

VIEWPOINT

Tuesday, November 5, 1996

page 7

THE OBSERVER

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■ AND IN THIS CORNER...

Remember, remember the fifth of November...

By the time you read this, the 1996 presidential election will be over. Of course, the polls will still be open, and people will still be casting their votes, but the election will already be over. It was actually decided some time ago — in March of this year, in 1992, in 1984, in 1960, in 1912, even in 1876. It was decided by "electors," and it was decided by television. It was decid-

ballots, depending upon the state, depending upon how many signatures they could scrounge up to fulfill the ridiculous requirement for independent national balloting. The Green Party, the Libertarian Party, the Natural Law Party and the Taxpayers Party all have internet homes; there are at least again as many which do not have an internet presence but have candidates of their own. Regardless, practically nobody has heard of these parties, and practically no one will cast ballots for them, because the public did not see them represented in fifteen second television ads.

The political mind set of American society can be summed up as polarized, dualistic, simplistic, and easily misled. It can also be summed up in a Miller Lite TV commercial between time-outs on Sunday; or in a Drew Barrymore interview on MTV; or in a Phillip Morris magazine ad; or in a Wall Street brokerage firm.

It can also be turned on by bizarre tax strategies which won't work and by education promises which will never be implemented; it can be impressed by smooth-talking and by sob-stories; it can also pick up the remote control and flip the channel to Monday Night Football.

What went wrong with American democracy? Aside from the incidental scandal here and there, the United States government remains a model of stability for governments around the world. But what about the society? What about the people whose interests are supposedly being represented? What about a real choice?

Here we have two major parties — one a model of corporate greed and environmental insensitivity, the other a paragon of spinelessness and organizational idiocy — neither of which is willing to look farther than seven years down the road, both of which hoist banners for two cookie-cut figures with nearly flawless false sincerity and image-is-everything TV manners. We are given once again the choice for a "lesser of two evils," or perhaps in this case, the lesser of two actors.

We do not elect leaders any more. We do not vote for statesmen, or great

thinkers, or even great warriors, but for those who make us believe they have all these admired qualities of the "hero" which we could find in ourselves if we looked for them. We elect a smile and a handshake; we elect a slogan or a flashy commercial distortion; we elect a mask, a Shakespearean actor who never forgets his lines on national broadcasts but would be completely at a loss if he were bereft of his ever-prompting sideline aides.

And we have no one to blame but ourselves. Who else elects these men, but us? What starts in high school, and proceeds through college and higher, the system which teaches us that what we do is not so important as how we look while doing it, or what sport we play, or what battles we fought, or what our height and hair color is, or how confidently we preen and posture — this is all mere training for the fifth of November.

Remember, remember, the fifth of November, the gunpowder, treason and plot...

But we have forgot. We have let power fall into incestuous politicians' laps while we toddle to the fridge for a cold one while watching Simpsons' reruns. Here in America, we do not have vision. We neither learn from the past, nor live in the present, nor plan for the future. We merely exist, static, bored with the whole thing and wishing something better would come along by itself while we lounge around waiting for Godot.

Since 1966, nationwide registration in the Democratic Party has dropped by 25%, and registration in the Republican Party has dropped by 10%. Third party registration has quadrupled. And there still is no chance at all for any third party candidate to become President. And what if there were a party which could duplicate the election of 1860 and, like the Republican Party, displace one of the big two? The Democrats and the Republicans have been the only two kids in the sandbox for over a hundred years...is the sand with which they have been blinding us beginning to run out?

How much longer will there be "wasted votes"?

Today is Election Day across the nation. We vote for the donkey and the elephant, the braying jackass and the lumbering behemoth. We vote for a cardboard stand-up figure with a tape recorder set to endless loop, who has broken every promise he ever made and has let down those who needed him most; or we vote for the oldest man ever to run for President who believes he can give "power to the people" by accepting campaign contributions from America's leading carcinogenic producers, and who still thinks the Dodgers play in Brooklyn; or we vote for one of the richest nerds in the world, other than Bill Gates, who has the personal charisma of a 1040 tax form.

In the meantime, one out of four American children lives in poverty; the nationwide illiteracy remains the highest among all industrialized nations; the gap between the wealthy and the poor is the greatest it has ever been in U.S. history; the state and federal government continue to insist they can fight crime by hiring more police and building more prisons; large producers of electricity are allowed to purchase permits to emit pollutants into the air; and our wetlands and woodlands are being plundered by faceless corporations who owe allegiance to no one.

Implicit in the call for someone to lead America into the 21st century is the assumption that we need to be led. It may be that this election date will mark some sort of turning point in American history...

...I see no reason why gunpowder treason should ever be forgot.

...or it may become nothing but yet another footnote, a new entry in future editions of the game of Trivial Pursuit.

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Matthew Apple

ed by millionaires and by their international corporations. It was decided by tobacco, and it was decided by speech writers. It was decided by the pollsters, and it was decided by the talk-show hosts. It was decided by half-truths, and half-people, and half-wits who believed what they wanted to believe.

The CNN world wide web page devoted to Campaign '96, called "Allpolitics," lists the following as "issues" of the presidential election: abortion, affirmative action, the budget, character, crime, education, the environment, foreign affairs, health care, immigration, taxes, values, welfare reform, and medicare.

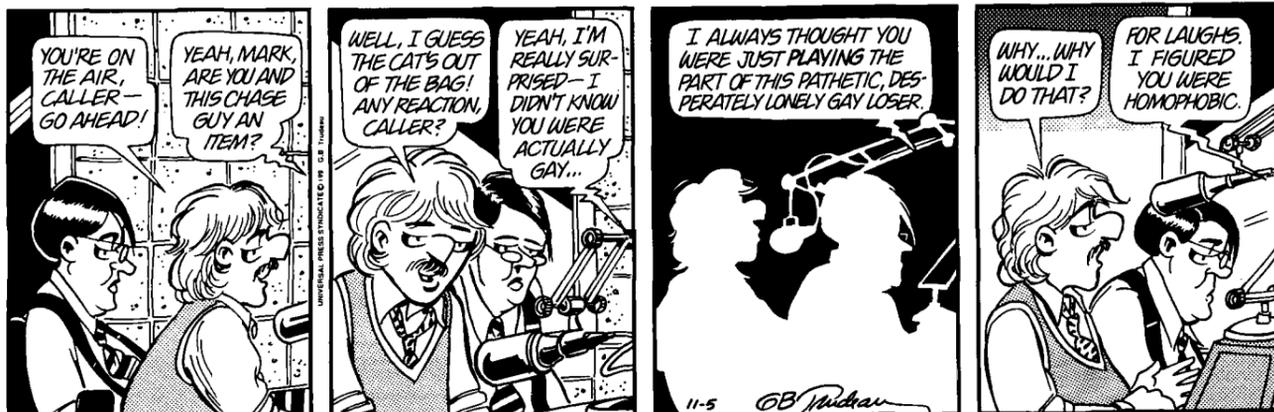
It lists two candidates, Bill Clinton and Bob Dole.

H. Ross Perot occasionally surfaces in CNN/Time political reports, but he is never taken seriously. He hovers around the political periphery, lashing out in the 11th hour with his multi-billion dollar personal net value backing his Reform Party. He is the only third party candidate with the money to buy four half-hour television commercials, and the only magnate with the chutzpah to tell the public "you own this country."

There are additional party tickets which will appear on most presidential

■ DOONESBURY

GARRY TRUDEAU



■ QUOTE OF THE DAY

"It [Democracy] is a great I word. whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted."

—Walt Whitman