

Steyn's After America

☒ Sometimes the author rises to meet the times, and the times cooperate. Just after the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Mark Steyn forever cemented his reputation among the literary Right by releasing *America Alone*, a short, painfully well written and reasoned book about terrorism and demography. *America Alone* had the effect on the Right of an excruciatingly loud, rude alarm clock: It was not enough to want to win the battle for civilization; we much also think about the odds against us.

About sixteen months later Jonah Goldberg's *Liberal Fascism* was published, effectively making the case that no matter what one assumes or is told, fascism shares with socialism and Communism the unmistakable stench of the Left. So as Barack Obama went on about "shared sacrifice," the need for government-run health care, and how America should start apologizing for itself, *America Alone* and *Liberal Fascism* became primers and debate prep for those conservatives who not only understood what Obama was, but otherwise just could not hold their noses for John McCain.

Now, near the tenth anniversary of 9/11, Mark Steyn has produced *After America*, a relentless, brilliantly reasoned, fantastically written, and unflinchingly dark analysis of what one could reasonably call the decline and fall of the United States of America (after Gibbon). Steyn is at his absolute best as a writer and thinker here, taking that rare step up from a man who wrote an important book to one of conservatism's few indispensable men.

As one who writes only occasionally these days, I must admit that when Steyn gets on a roll, he very nearly brings me to the brink of stopping entirely. "Obama himself is not about 'doing,'" he explains early on. "Why would you expect him to be able to 'do' anything? What has he ever 'done' other than

publish books about himself? That was the story of his life: Wow! Look at this guy! Wouldn't it be great to have him ... as Harvard Law Review editor, as community organizer, as state representative, as state senator, as United States senator. He was wafted ever upwards, staying just long enough in each 'job' to get another notch on the escutcheon, but never long enough to leave any trace – until a freak combination of circumstances (war weariness, financial meltdown, divisive incumbent, inept opponent, the chance to cast a history-making vote) put Obama in line for the ultimate waft.”

That is Barack Obama put succinctly; it is also one part of one paragraph on page sixty-two. The great joy of After America is that there is so much to take in, the reader will find himself going back, re-reading, and thinking about the passage he just finished. This is not a book to be skimmed or taken lightly; Mark Steyn wants, and deserves, your undivided attention.

Mitt Romney and the Mormon Question(s)

✘ Gallup announced Monday that 22 percent of Americans would not vote a Mormon into the presidency, even if he were nominated by their own party. This is a figure that has not just remained steady since 1967, but on the whole has risen five points.

Broken down by affiliation, 18 percent of Republicans, 19 percent of Independents, and 27 percent of America's most open minded and tolerant political party, the Democrats, say they couldn't be persuaded to take the plunge. Though Gallup notes

lesser educated people are more likely to reject a Mormon nominee, there “are no significant differences on this question by gender, age, region of the country, or religious preference.” What does this mean for Mitt Romney, who is not only the Republican front-runner, but also a Mormon?

Call it a hunch, but it feels like those Republicans are opposed for religious reasons, and those Democrats are opposed because they fundamentally distrust and dislike all religions. (Except Islam, of course, which the Left adores and respects to the utmost, because tolerating Islam is a hell of a lot easier than being stabbed to death in the street.) Problem is, you can't always tell the difference between a Catholic objection and an atheistic one – they both tend to believe their way is the One Way.

For example, this caller to the John Gibson show: “The Mormons and the whole magic underwear thing is what has me tilted out... They believe they wear a special garment that they believe are magical, and if Romney believes that, if he believes in magic undergarments, I don't want him” to be president. You call it: annoying Catholic or annoying atheist?

Gibson did eventually ask the caller, “Do you know how silly this gets once you open this door?” but at the root of it, just about every religion becomes silly once it's broken down and honestly examined. Whether Romney is a strictly observant Mormon or a Jack Mormon (i.e., the LDS equivalent of a “cafeteria Catholic”) is less critical to his campaign than how to address attacks on his religion.

And make no mistake: The strongest points against him are RomneyCare and Mormonism. The Left will be hesitant to attack RomneyCare because that would mean, ipso facto, attacking ObamaCare. So you'll have what we had throughout the 2008 nominating process, mainly fits of disbelief, perfectly encapsulated for the purposes of this column by Lawrence O'Donnell, MSNBC host and professional oh-dear.

“This man stood there and said to you, ‘This is the faith of my fathers,’” O’Donnell said on The McLaughlin Group in late 2007. “The faith of his father is a racist faith. As of 1978 it was an officially racist faith, and for political convenience in 1978 it switched, and it said ‘Okay, black people can be in this church.’ He believes, if he believes the faith of his fathers, that black people are black because in Heaven they turned away from God, in this demented, Scientology-like notion of what was going on in Heaven before the creation of the Earth... When he was 30 years old and he firmly believed in the faith of his father, that black people are inferior, when did he change his mind? Did the religion have to tell him to change his mind?”

These charges will stick because they’re spectacular, saying nothing of those few on the Right who will argue Mormonism is a cult. So what seems more likely, that Romney will deftly maneuver around them or that he will stumble badly and, in doing so, clear a path for Governor Perry?

The Left v. Sarah Palin

✘ She was the first female governor of her state; she was the second ever female vice presidential nominee; she’s a working mother; she does the best she can to raise five children, including one with Down Syndrome, and graciously suffered through a daughter giving birth to a bastard child; she spoke out lustily against the politically incorrect use of the slang term “retard.” Superficially, Sarah Palin is the kind of gal the Left would fall over itself to support – if only she would agree that dismembering a fetus in the womb is constitutional. And if only she would sign off on gay marriage. And if only she weren’t so dumb. Right? Isn’t it

that simple?

For an ideology that claims free expression is its cornerstone, liberalism sure does react badly when confronted with the knowledge there are people who think differently than it does. In the majority of cases, when someone disagrees with the Left, it is enough for liberals to say that so-and-so is a dope, a racist, a sexist, a reactionary, and all the rest. But it is something different with Palin – why? If Sarah Palin is so harmless, why does the Left obsess over her?

The cookie cutter explanation is that she is too dumb to take seriously, and they are distressed that so many people do. Those making this point would be hard pressed to distinguish between Palin's slip-ups and, say, Joe Biden's numerous missteps. Or Barack Obama, who did once say there are 57 states, pronounced "corpsman" as "corpse-man," said Israel would continue being a strong ally under a McCain administration, said 10,000 people died in a Kansas tornado where 12 had died, and who just this week partially blamed ATM machines for Americans not being able to find jobs. So it cannot be just that Palin sometimes comes off harebrained, because everyone does sooner or later.

Palin Derangement Syndrome – the popular name given to the angry, sputtering rage that overtakes so many liberals when it comes to Palin – exists, and McCain Derangement Syndrome doesn't. Once you understand why, you've basically solved the mystery of the Left versus Sarah Palin. Liberals will not bother themselves with a man who cares what they think of him, especially if the man agrees with them a lot of the time. Thus no one is (or was) deranged when it came to McCain; he was just another feckless obstacle to get around.

But John McCain chose Sarah Palin because he needed desperately to impress conservatives, and because she in many ways neutralized Obama. You could not say that Palin was unqualified for high office without admitting Obama was, as

well; you could not praise Obama as a young, attractive, enthusiastic candidate while ignoring the fact Palin was younger, just as attractive, and just as enthusiastic.

To the degree Palin fostered the same feelings in much of the Right as Obama did in much of the Left, and to the degree she posed a real threat to Obama's march to the presidency, liberals never forgave her. And because those feelings for Palin have mostly remained while Obama has squandered so much goodwill, the Left continues to view her as a threat.

This is why, when a Lefty nut shot Gabrielle Giffords, liberals seized upon her congressional district maps with pictures of crosshairs on them (ignoring Democratic examples of the same). This is why media outlets spent a fortune sending reporters to Juneau, Alaska in hopes of uncovering something politically fatal in the 24,000 emails released from her administration. This is why the conspiracy theory over who gave birth to her youngest child still exists.

These (and so many others) are not the actions of a movement that believes Sarah Palin is a non-event. They are the actions of a movement that believes she is so dangerous that she must be neutralized, whatever the cost. Ultimately, that fact speaks of her worth to conservatism.