

# On My Mind (Vol. 2)

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Well of course the biggest (American) political news of the week has got to be the Republican National Convention. I remember being in awe as I watched the conventions as a kid, starry-eyed and star-struck. They excited me, made me hopeful, just about romanced me into love for candidate, party, and country.

Oh, how times have changed.

I'm easily embarrassed, so I've mostly been watching/listening to the convention coverage in spurts: I pay attention for a little while, die of embarrassment, turn it off, stew in agitation for a little while, then turn it back on because I can't stand not knowing what's happening. Repeat.



*Demonstrators from various groups, including End Poverty Now-March for Economic Justice, gather for a protest July 18 in Cleveland outside the arena where the Republican National Convention was taking place. (CNS photo/Adrees Latif, Reuters)*

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Last night was a little different. Though I did not support him in the primaries, I was intrigued to know how Ted Cruz would handle his speaking slot at the convention. Would he endorse? Oh, he wouldn't endorse? How would he walk this tight little line?

I was not disappointed: Cruz's speech was strong, compelling, entertaining, even – and full of veiled jabs at Donald Trump. I imagine it left his supporters on the floor weeping for what might have been.

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But on the whole, I've found the convention to be very, very disappointing. Most of

the speeches have been unsatisfying, void of anything more substantive than campaign slogans. (Sue me, but I'd like parties to earn my vote by actually making solid cases for their candidates and platforms.)

Worse, it's had an unsettling, even scary vibe, what with crowds shouting for an individual's imprisonment. I disagree with and disapprove of Hillary Clinton on a great many important things, but I find it unseemly – no, downright scary – to see a crowd act like it's ready to lynch her for them. There is a relish in their calls that makes me very nervous for the future of our country.

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Yesterday afternoon I was taking a break with my copy of *The Economist* when I read a couple of paragraphs that voiced a concern I've had for some time:

“Political leaders from America to Austria have a problem. To simplify, lots of people want something impossible: a return to some hazily-remembered golden era before globalisation, offering jobs for life, upward mobility and shared traditional values.

Too often, the response of mainstream leaders amounts to political homeopathy. They offer a small dose of a harmful idea, whether that is foreigner-bashing, protectionism or ugly partisanship, in the vain hope of soothing voters until their fevers pass. That is a mistake. What voters hear is leaders agreeing that economies should be shielded from global competition, that immigrants disproportionately steal jobs and property, or that political opponents are bent on wrecking the country. But then, to the disgust of supporters and grassroots activists, the realities of global commerce mean that those same leaders are only able to deliver half-remedies: eg, long-term targets for reducing immigration and vague pledges to put native workers first. Then such elites are surprised to find themselves barged aside by populist insurgents like Donald Trump peddling toxic ideas – build a border wall, start a trade war, ban Muslims – at full strength.”

(*The Economist*, July 16<sup>th</sup> 2016, Lexington, Homeopathy politics: Bad ideas in small doses only give voters a taste for something stronger)

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Here's my less elegant version, which has been sitting atop my heaps of discarded, never-published thoughts for months:

As I turn this Trump thing over in my head I keep getting hung up on the Republican Party. How did Trump manage to hijack it? How did it screw things up so badly? What will become of it? What will become of those of us who fear we have no moral option but to leave it?

What a mess.

Of course Trump didn't rise up in a vacuum. Jobs have been lost, earnings have been slow to rise, once-reliable industries have declined, debt has grown, communities have changed, and society seems to be changing too. Conditions were ripe for Donald Trump's candidacy, even if he was the only one to realize it at first.

Many say – and maybe they're right – that Trump's done so well because he's been able to take advantage of white working class anger at such things. But he doesn't deserve all the credit.

Because it's not all about those conditions. I think the Republican Party has had an outsized role in its own disruption/decline/dismantling/demise/whatever this is. The Party's leaders, egged on in recent years by the Tea Party, have made hay by saying that "Washington" was the problem.

Well, what did they think they were going to do when voters (understandably) decided that "Washington" includes Republicans too? And not just the old-school, committee chairman-type Republicans – the Tea Party types too. The Ted Cruzes.

A whole generation of Republican politicians has made promises they could not keep. They have conditioned the electorate to expect ever wilder promises, to reach toward ever more unattainable goals. It's no surprise that they faltered when they were called out for not delivering what couldn't be delivered in the first place.

(How did Republicans expect to repeal Obamacare with President Obama still in office and insufficient support for a veto override? How do they think they can simultaneously lower taxes, increase military spending, and keep Social Security checks coming in? How do they think they can track down millions of undocumented

immigrants in an untold number of communities and seal a border that's thousands of miles long?)

Republicans have gotten to this point by wanting it all and by making themselves believe they could get it. And they've made matters worse by punishing those in their ranks who have been pragmatic enough to seek partial solutions, to work with Democrats in order to achieve them. They've made the perfect the enemy of the good.

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The Republican National Convention isn't the only important thing happening this week, of course.

What a week for Turkey.



*Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaking during a July 20 press conference in Ankara. Erdogan has declared a three-month state of emergency after a July 15-16 coup attempt. (CNS photo/Turkish Presidential Press Office)*

For those of you who aren't in the habit of tracking international news or who don't know much about Turkey, here's a basic, imperfect little background:

Turkey is a secular, democratic, majority-Muslim country located at the intersection of Europe and the Middle East. Its secular values were long safeguarded by its military, which has often had a strong (sometimes too strong) presence in the country's leadership. Turkey's current president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, represents a (moderate) Islamist party, which has at times been at odds with the military. Erdoğan and his party are now also at odds with a movement lead by a former ally of his, Muhammed Fethullah Gülen.

Gülen, who is living in exile in Pennsylvania, is a Muslim cleric who generally espouses cooperation with the West and with other major religions.

Erdoğan was Prime Minister of Turkey for many years before he became President. He is accused of something like a creeping power grab, even trying to change the

country's constitution to widen his powers.

So now we have this attempted coup, in which hundreds of people were killed. Erdoğan blames the Gülen movement and has subsequently purged the military and government ministries of *tens of thousands of people* associated with it. And now he has declared a state of emergency in the country.

The whole thing generates an incredible amount of head-spinning: Which side is more interested in democracy? Is it the democratically-elected but power-grabbing government or the unelected but secular-minded military? Is the Gülen movement really responsible? How was the Erdoğan administration able to move so quickly against the Gülen movement's supporters? What additional powers might Erdoğan grab during the state of emergency?

Keep in mind that Turkey is a NATO member and an important partner of the United States in matters related to Syria and Iraq. What. A. Mess. I certainly hope our next president is prepared to deal with it.

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The horror continues on the race relations / police relations front.

Those police officers in Baton Rouge, brutally attacked... I have no words to express how I feel about their murders. "Hopeless" comes pretty close. I'm tense, nervous for my friends whose husbands are police officers, but I'm sure I can hardly begin to feel what they do. What a terrible, difficult time.

And now another black man has been shot by a police officer, this time while lying on the ground with his hands in the air. He'd thought he was safe because he was cooperating; he'd shouted out an explanation to police in order to safeguard his charge, a young man with autism. The young man was a patient in a group home, the older man a therapist trying to calm him, to bring him back.

A man was lying on the ground with his hands in the air, shouting out an explanation so as to protect his patient. And still he was shot.

What have we come to?

*(I'm linking up with Kelly of This Ain't the Lyceum for this week's 7 Quick Takes. Be sure to head over there to check out the rest.)*

