

COMMENTARY

A spoonful of sugar

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If you read this column, you're probably a voter, and thus you're a political creature, like I am. And if you read it regularly, you may realize that everything I've written is political, at least in some way — whether the subject has been tragic or comic, or the writing has been sensible or nonsensical.

Whether I've written about war, or ethics, or children; or about the environment, or women, or men; or about our cities or counties or the sunshine state itself — no matter what, I've taken all of it from the whole cloth of politics. Of which you are a part.

The original political words themselves, polis or politikos, came to us as a gift from the Greeks (never trust a Greek bearing gifts, the Trojans might have said). Then they became variations of themselves expressed in other languages. Politics literally means the center of things, the pole about which the world revolves, the core (polis) of the city or state.

In this day and age, the body politic is still us, we Americans. We're the center of this little experiment of a Republic.

As a political columnist, therefore — one writing at the center of things — I aim to convince you to think like I do, which is the aim of all other political columnists, too. And always to take my advice, like I would

if I wasn't myself (occasionally, I am not myself, but that's another story).

Therefore, I am going to help you decide how to vote in the presidential election of 2008, which is turning into a real horse race.

A cynic might say it's a rat race, but I'm no cynic (that's another Greek word, meaning, without or nothing). I believe in our system, both as an admirer and a skeptic. But I don't need faith; I've seen it work. Not always, but sometimes.

So I will now make it perfectly clear who the best candidate is, but not by naming this enviable soul. Instead let me just quote a man ranked as one of the three greatest Americans in national polls. He's a political person himself, like you and me, and he's commented extensively on this race, and all the others before it, going back more than 45 years.

Unfortunately, if he were to throw his hat into the ring now, in spite of being one of the three greatest Americans, he probably couldn't win the presidency. And neither could the other two greatest Americans, as ranked by the rest of us.

That's because some of the things he says might scare off a lot of voters, who want a spoonful of sugar to make the medicine go down. He is not a spoonful-of-sugar American, though, and neither are his peers.

But he can point the way in 2008. So just read on, and by the time you conclude, you'll know your candidate, I'm certain.

Here's what he says:

- Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.
- I refuse to accept the view that man-

kind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.

- Never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was legal.

- Never succumb to the temptation of bitterness.

- The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education.

- It is not enough to say we must not wage war. It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it.

- Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.

- The hope of a secure and livable world lies with disciplined nonconformists who are dedicated to justice, peace and brotherhood.

- We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

- We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.

- Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him.

- Means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek.

- I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

- The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But... the

good Samaritan reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

- Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.

So there you have it, clear as a bell on every issue confronting Americans today — the Iraq war, foreign policy, the education of our children, domestic goals, and so on. All from a man who figured all this out by the time he was 39, which was all the time he had.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, so when his birthday rolls around in a few days, and as you listen to our presidential candidates practice the art of politics with the generally courteous and hopeful approval of all of us Americans, remember some of the things he said. And it will all be clear.

And who are often considered the other two greatest Americans?

Well, George Washington, for one. He said, "My first wish is to see this plague of mankind, war, banished from the earth." And he went on to advise us that, "We should not look back unless it is to derive useful lessons from past errors, and for the purpose of profiting by dearly bought experience."

Abraham Lincoln is the other, as you probably guessed. He commented on the 2008 race as well, noting, "I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts."

And then he posed a question, and gave us an answer: "How many legs does a dog have if you call the tail a leg? Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg."

Now, get ready to go vote. ■

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