

March 24, 2015

Austin Bay on the diplomacy of fools.

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The 21st-century bitterness Poles did not expect was President Barack Obama's shocking Sept. 17, 2009, announcement. To "reset" U.S.-Russia relations, Obama said he had terminated U.S. participation -- which meant Polish participation as well -- in what Poland and other U.S. allies regarded as an essential NATO and European defense program: deploying long-range anti-missile missiles in Poland (Ground Based Interceptors).

The peaceful order Obama said his decision would achieve dismayed Poles who know from experience that the Kremlin's version of a reset usually involves Russian military resurgence, not peace. Obama's abrupt termination of a major, negotiated multi-lateral policy worried them. His failure to consult Warsaw infuriated them. History added injury; the date on which he announced his flip-flop appalled them. ...

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... World War 2 taught Poland that collective defense matters. Weak nations need strong allies. But in a world where destructive actors possess long-range missiles and have the intent to use them, an adequate defense requires international participation. The Poles understand that a robust missile defense is a key element in collective defense protecting constructive nations from destructive actors. They also understand that constructing and deploying complicated weapons requires a long lead-time.

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And it's not that the history is inaccessible, Pickerhead wrote a piece in March, 2010 that kicked off with reference to the slight we gave to Poland.

Perhaps it is strange for a free market blogger to suggest American knowledge of Russian history is woefully inadequate. But, we really are ignorant of that part of the world. If the Obama administration knew more, maybe they would have picked another day to tell Poland we were caving to the Russians and canceling plans for Eastern Europe's missile defense shield. Instead, they picked the 70th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland. That was a minor event in the overall war, but it was followed by typical Bolshevik horrors, including the massacre of 22,000 Polish officers at sites like Katyn Forest.

Poles will never forget.

As we approach the rolling 70th anniversary of the major events of World War II it is easy to forget the conflict was underway for almost two years before all hell really broke loose. This period started with the September 1939 invasion of Poland by, first Germany, and then Russia. Then came the German invasion of France and the Low Countries in May 1940, and finally the German move against Russia in June 1941. In the eight months between the invasions of Poland and France, headline writers had fun reporting on the "Bore War" and called it "Sitzkrieg" rather than Blitzkrieg.

In and around Russia, though, there was a lot of activity. A border incident with Japan in Mongolia at Khalkhin Gol turned into a small war, and in Europe there was the Winter War with Finland. The world ignored the first because it was far away and overshadowed by the contemporaneous Hitler-Stalin Pact; was aghast at the second, and kicked Russia out of the League of Nations. The Red Army's poor showing against Finland was further embarrassment for Russia and led to Hitler's fatal misunderstandings about Soviet forces. ...

In yet another example of his thundering ignorance, the president has proposed mandatory voting. What would he do? Would he hire another 16,000 IRS agents to complement those hired to enforce the health care act? Pickerhead has always maintained that free people are those who don't feel the need to vote. John Fund starts the comments.

Since he will never again see his name appear on a ballot, President Obama is finally telling us what he really thinks.

"If everybody voted, then it would completely change the political map in this country," Obama said yesterday at a Cleveland town hall meeting. "It would be transformative if everybody voted."

He also said it would be "fun" to force through a constitutional amendment restricting the free-speech rights of Americans to contribute money to politics. Fun?

Mr. President, we wouldn't be America anymore with forced voting and people fined or jailed for using the First Amendment to express political views.

When it comes to voting, only eleven nations in the world actually enforce laws requiring people to vote. Several nations have tried them and dropped the idea, including Chile, Fiji, and Italy, which rescinded the policy in 1993. "There was finally a consensus that it was a basic infringement of freedom," says Antonio Martino, a former Italian foreign minister. "Forcing people to vote violates their freedom of speech, because the freedom to speak includes the right not to speak."

Indeed, not voting can send a message just as much as voting. If times are good and major parties are in broad agreement on major issues, a low voter turnout can be a sign of a healthy democracy. Similarly, in times of discontent when major parties are not offering up clear and compelling alternatives, non-voting signals that the legitimacy of the process is being questioned.

President Obama gave his real motivation away during his Cleveland riff by noting that Democrats stayed home in last November's election, in which his party was crushed. It won't surprise you that his motivation is political. Recall his famous post-election comment that he

also heard the voices of Americans who didn't vote. This week the president said "the people who tend not to vote are young, they're lower income, they're skewed more heavily towards immigrant groups and minority groups. We should want to get them into the polls." But rather than blame himself or his party for the failure to inspire his ostensible supporters to vote, the president is turning to the idea of dragooning them to the ballot box.

The columnist George Will once said: "Really up-to-date liberals do not care what people do, as long as it is compulsory." President Obama has joined their ranks. ...

John Hinderaker comments on compulsory voting.

... It is hard to know where to begin. The idea of forcing Americans to vote is, frankly, un-American, and would have been regarded as such by every American political leader from George Washington through George W. Bush. If an American wants to stay home on election day, it is his God-given right to do so. The idea that policemen should herd Americans to the polls, or the IRS should withhold extra taxes if they don't appear on a voter list, is repugnant. ...

WSJ Editors weigh in.

We're going to need more IRS agents. That's the gist of President Obama's latest bid to impose yet another mandate on the American people. This time he wants to require all Americans to vote, whether they want to or not. ...

... Some Americans have already got a taste of what President Obama's fondness for government by mandate means. Before it won its Supreme Court case, the crafts chain Hobby Lobby was faced with fines of \$1.3 million for every day it refused to obey the contraceptive mandate. This year, with the April 15 tax deadline approaching, many young and healthy Americans who have disobeyed the Obama mandate to buy health insurance from the government's limited menu are going to have to deal with the IRS.

"Everything not forbidden is compulsory." That line comes from British writer T.H. White, in his novel recreating the life and times of King Arthur. White meant it as mockery. President Obama doesn't get the joke.

Shame, Shelby Steele's latest book, is reviewed by Joseph Epstein.

'You,' a character in Ossie Davis's 1961 play "Purlie Victorious" says to another, "are a disgrace to the Negro profession." The line recurs to me whenever I see [Al Sharpton](#) or Jesse Jackson making perfunctory rabble-rousing remarks in Ferguson, Mo., Madison, Wis., current-day Selma, Ala., or any other protest scene where their appearance, like Toni Morrison on a list of honorary-degree recipients, has become de rigueur. I wonder if Shelby Steele has also been called "a disgrace to the Negro profession," and this for diametrically opposite reasons. Had he been it could only have been by people who, despite their endless cries for social justice, in one way or another have a deep emotional if not financial investment in keeping black Americans in the sad conditions in which so many of them continue to find themselves.

Shelby Steele is one of the very few writers able to tell home truths about the plight of black Americans. ...

... The author has a fierce racial pride, and his writing about blacks in America is without condescension and imbued with deep sympathy. He is a brother, make no mistake, but a brother quite unlike any other. What distinguishes him is his openly stated belief that blacks in America have been sold out by the very liberals who ardently claim to wish them most good. He regrets that affirmative action, multiculturalism and most welfare programs purportedly put in place to show racial preference, far from liberating black Americans, have failed to advance their fortunes. Judging from high crime, divorce and unemployment rates, as well as relatively low rates of high-school and college completion, a case can be made that liberal policies have harmed them. To cite a single statistic: In 1965, the year after passage of the Civil Rights Act, 23.6% of black births in America were to single women; today that number is 72%....

... The author's conclusion is that black America sold itself out, entered "a Faustian pact," as he puts it, by placing its destiny in the "hands of contrite white people." Doing so, he writes, "left us pleading with government, not for freedom, which we had already won, but for 'programs' and 'preferences' that would be a ladder to full equality. The chilling result is that now, fifty years later, we remain—by most important measures—in the position of inferiors and dependents." The liberalism that has come into prominence since the 1960s, Mr. Steele believes, "has done little more than toy with blacks." ...

Strategy Page

[September 2009: Obama Diplomacy in Wretched Miniature](#)

by Austin Bay

Poles knew September 2009 would be a bitter month. It marked the 70 anniversary of their country's great geo-political catastrophe, the start of World War 2 and their nation's imprisonment.

The 21st-century bitterness Poles did not expect was President Barack Obama's shocking Sept. 17, 2009, announcement. To "reset" U.S.-Russia relations, Obama said he had terminated U.S. participation -- which meant Polish participation as well -- in what Poland and other U.S. allies regarded as an essential NATO and European defense program: deploying long-range anti-missile missiles in Poland (Ground Based Interceptors).

The peaceful order Obama said his decision would achieve dismayed Poles who know from experience that the Kremlin's version of a reset usually involves Russian military resurgence, not peace. Obama's abrupt termination of a major, negotiated multi-lateral policy worried them. His failure to consult Warsaw infuriated them. History added injury; the date on which he announced his flip-flop appalled them.

Obama claimed "reset" relations would start an era of transformative cooperation. Yes, transformative has utopian echoes. During the Cold War, the Kremlin anathematized U.S. missile defense. Though NATO's limited system was designed to defeat, attack from Southwest Asia (Iran?) Moscow opposed it. This U.S. concession would elicit Russian cooperation, Obama said. Together we will solve global problems.

Polish dismay with US optimism precedes Obama. In 2001 they cringed when George W. Bush said he looked in Vladimir Putin's eyes and got "a sense of (Putin's) soul." Poles saw a KGB colonel gulling a naive American.

In 2005, Putin opined that the collapse of the Soviet Union "was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the (20th) century." Re-read this essay's first sentence. Poles spent five decades in chains, Nazi chains, and then the Communist chains of Putin's beloved Soviets.

In 2009, when Obama canned Poland's GBI's, Putin's increasingly violent regime was murdering journalists, curtailing free speech and jailing political opponents.

But Obama wanted a deal. We now know what Putin wanted: Crimea, Ukraine and possibly more.

Obama's deal worried Eastern Europeans. Can we trust his America? NATO's pre-2009 missile defense program epitomized multi-lateral negotiation. Poland would host 10 GBI's -- right, just 10. GBI's intercept enemy missiles in space. The Czech Republic would host their radar complex. If a warhead evaded the GBI, it would face theater defensive missiles (Navy Standard-6, Army THAAD) and short-range systems (Patriot PAC-3) deployed throughout Europe. The good news is that some of these systems are being deployed.

As for fury: Obama's announcement was classless tactical diplomacy. Your friends deserve a heads up, not a double-cross, yet the candidate who promised to practice "smart diplomacy" didn't discuss his about-face with affected nations. A wave of unease rippled through Eastern Europe. Would Obama's Great Power America do as it pleased, even if it meant ignoring the concerns of its vulnerable allies?

And now his appalling ignorance of relevant history: The world remembers Sept. 1, 1939, the day Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany attacked Poland and started WW2. Global memories of the Eastern front, however, are less clear -- but not in Poland. Poles recall, with informed anger, Sept. 17, 1939, the day Joseph Stalin's Communist Soviet Union attacked Poland from the east.

World War 2 taught Poland that collective defense matters. Weak nations need strong allies. But in a world where destructive actors possess long-range missiles and have the intent to use them, an adequate defense requires international participation. The Poles understand that a robust missile defense is a key element in collective defense protecting constructive nations from destructive actors. They also understand that constructing and deploying complicated weapons requires a long lead-time.

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Lessons of the Phony War

The Second World War didn't happen the way we remember

by Edgar B. Roesch

March 8, 2010

"The only thing new in the world is the history you don't know."

--- Harry

Truman

Perhaps it is strange for a free market blogger to suggest American knowledge of Russian history is woefully inadequate. But, we really are ignorant of that part of the world. If the Obama administration knew more, maybe they would have picked another day to tell Poland we were caving to the Russians and canceling plans for Eastern Europe's missile defense shield. Instead, they picked the 70th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland. That was a minor event in the overall war, but it was followed by typical Bolshevik horrors, including the massacre of 22,000 Polish officers at sites like Katyn Forest.

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In and around Russia, though, there was a lot of activity. A border incident with Japan in Mongolia at Khalkhin Gol turned into a small war, and in Europe there was the Winter War with Finland. The world ignored the first because it was far away and overshadowed by the contemporaneous Hitler-Stalin Pact, was aghast at the second, and kicked Russia out of the League of Nations. The Red Army's poor showing against Finland was further embarrassment for Russia and led to Hitler's fatal misunderstandings about Soviet forces.

The skirmish with Japan was occasioned by incursions into Mongolian territory by Japan's Kwantung Army which had conquered Manchuria in 1932 and was busy testing the borders of Russia's client state to see what weakness could be found towards Russia. Even though events in Europe occupied Stalin, he was concerned enough to send a senior officer to report on Far East events. His gaze fell upon Comcor (Three stars) Georgi Zhukov a deputy commander in the Belorussian Military District headquartered in Smolensk west of Moscow. Zhukov just barely avoided Stalin's two year purge of 36,000 officers that followed the earlier purge of Communist party ranks.

Zhukov arrived in Mongolia in early June to find the command post fully 75 miles from the Japanese center of effort at Khalkhin Gol. After inspection at the front he made a series of recommendations all of which were accepted by Moscow and he was put in charge. While deflecting continued Kwantung attacks, a counter-offensive was prepared that kicked off on August 20, 1939. By August 31, all Japanese units were cleared from Mongolian territory. Some sources report 45,000 Japanese deaths out of 60,000 troops committed to the battle. Zhukov had achieved a double envelopment in the mold of Hannibal's victory over the Romans at

Cannae in 216 BC. Nobody paid attention though, because at the same time, thousands of miles to the west, Germany and the Soviets signed a non-aggression treaty on August 24th that opened the way to Germany's September 1st attack on Poland.

However, the Imperial General Staff in Tokyo noticed. Henceforth the North Strike army doctrine would be replaced by the South Strike policy favored by the navy. Japan had seen quite enough of battle with these Russians who could project overwhelming force 3,500 miles from Moscow and 450 miles from the nearest railhead. The Southeast Asian colonies of the French, English, Dutch, and Americans looked like more inviting targets in Japan's drive for access to natural resources.

But close to home the Russians looked like fools. The occasion was the Winter War with Finland that grew out of Russia's desires for a larger buffer around Leningrad; a buffer previously provided by Finland's inclusion in the Russian Empire. The Finns escaped in the chaos following the 1917 Revolution. Some twenty years later the Soviets offered to trade large pieces of wilderness for some kilometers of the Karelian Isthmus. The Finns refused and the Russians attacked. Apparently Stalin was quite taken with the fake border incident Germany employed to start their Polish invasion, so the Kremlin's NKVD troops fired on Red Army forces and using that pretext, the war commenced. The vestigial form of morality employed by these two rogue regimes is worth pondering. Why bother? Everyone knows what is going on, but they still pretend to some form of civilization.

The Russians invaded on November 30th to wide spread condemnation. Two weeks later, in what must be a record for swift action by a multi-national organization Russia was kicked out of the League of Nations. Worse yet, they could not subdue the Finns. They invaded with 450,000 men, 3,000 tanks, and 3,500 airplanes and were bogged down four weeks later when large scale operations were suspended as the Soviets regrouped. Derision followed. Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, claimed Russian bombs were food parcels dropped to starving Finns. The Finns began to call the bombs "Molotov bread baskets" and continued the metaphor by dubbing their ad-hoc anti-tank weapons as "Molotov cocktails."

February 1st the Russians signaled they were ready to finish the war with an offensive that began with one day's firing of 300,000 artillery shells. This time they were not to be denied and negotiations soon ensued. The final peace treaty went into effect March 13, 1940 and Russia finally secured the buffer they had sought two years earlier as they watched, with concern, the growing military strength of Nazi Germany. But the damage had been done. Although Germany was soon to launch their campaign in the West against France, Hitler, sensing the weakness in the East, ordered plans for an invasion of Russia. As those plans were prepared, Hitler told his generals, "You only have to smash in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down."

In lectures given at the Wren Society at the College of William and Mary, I have suggested the short course for WWII is this; in the beginning Hitler was listening to his officers and Stalin was killing his. At the end Hitler is killing and Stalin is listening. The great tragedy for Russia was that before the war Russia had in place generals who knew how the next war was going to be fought. And Stalin killed them. Foremost among them was Marshall Mikhail Tukhachevsky who commanded armies in the Civil War and an entire front in the 1920 campaign against Poland when he was only twenty-seven years old. In peacetime Tukhachevsky was Deputy Commissar of Defense and in that role oversaw and encouraged extraordinary developments in military thought.

The Russian Civil War was the antithesis of the Great War that came before. It was a war of dynamic maneuver rather than a static slugfest from trenches. In an effort to codify their experiences, the Soviet general staff formulated the “theory of operational art” which they saw as the connection between local tactics and grand strategy. Aleksander Svechin wrote, “Tactics make the steps from which operational leaps are assembled; strategy points out the path.” The crown jewels of their efforts were the dual concepts of “deep battle and deep operations.” Deep battle is the concentrated shock penetration with combined infantry, armored, and aviation components against a narrow sector that is designed to rapidly break through the depth of an enemy’s tactical front. Deep operations are the exploitation of that breach to produce operational collapse in the opponent’s rear echelons.

Those ideas fell into disfavor in the Kremlin, but Zhukov and those like him who survived the purge were the remnants who, when allowed by Stalin, were able to defeat Nazi Germany. In order to gauge the depth of the swath cut through the leadership of the armed forces by Stalin's purge, consider that during WW2 600 Soviet general officers were killed or reported missing. The purge killed three times that many. When reading history, it sometimes seems Hitler and Stalin were competing to see who could kill the most Russians.

In the middle of the last century, two major European countries were ruled by paranoid sociopaths. To help understand why, we can look to Chapter 10 in The Road to Serfdom written during the war by the Austrian Friedrich Hayek. The title of the chapter is Why the Worst Get on Top. Hayek’s thesis is the more power a government has, those who manage to scramble to leadership will be some of the most corrupt and dishonest.

Moscow will soon be the scene of celebrations of the 65th anniversary of victory in the war. There will be pictures of Joseph Stalin carried in parades proving some Russians need to learn more about their history.

Edgar Roesch blogs on current events at www.pickerhead.com

National Review

Mr. President, We Have a Civil Right Not to Vote

Rather than inspire people to show up at the polls, progressives would just as soon make it compulsory.

by John Fund

Since he will never again see his name appear on a ballot, President Obama is finally telling us what he *really* thinks.

“If everybody voted, then it would completely change the political map in this country,” Obama said yesterday at a Cleveland town hall meeting. “It would be transformative if everybody voted.”

He also said it would be “fun” to force through a constitutional amendment restricting the free-speech rights of Americans to contribute money to politics. Fun?

Mr. President, we wouldn't be America anymore with forced voting and people fined or jailed for using the First Amendment to express political views.

When it comes to voting, only eleven nations in the world actually enforce laws requiring people to vote. Several nations have tried them and dropped the idea, including Chile, Fiji, and Italy, which rescinded the policy in 1993. "There was finally a consensus that it was a basic infringement of freedom," says Antonio Martino, a former Italian foreign minister. "Forcing people to vote violates their freedom of speech, because the freedom to speak includes the right *not* to speak."

Indeed, not voting can send a message just as much as voting. If times are good and major parties are in broad agreement on major issues, a low voter turnout can be a sign of a healthy democracy. Similarly, in times of discontent when major parties are not offering up clear and compelling alternatives, non-voting signals that the legitimacy of the process is being questioned.

President Obama gave his real motivation away during his Cleveland riff by noting that Democrats stayed home in last November's election, in which his party was crushed. It won't surprise you that his motivation is political. Recall his famous post-election comment that he also heard the voices of Americans who didn't vote. This week the president said "the people who tend not to vote are young, they're lower income, they're skewed more heavily towards immigrant groups and minority groups. We should want to get them into the polls." But rather than blame himself or his party for the failure to inspire his ostensible supporters to vote, the president is turning to the idea of dragooning them to the ballot box.

The columnist George Will once said: "Really up-to-date liberals do not care what people do, as long as it is compulsory." President Obama has joined their ranks.

Nor is he alone. Oregon governor Kate Brown has just signed into law a requirement that everyone in the state be automatically registered to vote based on information the Department of Motor Vehicles has in its electronic files.

Liberals justify such actions by claiming that people aren't voting because they don't have enough chances to register to vote. But the U.S. Census Bureau disagrees. It has long published reports on election turnout and the reasons people don't vote. As my co-author Hans von Spakovsky has pointed out:

For example, of the 146 million people who the Census Bureau reported were registered to vote in 2008, 15 million (10 percent) did not vote. Of those who did not vote, only 6 percent cited registration problems as the reason for not participating. Rather, the vast majority of these registered but nonvoters said they did not vote for reasons ranging from forgetting to vote to not liking the candidates or the campaign issues or simply not being interested . . . The Census Bureau's 2008 report demonstrates that the major reason individuals failed to register was that they were not "interested in the election/not involved in politics." That represented *46 percent* of the individuals in the Census Bureau's survey. Another 35 percent of individuals did not register for a variety of reasons such as not being eligible to vote, thinking their vote would not make a difference, not meeting residency requirements, or difficulty with English.

And those responses were in 2008 — the year turnout went up amid "hope and change."

It is entirely rational for someone to think his vote might not make a difference, either because the candidates don't represent real change or because of the simple laws of mathematics. As Ilya Somin, an assistant professor of law at George Mason University, points out: "Even a smart and hardworking person can rationally decide not to pay much attention to politics. No matter how well-informed a person is, his or her vote has only a tiny chance of affecting the outcome of an election." Do we want to deny such persons their freedom by forcing them to make a choice they view as either unpalatable or meaningless?

Liberals tend to see anything that increases voter turnout as a positive for democracy. "The more people who are exercising that right (to vote) the better," asserts a *Slate* article on Oregon's new mandatory voter registration. That's one reason liberals give such short shrift to measures to promote ballot security and reduce fraud. Conservatives, on the other hand, often emphasize the rule of law and the fact that if procedures aren't followed not every ballot is a valid vote. That can sometimes lead them to not see the forest for the trees.

But what both sides should agree on is that nothing good comes of coercing people into voting. The idea has, of course, been tried in countries ranging from Saddam Hussein's Iraq to the old Soviet Union. It's also been tried in free countries, but half of them no longer enforce the requirement and in several of the others enforcement is sporadic. By resurrecting the discredited idea of mandatory voting, President Obama has shown that, even as he touts his old stint as a constitutional law instructor, he gets a failing grade when it comes to understanding the notion of liberty.

Power Line

[Mandatory Voting? Is This a Joke?](#)

by John Hinderaker

President Obama, bemoaning the fact that Democrats have recently tended to stay home during off-year elections, has seriously floated the idea that [Americans should be legally required to vote](#):

President Obama, whose party was trounced in last year's midterm election due in part to poor turnout among Democrats, endorsed the idea of mandatory voting Wednesday.

"It would be transformative if everybody voted," Mr. Obama said during a town-hall event in Cleveland. "That would counteract [campaign] money more than anything. If everybody voted, then it would completely change the political map in this country."

Mr. Obama raised the subject during a discussion of curbing the influence of campaign donations in U.S. elections. The president said he had never discussed the idea publicly before, but said Australia and some other countries have compulsory voting.

It is hard to know where to begin. The idea of forcing Americans to vote is, frankly, un-American, and would have been regarded as such by every American political leader from George Washington through George W. Bush. If an American wants to stay home on election day, it is his God-given right to do so. The idea that policemen should herd Americans to the polls, or the IRS should withhold extra taxes if they don't appear on a voter list, is repugnant.

Moreover, there are a great many people who should not vote. They have no idea who the candidates are; they haven't followed the issues; they have don't know what policies would best advance their interests. Happily, these people generally know who they are, and historically most of them have had the good judgment to take a pass on election day. Obama wants these people to be forced to vote because he thinks they can be propagandized into voting Democrat.

Finally, Obama's discontent arises from the fact that many potentially Democratic voters stayed home in 2014. He wants to force them to the polls, whether they like it or not. But why did they stay home? Because they knew that Obama's administration has been a disaster, but, because of ceaseless Democrat propaganda, they weren't willing to vote Republican. If future Democratic presidents want a better turnout in off-year elections, they should try being better presidents.

UPDATE: I should add two things. First, forcing American citizens to vote would almost certainly be unconstitutional, as a violation of the First Amendment. Not that this has ever stopped Obama before. Second, there is, in theory, a silver lining to Obama's proposal: to enforce a legal requirement that all eligible voters vote, you would need to have a list of eligible voters. Logically, this should imply that non-eligible voters wouldn't be able to cast illegal votes. But this is probably a minor point: the Democrats, no doubt, would quickly come up with a workaround.

WSJ - Editors

[The IRS Gets Out the Vote](#)

The President has another offer you can't refuse.

We're going to need more IRS agents. That's the gist of President Obama's latest bid to impose yet another mandate on the American people. This time he wants to require all Americans to vote, whether they want to or not.

In Cleveland on Wednesday the President called for compulsory voting in response to a question from the audience. What, the questioner inquired, is the best way to limit money in elections and overturn the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*, in which the Justices declared—rightly—that limits on union and corporate spending on campaigns was a limit on free speech?

The President invoked Australia and went on to recommend that the U.S. require Americans to vote as they do Down Under. "It would be transformative if everybody voted," said Mr. Obama. "That would counteract money more than anything."

He's surely wrong about the money point. Politicians would have to spend as much as ever to sway more voters. But it would be transformative. By definition a legal mandate requires enforcement. Even the good-natured Aussies impose a fine for not voting, which can expand to include court costs and jail time if you don't cough up.

Some Americans have already got a taste of what President Obama's fondness for government by mandate means. Before it won its Supreme Court case, the crafts chain Hobby Lobby was faced with fines of \$1.3 million for every day it refused to obey the contraceptive mandate. This year, with the April 15 tax deadline approaching, many young and healthy Americans who have

disobeyed the Obama mandate to buy health insurance from the government's limited menu are going to have to deal with the IRS.

"Everything not forbidden is compulsory." That line comes from British writer T.H. White, in his novel recreating the life and times of King Arthur. White meant it as mockery. President Obama doesn't get the joke.

WSJ

Shelby Steele's Thankless Task

Blacks in America have been sold out by the very liberals who ardently claim to wish them the most good.

by Joseph Epstein

'You,' a character in Ossie Davis's 1961 play "Purlie Victorious" says to another, "are a disgrace to the Negro profession." The line recurs to me whenever I see [Al Sharpton](#) or Jesse Jackson making perfunctory rabble-rousing remarks in Ferguson, Mo., Madison, Wis., current-day Selma, Ala., or any other protest scene where their appearance, like Toni Morrison on a list of honorary-degree recipients, has become de rigueur. I wonder if Shelby Steele has also been called "a disgrace to the Negro profession," and this for diametrically opposite reasons. Had he been it could only have been by people who, despite their endless cries for social justice, in one way or another have a deep emotional if not financial investment in keeping black Americans in the sad conditions in which so many of them continue to find themselves.

Shelby Steele is one of the very few writers able to tell home truths about the plight of black Americans. Telling truth to power used to be a sign of intellectual courage, but today, when the Internet has made this no great feat, what takes courage is telling truth to listeners who have grown accustomed to thinking themselves victims, have accepted the ultimately inadequate benefits of victimhood and, touchier than a fresh burn, take offense at the least criticism. Mr. Steele has taken on this thankless job with, as I suspect he would agree, less than happy results. Still, he shows no sign of letting up. In "Shame," an essay on the political polarization of our country and on the want of progress among black Americans, he has produced his most complex and challenging work.

Shame

By Shelby Steele

Basic, 198 pages, \$29.95

His authority for writing derives in part from his intellectual cogency, in part from his birth. His white mother married his black father in 1944, a time when a more radical act than miscegenation is not easily imagined. A mixed marriage in those days meant that a couple lived in black neighborhoods. Shelby Steele, born in 1946, grew up in Harvey, Ill., a predominantly working-class town just south of Chicago. He has described his biracial birth as "an absolute gift, the greatest source of insight and understanding. . . . [because] race was demystified for me. I could never see white people as just some unified group who hated blacks." Although he doesn't say so, being biracial has also allowed him insight into the hypocrisy of both blacks and whites on the subject of race.

The author has a fierce racial pride, and his writing about blacks in America is without condescension and imbued with deep sympathy. He is a brother, make no mistake, but a brother quite unlike any other. What distinguishes him is his openly stated belief that blacks in America have been sold out by the very liberals who ardently claim to wish them most good. He regrets that affirmative action, multiculturalism and most welfare programs purportedly put in place to show racial preference, far from liberating black Americans, have failed to advance their fortunes. Judging from high crime, divorce and unemployment rates, as well as relatively low rates of high-school and college completion, a case can be made that liberal policies have harmed them. To cite a single statistic: In 1965, the year after passage of the Civil Rights Act, 23.6% of black births in America were to single women; today that number is 72%.

“Shame” does not portray the United States as the promised land in which all promises have been made good. Even our liberal royal family, the Kennedys, were, when in power, wobbly on civil rights. Mr. Steele’s father was a truck driver who, owing to racism, was kept out of the Teamsters union, and hence out of making a good living, until late in his working life. Mr. Steele recounts a heartbreaking story of his own high-school days in the early 1960s when he learned that the school swimming team, of which he was a key member, was invited to the coach’s mother’s summer house and that he was excluded because the woman disliked blacks. Pockets of racism of course still exist in the country, and doubtless always will. But legal freedom has long been established, owing in part to the physical courage of civil-rights activists in the South, and opportunities for blacks to rise are now in place. “Shame” takes up the question of why for the most part they haven’t.

Mr. Steele graduated college in that *annus horribilis* 1968, at the height of protest tumult and before affirmative action kicked in. An Afro-wearing, James Baldwin-reading young man, he worked in an anti-poverty program in East St. Louis, Ill., and was sufficiently swept up in what in those days was called “the movement” to have spent time with members of the Black Panthers exiled in Algiers. He did not attend any of the name-brand, or what today might be called designer, colleges. He went to Coe College in Iowa, Southern Illinois for a master’s degree and the University of Utah for a doctorate in English literature. This relieves him of doubt about his having been given a free pass on his education by affirmative action.

In a few dispiriting pages, Mr. Steele takes up the dubiety that Supreme Court Justice [Clarence Thomas](#) has always felt about his own entry, via affirmative action, into Yale Law School. After law school, Justice Thomas applied for jobs with several firms, but to no avail. “His interrogators did not believe that he was as good as his own grades indicated,” Mr. Steele writes. “They assumed his presence before them was explained by racial preferences, not by talent. It was as if they were saying the pretense was over: Yale could afford tokenism, but they could not.” Every black student in the affirmative-action era must feel similar doubt. One wonders if the Obamas, who between them were admitted to Columbia, Princeton and Harvard Law School, ever do.

“Liberalism in the twenty-first century,” Mr. Steele writes, “is, for the most part, a moral manipulation that exaggerates inequity and unfairness in American life in order to justify overreaching public policies and programs.” This liberalism, which is not your Aunt Bessie’s liberalism but the liberalism that came into play at the 1972 Democratic convention that nominated George McGovern, “is invested in an overstatement of America’s present sinfulness based on the nation’s past sins.” Mr. Steele argues that liberalism’s efforts to alleviate the past injustices done to blacks in America have amounted to another botched project of that famously failed political construction firm, the Good Intentions Paving Co. “Liberalism,” Mr. Steele writes, “expresses its inborn racism in the way it overlooks the full human complexity of blacks—the

fact that they are more than mere victims—in order to distill and harden the idea of their victimization into a currency of liberal power.”

Liberals, Mr. Steele holds, deal in what he calls “poetic truth.” This is a kind of truth “conceived in reaction to the great shames of America’s past—racism, sexism, territorial conquest (manifest destiny), corporate greed, militarism, and so on.” In poetic truth, the world is reduced to victims and victimizers, with liberals alone innocent of evil and thus excluded, by self-dissociation, from the role of victimizers. Under the realm of poetic truth, Mr. Steele explains, the race riots of the late 1960s could find justification and the feminist slogan “woman as nigger” could be taken seriously, while “fifty years of real moral evolution in America” can be entirely ignored.

After the 1960s, in Mr. Steele’s reading, authority was undermined and “authenticity” put in its place. Authenticity, he writes, “meant the embrace of new idealisms and new identities that explicitly untethered you from America’s notorious hypocrisies.” Through rebellion, antiwar activity, dissent, civil and uncivil disobedience, and dropping out before selling out, authenticity rendered one innocent of all the old evils associated with American power, domestic and international; authenticity also gave one the right to view “traditional America as a fundamentally hypocritical society.”

Mr. Steele does not use the word, but authenticity also conferred virtue on those who chose it. Self-virtue is the ultimate consolation to be found in the poetic truth of the new politics that came into being in the 1960s, and millions of Americans, rich white liberals prominent among them—recall Leonard Bernstein’s famous party for the Black Panthers—gloried in it. These politics changed the nature of liberalism from a reform-minded, character-forming set of political ideas into “a broad, guilt-driven, moralistic liberalism in which at least a vague anti-Americanism was decency itself.” America, in this interpretation, is essentially evil, and those who oppose it from within are thereby good. Hence the claim to moral superiority of the protest groups—blacks, women, gays et al.—of our day. For black Americans, the claim to moral superiority took the form of grievance, boisterous, unrelenting and willfully blind to any evidence of progress.

The new liberalism, eager to bring about The Good (Mr. Steele’s capital letters), went in for social engineering to accomplish its missionary work. For Mr. Steele not The Good but true good “would include an incentive to minorities to in fact become equal with all others by *talent* and *merit* . . . [and] would ask minorities to assimilate into modernity even if that felt like self-betrayal. . . . And it would discourage them from building a group identity singularly focused on protest. . . . Instead, all would be focused on their becoming competitive.” Blacks, Mr. Steele argues, ran into serious discrimination in sports and music, and yet in these competitive fields “their excellence and merit ultimately prevailed over all else.”

As things now stand in American political life, the desire for equality has trumped freedom; self-virtue, honesty; and preferential programs, the development of character. The effect of these liberal victories has been to lessen the quality of American life. Consider the contemporary university, where the goal of diversity, enforced by the whiphand of political correctness, has brought in various minority studies, women’s and gay studies, and other intellectual vulgarities in the name of redressing old injustices and mollifying grievances. The humanities and the social sciences have become hopelessly tendentious, the ideal of truth besmirched and higher education itself turned sadly comic.

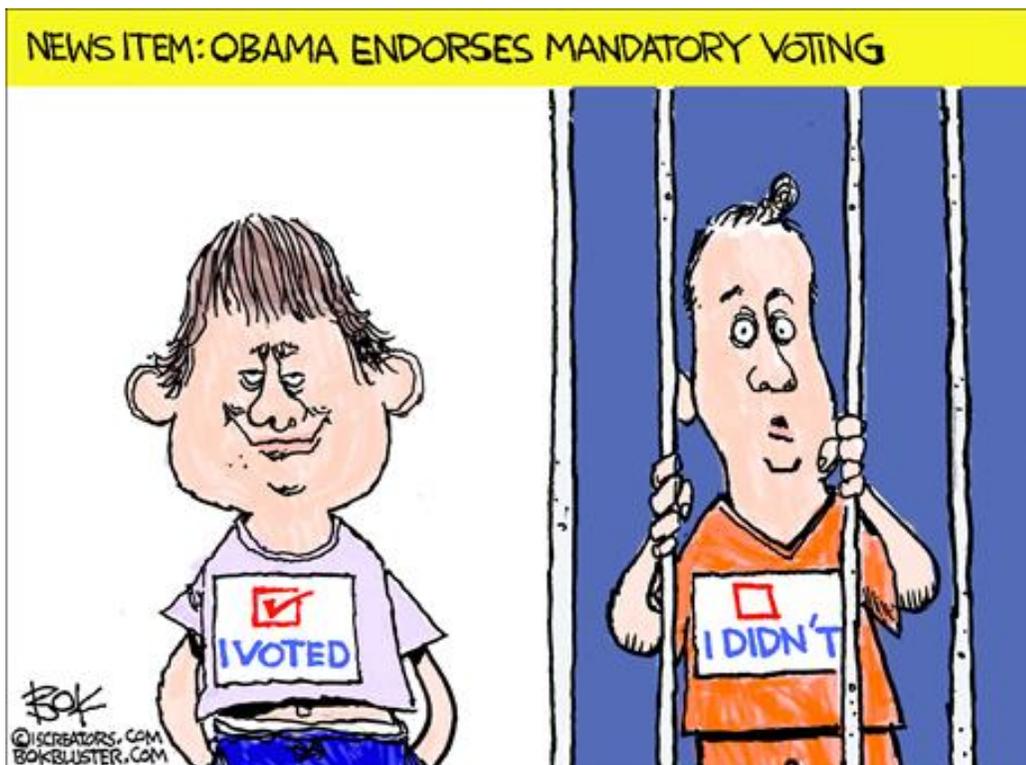
Through the pages of “Shame,” Mr. Steele fills in a few of the details behind his own conversion from angry young black man to chronicler of the dead end that anger and moral indignation, supported by white guilt, have brought to American blacks. Strongly implicated in this

conversion was his father, who had seen much darker days than his son ever would and who, as long ago as the late 1960s, assured him that “you shouldn’t underestimate America. . . . It’s strong enough to change.” After visiting the Black Panthers in North Africa and witnessing their self-destructive hatred for their own country, which left them placeless and bereft, Shelby Steele began to recognize that “the American mainstream would be my fate.”

The author’s conclusion is that black America sold itself out, entered “a Faustian pact,” as he puts it, by placing its destiny in the “hands of contrite white people.” Doing so, he writes, “left us pleading with government, not for freedom, which we had already won, but for ‘programs’ and ‘preferences’ that would be a ladder to full equality. The chilling result is that now, fifty years later, we remain—by most important measures—in the position of inferiors and dependents.” The liberalism that has come into prominence since the 1960s, Mr. Steele believes, “has done little more than toy with blacks.”

Mr. Steele has himself become a conservative. He is a conservative who believes less in the mysticism of the invisible hand of the market than in the force of strong character as the main element propelling social change. He is certain that there will never be a government program that builds such character. Speaking out about the false bargain that blacks have made with the new liberalism will doubtless earn him, if it hasn’t already done so, the old opprobrious title of Uncle Tom. The irony here is that Shelby Steele might just be a Tom of a different kind—a black Tom Paine, whose 21st-century common sense could go a long way to bringing his people out of their by now historical doldrums.

Mr. Epstein’s latest book is “Masters of the Game: Essays and Stories on Sport.”





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