue to find sustenance. What is politics today except an object lesson in bad faith?

"These things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:16-19).

Stupidity roams the world.

[http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/02/egypts\\_putative\\_revolution.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/02/egypts_putative_revolution.html)

This Israeli political scientist contends that what we are seeing in Egypt is a military *coup d'etat*. It is also evident that the same genie of Arab national socialism will be impossible to put back into the bottle.

"The outstanding phenomenon with far-reaching consequences is that Arab-Islamic fear barrier has been broken; perhaps forever. The people are no longer afraid of the regime. This is an important lesson: The Arab people have become a political player.

"The new spirit waving in the Arab-Islamic Middle East is the need of the rulers to listen to the people; to be attentive to their needs. This is a meaningful revolution in the Arab-Islamic polity. That is to say that a civil society is growing.

"The international media plays a decisively important role. It directly intervenes in the events and takes clear side. This has very negative ramifications, but should be taken as a given."

The writer does not believe that the issue of Israel has much at all to do with these events. The danger is that Islamism will continually work to get greater political concessions and thus become a growing danger in coming years.

## Thursday 17

[http://voices.washingtonpost.com/plum-line/2011/02/missing\\_wisconsin\\_dem\\_speaks\\_w\\_1.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/plum-line/2011/02/missing_wisconsin_dem_speaks_w_1.html)

Public employee unions may have been around for fifty years, and they have also frequently been the greatest threat to fiscal sanity. They played a major role in rendering New York City virtually ungovernable in the late 1970s. Today they may be the single most important factor in driving up taxes while driving away entrepreneurs and shrinking the tax base.

During a 1919 police strike in Massachusetts, Gov. Calvin Coolidge wrote to Samuel Gompers: "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time." This may not be a public safety issue in the most direct sense, but the diversion of taxpayer funds into union coffers, while forcing non-union public employees to pay into union war chests and denying taxpayers alternate forms of providing services, only further estranges us - the general public - from that level and quality of service we should be able to expect in return.

These Wisconsin senators, who are enjoying a Spring break, are merely symptomatic of the larger problem of fiscal irresponsibility. No solutions can be expected from their quarter. Far more important to the future of Wisconsin and other failing states is the fact that tens of thousands of taxpayers are going to great expense and inconvenience to pull up stakes and move out. I suspect that Wisconsin's loss of those who vote with their feet will not be Illinois's gain, even temporarily, as has (only temporarily) been the case with these holiday revelers.

<http://albanysinsanity.wnymedia.net/blogs/2009/10/28/tax-refugees-staging-escape-from-new-york/>

Here is a case in point: a piece published in the New York Post entitled "Taxpayers Staging Escape from New York."