



Dangerous Demagoguery

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Most of the horrors of the 20th century — of which there were many — would not have been possible without demagoguery or misleading propaganda.

Most people have too much of a sense of decency and too much common sense to have gone along with those horrors unless someone found a way to turn off their thinking and turn on their emotions.

That is how Jim Jones led hundreds of people to their deaths at Jonestown. On a much larger scale, that is how Lenin created a regime of mass murder in Russia, how Hitler did the same thing in Germany and Mao in China.

Yet we seem to be no more aware of a need to be on guard against demagoguery today, in the 21st century, than those people who looked up with open-mouthed adulation at Adolf Hitler in the 1930s and at nu-

merous other demagogues, large and small, around the world throughout the turbulent 20th century.

Many people find it thrilling that the mantra of "change" is ringing out across the land during this election year. But let's do what the politicians hope that we will never do — stop and think.

It is doubtful whether there is a single human being in this entire country who is 100 percent satisfied with everything that is going on. In other words, everybody is for change.

The real difference between liberals and conservatives is in which specific things they want to change, and in what way.

Milton Friedman was the leading conservative thinker of his time but he wanted to radically change the Federal Reserve, the school system,

and the tax system, among other things.

Everybody is for change. They differ on the specifics. Uniting people behind the thoughtless mantra of "change" means asking for a blank check in exchange for rhetoric. That deal has been made many times in many places – and millions of people have lived to regret it.

It is not too much to ask politicians to talk specifics, instead of trying to sweep us along, turning off our minds and turning on our emotions, with soaring rhetoric.

Optimists might even hope for some logical consistency and hard facts.

Barack Obama says that he wants to "heal America and repair the world." One wonders what he will do for an encore and whether he will rest on the seventh day.

That we have so many people who are ready to be swept along by such rhetoric is a huge danger, for it means that the fate of this great nation is at risk from any skilled demagogue who comes along.

Barack Obama says that he wants to "heal" the country while at the same time promoting the idea that all sorts of people are victims for whom he will fight.

Being divisive while proclaiming unity is something you can do only in the world of rhetoric.

Senator Obama has no monopoly on demagoguery, however.

Former Senator John Edwards has been playing this game longer, even if not as effectively in the political arena.

John Edwards built his own fortune in the courtroom, depicting babies with birth defects as victims of the doctors who delivered them. The cost of such demagoguery has gone far beyond the tens of millions of dollars that Edwards pocketed for himself from gullible juries.

Such lawsuits based on junk science have driven up the cost of medical care, not only directly but even more so indirectly, by leading to an increase in Caesarean births and other costly "defensive medicine" to protect doctors rather than patients.

The world of John Edwards, like the world of Barack Obama, is a world of victims, whose savior he claims to be.

What is scary is how little interest the public and the media have in the actual track record of political saviors and the cry of generic "change."

America is not czarist Russia or Iran under the shah, so that people might think that any change was bound to be for the better. Yet even in those despotic countries the changes – to communism and to the ayatollahs – made them far worse.

The time is long overdue for voters to demand specifics instead of rhetoric that turns their emotions on and their minds off.