

JOHN KERRY: THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

By Tecola W. Hagos

The prediction on the outcome of political elections (of winners or losers) in a democratic state is more of an art form than a science. By contrast, in staged elections in states under dictatorial governments, election results are predictable because the variables that determine the outcome of such elections are preordained and ascertainable as in science. The Russian election that is underway at this time is a clear example of the latter. Nevertheless, even if political prediction seems to be more of an art form than science, such prediction need be backed by some degree of rationality, experience, and intuition. I have lived through five United States Presidential elections starting with President Carter. I have consistently picked the winner for all of the elections held since Carter's Presidency. Two of the predictions I made were very easy, and most everyone was in agreement--that of Ronald Reagan and George Bush (Pere); however, my prediction that George Bush (Son) would win over Al Gore was a difficult one, and I did not predict the outcome of that election would be based on the decision of the Supreme Court!

Here forth, I may sound like I am negating the time-worn and well-accepted technique of prediction methodology of national political contests. We all have read about election results, listened in seminars or through the media, to all kinds of political experts, making all kinds of predications, using all kinds of measuring devices. Mostly, these measuring devices are a) the economic situation of the country, b) a candidate's record on fighting crime and punishing criminals, c) a candidate's approach to national security and the fight against left oriented ideology, and d) a candidate's views on ethics/morality and religious practices. These main focus points could be expanded to incorporate and emphasize particular period sentiments. However, I do not give much weight to all these great ideas in my prediction. I find fundamental errors in these types of tools used by political and other experts predicting election outcomes. Such predictions seem to work on the assumption that presidents are elected by direct vote.

The writers of the U.S. Constitution were concerned about mob action and seem not to trust the common population to carry out such an august task; thus, they devised a two-stage system where in the first stage of the process, the general public would be able to express its sentiments and preferences in its election of electoral representatives, and in the second stage the electoral representatives will carry out the actual election of the President of the United States. It is in these dynamics that exist in this two-stage system, that is significant to my prediction. It is in these dynamics where I see voters and their representatives alike playing out the role of adjusters and censors of trends and directions rather than voting for or against candidates.

We often hear through the media that according to various polls, a particular issue is important to the American voting public. And based on such polls, political analysts try to tell us that a particular candidate would be the winner by so much percentage if elections were held at such time. I challenge that form of conclusion because it is based on assumptions that voters when they step up to the voting booth are making decisions based on their individual experience and address their vote to that end with a particular candidate in mind. The error in such approach by political experts is due to a

misunderstanding or misreading of the American public. The adoption of any of the measuring tools identified above seems to suggest that the American public is voting on the basis of individual self-interest. To me, the American voter is anything but self-centered or egotistical individual when carrying out such an important public duty. Rather, there seems to be a kind of gestalt and highly developed collective consciousness of what needs be done at a particular time that seems to affect voters' decisions. I may consider such a process to be the ethos or "collective unconsciousness" of a people. In other words it is not any particular need, fear, ideology et cetera that determines the election of a particular candidate by the public.

I think Americans do not vote for or against an individual candidate per se in an election. What the American voting public undergoes in the election process is far more subtle and sophisticated than simple reaction to specific problems. As an illustration of my understanding of the American election process, let us consider the whole American political election system as an ever-swinging pendulum of "a political clock". The participation of the American public is to maintain the swinging of such political pendulum from either going too fast and far out, or too slow and end up in a state of inertia. Thus, the role of the American voter is far more sophisticated and much more subtle and period oriented rather than focused on particular problems of the individual voter. It is not based on the individual candidate's abilities or character.

As stated above, the American voting public is like "a vigilant time keeper" of a "public political clock" always adjusting the velocity and the distance and the duration of each swing of the political pendulum. And the election of a particular candidate is simply a part of such adjustment by the vigilant timekeeper. The individual candidate who got elected is the person who is swept along with the swing of the political pendulum. I realize that my reading of the election process is not flattering to candidates, and some may even think the distinction that I am making is tangential and at best minor and not some ground-breaking revelation. Nevertheless, I see great subtlety in common people going to an election and casting their votes. Their vote is neither a vote for or against a candidate because focusing on a candidate would have been a simple quantitative evaluation, whereas American voters are making qualitative choices bringing in a tidal change with far more ethical elements in their voting than they are given credit for by political analysts.

When we consider past elections, we find that victorious Presidents or victorious political Parties have been voted out in spite of their stellar record. One clear example is the defeat of George Bush (Pere), a war hero who just mounted and won a massive war in the Gulf, by "a draft dodger" virtual unknown Bill Clinton. What the Public was voting for was an adjustment to the excess of militarism, and the candidates were just like drift-wood carried on the crest of the tidal waves of change, and one such tidal wave reaching shore far ahead of others carried the winning candidate. What political analysts seem to have missed is the fact of the uniquely fundamental decency of American voters specially overlooking that electrifying instance when such voters step up to their voting booth to cast their vote. It is very simplistic to think that American voters are casting their votes based on ideation they have of themselves such as "I am out of work because of Candidate X," or "My security is threatened because of Candidate Y," and thereof casting their vote's for/or against a candidate.

By just studying the voting records of the last hundred years one can easily ascertain the fact that my assessment has a ring of truth. By carefully analyzing the last three elections, for example, I was very much convinced that the many simplistic factors political analysts focus on to make their political predictions are not the real reasons why people seem to vote for a particular candidate. Thus, no matter what Bush and his camp do, even if they hand out hundred dollar bills standing at street corners, they will not be able to redirect the political corrective tide of change that is already underway. The American voter is involved in far deeper mission of insuring the Republic's healthy continued existence as it always has done, which is more than the mere choosing between two candidates for office. The dubious reason given by the Bush administration to justify going to war against Saddam Hussein, the overzealousness of the Justice Department in going after real and imagined enemies by spreading out dragnets indiscriminately detaining most anyone soon after the September 11 terrorism, the bulldozing over of the human rights of groups and individuals, the unnecessary inhumane treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay et cetera did sink into and touch the aquifer of the sense of justice and fairness of the American voters' psyche. When the collective consciousness of the American public is affected, it moves to correct such injustice.

Most experts and students of American Presidential elections repeatedly use the economy of the nation as their thematic thesis in assessing the 2004 election's possible result. The economy of the nation has been already used by the Bush administration to manipulate productivity, employment, investment et cetera. Alan Greenspan has been toying with the American economy by keeping the interest rate unusually low. I imagine that Greenspan's effort may be seen as an effort to fix the bad-blood that existed with George Bush (Pere) who had accused Greenspan as the cause for his loss of the Presidency to Bill Clinton because Greenspan did not lower interest rate deep enough at the right time. The relationship of interest rate, employment, and elections is very interesting to read up on. I suggest Michal Kalecki's path-breaking article "Political Aspects of Full Employment," [Political Quarterly, Vol. 14, October-December 1943] for our enlightenment on the issue. The main point Kalecki was making in his article is the fact that politicians will manipulate fiscal and monetary policies in order to win elections. For example, they will introduce and try to implement such new policies in the period leading up to an election. However, since such policies are artificial and not anchored to the economic reality of the period, such policies create even worse problems of inflation. However, the winning Political Party would soon after it is installed, as the new government will introduce deflationary measures far more hurtful to the population in the long run. We already see such manipulation being introduced by the Bush administration in its recent creation of a political office dealing with outsourcing and loss of manufacturing jobs, on one hand, and Greenspan depressing interest rate unrealistically low on the other.

Moreover, I am not in any way undermining the significant political role of Southern evangelism (in Southern States). Among Southern preachers we can easily find a present day Savonarola who would not hesitate to burn at the stake political liberals, or even those with a different color or accent. Congress is not immune either from such types of overzealous out-of-time politicians who hate liberal politicians more than they love the nation. Extremist people abound in the general public too; however, the extremists of either the left or the right are never right in their reading of the American public. The fact

is they too are part of the American milieu. Thus, the vigilant timekeeper is ever engaged in reigning in such runaway conditions at all times.

President Bush at times seems to be clueless about international history or relations, and seems to have difficulties understanding or articulating complex ideas. Nevertheless, he seems to be a very amiable man who makes people comfortable with his presence, with his great sense of humor, and with his folksy charm. Mrs. Bush in her own right projects also a solid family ideal in many ways. However, all this charm and popularity does not a president make for the 2004 election. The tide of change has its own rational and works outside of any candidate's charm or lack of, and transcend or circumscribe a particular Party's stated public policy et cetera.

I am not glossing over the stiff almost mannequin-like personality of John Kerry, but that unfortunate impression may have hidden a genuinely warm personality. At any rate, no one should overlook the heroic record of John Kerry, or his exceptionally consistent defense of the oppressed, the under privileged, in short his democratic liberalism. One may be tempted to consider the current tide of change to be synonymous with John Kerry's candidacy, but that will be a mistaken analysis as well. For sure, John Kerry is going to be elected President not because of his political program or his exemplary service and his liberal record in the Senate (all attesting to greatness and statesmanship), but as a result of the corrective adjustment the American voter is going to make to the wild swing the American political pendulum had taken during George Bush's watch.

All negative campaign advertisements, scathing interviews by either candidate et cetera would not change the outcome of this election. It will only leave bad after-taste disagreeable to all. The "vigilant time Keeper" will do his or her adjustment ever looking out for the welfare and survival of the Republic in fairness and justice. May be it is my plebeian affinity or my modest condition of life, I am more inclined to trust the fairness and justice of simple folks than those highly paid learned experts. This prediction may prove to be my Waterloo, and my first mistake.

In conclusion, I want to reflect on a subject that is not part of the theme of this essay, but never far from my mind all the same. The question of the fate of Ethiopia is always with me, thus I just cannot help wondering how wonderful it must be to be able to change a government every four years without bloodshed except for the inevitable bruised egos. Ethiopians are burdened with one *azaba* leader after another for years. These groups of Ethiopia's semi-urbanized peasants who only yesterday growing up in little villages and towns were walking around bare-footed and wiping their noses on their sleeves are now being driven around in limousines and in world class cars baptizing each other with all kinds of titles while fellow Ethiopians are eating dirt. Such state of affairs should make anyone with a scintilla of consciousness to vomit with disgust. We suffer this ignominy because we are essentially cowards, and because we are a generation of people who want to survive on the sacrifice of others. We want others to do our fighting, and by some God-given right we feel we have the right to be leaders since we can speak some foreign language and have read a few dozen books. We are spineless and want to use others with spines as bridges to step across to power and wealth. Those of us who studied in the West, lived for an extended period of time in democratic countries et cetera have no excuse for acting out as thugs and dictators once we get back to Ethiopia.

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