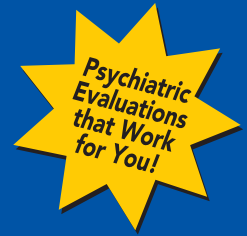




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The Underdog Barks His Way to Victory

by Pierre David

REPUBLICAN SCOTT BROWN'S VICTORY LAST MONTH — IN which the Massachusetts underdog won “Ted Kennedy’s seat” in what was once the bluest state in the union — should not be viewed as a sign of GOP resurgence or Democratic decline or even the end of ideology, as so many of our politicians like to say. It should be seen for what it most certainly was: The beginning of the realignment of American politics.

Since the very beginning, Americans have (almost) always had to choose between two parties on Election Day: Federalists v. Anti-Federalists, Whigs v. Democrats, Democrats v. Republicans. Internal, partisan disputes and divisions have generally led to “corrections,” or repositionings, in the political marketplace. Among the most important repositionings in recent decades was the huge migration of white, Southern voters from the Democratic to the Republican column. The massive block of red states that routinely pop up on CNN’s Election Night maps reflect this migration; a half-century ago, those red states would have been blue. What, exactly, prompted this migration is hotly debated: Democrats contend that

Republicans, with their so-called Southern Strategy, exploited racist fears of a more integrated and egalitarian society; Republicans counter that Democrats failed to represent their constituencies by embracing unpopular measures (although we hear this less nowadays because those measures, like the Civil Rights Voting Act of 1965, enjoy broad, bipartisan support). Both explanations point to underlying ideologies and politics, and neither is entirely wrong. Neither is also entirely right.

Which suggests that all the post-Massachusetts spin, as

— continued on page 3

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Catcher in the Rye

by J.D. Salinger

J.D. SALINGER HAS DIED, AND IT'S A GREAT LOSS TO AMERICA AND American letters. What better time than now to reread — or for those just coming of age — to read his most famous work, “Catcher in the Rye”?

Like Huckleberry Finn, Holden Caulfield is a national icon, a symbol of a certain ethos and cultural disposition and political bent. His particular background — white anglo-saxon male born of privilege and “good breeding” — is unimportant. What is important is that he transcends his background and speaks to the whole of America. This is what makes “Catcher in the Rye” literature and not simply fiction.

Viewed through the prism of contemporary America, Holden Caulfield is often seen as a prototype for, or leading indicator of, a broader, more unkempt, more violent reaction to post-war America. From Salinger is said to spring James Dean, Elvis, rock n' roll, the anti-war movement, Students for a Democratic Society, Woodstock, and the wholesale revolt against an entire system.

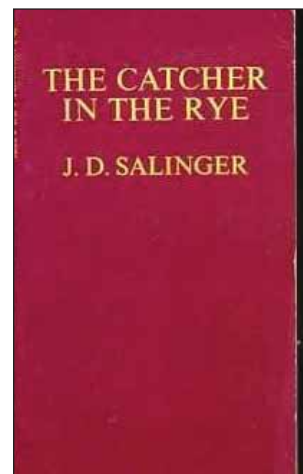
That's a gross over-simplification and a misreading of Salinger's unique genius. What makes Holden Caulfield so remarkable — or, better put, what makes him such a remarkable force — is that he taps into deep-seated anxieties about the meaning and sustainability of America in the second half of the twentieth century. In other words, he doesn't represent a clear-cut rejection of the old order; he represents a fear of or inquiry into where it all leads. He is far more philosophical than his fans would have us believe. That may sound like splitting hairs — questioning, after all, frequently anticipates rejection — but it's not.

What's critically important to bear in mind is that, at the beginning of the novel, our hero has been kicked out of boarding school — and, what's more, he's angry about it. He resents the system and all its politics and sycophants, but, more to the point, he resents having been dislodged from it. This is not the voice of one who rejects; it is the voice of one who wants to belong but cannot. This prompts a wide-ranging conversation (mostly between the narrator and the narrator) about why he's here in the first place, what it all means, what he wants to do with his life, and so on and so forth. It prompts reflection. We are not left in a particularly happy mood — any kind of investigation is bound to upset much more than reassure — but that's not the point. And who cares about being in happy mood in any event? Salinger had bigger things in mind. For one thing, he was deeply concerned about the plight and direction of America in the early decades of the cold war. His questioning of the established wisdom — Holden Caulfield's questioning of the established wisdom — is as relevant today as it was then. Indeed, probably more so.

What we should be worried about is not GDP or tax policy or the mechanics of this or that reform or plan or macro-strategy for revamping the way the world works. That is the stuff of bureaucrats and technocrats, and it's important, in a

way, but it's secondary — or it should be secondary. It should be eclipsed by the big questions, about who we are and why we're here and what it all means. This is the meaning of Holden Caulfield. Holden Caulfield is the angry, would-be philosopher enveloped by those who know only how to make rules, follow them, evade them, create systems, create orders. These are people who are too busy advancing their own very petty interests

to bother considering all the things that people should concern themselves with. This was Salinger's great concern at the outset of the technological and managerial revolution that transformed America from a great power into a superpower, into a sleek and highly profitable machine that revolves around quarterly-earnings reports and gargantuan government interests, that cares not about the cultivation of the soul or the meaning of life. This might sound like an adolescent rant — like Holden Caulfield on a train bound for New York City — and, no doubt, it has that ring to it. But there's truth in childishness. Salinger understood as much. This is why we celebrate him, and it is why we mourn his death. — PD



WINTER WARNING

California may not be buried under 30 inches of snow, but torrential rains have taken their toll on the state. Flooding and water damage has led the Contractors State License Board (CSLB) — one of the leading consumer protection agencies in the country — to remind California homeowners to be cautious when hiring contractors for clean up and repair jobs; and it urges people to use state-licensed contractors.

One reason the CSLB is cautioning residents, is to protect them against liability if a worker is injured on the job — not an insignificant consideration when workers are removing fallen trees or patching leaky roofs. And according to CSLB, all state-licensed contractors are required to carry workers' compensation insurance for their employees.

People tend to get into trouble at times like this when severe weather requires immediate maintenance, and homeowners hire someone too quickly. That's why the CSLB urges residents not to rush into home improvements, take time to get several bids and collect references, and always obtain a written contract — all easy preventative measures to protect consumers against fraud and misconduct.

— Sabrina Leigh Schaeffer

Politics: A New Year and a New Decade

—continued from page 1

usual, is just that — spin. Republicans insist the Brown win indicates that voters are migrating in a right-ward direction. They suggest that, after a year of bailouts and “big government,” Americans are returning to markets and “small government” (as if the Republicans, who presided over a huge expansion in the scope and power of government under George W. Bush, know much about small government, whatever that means). Please. If Scott Brown and his Republican colleagues fail to come up with meaningful alternatives to whatever it is they’re railing against in Congress, and if they fail to act on those meaningful alternatives — if, in the end, they fail to lead — they will be kicked out of power just as surely as they acquired it. Right now, the Republican surge, as seen not only in the Senate race in Massachusetts but in gubernatorial races late last year in Virginia and New Jersey, is being fueled by one factor only: Democrats. Because Republicans are not Democrats, they’ve performed well. But those Republican wins are but invitations to alter the course of things for the better. If Republicans don’t do that, they will only keep winning so long as Democrats keep stumbling; once Democrats stop stumbling, Republicans will stop winning.

That said, Democrats’ take on the race, beginning with the president’s interview with ABC, is downright delusional. They contend that the Brown victory stemmed from the same voter anger and disillusionment that put Barack Obama in the White House. The president, attempting to salvage his party’s political prospects, sells himself short: He wasn’t elected simply, or even mostly, because voters were angry or scared. The financial crisis notwithstanding, he was elected because they were inspired by him. He came to office on a wave of a positive, “post-racial” sentiment. This is why he enjoyed historically high poll numbers right after taking office — because a large majority of Americans liked him and not because they didn’t like or feared his Republican rival, John McCain. In any event, the contention that the anger generated by President Bush throughout much of his second term — anger fueled by the war in Iraq, the administration’s handling of Hurricane Katrina and other fumbles — is the same anger that we’re seeing in 2009 and 2010 is ludicrous: Most obviously, the people against whom voters are directing their ire have changed. Voters may be summoning the same angry spirits in 2010 that possessed them in 2008, but that anger is being stoked by Democrats, not Republicans.

So, what should we make of the Brown victory? What does it mean? It’s a bit tough to say what it means ideologically because neither Democrats nor Republicans have bothered to articulate what it is, exactly, they believe in. Democrats say they believe in health-care reform, as if health-care reform is a principle or a tenet of a worldview. It’s not; it’s a goal favored by some and opposed by others. Most Republicans, for their part, haven’t said much about where they’d like to lead the country because they haven’t had to. This situation will not last. Voters want to be led, and they want the people who do that leading to tell them which principles (which ideology) informs their leadership. They just don’t know right now which ideology they prefer. What Brown’s upset tells us is that they’re shopping, rethinking — realigning. Where that leads remains unclear. — PD

TO APOSTROPHE OR NOT TO APOSTROPHE?

Ever wonder if you’re spelling Workers or Worker’s or Workers’ Compensation correctly? Well, you’re not alone. To apostrophe or not to apostrophe — that is the question. And online Grammar Girl (GG) recently addressed the issue in one of her grammatically-correct blogs.

The phrase GG considers in her post is “Homeowners Association.” But as she writes, the “topic also comes up in the news when there’s a writer’s strike or a teacher’s strike. Does the strike belong to the writers or teachers, or are the words writers and teachers adjectives that tell people what kind of strike is happening?”

The same question arises, of course, with workers compensation: Does the compensation belong to workers or is workers simply a descriptive term?

Even those of us who are not as grammar-savvy as GG know how to use — or not use — apostrophes when we’re dealing with a singular, descriptive or possessive phrase: A blue boat vs. Mr. Blue’s boat. But, GG tells us, it’s when the phrase includes a plural, as it does with workers compensation that “it can be a tougher call.”

When GG looks more closely at writers strike, for instance, she tells us “it’s pretty clear that the writers don’t own the strike, and that the word writers is there to tell us more about what kind of strike it is. So I’d leave out the apostrophe.” On the other hand, when it comes to homeowners’ association she tells us to include the apostrophe, “at least when the homeowners actually own or control the association that manages their property.”

So where does that leave workers compensation? Well, one writer chimed in saying that the style for WC is arbitrary but that you can adjust how you write it depending on the name of any given state program, which in California is: Workers’ Compensation.

I guess the people of California really do see compensation as belonging to the workers!

(Read more of GG’s posts at <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>)

— Sabrina Leigh Schaeffer

In the DSM – V, scheduled to come out in 2013, Asperger’s Syndrome:

- A. is redefined
- B. is not listed
- C. is the subject of an entire chapter
- D. is referred to as a special talent condition



ANSWER: B. Asperger’s Syndrome is absorbed into the category of autism and referred to as mild. It is not redefined or the subject of a chapter; nor is there anything referred to as a special talent.

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