

COMES THE EVOLUTION
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At about 10:00 PM on election night I was preparing a column the thrust of which was this: I was wrong, Gore won, but The Evolution is only slowed, not stymied.

By 2:00 AM, when Florida was called for Bush, I changed the beginning of the column: Bush won, and the Evolution will proceed, slowly.

I write this as the Florida results are being recounted. As I understand it Bush is the more likely victor there, so we'll use my second beginning.

The Republicans, with the help of some Democratic moderates, will move the Evolution ahead. And that offers them--thanks to some luck, which can be utilized by the deserving--the opportunity to capture the long-awaited, and possibly ephemeral political prize: The Great Realignment. That could yield for the Republicans in the first third of the 21st century what the Democrats had in the middle third of the 20th century: political dominance.

That's a lot of capital letters. Let me explain quickly, lest Florida goes the other way before I finish.

The Evolution, is sometimes mistakenly called "a move to the right." In fact, it concerns the further extension of liberty in America, both economic and social. On the economic side it includes the drive toward a more market-driven economy, de-regulation, free trade, broader stock ownership,

and much more. On the social side it involves more tolerance, more choice in education, with a continued recrimalization of criminality so that greater tolerance can take hold, unafraid.

The Republicans will "control" virtually the whole edifice of federal and state government. They have a solid lead among the state Governors, the folks who set the Bush candidacy in motion. They have barely retained the House, but this is the fourth straight time--and that no longer looks accidental. Through the tie-breaking vote in the Senate of Vice President Richard Cheney the Republicans will organize that body, from where it can confirm Bush's Supreme Court nominations, if they are moderates. Even the state legislatures, which not long ago were solidly Democratic, are very close now. The new re-apportionment that will follow the announcement of Census 2000 results should give the Republicans some further help.

So, George W. Bush and his party are now accountable for the whole government. Bush said he could bring Republicans and Democrats together to do the country's business. Your serve, Governor.

But will he have a mandate to act? My dear friend and sometimes co-author Richard M. Scammon worked as a political analyst with the 1960 presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy. JFK won by the thinnest of margins. After the election, Kennedy and some political advisors met, Scammon among them, and discussed the moment. One aide asked the President-elect: "but what about the mandate?" To which

Kennedy replied (according to Scammon) "Mandate schmandate; I'm here, he's there..."

Yes, the President has 100% of the executive power even when he wins with 49% of the vote.

Bush's test will be to show that The Evolution is healthy, unthreatening and realistic. The partial privatization of Social Security is a case in point. It can be the greatest anti-poverty program since what? Since most anything. It helps poorer people most, giving them what their economic betters have always had: accrued wealth (not just income.) The workers of the world will finally own the means of production! (I overstate, but not by much.)

Similarly, some small federal school voucher programs, and some larger state ones, will yield more liberty to parents and children, particularly poor ones.

Interestingly, were Gore to be elected, it would take longer, but the direction on these matters would likely be the same. The 21st Century will be an opportunity society. (And it's going to be damned good, no matter which party harnesses the beast.)

The election can offer something else, big, to Democrats. The vaunted "economic modelers" in their academic nests were wrong, dead wrong. The economy does not determine national elections. Period. This is more than just a silly academic debate. Many liberal Democrats have chosen to believe it, at

their peril. They think they can do most anything, stand for most anything, provided the economy grows. That may have been true in the middle third of the 20th Century. It will not be true in the first third of the 21st. Recent Wall Street Journal polling, for example, shows conclusively that even in a time of robust economic growth Americans say that moral and social values trump economics.

Let good feeling reign. It's a hell of a process. I will forget about Gore's scabrous statements in black churches over the final weekend, if Gore supporters loosen up and give the new guy a chance. And so I close, lest Florida shift again.

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