

## The Insanity Defense

Hey, did you see the results of the Missouri Primaries last week? Apparently the great State of Missouri has decided that traditional, old line, well connected, Washington insider politicians are what the country (or at least Missouri) needs right now. Ms. Carnahan, the Democrat, and Mr. Blunt, the Republican, are about as connected as you can get in Missouri. This does my heart good for one reason and one reason only. It tells me that the heretofore unstoppable Tea Party Movement might turn out to be just another interesting side note in American history. If Missouri, that classically mid-south mostly conservative bastion, can't nominate an outsider candidate then who can? If a Tea Party candidate can't do well there then where will they do well? OK, so there's Kentucky but remember Rand Paul will just be following another nut case, Jim Bunning. Rail as we might against traditional politics, there's nothing as useful as money and connections. The Tea Party goes up against both. Good luck.

It might just be that the Tea Party Movement is a symptom of our latest national affliction. America these days has the attention span of an adolescent gnat. I don't know if it's the media that drives the malady or our limping public education system or parental lethargy or our culture of instant gratification but we seem to be enduring an era that will go down for its attention to fluff, short term fluff. There are people lining up and doing reprehensible things every day just to land a spot on a "reality" show. There's Joe the Plumber who isn't either. There's a 70% Obama approval rating in 2009 and a 47% rating ten months later. There are major stories making headlines for a day or two only to be replaced by some star's latest rehab failure. We have young people dying in South Asia every day but the Afghan war is lucky if it gets bottom of the news-page placement.

We just can't seem to care long enough about important matters and it's gotten to the point where there are no matters of import. Just stuff. The trivial and the profound are all the same, no distinctions. It doesn't matter whether the coverage is of Constitutional Issues or a Zoo Escape, Heat Indexes or Fashion Eyewear, Genocide or Vacation Destinations. Did you notice that the prosecution at the international trial of Charles Taylor called on the testimony of a fashion model to help make the case against a most obvious war criminal? Why?

My guess is that they thought it might get people to pay attention if Naomi Campbell took the stand. Imagine that. Here's a man accused of institutional rape, slave trafficking, arms dealing, blood diamond trading and wholesale murder but the prosecution feels that it needs a "star" to make the trial interesting.

Are we stupid or have we just given up? It's OK to give up every once in a while. You know, like when we were kids and the other side was winning 132 to 6 and you just started over, clean slate and all. That's one thing and, as unpleasant as it is, I get the idea that we need a rest occasionally, a rest from weighty issues and perpetual dilemmas.

But it's the other notion that scares me. What if, over the past few years, we have gotten so dumb that reality TV is real, that emotional rants are policy proposals and wannabe stars and talking heads become popular Party leaders? What if we really are in a place where a zillionaire's saying he is for the little guy can get him elected? What if we really are in a place where pretending your name is Joe and that you are a licensed plumber is enough to make you famous? What if we really do think that Rand Paul's message is something other than recycled William Jennings Bryant hokum? What if we really do believe that collaterally killing wedding guests in Afghanistan will prevent future terrorist attacks? That is one definition of insanity, you know, trying the same thing time after time and believing that the outcome will somehow be different.

I feel better having said that. Maybe we haven't given up. Maybe we aren't stupid. Maybe we're just nuts.