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# EDITORIAL

## Two Good Candidates This Time?

BY ROGER E. HERNANDEZ

What we have after Iowa and New Hampshire is the possibility of a presidential race between two candidates who are charismatic, honest and thoughtfully moderate.

It might make for a November the likes of which baby boomers have never seen.

Counting from 1968, the first election in which boomers voted, we had Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Poppy Bush, Bill Clinton and now W. himself. None combined charisma, intellectual honesty and moderate politics. And these are just the winners. Remember George McGovern, Gerald Ford, Walter Mondale, Michael Dukakis, Bob Dole, Al Gore and John Kerry?

That's 40 years and 10 elections in which, more often than not, both candidates disappointed.

Is this the end of the streak of awfulness?

Among Republicans, Mitt Romney and Fred Thompson are paint-by-numbers conservatives, with their soporific talk about guns and lower taxes. Can't they think of something fresh, 20 years after Ronald Reagan left office? Rudy Giuliani might be

a strong leader and moderate in domestic issues, but in the international arena he is capable of performing the improbable feat of making the United States even less respected than it is now. Ron Paul? As radical in his own way as George McGovern.

That leaves John McCain and Mike Huckabee. The latter has his own quiet brand of likability (the first fundamentalist with irony, somebody called him), and seems more pragmatic than the stereotypical Christian conservative. But people who reject the basics of modern scientific thought cannot be called thoughtful.

Over on the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton has constructed a public persona so opaque, even post-tears, that it is no longer possible to tell what she is or is not. And John Edwards has converted himself into a Democratic version of Mitt Romney, mouthing platitudes stale since Hubert Humphrey.

Which leaves Barack Obama. And the possibility of Obama versus McCain in November.

The Democrat's appeal is that he has the power to recast the image of the United States abroad and at home. An Obama

presidency will make America less race-conscious — we will look at him and see him as the president, not just as the black president. Overseas, the recasting is even more necessary, but is Obama too eager to run around the world embracing dictators?

McCain, too, has the power to make this country be itself again, with his principled stand against torture, his refusal to play immigrant-basher along with most other Republicans. Even war opponents who are honest will admit (at least to themselves) that his support for the Iraq surge is born of honest conviction. But I keep thinking back to his "Bomb Iran" moment, singing it to the tune of the Beach Boys' "Barbara Ann." And I wonder what making light of such a grave affair says about the man.

They both bear watching. As does the exciting possibility that for the first time, millions of Americans will know what it feels like to vote for a presidential candidate they actually like, instead of the lesser of two evils. ■

— Roger Hernandez is a syndicated columnist and writer-in-residence at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

## OPINION

### Liberal Fascism

BY RICH LOWRY

The f-bomb of American politics is the word "fascist," routinely hurled by the left at conservatives. Ronald Reagan and Barry Goldwater were smeared as incipient fascists, and George W. Bush now receives the honor.

The operational meaning of the word "fascism" for most liberals who invoke it is usually "shut up." It's meant to bludgeon conservatives into silence. But many on the left also genuinely believe there is something fascistic in the DNA of contemporary conservatism.

In his brilliant new book "Liberal Fascism," Jonah Goldberg (a colleague of mine) demonstrates how the opposite is the case, that fascism was a movement of the left and that liberal heroes like Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were products of what Goldberg calls "the fascist moment" in America. How we think of the ideological spectrum -- socialism to the left, fascism to the right -- should be forever changed.

Benito Mussolini earned the title "Il Duce"

as the leader of the socialists in Italy. When he founded the fascist party, its program called for implementing a minimum wage, expropriating property from landowners, repealing titles of nobility, creating state-run secular schools and imposing a progressive tax rate. Mussolini took socialism and turned it in a more populist and militaristic direction, but remained a modernizing, secular man of the left.

The Nazis too were socialists, "enemies, deadly enemies, of today's capitalist economic system," in the words of the party's ideologist Gregor Strasser. The Nazis wanted to chase conventional Christianity from public life and overturn tradition, replacing them with an all-powerful state. Both Hitler and Mussolini were revolutionaries, bitterly opposed to "reactionary" forces in their societies.

By what standard, then, are they considered conservatives who took things to extremes? The left points to their anti-Semitism and militarism. But anti-Semitism isn't an inherently right-wing phenomenon -- Stalin's Russia was anti-Semitic. As for militarism, these regimes looked to it as a way to mobilize and organize society, something deeply anathema to the anti-statist tradition of postwar American conservatism.

On the other hand, the progressive move-

ment of the early 20th century looked to Mussolini as an inspiration. Goldberg eviscerates Woodrow Wilson as the closest we have ever had to a fascist president. Wilson and his supporters welcomed World War I as an opportunity to expand the state, instituting "war socialism" and a far-reaching crackdown on dissent.

FDR picked up where Wilson left off. The crisis of the Great Depression was the occasion for reviving "war socialism," the classic fascist impulse to mobilize society and put it on a war footing.

Goldberg argues that "liberal fascism" -- the phrase was coined by H.G. Wells, and he meant it positively -- is a distant heir to European fascism. The liberal version is pacifist rather than militaristic and feminine rather than masculine in its orientation, but it also seeks to increase the power of the state and overcome tradition in sweeping crusades pursued with the moral fervor of war.

Goldberg's book is a profound cautionary tale about the perils of state aggrandizement and of revolutionary movements. If nothing else, it should convince liberals that it's time to find a new insult. ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.

## MOMENTS IN TIME

- On Feb. 10, 1920, "Kathleen Mavourneen," starring Theda Bara, provokes a riot when it opens in San Francisco. Rioters sacked the Sun Theater in protest of the film's portrayal of the Irish poor.

- On Feb. 4, 1941, the United Service Organization is founded to offer support for U.S. service members and their families. The USO sent many actors, musicians and other performers to entertain the troops. Comedian Bob Hope made annual trips to entertain overseas troops from World War II through Desert Storm in 1991.

- On Feb. 6, 1952, King George VI of Great Britain and Northern Ireland dies at

the royal estate at Sandringham. Princess Elizabeth, the oldest of the king's two daughters, was crowned Queen Elizabeth II on June 2, 1953, at age 27.

- On Feb. 7, 1964, the Beatles arrive in New York from London on their first visit to the United States. Two days later, an estimated 40 percent of the U.S. population tuned in to watch the band's appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show."

- On Feb. 9, 1973, Max Yasgur, owner of the 600-acre farm where the Woodstock music festival took place in August 1969, dies in Florida at age 53. More than 400,000 people attended the three-day festival in upstate New York. Concert organizers had expected only 50,000 to show up.

- On Feb. 8, 1983, gunmen steal the champion Irish race horse Shergar from a stud farm owned by the Aga Khan in County Kildare, Ireland. The 5-year-old thoroughbred stallion was worth \$13.5 million. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of more than \$2 million. Despite a highly publicized search by authorities, Shergar was never seen again and no ransom was paid.

- On Feb. 5, 1994, Byron de la Beckwith is convicted of the assassination of civil-rights leader Medger Evers 31 years earlier in Jackson, Miss. Beckwith, widely recognized as the killer, was prosecuted for murder in 1964. However, two all-white juries deadlocked and refused to convict. ■