

Lessons from American History
Abraham Lincoln to Modern China

THE BLACK BOOK

of

Vice President Adlai E. Stevenson, 1836 -1914
Governor Adlai E. Stevenson, 1900 - 1965
Senator Adlai E. Stevenson, 1930 –

Edited, with commentary, by the Senator.
American Values and American Politics

First printed by the Stevenson family for their father,
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Preface

Organizing and editing the Black Book with commentary on its implications for America's politics and future consumed nine years more or less of intermittent effort. It was a high priority but always fell behind the daily chores which could not wait. Events and anecdotes continued to accumulate as I sought intermittently to record them from my family's political archive which begins in central Illinois with great great grand father Jesse Fell, Abraham Lincoln's sponsor. Organizing the Black Book for publication threatened to become an endless process, and I was not growing younger. So I closed the Black Book in early 2008. Since then events have continued to over take the Black Book but without undermining its lessons. The chapter on Economics foretells credit crises and menacing global imbalances. Terrorism was foretold with some precision, the futility of war in Iraq - and war in general as a substitute for policy - inter alia, citing Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz - and so it went. The Black Book's improbable ending in China no longer seems so improbable. Tides of history flow in foreseeable directions for those who see the past - citing Confucius and Churchill. I pulled the trigger and have not gone back to record recent events and continue an endless process. The lessons and values of the Black Book are enduring. My few revisions since that indistinct moment of decision in early 2008 are largely editorial, the delay since then occasioned by pursuit of a publisher for a volume which fit no mould. I am grateful to my family, led by son Warwick, for stepping into that breach.

The election of Barack Obama to the U.S. Presidency deserves recognition in the Black Book. It marks a refreshing reengagement of Americans in their politics, notably the youth of America, though Grandmother Nancy Stevenson was back in the precincts, and she was not alone. The election may mark one of the recurring reactions to adverse times and failures of policy which punctuate American history and are cited in the Black Book - a restoration of political energy and idealism. But for all the imagery and exultation, Obama's election reflected an America divided by religion, region, race and gender. The slanders against him were many and venomous. He lost the votes of most American white males. His campaign and inauguration will have cost a billion dollars over more than two years of campaigning and fund raising. He rejected campaign finance limitations and outspent his inept Republican opponents in the general election by two to one. And, still,

the election outcome was close, especially considering the failures of George W. Bush and the ideological right.

One election will not restore the political system and values of the Black Book. The internet socializes and personalizes politics, possibly undermining once durable structures of the American past, including what remains of party organization, in a wilderness of electronic messages bereft of the old press. It is dying - as is described in the chapter on Press. Money still reigns. It is pouring into Washington's political coffers from lobbyists, bundlers, corporations and interest groups competing for increased Federal spending and investment. K Street is booming. Roughly half of retiring Members of Congress routinely stay in Washington to multiply their salaries as lobbyists, consultants and lawyers, joining former staffers. Members did not retire to lobbying and consulting in my time and in the Black Book.

Money reigns at all levels of government - debt piles up at all levels. The City of Chicago is leasing its parking meters. In January, 2009, Governor Rod Blagojevich appointed Barack Obama's successor to the U.S. Senate after having been arrested and impeached for his apparent political mercantilism, even seeking a price for the Senate seat.

The election of Barack Obama marks a return of Reason to Washington. He won by appealing to the good sense and decency of the American people after the long years of the Bush Administration and its rule of ideology, religious fundamentalism and ignorance. Obama was eloquent, his intelligence conspicuous. Time and again, I was asked by journalists to respond to complaints and suggestions that he was like Adlai Stevenson, the egghead - too intelligent, eloquent and idealistic to win and govern. For speaking sense to the American people - trusting in their decency and good sense - Adlai II was labeled an elitist, and so was Barack Obama.

The Black Book ended in despair inspired by George Bush, the neoconservatives, their supporters and tactics. That despair has been overtaken by the victory of qualities exemplified by Governor Stevenson, albeit a victory qualified by the historical analogy. In 1952, it was General Eisenhower who ran with a promise of "change" after many years of Democratic rule and against an alleged mess in Washington. As will be recorded, Stevenson lost the election to the returning war hero, but it was he who delivered the change.

President Obama has moved with commendable zeal and speed to organize an administration that includes capable, experienced and rational officials. An ambitious agenda for America and the world is far along as I write in late January, 2009. It is slow to confront challenging

life and death issues of terrorism and peace in the Middle East and Central Asia, especially the Palestinian issue, to design a global regime for monetary policy and regulation of financial products and institutions in a global economy. Multilateralism and strengthening the UN, its far flung peace keeping and life saving activities and agencies await action. Massive doses of Keynesian economics wisely, if imprecisely, focus on infrastructure, health, science, education, and the social compact - and with insufficient concern about debt, private and public, including trillion dollar federal deficits and unfunded long term liabilities stretching beyond the horizon, for the dollar, interest rates and the international monetary system - and global economy. Are burst debt bubbles to be cured by larger bubbles? Gas taxes could be raised. Weapons systems could be slashed from the bloated defense budget. Universal service, including a draft, could be established if, indeed, military manpower is to be increased. The tumult and the cheers subside. The stark reality of responsibility has arrived.

The Obama administration is in its infancy. Hope to the Black Book is eternal. It is revived. The presidency of Barack Obama renews the hopes for America of peoples everywhere. The challenges are formidable. The forces of history and the life cycles of nations and empires are relentless. But we can hope again - for a restoration of Reason and American values to American policies. The Black Book remains a reminder of the rich past, its lessons and the demands of service for those who would pick up where America left off and resume leadership of mankind's evolution to a peaceful world order based on cooperation, law and Reason.

Introduction

Anecdotes and maxims are rich treasures to the man of the world, for he knows how to introduce the former at fit places in conversation, and to recollect the latter on proper occasions.

Goethe

The Black Book is a compendium of wit, wisdom and whimsy spanning a century and a half of American public life. It began as a brown loose-leaf binder in which my great-grandfather, Adlai E. Stevenson I (1836-1914), collected anecdotes and maxims, stories and sayings during his life as a county prosecutor, congressman, Assistant Postmaster General and U.S. Vice President under Grover Cleveland. His son Lewis, Illinois Secretary of State, added little to the collection, but Lewis's son Adlai II, known to friends and family as "the Guv," expanded the collection in a large black binder during his life as an official in the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations, Governor of Illinois, Democratic presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956, and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

This binder was known as the Black Book. It was stuffed with the Guv's and Adlai I's voluminous notes jotted on menus, place cards, napkins, whatever was at hand. Supporters and friends contributed as word of the Black Book spread. The Guv's staff, mine later, edited and organized this trove as a ready source of jokes, anecdotes, aphorisms, wise comment, solace and inspiration, often unattributed in the heat of the moment. I inherited the Black Book, along with the original binder of Adlai I, and augmented it from my life as a Marine, Illinois Supreme Court law clerk, partner in a large law firm, State Representative, State Treasurer, U.S. Senator, two-time Democratic candidate for Illinois governor, farmer, international investment banker, and ever the hereditary global sojourner and public policy activist.

I used the burgeoning Black Book as my predecessors had to enliven speeches. Mine needed it more than theirs. My father, like his grandfather, was renowned for spontaneous wit and eloquence. I suffered by comparison. As columnist Mike Royko wrote in the *Chicago Sun-Times*:

The most dangerous element in our politics is charisma. It makes people get glassy-eyed and jump and clap without a thought in their heads. Adlai Stevenson [III]

never does that. He makes people drowsy. His hair is thinning. He has all the oratorical fire of an algebra teacher. His clothes look like something he bought from the coroner's office. When he feels good, he looks like he has a virus. We need more politicians who make the blood run tepid.

The Black Book helped me only so much.

The Black Book owes much to Abraham Lincoln, a friend of the Guv's maternal great-grandfather, Jesse Fell. Fell was among the first to urge Lincoln to seek the presidential nomination, and it was he who proposed the Lincoln-Douglas debates as a means of bringing Lincoln to the nation's attention. Lincoln had a gift for befriending the audience and making his point with story. His influence and this methodology permeate the Black Book, which reflects a reverence for the politics, warts and all, in which the Stevenson family has participated for generations.

The influence of Woodrow Wilson is less explicit but pervasive. Wilson was a scholar, President of Princeton University, the reform Governor of New Jersey, and President of the U.S. when the Guv entered Princeton, graduating in 1922. He had first met Wilson as a boy in the company of his father, Lewis. Wilson's reformism as Governor and President, his enlightened internationalism, his crusade for a League of Nations, undoubtedly left a mark. The Guv visited the battlefields and military cemeteries of Europe shortly after World War I, and later, as a young newspaper correspondent, saw orphaned "wolf children" of Russia's civil war fighting like animals for scraps of food in the streets. He saw more of war as Assistant to the Secretary of the Navy, among other assignments, during World War II and its aftermath. Like Wilson, Adlai II was an idealist and an intellectual for whom war had no charms. Unlike Wilson, he absorbed the world's history from on the ground. He was an intellectual but not a scholar. The press dubbed him the "egghead," but he was a pragmatic internationalist, a hard-boiled egghead. Following Wilson's failed fight for the League of Nations, he became an architect of the post World War II international order, including the United Nations, which preserved the peace. The Guv was a peace maker.

Our family roots, nourished in politics, farming, the law and journalism, run deep in Central Illinois. But my father's universe, and mine, was the world. From his days as a young newspaper correspondent, the Guv was a peripatetic student of the world, exploring

its markets and *favelas* to learn how people lived and suffered, rummaging among ruins and monuments to discover their past, always listening and absorbing history. His perspective came from history and the real world, on the ground and often on the front lines, not from an ivory tower of scholasticism for armchair strategists and polemicists. His thinking was devoid of ideology and religiosity, those facile and convenient substitutes for knowledge and experience. I followed him, sometimes joined him. My global sojourns outside North America began with my father in London in 1945, more than sixty years and eighty countries past. “On the ground and in the real world” becomes a refrain in the *Black Book*, intended to contrast perspectives of Americans past and now: Reason then; conventional wisdom, ideology and tactics now.

According to the *Black Book*, politics is the noblest of callings, with more potential for good and for evil than any other. The *Black Book* reflects a politics all but forgotten in which winning was not the only objective of a campaign. In a democracy one must win well to serve well. The purpose was to inform so the public could make an educated judgment. “Trust the people, trust their good sense, their decency, their fortitude, their faith. Trust them with the facts. Trust them with the great decisions. . . . What wins is more important than who wins,” the Guv said. As President Grover Cleveland put it in 1887, “What is the use of being elected or re-elected unless you stand for something?” He was defeated, standing against a protective tariff, but re-elected in 1892 with Adlai I, his vice presidential running mate and my other coauthor.

It was a hard-fought politics, but a politics of humor, wit and the spontaneity made possible by integrity and an ability to trust one’s cause—and instincts—and party. As witnessed in the *Black Book*, politics was barren of sanctimony and deception. Campaign managers asked what the message was. Now pollsters and consultants tell the candidate what the message is.

I am sometimes very much interested when I see gentlemen supposing that popularity is the way to success in America. The way to success in this great country with its fair judgments is to show that you are not afraid of anybody except God and his final judgment.

Woodrow Wilson, July 4, 1914

Today's politics tends to focus on popularity and the game: who is supporting whom, the polls and the money, personalities over truth, images over policy. Ideology, even religious fundamentalism, substitutes for Reason. From a process thus corrupted, Americans drop out or divide along lines divorced from the democratic dialogue—the life and death issues and policy formulations. In Adlai I's day, people came on foot and horseback from miles around to cheer their candidates and be a part of their politics. Historian Richard Norton Smith tell us that more Americans turned out in 1896 to hear William Jennings Bryan barnstorm and William McKinley orate from his front porch than heard Bill Clinton, Bob Dole and Ross Perot exactly a century later.

The New York Daily Post headlined a crowd of 350,000 in the streets of New York to hear Adlai II campaign for President late in 1956. In 1960, tens of thousands of his supporters converged on San Francisco, breaking into the Democratic convention to demand a third nomination. In my time thousands marched with posters and banners in the streets of Chicago, late in the campaigns, to their rallies in the old Chicago Coliseum, filling its surrounding streets. The Black Book reflects a robust partisanship. Politics was the stuff of debate and hard work in the precincts, not of daily denigration or entertainment on talk shows, let alone fund raisers and marketing. The people's business was serious and joyful—their participation uncontrived. The Black Book's aphorisms and anecdotes highlight the contrast between the founders' ideals and the realities of politics. The contrast diminishes during bursts of enlightened political activism, as during the Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, New Deal and early post World War II eras, but it is sharper now than it was in the first Gilded Age when Adlai I was active. In today's Gilded Age, the ideals of politics have faded from the rhetoric which has lost its flourishes and its humor. The old, healthy public skepticism toward politics has become an unhealthy cynicism. Ideals receive lip service in clichés about freedom, democracy, conservatism, change, hope and “values.” The political ideals of the Black Book express conscience and personal conviction and propositions, which, however unpopular, are rooted in realism and history. These ideals owe nothing to ideology, poll-tested public opinion, the Nixonian ethic of anything goes—and money. The political process reflected in the Black Book yielded an eloquence born of principle, communicable and capable of arousing public enthusiasm. Before patriotism erupted on the lapels of politicians it was what the Guv described as the “tranquil steady dedication of a lifetime.”

One of my purposes in publishing the Black Book and augmenting it with comment is to remind readers what our politics was, what it can be, and what it is. Memories are short. Generations are disconnected from one another and the rich American past. Some will say it was always thus and, of course, American politics never was “beanbag,” as Mr. Dooley reminded us.

As I try to make clear through some of my recollections, no veteran of Illinois politics is unaware of the demands of party discipline and the underside of American politics. The Black Book weathered the 1870's and the 1920's. But the corruption to which we were accustomed was of an old-fashioned, universal variety. Votes and favors could be traded and bought, but never were the nation's security interests corrupted by foreign interests, religious fundamentalism or the delusions of ideologues with little experience in the real world, none in war. Party organization and discipline were strong, at times abusive, but parties had a purpose which transcended patronage and raw power. Reason, not ideology or religiosity, informed policy. Policy was not for sale. The Black Book spans an Age of Reason in America.

In preparing the Black Book for publication, I have included a chapter on our family origins and background in Illinois, added quotes from my father, weeded out some of the more familiar material, including much from the Bible, and retained materials which, even though they are politically incorrect today, nonetheless reflect public attitudes at the time, some of them racially insensitive. I have added comments from experience to contrast contemporary politics with the more traditional politics reflected by the Black Book, and defined challenges facing America while sketching means of meeting them.

These disparate materials are uneasily organized in two Parts. Part I is a narrative with excerpts from the Black Book focusing on politics, policy making and related abstractions such as freedom, law and justice, money and economics, the press, also Lincoln and the family ties. It reflects the environment within which politics and politicians functioned during an earlier era, and contains comments on the implications of the past for the future.

Part II pulls together excerpts—sayings, anecdotes and “humorous recitations and laugh lines”—from a wider range of subject matter. They lack easy categorization but reflect influences on the thinking and motivation of our generations, and may be of value to readers as they were to us. These Afterwords are often of inspiration, courage, crime and justice and friendship: a universe of diverse

comment and wisdom for politicians who carry on, and a reminder for us all.

The Epilogue in Part I raises fundamental issues about America's viability in a new world, its stage in the life cycle of nations and empires. In the chapter "China and Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea," I detect traces of the old America in today's China—a rule of Reason; and in today's America, signs of the former China — a rule of ideology. In East Asia, I have experienced for more than half a century the development of the world's largest regional economy, and in recent years, America's descent and China's rise.

Throughout the Black Book, parables, aphorisms and anecdotes reappear in different versions in different times, but with the same enduring themes. Our own times seem bereft of both the timely anecdote and its enduring message. Political fodder for the Black Book has become scarce.

Despite the metamorphosis of American politics, there still are many courageous and sensible men and women prepared to lay down their political lives for their country. The Black Book is for them. May they gain some amusement, nourishment and strength from its bits of wisdom.