

# The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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## **Goodbye And Good Riddance To 2008 National Affairs By Lawrence R. Velvel, JD BlackCommentator.com Columnist**

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On December 11th, commenting that I had been "off the air" for awhile because this had been the busiest fall in 45 years as a lawyer, I said I nonetheless could not resist publishing a commentary on Blagojevich. Surprisingly, it received many more comments than most of what I write in National Affairs. It must have somehow or other touched a nerve, a nerve that in some part consists of disgust that all or nearly all of our entire political class seem to be crooks. Being from Chicago, Blagojevich just talks about the crookedness more bluntly than others do.

Anyway, written eleven days after the commentary on Blagojevich, the present commentary will be the last of the year. There are two reasons. One is that my already intense workload has heavily increased since the Blagojevich commentary because I am one of the thousands who have been caught up in what is being described as the biggest Ponzi scheme in history. (Some readers - why they read my stuff escapes me - were nice enough to send me emails saying that it figures that a jerk like me would get caught up in a Ponzi scheme.)

The other reason is that, as readers know, I don't use a computer, so my secretary has to type my handwritten stuff, which, after my editing, she puts on the web. But our school will be closed for about ten days for Christmas and New Year's, so there will be no secretary, no typing and no commentary.

So...let this commentary be, in a way, a pseudo valedictory for the soon to be late but unlamented 2008. The year started bad, it stayed bad, it had a temporary uptick because of Obama's victory, but it ended bad. Bad, bad, good, bad. On balance that's bad.

2008 has reinforced views that came to sharp realization for me when writing my four volume memoir titled, [\*Thine Alabaster Cities Gleam\*](#) - yes, one finds, to my initial surprise, that writing creates or solidifies views rather than views being the cause of writing.

Reinforced on me is that honesty is the number one requisite of society and dishonesty its number one scourge. When people know the truth, settling on a desirable course of action is often not that hard. But from Iraq to Madoff, from lies to customers about subprime mortgages and lies from or nondisclosure by customers about income, to ignorant foolishness and untruthness about Afghanistan - which is going to sink Obama's presidency if he doesn't get out of there quickly but instead puts in more troops, as seems his current plan - to the constant lies on all sides during the political campaign, untruths reign in this country.

This is a nation in which honesty has taken a holiday. If this does not end immediately, if we do not have a cultural sea change in which truth is continuously demanded from everyone and about everything, and overrides government claims of secrecy based on claims of national security, then this nation will be lost. Don't take my word for it. Stick around and see for yourself.

One of the things that will have to change if this is to become a truthful country instead of the lying one it has now been for a long time, is the quality of political speech. Chris Hedges has rightly railed about the fact that the quality of speech is now on the fifth grade level if I remember correctly. This, he says, is because people can't read, and it plainly causes people to think about American affairs on the fifth grade level. Amen to Chris Hedges. Truth depends on intelligent linear thought at a much higher level than fifth grade, and without truth we will be lost. As said, don't take my word for it; stick around and see for yourself.

Then, too, there is the question of competence. Honesty is a sine qua non for competence, since it is difficult or impossible to make competent decisions on the basis of false information. But honesty, while a necessary condition, is not a sufficient one, and the fact is that the country has for years now rewarded incompetence, sometimes because of celebrityhood, sometime because the same people keep getting picked over and over again despite gross failures and proven lack of judgment.

In the latter regard, think Larry Summers. Think Tim Geithner. Think Hillary Clinton. Think baseball managers, basketball coaches and football coaches. Think university presidents. And when thinking of incompetence, think George Bush, think his entire administration, think Congress, think the SEC, think Fanny Mae and Freddy Mac. Think Michigan football, where players seem not to have been taught to tackle, not to fumble, or to kick. Think some of the truly obscene opinions of the Federal courts, opinions straight out of the playbook of the long sacrosanct, long untouchable Federalist Society. Think the vicious incompetence of Blackwater, and the very fact that America

extensively, like tyrants of old, now fights its wars through the use of such mercenaries. Think the incompetent policies in foreign affairs that our country has pursued for nearly 20 years. (They are described very well in Andrew Bacevich's brilliant new book, [The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism](#).)

Then, too, there is the question of concern for others versus selfishness, a morality of concern which Ronald Reagan began destroying early in, and continued destroying throughout his presidency, a morality whose destruction was carried on by Saint Clinton and George the Second. Our government has never given a damn how many Iraqis or Afghans it kills (or Viet Nameese in earlier days). Neither the government nor Wall Street have ever cared how many of our own citizens they reduce to penury or cheat. University presidents don't care if professors do not earn good salaries so long as the presidents themselves make \$750,000 or a million dollars. Corporations don't care how many current or retired employees they screw out of major portions of their retirements or out of medical plans.


Frankly speaking, in terms of cultural values like honesty, competence and concern for others, this country now sucks. It is not the country a lot of us thought we were citizens of. A lot of people are beginning to think, as I do, that there is nothing to do but start over in regard to our culture. Some of these people are hoping Obama can play a role here. Others merely despair.

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