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Title: *The Niagara Movement* in contemporary perspective: 2004 U.S. Election Results and Kundera's "Moral Judo"

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"We want full manhood suffrage and we want it now....We are men! We want to be treated as men. And we shall win." This was *The Niagara Movement's* manifesto in Du Bois's words. Are they relevant to us today? Have we won as Du Bois expected?

Conservative political scientist Samuel P. Huntington stated in his book *The third wave: democratization in the late twentieth century* that "'No taxation without representation' was a political demand; 'no representation without taxation' is a political reality." The former was a slogan used for criticizing the British colonial regime on those thirteen colonies, which served as a driving *moral force* in the independence struggle; a struggle for being seen and respected as an equal. The latter is a more practical and empirical reality-call without being disconnected to the previous moral calling.

We could paraphrase *The Niagara Movement's* manifesto and combine it with Huntington's play of words as "'No humanity without suffrage' was a political demand; 'no suffrage without humanity' is a political reality." Analogous to the U.S. independence movement, the former was *Niagara's* call for being seen and respected as equals irrespective of skin color. It was a call for inclusion. The latter again underscores the incomplete nature of the moral formality of suffrage without any practical, substantive context for exercising that formality. This statement is not a call for undermining the relevance of formal institutions or advocating an either/or statement. Both sides are needed and necessary for full citizenship, for achieving sufficiency. Either side alone is incomplete and dangerous for humanity: formality without substance is empty, while substance without formality is patronizing and an invitation for open exploitation.

Hence, we argue that that craving for inclusion and respect represented by the U.S. independence movement and the *Niagara Movement* is still relevant today not only as a moral slogan, but also as a "measuring stick" to gauge our performance as a society. At the same time, we can use this space for reflecting and assessing Du Bois's prediction of victory. We can use the 2004 election's results as a node of analytical coalescence of that inclusive and respect craving and actualization.

This is why President George W. Bush's victory more than anything else should represent an opportunity to embolden those democratic values of inclusion, justice, and equity as means toward freedom and equality. It should mean an opportunity of putting a battle tactic the Czech writer Milan Kundera labeled as "moral judo" aside and concentrate in unraveling our core humanity, which entails unleashing that common thread purporting 'a coming together;' and consequently, emboldening and underscoring leadership abilities, which might be called later-on a legacy; a legacy that embraces those values which were so important for the U.S. independence and *Niagara Movement* struggles. In terms of a legacy, means and ends need to converse, because what is a legacy if not a long-term attainment retrospectively evaluated? This retrospective evaluation is uncertain, unknown. We do know the past. We must embrace the past not for becoming conformists, not for becoming overwhelmed, but to distill and derive our strategies, means for attaining our underscored ends. It is impossible to be against Pres. Bush's aimed ends,

'In all these proposals, we seek to provide not just a government program, but a path -- a path to greater opportunity, more freedom, and more control over your own life,' [the President] said. (VandeHei and Milbank, 2004)

Nevertheless, this so-called "path" cannot be extricated from the real world and its history. The United States' population remains closely divided regarding a variety of issues, which have been singled-out and discussed before, during, and after November 2, 2004. Race remains one of these dividing issues even after 140 years of abolishing slavery and 41 years after the signing of the *Civil Rights Act*.

There has been a great amount of writing and debate on what Pres. Bush's victory means and entails, which should be perceived as positive from a democratic discursive point of view. Beyond the obvious expected conclusion of partisan evaluative disagreements, this varied interpretative plethora further underscores the closely divided nature of the U.S. population's stances. Nonetheless, what we need to focus on at the moment is putting forth meanings of the election results, which would help provide means and tools to engage, in as an informed manner as possible, the forthcoming policy debates.

As analysts, we struggle to make sense of the population's tendencies. Thus, within this analytical morass we should be cautious and humble when laying-out our conclusions of what we end up "reading" from the data at hand. In other words, scoping our conclusions and separating our *educated guesses* based on statistics; and *educated prophecies* based on our educated guts and world views. By this we are not holding-on to a naïve objectivism, but advocating for analytical transparency and not presenting "gut feeling" as "scientific deductions."

The closely divided nature of the U.S. population at the present moment instead of complaint and frustration should encourage us to engage into deeper concerns about a democracy. A democracy is much more than numbers. Democratic ideals are based on moral values. Moral values that seek to empower a society as a whole irrespective of any individual's demographics. They remain ideals not solely because of their utopian characteristics, but because of the ongoing juggling between empirical progress and

setbacks along the way, which are based on unforeseen outcomes, miscalculations, or both.

A large number of written and oral commentaries have been dedicated to the so-called relevance of “moral issues” for voters. This should not be perceived as something negative or scary. Negative and scary would only be the outcomes of how those “moral issues” are addressed or channeled. We need to acknowledge that there is no direct or immediate translation of “moral values” into public policy. Relevant “moral values” for a particular society emerge from debates. Thus, their identification and definition depends on how those debates take place and who is included in those debates. Another point to be underscored is that no policy or empirical example solely addresses any single “moral value.” The underscoring or association of a particular policy with a particular “moral value” is an outcome dependent on the framing, manner, and inclusion of the defining debate.

Hence, we need to be cautious in simplistically translating numbers into “moral advocacy.” Put in another manner, popularity is not necessarily translated into or truncates “moral virtuosity.” If we are going to deduce the relevance of “moral issues” from the electoral results, we need to acknowledge a much more complex and contingent relation between popularity and “morality.” There is a possibility of encountering “popular issues” of questionable “morality,” as well as “morally virtuous unpopular issues.” Could we argue that *Jim Crow Laws* were more morally virtuous than South Africa’s *Apartheid* because in the former a majority race while in the latter a minority race was benefited? We do not think so and that is why we argue and advocate for caution on the direct relationship between popularity and moral righteousness. Its appeal derives from its simplicity, but that same simplicity could obviate many important and relevant factors, which might end-up truncating live chances of particular sectors of society.

It has been argued that “faith,” is very important for the U.S. population; but faith on what? Faith is a very broad, all-encompassing label that means and has meant many different things: good and bad. The so-called “cultural gap” between the red and blue states should not be interpreted or understood as any one of the two states’ shades needing to rescue the other. This “gap” should be interpreted as a disconnect and a misunderstanding between the two shades, which calls for enlightenment and leadership by a grounding of the “moral issues” debate. This moral issues debate cannot be settled during an election campaign. Thus, the election having passed, it is now a good time to enlighten that debate. However, that debate must start, and in the process, enlightenment and leadership could emerge. Good vs. evil is catchy, but oversimplified, unjust, and mistaken. Furthermore, they do not stop being labels.

Economic Science Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen argues that what development means and entails is permitting people to live the kind of lives they have reason to value. All people should be able to do so irrespective of any demographic feature: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, region, creed, among others. Hence, this is why the U.S. leadership should strive to expand, strengthen, and broaden citizenship and not the opposite. The U.S. leadership should avoid “moral judo” and further tolerance to

broaden our understanding of life and of each other. The U.S. leadership should disentangle the simplistic correlation between accepting the existence and possibility of “other” views than our own *versus* caving and claudicating our views for those “others.” A mere acceptance of “other” possibilities does not imply moral weakness, caving, or claudicating, but moral humility; this is a humility that only takes pride of its inclusion and acceptance of the plural possibilities of humanity.

We argue that the U.S. independence and *Niagara Movement*’s moral appeals are still relevant today with the necessity to incorporate and associate substantive issues not for undermining their appeal, but for grounding them in our day to day lives. Du Bois’s victory prediction was certain if we understand it as open ended, as an objective, goal for our collective humanity. And as he once stated,

In order to increase the satisfaction for the mass of our people and all people, someone must sacrifice something of his own happiness. This is a duty only to those who recognize it as a duty. It is silly to tell intelligent human beings, be good and you will be happy. The truth is today, be good, be decent, be honorable, and self-sacrificing and you will not always be happy. You will often be desperately unhappy. You may even be crucified, dead, and buried. And the third day, you will be just as dead as the first. But, with the death of your happiness, may easily come increased happiness, and satisfaction, and fulfillment for other people...strangers, unborn babes, uncreated worlds. If this is not sufficient incentive, never try it and remain among the hogs. (quoted in Franklin, 2003)

We can and should hope for progress, but it is as important that we work for it. There is nothing automatic, there is no given in human living. This is a certitude that we should understand to avoid optimist and pessimist delusions.

Throughout the 2004 presidential campaign because of its combative nature, we experienced a lot of “moral judo” on both sides. Now that the campaign has ended and the results are in, we know who won. This victory, this mandate is for leading the U.S. population, in its entirety, toward a destiny. We know that it is easy to divide and exclude, but difficult to unite and include. President Bush’s legacy, that future retrospective assessment should and would be gauged according to the nature of that path he made reference to in his acceptance speech at the Republican convention. Our hope is that the chosen path is one of unity and inclusion, but as stated, in conjunction to hoping we need to work for and toward making our hopes of inclusion, justice, equity, freedom, and equality a reality for all irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, region, creed, among others. Because as Theologian Reinhol Niebuhr states,

Nothing worth doing can be accomplished in one lifetime, therefore, we must be saved by hope. And, nothing that is true or good or beautiful makes complete sense in any immediate context of history, therefore, we must be saved by faith. And, no act, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone, therefore, we must be saved by love. (Franklin, 2003)

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