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After Globalism and Identity Politics

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Since the end of the Cold War, America has been mesmerized by two ideas that have given hazy coherence to the post-1989 world: “globalism” and “identity politics.” Formidable political movements in America and in Europe, still raucous and unrefined, now reject both ideas. Political and intellectual elites dismiss these movements because they believe the post-1989 world as they have understood it is still intact, and that no thoughtful person could think otherwise. Hence, the only-dumb-white-people-vote-for-Trump trope.

The “globalization” idea has expressions on both the Left and Right: on the Left, the emphasis has been on so-called “global norms” and culture; on the Right, the emphasis has been on so-called “free-trade” and democracy promotion through military means. Both sides believe in the inevitability of their idea of globalization. We live, however, in a world of states. In that world, the movement of cultural information and material goods has not been free-flowing, and really can never be. Regulatory agencies within the state, often captured by corporations who by virtue of economies of scale can afford large back-office compliance staff, determine what comes in and what stays out. NAFTA is hundreds of pages long. TPP is thousands of pages long. The real beneficiaries of these arrangements are state regulators and large

corporations. They will always be in favor of so-called “free trade.” They both gain; but American workers generally do not. Consumers get cheaper goods, but a chasm opens up between those who are in on the game and those who are not. Standards of living fall for all but the few. Government grows. Corporations get rich. What happens to everybody else?

“Globalization” suggests a world where states matter little. If states matter little, then citizenship matters little. To assist in this diminishment of the importance of the state, we have become enthralled by the idea that we are *not* citizens who have been encultured into a certain set of practices and traditions that we hold dear because we are legal members of a state in which we find our home. Rather, we are bearers of this or that “identity,” which is the only really important thing about us. With this idea, the purpose of the state shifts from mediating the interests of lawful citizens (with a view to defending liberty and property) to disseminating resources based on what you *deserve* because of your “identity.” The “aggrieved” person is not an active citizen, encouraged to build a common world with his or her neighbors, but a passive victim who is to receive assistance from the state. The *real* debt of money does not matter, for the U.S. Government can go deeper into debt without cost. All that matters is that educators and politicians continue to chant about the debt you are owed because of your “identity.” In exchange, you, the identity-bearing citizen, must continue to chant about “global norms” and “free trade” that elites promise will redound to the benefit of all. And if it doesn’t, all is not lost, because even if the crony-capitalists and state regulators don’t do anything but line their own pockets, you will at least get the satisfaction that you are *owed something* because of your victim-status. They, who are getting rich while you are getting poor, tell you so. Indeed, the price of admission to *their* world, is that you should continue to be mesmerized by “globalization” and “identity politics.” Here, parenthetically, is the corruption at the heart of the American University, without which this configuration of ideas could not have come to prevail in the post-1989 world.

The upcoming Presidential campaign is about many things, not least the persons of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. In the midst of a world that longs for perfection, we find ourselves with two human-all-too-human candidates.

Beyond the lure or abhorrence of their character is the singular question: will the next Administration double-down on the mesmerizing configuration of “globalization” and “identity politics,” and in the process fortify the crony-capitalist class and those who think they profit from identity politics? Hillary Clinton and The Clinton Foundation are ground-zero for this configuration. Donald Trump opposes that configuration, on a good day gives inchoate expression of a genuine alternative, on a bad day blunders horribly, and will probably lose the upcoming national election.

The outlines of a genuine alternative involve the following correlated ideas, some of which have been clearly formulated in Trump’s campaign, while others have been lurking in it or are merely encouraged by it:

- Because States are territories within which specific laws are enforced, borders matter. Borders mark where one set of laws begins and another set of laws ends. Tender-hearted sentiments about “universal humanity” cannot overrule this consideration. If mercy is shown, it is as an exception to generally-binding law, and not a repudiation of it. **Borders matter.**
- Because the laws of States work only when people are acculturated to them and adopt them as their own, legal immigration of people from cultures not accustomed to the laws of the State and their practical foundation must proceed slowly, and with the understanding that it takes several generations to acculturate them. **Immigration policy matters.**
- Because we live in a world of States, there will always be war. Therefore we must firmly establish who our allies are, and what we will do to defend them. In keeping with a somber view of the world, we cannot be driven by the dreamy ideals of universal world-around democracy in choosing our allies. Foreign policy is for the purpose of defending our own nation, not spending blood and treasure trying to persuade other nations to imitate our laws and ways. **National interests, not so-called universal interests, matter.**
- Because the United States is composed of immigrants, admission into the Middle Class, made possible by robust economic growth, must be among the

highest domestic priorities. Crony-capitalism diminishes growth by pre-determining permanent winners and permanent losers. So-called “free trade” agreements that benefit crony-capitalists eventually slow growth. Also slowing growth is the ever-increasing state regulation of nearly every aspect of daily life, which purports to protect us from harm. What good is such protection, however, when citizens cease to believe that they are responsible for themselves, their families, and their neighbors; and when the very spirit of entrepreneurship is undermined by it? **The spirit of entrepreneurship, not just state-sponsored “care” of docile citizens, matters.**

- Because the sway of lobbyists in national politics grows in proportion to the growth of the federal government, the distorting power of lobbyists cannot be curtailed until the Constitutional limits on the federal government, established by the Founding Fathers, are observed anew. The federal government was set up to adjudicate certain issues, but not others. Those other issues—issues pertaining to the daily life of citizens—were to be adjudicated by state and local governments. When the purview of the federal government is extended beyond its original bounds, it becomes dysfunctional, and the power of the Executive and the Courts extends to compensate. This invites the tyranny of the Executive. The greater danger is not the person holding the Presidential office at any given time; the greater danger is the nature of the Executive office when the federal government grows disproportionately. **Federalism and the decentralization of power matters.**
- Because “identity politics” undermines the idea of citizens who must engage one-another based not on their identity, but on “the content of their character” as Martin Luther King famously said, the politically correct speech that destroys citizenship and the possibility of any *common accord* about what personal and national greatness may involve must be roundly repudiated. PC speech is corrosive to the soul of America. It is humorless; it reduces all real “differences” to highly contrived, orchestrated, and controlled categories, the cost of straying from which is ostracism or worse. The Salem witch trials of 1692-93 have nothing on us today. America: ever involved in casting out the impure and the doubting. If you are African-American, please don’t mention that you believe in God and go to Church; identity politics allows no room for Christianity—though it bows before an imagined purity of Islam. Women? You may have apprehensions about how the proliferation of gender “identities” bears on your unique struggle to balance and to make sense of the conflicting demands of family and professional life. You, however, must say nothing. Every imagined gender identity is to be equally respected. You thought you were special, but you are not. We live in a world where all things are possible. Anyone who speaks of limits, of constraints, is “phobic” in one way or another.

The bourgeois spirit that built America, the interest in making *lots* of money, in being “successful,” in taking risks—above all the strength of soul necessary to face *failure* and come back from it, stronger—these are held in contempt. No one dares speak up in a PC world. Feelings might be hurt; people may feel “uncomfortable.” Trigger warnings and “safe spaces” occupy our attention. The task in the highly choreographed world of “identity politics” is not to toughen up but to domesticate. No fights. No insults to which we respond with strength and self-assurance and overweening confidence. Indeed, with laughter! Everywhere: protections made possible by The Great Protector—the State—for by ourselves we cannot rise to the occasion. **Greatness matters; if we are to have it, personally and as a country, we must cast off PC speech that in “protecting” us from suffering causes us to be its victim in perpetuity.**

On each of these issues—borders, immigration, national interest, the spirit of entrepreneurship, federalism, and PC speech—Hillary Clinton responds with “globalization-and-identity-politics-SPEAK,” the language that has given us a world that is now exhausted, stale, and unredeemable. It is against this sort of world that citizens are revolting. And not just in the United States, but in Europe and Britain as well. The ideas of “globalization” and “identity politics” that mesmerized us in the aftermath of the Cold War now belong in the dust-bin of history. The question, bigger than the question of the personalities of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, is whether we will have one more Administration that authorizes them and tries to solve our problems through their lens.

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