Opinion
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by Michael Sean Winters

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MSBNC host Rachel Maddow had author Timothy Snyder as a guest last week. His new book, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, seems suddenly of immediate significance, yes? This segment really touched an important theme as Snyder discussed what we can all do to defend our democracy: be unpredictable, advice that may not seem obvious but is profoundly true. His comments about the different methods of authoritarianism in the 20th and 21st century are also worth noting.

In The Washington Post, Michael Gerson does what the U.S. bishops have not been able to do in nearly two decades of trying: articulate the moral calculi that should guide pro-life voters when facing complex decisions at the ballot box. Of course, Gerson is a journalist, not a bishop, so he has more freedom, but where are the conservative Catholic commentators who know better? Why can't they do what Gerson is doing?

Relatedly, the "party of life" is fast turning into the "party of authoritarianism." It is not just the interference with the Department of Justice, but with efforts like this one

in South Carolina to cause chaos in the Democratic Party. The New Yorker has the story. And, as is the case with much else about President Donald Trump, this strategy was first trotted out years ago by Rush Limbaugh.

At Working Class Perspectives, Jack Metzgar points out that while the dominant cultural narrative about polarization in our country is true in many regards, it is emphatically not true when you ask voters about a range of progressive economic policies, such as a 2% wealth tax, capping prices on prescription drugs, or large infrastructure plans, all of which poll north of 70%. Another set of progressive policies poll north of 60%. Yet, those numbers do not entice the "moderate" Democratic candidates to embrace those policies because they need to signal moderation. Insane.

At Vox, Matt Yglesias makes the argument that Trump won the presidency by campaigning as a moderate, not as an extremist, and urges Democrats not to draw the wrong lesson. Yes, Trump's hostility to the Iraq War helped him a lot in rural areas, and older voters appreciated his vow not to cut Social Security or Medicare. But Yglesias starts by introducing data drawn from congressional and statewide elections, which are very different elections than a presidential election, and what is more, he fails to articulate the need to distinguish between moderation on social issues and economic ones. That said, yes, the Democrats are silly to promise to abolish ICE or take other ridiculous stances.

Paul Krugman at The New York Times puts the pedal to the metal, asking if zombies have eaten Michael Bloomberg's and Pete Buttigieg's brains. Ouch. Whatever you think of the metaphor, he points to the principal problem with this year's "moderate" Democrats, namely, they only signal their moderation by adopting outdated and well-refuted economic ideas. One year and one week ago, I called attention to research by Lee Drutman that indicated conclusively why this is as bad idea and that the way to an electoral majority is by moving to the center on social issues and to the left on economic ones.

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A friend was concerned that I was being unfair to Bloomberg in my column on Monday. He called my attention to a policy paper on labor that Bloomberg's

campaign released last weekend. (You need to scroll down and download the full document.) I agree it is well done, but the campaign itself describes their candidate as a "self-made entrepreneur" and, just so, fails to understand the essential Catholic and progressive indictment of today's billionaire class. No one is "self-made" and anyone who thinks he or she is should not be leading the Democratic Party.

At The Atlantic, John McWhorter — who is *always* worth reading — argues that Bloomberg failed the "wokeness" test and that is not a bad thing. I agree about how out of touch the "wokeness" caucus is, but Bloomberg's flailing apology/defense of his stance was craven and undercut his principal claim to the nomination — that because he is a billionaire, he does not have to be craven to win.

Also at The Atlantic, David Brooks has an excellent essay about what is maybe the biggest cultural mistake of the past 100 years: holding up the nuclear family as an ideal. It has failed and we need to begin thinking about different ways of living together. His section on how AIDS brought many gay men to redefine their understanding of family — and the need for extended family — is spot-on.

In The New York Times, a beautiful essay by Bari Weiss explaining the national excitement that former prisoner Gilad Shalit is getting married. This is a reminder that not all nationalism comes with lousy ethics. The money quote:

> It makes me wonder what kind of country America would become if we regularly, collectively, campaigned for the release of our fellow citizens whose names I had to look up. What would change about this country if we felt that their fate was our responsibility? Perhaps it would help us remember that we have a shared destiny to begin with.

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

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