

Tuna Tartare, Grey Poupon, and . . . Broccoli?

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I've written an essay called "Voices from Philistia" ([here](#)). The title comes from WFB, who in 1975 wrote a column headed "A Voice from Philistia." He was responding to a critic of his — a populist Republican. The populist had giped at Bill in a piece about public television:

Most of it is liberal in tone, but there are a couple of "conservatives" on tap, people who share Establishment cultural chic. Only a few weeks ago, one of them, Wm. F. Buckley Jr., announced that he was loading his yacht with vintage wines for a transatlantic voyage, which makes him just right for PTV.

Now and then, people will jump on Kevin Williamson and me for our critiques of populism: "Buckley would be rolling over in his grave!" Kevin will say, "You mean the guy with the harpsichord on his yacht?" All his life — certainly all his career — WFB was knocked as "effete," "elitist," "cosmopolitan," and worse.

Par for the course.

Recently, I have been browsing through the Buckley archive ([extensive](#)). Once again, I am dazzled. And I wonder what people would make of him in our current environment. The erudition, the vocabulary, the ratiocination (as he would say). He elevated the reader, and the reader — lots of them, at the time — liked it.

The impetus for my essay today came from John Kennedy, not the 35th president but the incumbent senator from Louisiana. Talking with Sean Hannity, this Kennedy giped at "the tuna-tartare crowd who live in the expensive condos with the high ceilings and the imported art on the wall."

That's pretty good, if you like that kind of talk.

A reader now points me to Howell Heflin, another southern politician, an Alabamian. Heflin was a Democrat and Kennedy is a Republican, but the talk seldom varies.

In 1990, Howell was running against a Republican named Bill Cabaniss. (Beat him, of course.) And he spoke of "the Grey Poupon crowd: the Gucci-poochie-coochie-shoe-wearing, Mercedes-driving, polo-playing, Jacuzzi-soaking, Perrier-drinking, Aspen-skiing, ritzy rich, high-society Republicans who eat broccoli."

Broccoli! Why that vegetable in particular? The president at the time, George Bush, a Republican, was a famous, or infamous, foe of broccoli. Do you remember? "I do not like broccoli. And I haven't liked it since I was a little kid. And my mother made me eat it. And I'm president of the United States. And I'm not gonna eat any more broccoli!"

(His wife, Barbara, handled the “broccoli vote,” as the president called it.)

Responding to Heflin in Alabama, Bill Cabaniss said, “If that’s all Heflin has to run on — personalities and personal criticism — he has no business being a U.S. senator. I consider politics serious business.”

Hahaha. Loser. Sucker.

As I say in my piece, Latin American demagogues are the all-time champeens when it comes to populism. Hugo Chávez was the master. But the region has no shortage of them, on left and right. AMLO, in Mexico, is a left-wing populist; Bolsonaro, in Brazil, a right-wing. I quote each of them in my piece.

I’ll give you a bit more Bolsonaro, here in the Corner. Recently, he scorned vaccines for COVID, saying, “If you turn into a crocodile, that’s your problem.” Also, women could suddenly grow a beard, and men could start speaking “with an effeminate voice.”

The people eat it up.

CPAC, last weekend, was a festival of populism, needless to say. A Fox News host said, “I sit down with a schoolteacher, or a construction worker, or a small-business owner, or a cook at a restaurant, or a waitress at the restaurant we’re at.” Okay. “And they’re not talking about esoteric things that the Ivy League talks about or MSNBC talks about.”

Oh? I didn’t realize MSNBC was esoteric, but what are these true-blue (true-red?) Americans talking about?

“They’re talking about the Bible, and faith, and prayer, and their family, hard work, supporting the police, standing for the national anthem, the First Amendment, the Second Amendment, the Tenth Amendment.”

Hmmm. I’m not sure. The Fox host must mingle with people more high-minded than I do. The Bible doesn’t come into it much, to say nothing of the Tenth Amendment.

From time immemorial, pols and demagogues have played to grievance, envy, and resentment. It is a sure vote-getter. But does it do anyone any good? I think it rarely does, in either a spiritual or a material sense.

As I say in today’s piece, I love what Scott Lincicome wrote recently. He is a free-marketeer associated with the Cato Institute and *The Dispatch*. Scott wrote,

What if the Real Populism is robotically investing a reasonable share of your monthly pre-tax income into ultra-low-fee index and/or age-based funds and never touching them again until you retire?

Yeah, what if?