



Politics and Emoting

President Obama's decision to have himself surrounded with school children as he announced his "proposals" to deal with "gun violence" on Wednesday caused a lot of hand-wringing among his opponents.

"Demagogic," "offensive," "disgusting," and "shameless" were just some of the adjectives used to describe it.

I have no interest in defending Obama. Anyone with an IQ above four and just a modicum of decency has no difficulty seeing the president's rush to exploit children — both those who lost their lives in the Sandy Hook School shooting, as well as those with whom he surrounded himself — as the intellectually and morally impoverished enterprise that it is.



But what does rationality and moral virtue have to do with political strategy?

Obama and his fellow travelers on the Left are often accused by their rivals on the Right of "emoting." That the Left is not infrequently guilty of this charge is true enough. Yet what those on the Right refuse to grasp is that what they perceive to be a weakness is, politically speaking, the Left's greatest strength.

While this doesn't accord with the myth — and, yes, it is indeed a myth — of the Wisdom of the American People, the brute, immovable fact of the matter is that when it comes to politics, the vast majority of American voters do not live by reason. Emotion is the air they breathe. Emoting is what they do.

That is, the Left stands a far greater chance of making inroads with the average American voter because the Left speaks his language.

Notice, I am not suggesting for a moment that the average American acts unduly irrational or emotional. It is the average American voter who acts thus. It is within the realm of politics, particularly national politics, that he or she is most susceptible to abandoning reason, for the average voter is just not all that attentive to the events that unfold on this stage — or how those events are framed so as to serve predetermined political ends.

As the conservative theorist Joseph Schumpeter noted, the average voter "drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field." Schumpeter explains that the voter "argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again. His thinking becomes associative and affective."

Translation: The average voter emotes.



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Not only does the average voter “tend to yield to extra-rational or irrational prejudice and impulse,” but “because he is not ‘all there,’ he will relax his usual moral standards as well and occasionally give in to dark urges which the conditions of private life help him to repress.”

The average voter then becomes easy prey for “groups with an ax to grind,” groups that “are able to fashion and, within very wide limits, even to *create* the will of the people.” (Emphasis added.)

Whether Obama and his ilk have ever read Schumpeter is irrelevant. They are more than slightly aware of the truth of which he speaks.

And there is nothing or no one that they won’t manipulate to advance their political agenda.

No class of persons, no event, and no emotion is exempt from being conscripted into the service of perfecting the Left’s mission to “fundamentally transform” the country.

Republicans can bellyache all day long about Obama’s and the Democrats’ tactics. Or the former can realize that only by playing the latter’s game, only by combating image with image, can Republicans defeat Democrats.

Republicans are not very adept at this sport. Sadly, there is more than enough proof of this, but the most recent exhibition comes to us from last year’s presidential race when the candidates insisted upon centering the bulk of their focus on debts, deficits, and numbers that aren’t remotely fathomable to the average voter.

If Republicans understood what Schumpeter and Obama know, then on Wednesday they could’ve choreographed a rebuttal to Obama’s push for greater “gun control.” Rather than surround themselves with children, they could’ve surrounded themselves with images — statues and/or paintings — of the men who ratified the United States Constitution. They could’ve delivered their rebuttal in front of a huge screen with the words of the Second Amendment on it, or grand illustrations of American colonists voluntarily taking to the hills and the streets with their guns in order to do battle with the English King and his Redcoats who threatened their liberties.

Besides reminding Americans of their forefathers and their forefathers’ legacy, this tactic could have also sent the powerful, if subtle, message that while Obama and company prefer to turn to little children for advice on issues of national import, the president’s enemies consult the wisdom of the country’s Founders.



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