

Sexual Politics adapted from *A View from Acqualoreto* blog published 6/6/2013

Here in Italy our recent parliamentary elections featured as many as 16 different political parties offering up full lists of candidates for the 918 seats in the two houses of Parliament. While this may represent a wide range of political opinions, issues and interests, it more realistically results from the fact that electoral expenses of all the parties are paid for by the Government. The fragmentation of the electorate has led to coalitions of parties under the umbrella descriptions of center-left and center-right, in order to allow the possibility of alternating administrations, such as the two-party system has historically created in the United States.

Meanwhile, in the US people are clamoring for a third party, or even a move to a multi-party system. Based on the Italian experience, this may not be as fruitful as imagined. The two party system has been made up of Democrats and Republicans since the latter replaced the defunct Whigs in 1860. Republicans traditionally represented business interests and the wealthy, while Democrats have represented put-upon minorities, the term minority originally associated with people of non-British descent.

Three of my grandparents were of Dutch origin. The two best-known Dutch names in the US are Roosevelt and Rockefeller so I can't say I ever felt the sting of minority status. Nevertheless, I always tended to identify with the underdogs, possibly influenced by my Uncle Martin, a union carpenter who may have been regarded as the black sheep of the family, but who had democratic tendencies rare among his siblings. Our WASP Republican family lived in the New Jersey suburbs, well within the hegemony of the NY Yankees. It must have been my contrarian nature that led me, from an early age, to become a life-long fan of the Boston Red Sox, and equally a foe of the dominant pin-striped Yankees.

While I was spared from minority discrimination myself, I did hear stories of how my German great-grandfather's delicatessen had been vandalized and my mother's German language lessons curtailed during WWI. For a time Germans were also considered a minority, although I believe their contributions to the US gene pool were even larger than those of the English. In any case, Irish, Italians and Jews all had it much worse, and people of African descent had it worse by another whole magnitude. All have been embraced by the Democratic Party, although for blacks the embrace wasn't extended for a century, until FDR and LBJ came along. I've felt solidarity with them all, with a possible asterisk for the Irish resulting from their unsettling over-representation in local police departments. In any case, I've been proud to call myself a Democrat and vote accordingly.

With the three decade long transformation of the Republican Party from a bastion of the middle class to a single-minded advocate for the richest 1%, one might suppose that the GOP (Grand Old Party for the non-American readers and the very

young) would be facing extinction but the One dollar-One vote policies recently enshrined by the Supreme Court have gone a long way toward keeping the party afloat. Most of the above-mentioned groups no longer consider themselves minorities, nor are seen as such, so their Democratic roots have withered. We just don't hear much about Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans or other hyphenated Americans any more. That is not the case for blacks (of all shades) whose stubbornness in voting for Democrats at something like a 95% rate has made it easy for them to be gerrymandered or disenfranchised out of political relevance, allowing the outnumbered Republicans to seize the White House in 2002 and 2004. Most humiliating of all, they've been tricked into providing the margin of support needed to get a half black, big business Republican, disguised as a liberal Democrat, elected President, twice. None of the certified GOP Toms, from Alan Keyes to Herman Cain, managed to pull off that trick, but it seems they didn't really need to.

The mainstream media have taken to lamenting that there is no bi-partisanship in government and nothing can be achieved. Whether this stems from naivetè or collusion we can't say but there is bi-partisan agreement on most of the main issues that the US faces today. The need to keep the big banks safe from their own colossal gambling mistakes, the need to keep our military expenditures above those of the rest of the world combined, the need to slash all civilian services and programs; the need for de facto adjustment of the Constitution to accommodate the growing demands of the surveillance state, with the concomitant suppression of whistle blowers; the desirability of preemptive remote-control bombing of possible enemies worldwide; the need to slash taxes and, of course, the need to balance the budget, are all accepted on both sides of the aisle, with minor differences in the details. With President Obama in the White House, Jack Lew at Treasury and Penny Pritzker at Commerce, the big banks are safe.

So with all this unprecedented bi-partisanship around, what can the Democratic Party do to restore its traditions and keep the two-party system alive? There is a fast growing Hispanic minority, exploited and discriminated enough to qualify as Democrats, but it looks like they will be represented by rich emigrè Cubans, most of whom belong to the GOP. Eminent Senators have declared, and a number of Supreme Court justices have suggested, that there is no longer any need or justification for affirmative action legislation since the US is now free of racial discrimination. With racial and ethnic discrimination a thing of the past, in an effort to find new minorities to represent, the Democratic Party has now become the refuge of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) coalition. The party's entry into sexual politics is hardly a new thing. It's been the standard bearer for all feminist issues for several decades.

The Democratic embrace of the LGBT coalition has been fully reciprocated. In a move reminiscent of that historic moment a decade ago when Colin Powell and Condolizza Rice showed the world that the US Government was no longer just a bunch of old white men lying to and misleading the public, the SF Pride Board Chairman, Lisa Williams, organizer of the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade,

declared that no demonstration of support for gay whistle-blower Bradley Manning would be tolerated, thus putting the LGBT alliance solidly into the ranks of the political mainstream. Manning had been named Grand Marshall of the parade but that decision had been rescinded, setting off some demonstrations. This event may prove to be closer in nature and historic relevance to the 1968 Democratic Convention, where Chicago Mayor Daley came down heavily on anti-war demonstrators, paving the way for the phoenix-like rise from the ashes of one Richard M. Nixon.

While I welcome the LGBT folks into the fold and I'm happy to see the rights of gay friends as keenly advocated as were those of previous minorities, I do have a few concerns. This embrace does have some electoral logic since the foot soldiers of the oligarchy, as well as its voting base, tend to come from the ranks of gun nuts and non-Muslim religious zealots. Neither of these groups has shown much solidarity with the LGBT movement. Unfortunately, the LGBT vote, even if as solidly Democratic as the black vote, probably doesn't reach 15%, maybe not even 10% of the electorate. Why not build a bigger tent?

Much discussion of same-sex marriage has been mislabeled as "marriage equality" Who's kidding whom? Ask Mitt Romney. His polygamous grandfather was run out of the country for his religious beliefs and personal practices regarding marriage. Who knows what might have happened had Mexican-born George Romney, Mitt's father, won the 1968 GOP primary? Republicans may consider Mexico to be an American colony, much like Panama, John McCain's birthplace, but apparently haven't extended such imperial blessings to the State of Hawaii, the birthplace of the current President. What about all those Bin Laden family members spirited out of the country the day after 9/11 during the air traffic lock-down. They may have had special treatment getting out but were their marital rights respected when they entered the country? I doubt it! The US has suppressed the traditional customs of polygamists for centuries, be they Mormons, Muslims or hippies. Let's call them "pollies". Why don't pollies have the right to marry those they love?

Current progressive thinking is that people are born straight, gay or bi-sexual but no one seems to have considered that some people are born asexual. Asexuals may not have readily identifiable needs nor prominent issues but still, what political entity is speaking up for "Aces". Without getting into another nature-nurture argument, we can see that people are living longer, eating and drinking more while exercising less, enduring more daily stress, and suffering in greater numbers from prostate ailments, so the ace population is growing rapidly. Perhaps people who are more interested in money than sex just naturally gravitate to the GOP, but why should Democrats concede this growing slice of the electorate without a fight?

Once we tended to think of aces as being mostly priests and nuns, as if all aces were born Catholic, but does anyone speak for Protestant and Jewish aces? In recent years it has emerged that many priests haven't been the aces we thought they were. While our culture now glorifies sexuality in all its splendid variety, it

struggles to accept that priests have needs too, and that sometimes their love extends to young people. Lonely football coaches have also come in for harsh approbation when their affections or private parts have been exposed. The term pedophile carries heavy negative connotations. Offering sweets to their sweeties has gotten many older men into deep trouble, even though our laws are confusing and conflicting. Some young women in the teaching profession are now in prison because in addition to algebra they taught their young charges about love. "Sweets" would be a far less negative term for people whose love knows no age limits.

Much has been made of accepting or rejecting gay Boy Scouts. As I recall, the entry age for Boy Scouts was twelve. When I was rejected, it had nothing to do with sex. I simply failed to memorize the Boy Scout Oath or the Boy Scout Code, I can't remember which. With all the chemicals and hormones in the environment, kids are reaching puberty earlier these days, but is sexual identity cast in stone at twelve? The age of consent in the US ranges from 16 to 18 with some states providing exceptions from prosecution when, for example, the older offender is not more than two years older than the "victim". Girls can now get over-the-counter day-after birth control pills at any age, a big step toward protecting them from unwanted pregnancy but who is working to decriminalize their partners?

Nymphomaniacs, the patron saints of adolescent boys, and another unprotected sexual minority, are often targets of verbal abuse. Calling them sluts or hos should be just as unacceptable as using other terms of derision such as wop, kike, nigger and faggot, but what is the Democratic Party doing about it? With Post Traumatic Stress Disorder becoming an epidemic and more American soldiers committing suicide than being killed in battle, the government could be mobilizing our "nymphs" to restore morale in our ailing troops and letting them live to fight another day. We haven't even mentioned the rights and problems of our professional sex workers but they vote too.

Even with an expanded sexual campaign, the Democratic Party still needs to widen its base. The fastest expanding demographic group is made up of the morbidly obese. "Bigs" are still a minority for the moment but they need representation. Campaigning for larger airline seats and fighting Mayor Bloomberg's anti-soft drink crusade could go a long way toward rescuing this group from the clutches of New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie while creating a permanent Democratic majority.

With an expanded battle for full sexual rights and privileges, and support for Big issues, I believe the Democrats can regain control of the Congress and perhaps even the Presidency. If not, America may see the growth of one issue splinter parties howling in the dark about bank regulation, the environment, habeas corpus, ascendant oligarchy, economic justice, job creation, climate change, infrastructure collapse, social security, immigration, war crimes, education, unending war, corporate personhood and any number of other wedge issues. The US could even end up as politically fragmented as Italy finds itself today.