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Special 200th Birthday Issue

February 12, 2009, is the 200th birthday of both Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin. This gives a once-in-a-century excuse to discuss the effect of Natural Selection on Political Discourse.

Charles Darwin developed the theory of Natural Selection, that an organism that adapts to its environment most efficiently, tends to live longer and reproduce more, so its offspring which carry the adaptation likewise reproduce more, and as this process continues, the organisms with the adaptation displace the organisms which do not carry the adaptation.

Abraham Lincoln applied this theory to Political Discourse and the results confirmed the validity of the theory. Halfway through his first term, President Lincoln faced a third of his country in organized armed rebellion against the Federal government, and faced serious opposition in the non-rebelling portion of the country to spending lives and money to force the rebelling parts to stay in.

President Lincoln concluded that the rebellion would be shortened if the slave-labor basis of the economic activity that financed the rebellion's war effort, growing cotton to trade to England for arms, were disrupted by giving the slaves hope of freedom. But, looking to a re-election campaign in 1864, that hope of freedom had to be presented in a way that would not be seen as a threat to either Northern industry or Northern labor that would scare either of those groups into supporting General McClellan and the negotiated-peace platform of the Democrats.

Until 1862, anybody who advocated an end to Negro slavery was an "abolitionist", one who wanted to "abolish" slavery and thereby "take away" the property of the slaveholders. This term provoked divisive reaction throughout the United States. President Lincoln adopted the term "emancipation", to "set free" or to "bring forth from chains", which was lots tougher to argue against. This permitted the Republicans to join with the War Democrats to offer President Lincoln for re-election in 1864 as the Presidential candidate of the National Union Party, and defeat former General McClellan and the anti-war Democrats (winning in the State of New York by a margin of less than 1%, and losing in New Jersey, Delaware, and Oregon). President Lincoln won, to become The Great Emancipator, not That Abolitionist.

Political partisans realized that command of the language meant command of the political process, wherefore looting the occupied former rebellious States in 1867 became "Reconstruction", and a century later napaing villages became "rural pacification".

In 2009, the President needs to take command of the language away from Rush Limbaugh and those who would frustrate the President's plans to repair the damage of the past eight years. There is a recent urban legend, that this writer fervently hopes is based in fact, that at a meeting a few days after the Inauguration, the House Minority Leader questioned the President, "These very-low-income people don't make enough money to PAY taxes. How do they qualify for a tax REFUND?" To which the President replied, "Because we had an election in November and I WON."

So, enough with this practice of preventing individuals of outstanding qualifications from serving the public in the current Administration because they were “lobbyists”. A “lobbyist” is an individual who worked to influence the government to adopt a law or a regulation or a policy of which we of good moral character DISAPPROVE. Those who worked to influence the government to do things of which we APPROVE were “public policy advocates” and are not disqualified from serving the public in the current Administration.

Likewise with the policy of “no earmarks”. The Economic Recovery Act working though Congress was meticulously kept free of specifying individual job-creation construction projects so as to avoid violating the currently-fashionable prohibition of “earmarks”, instead delivering mountains of dollars to State governments to fund construction projects which those States had already approved but were unable to fund. On cue, NPR reporter Andrea Seabrook questioned Hon. David Obey, chair of the House Appropriations Committee, if Congress will be responsible if that money is spent badly. Rush must be bustin’ a gut.

This is another problem that is best solved by taking control of the language. An “earmark” is an allocation of the taxpayers’ money to fund a specific project or program, of which we of good moral character DISAPPROVE. An allocation of the taxpayers’ money to a specific project or program or other job-creating activity of which we APPROVE is a “focused demand initiative”. That phrase has got to have enough syllables to satisfy even NPR as to its existential validity.

Federal distributions of taxpayer dollars NEED focused demand initiatives, to vastly increase Pell-Grant-style programs to get young folks for whom there are no jobs, off the streets and into colleges. In college environments, those Pell-Grant dollars will be used to employ persons IN THE UNITED STATES to teach, house, feed, and clean up after those young people. The previous administration’s Globalization initiatives wrecked the last shreds of manufacture of consumer goods within the United States and left us with only service-sector jobs. Within the service sector, educational services and medical services are two areas where some jobs offer the prospect of a living wage. Congress should focus great big demand initiatives on those sectors and do it real soon.

President Lincoln’s adaptation of the language so as to be able to free slaves and still get re-elected established that the mere act of manipulating the words does not of itself rob the end result of its goodness. Over the past hundred and fifty years, most successful Presidents have manipulated words and some have done good by it. The Presidency is no longer in the hands of the Same Old Boomer Generation. This next-generation President demonstrated his skill at adapting the new technology so as to win the election. The President should waste no time in adapting historical language-manipulation tactics to get on with the job of saving the country, appointing the necessary people and allocating money to necessary projects, notwithstanding the Best Intentions of the Pure In Heart.

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