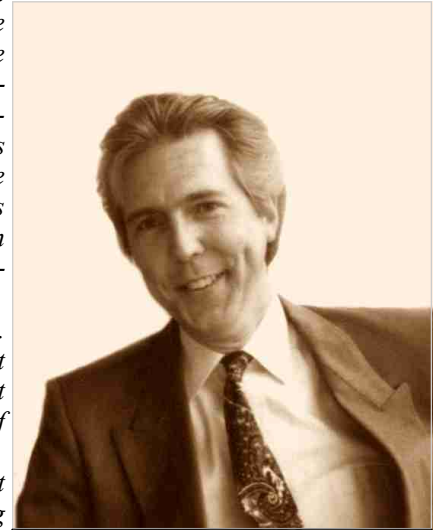


INTEGRITY & POLITICS—*Has integrity ever been the dance partner of American politics? Sure, we long for the warmth of Harry Truman’s fireside chats, but Harry made the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima — an act of terrorism that, because of our might, made us right — and later fed the Baltic States one by one to Russia to appease Stalin. We affectionately refer to Lincoln as Honest Abe, but his White House tenure is marked as the four bloodiest years in this country’s history, and surely, during his terms as president, he was much maligned by anyone south of the Mason-Dixon Line. We praise George Washington for owning up to cutting down that cherry tree — but that was when he was but a boy, long before he entered the world of politics. Perhaps our fixation on the past, our desire to see the good old days only through rose-colored glasses, prevents us from seeing the cold hard truth that in politics everyone lies.*

When I was younger I more readily held onto ideals such as integrity and honesty. But as Dr. Gregory House says, “Everyone lies.” I turn 52 next month and I wonder if it is wisdom — which often comes at the expense of innocence — that causes me to doubt the words of any candidate running for political office or merely cynicism in the wake of thirty-four years of voting for the public official who was best at telling lies.

In 1976 I recall watching a woman exit a voting booth to announce to the world that she’d voted for Jimmy Carter because her husband liked peanuts. No doubt many young women voted for Kennedy because he was young, handsome and dynamic (only later did we learn that he used our tax dollars to hire staff to procure women for him), and we turned a blind eye to Bill Clinton’s extramarital affairs because of a balanced budget, low unemployment and a healthy economy. Did we vote twice for Reagan because, like any good actor, he slipped into the role so convincingly? How did we vote twice for our current president, who has left us with an anything but efficient government?

The truth is, to win votes, all candidates tell an assembly of people what they think they want to hear — and that is likely to change with the target audience, whether speaking to a group of Catholic pro-lifers or a group of pro-choicers. But perhaps the greater truth this election year, or any election year, is whose lies we will believe the most. Both candidates are running on a platform of change, so what it comes down to is a leap of faith: do we trust Barack Obama as the second coming of Camelot (minus the Marilyn Monroe proclivity), that he is capable of bringing to Washington the change for which he rightfully identified we voters wish; or do we trust that John McCain’s experience will bring about the change he also promises or merely four more years of the same? Will Joe Biden counter Obama’s lack of experience? Or will Sarah Palin’s record of balancing the budget and combating corruption in Alaska, along with her energy, appeal to enough voters (including those who doubt McCain’s health) to risk four more years of a Republican in the Oval Office (as well as four more years in Iraq)? Perhaps the greater tragedy is that once the election is over the campaign lies or rhetoric will cease, only to be replaced by the truth that we will be fed a whole new diet of other rhetoric designed to pave the road toward 2012.



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