

JOSEPH SOBKAN

Liberals afraid to be called liberals

WASHINGTON, October 20 — Liberals in 1994 are learning how it must have felt to be Herbert Hoover, loathed by most of the electorate and therefore invoked with glee by the other side of a generation.

Yes, Bill Clinton, this means you!

You see, Bill — you don't mind if I call you Bill, do you? — you're a very smart guy. But like a lot of very smart guys, you're so fixed on your own cleverness that you've developed blind spots, areas where you don't have even average intelligence.

YOU AND I BELONG to the same generation, Bill — the so-called Baby Boomers. Remember when we were in college during the '60s, how our elders always told us we were "the brightest generation in history"? I always wondered how come so many of the brightest generation in history were relying on Cliffs Notes to get them through college. By the way, do you know that Cliffs Notes are now available in an audio format? That's right — on tape! I guess only real intellectuals read the full text of Cliffs Notes these days.

But I'm digressing. What I meant to say was that you seem to be the Compleat Boomer. Everything "we" were all supposed to be thinking during the '60s, you still seem to believe. It's become conventional to call it conventional wisdom. Peace, love, rock music, sexual freedom and progressive politics. You and your press pals thought it had finally come into its own with your election. At last the old

reactionary politics of Nixon, Reagan and Bush had been vanquished!

Gosh, victory went to your head. You not only forgot you'd won only 43 percent of the votes cast; you completely missed the significance of the Perot voters. I don't mean Perot; I mean, literally, the Perot voters — not just the 19 percent he finally got, but the nearly 40 percent who at one point were prepared to elect a third-party candidate!

You still don't get it, do you, Bill?

Those are the Boomers!

Oh, they're still radical, all right. But not in the way the avatars of the "'60s," with their professionally approved protest, defined radicalism. These people were never crazy about the system. But they were even less crazy about the people who took it over after Vietnam and Watergate in the name of "reform."

These are the Other Boomers, Bill. They were in the shadows while your breed was getting all the adulatory publicity in *Time* and *Newsweek*. They put up with big wars and big government, but they've never really trusted the welfare state. If you really want to drive them nuts, just tell them that illegal immigrants have "welfare rights."

THE OTHER BOOMERS never got in on the sexual revolution, either. I don't know if you saw that new sex survey, Bill, but most Americans aren't swingers. They are faithfully monogamous. I'm not trying to scare you, but their motto could be: "I have sex with my wife once a week, and I vote!"

In politics you haven't really won a lasting victory until your side is no longer a side. There is no longer an anti-communist "side"; nearly everyone is anti-communist now. For two generations the Republicans have been afraid to oppose the welfare state in principle; that shows how completely Franklin Roosevelt won in the '30s.

But something is changing. Liberals are afraid to be called liberals. Soon it will be "McCarthyism" to label someone a liberal. The Boomers don't remember Roosevelt; they only dimly remember Adlai Stevenson, and the memory of Jack Kennedy has been upstaged by the living reality of Ted Kennedy.

The result, Bill, is that your own party is running away from you and everything you and Hillary symbolize. Nobody is saying we need more government. There is only one side left. Your side is ceasing to be a side too, but for different reasons.

YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh, who feed (and feed on) anti-liberal passion. Well, suppose you're right. Has it ever occurred to you to ask yourself why there aren't liberal talk shows, where angry callers phone in to demand higher taxes and more federal regulation?

Get it?

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