

After the Election

Panel event held at the Frontline Club, London W2.

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Panellists: Stephen Howe, Greg Katz, Dominic Hilton, Ben Ramm
Chaired by Ziba Norman, Research Director, The Transatlantic Institute.

Uncorrected Transcript

ZIBA NORMAN: Welcome, very very good to have you all on a Friday evening, I know it was very late notice. I only decided to do this really last week, feeling that it was important to react to the American election as soon as possible and hopefully before everyone started thinking about the holiday season. So thank you very much for changing your plans, those of you that have done, to be with us tonight.

My name's Ziba Norman, and I've just founded, together with William Arthurs my partner here, something called the Transatlantic Institute. Our mission is to look at what America's role is in the world and to create a kind of global dialogue on that. These are our first opening events, we had a non-partisan election night party on the second of November, first ever of its kind, we expected maybe 150-200 people and we wound up with 800 people there, so what it shows is that if you ask people to buy a ticket to go to an event to drink and to watch CNN everybody comes, and if you ask them to actually debate serious issues, fewer people appear [laughter]. But certainly there is a tremendous interest in what America's role is and in American politics and what we're trying to do with this Institute is to open up debate, not just in bureaucratic and rarefied circles, but to a broader range of people, students, members of the public, journalists et cetera, and to create a kind of flow of ideas between those groups.

So that's roughly who we are, what I would say is, please have a look at our website, which is very much homespun, www.t-i.org.uk, which is on that little bit of paper you have, and it tells you a bit more about the projects we have in view, we are going to be a registered charity and we're planning to sponsor research, as well as events et cetera, if you have any ideas, anything that you'd like to see us do, or anything that you'd like to do yourself, please contact us via the website.

Right, to the question for this evening. After the election, is this a turning point for America? Well, everyone's got a view on that. But I thought that the panelists that I've chosen this evening, have a particular insight and I was very pleased to get my first choice on all of them.

First we have Stephen Howe who is a very distinguished historian and writer, and also a friend, and so too is his wife Daphna, here with us this evening, and also we have Ben Ramm who has asked to be last in the pecking order tonight, who has just founded the magazine which is in front of you which is called the Liberal, it looks as if you're trying to revivify a tradition there and also redefine the notion of what it means to be a liberal because it seems that somehow that's gotten lost. So we've got Ben here with us, who's just put his very first issue to bed, so I'm amazed that he has any energy for this. We have Greg Katz, who, again, doesn't really need an introduction for people who know this circle, he won a Pulitzer Prize a number of years ago, and was also bureau chief for the Dallas Morning News in London, and understands, I think, from what I've read, both the liberal consensus on the East coast and also small town America, so, fire questions at Greg, because he's your man, and Dominic Hilton of Open Democracy, who's columnist for something called Open Democracy which is an absolutely stunning compilation of views, from across the political spectrum and around the world, who's with us as well who has also some very particular views about this issue. So Steve if we start with you?

STEPHEN HOWE: Thank you very much, thanks for inviting me. Well, under the overarching questions posed to us on the sheets in front of you, no fewer than a dozen questions, now six of these are I think about very specifically US domestic politics, five are about international issues, and one, is Dubya concerned about his place in history, could I suppose be about either. Now I'm not going to say anything about, nothing that's worth hearing on the domestic questions, because despite having been in the US during the campaign, my ignorance of US domestic politics is really profound. And perhaps I should add, and others will come in on this, that if it is the case, and it clearly lurks behind several of the questions, that the United States is seen in some sense, more than ever before, as two nations, then really I only know one of them, I've almost literally not talked to a republican in years. Knowingly anyway [laughter].

I'm also certainly not a specialist in electoral behaviour, but I did misspend part of my youth hanging around in dark alleys and sleazy dives with psephologists and students of electoral behaviour, and it has struck me powerfully, and others on the panel and in the audience will either correct my misapprehension, or if it's not a misapprehension, explain why this is so, that American parties, American commentators even American academic experts, in electoral behaviour, simply seem to know their voters less well than appears to me to be the case for their equivalents in Britain, and in many other European countries. I don't mean that US election results are less predictable, that's not the case, but there's a great deal about the movements and the formations that seems to be being missed by even the most sophisticated statistical and sampling techniques.

And that I think may relate to something still broader which I do want to say more about in relation to the US's global role and those questions. A question behind those five in a sense, is to ask how far have, or will, US citizens internalised or worked through a sense of themselves

as being citizens of and voters in a global power, what is increasingly widely called, by friends as well as enemies, an imperial power. What stories do they tell themselves about their country's global role? How do these relate to their conceptions of national, and other identities? How far, and in what ways, if indeed at all, for many American citizens, have notions of themselves as being global or imperial entered into, or have been in some sense constitutive of, their identities and the more local senses of space and place that frame them?

I do think that senses of place are going to be very important in thinking about this, remembering how localised is so much US opinion and indeed cultural memory. Now, looking around one, almost anywhere physically in the United Kingdom, the traces, often a mass of traces superimposed on one another, of Britain's past and in some sense present, global role, are inescapable. It's most obviously the case, in somewhere like Central London, but you can scratch a little bit and find this anywhere. I think it's far harder to do that in the United States and it might be worth probing further what that difficulty of thinking about the global in the local, within so much of the US, means. I mean, you can obviously feel it, you can obviously spontaneously spring – spin interpretive webs, at Ground zero itself, in Manhattan, New York City, places like military bases, cemeteries, Annapolis or West Point, the Pentagon, or the Memorial Chapel at Fort Leavenworth, but beyond such obvious signs, what relationships are there between American sense of place, of locality, of home, and a global role?

Thinking about that, I think can be, maybe, should be, linked with a whole series of other questions, which are now very hotly debated, others of which seem to me to be quite startlingly neglected. On one hand, focus on the US's international role, in the wake of the election, has, ever since 9/11, has been overwhelmingly strategic, diplomatic, even straightforwardly military, being so heavily about the US's potential role as a military power, and it's often been pointed out that a military gap probably unmatched since the late 19th century, since the era when European imperial armies had breechloading rifles, muskets and cannons – rifles and cannons, sorry — had the Gatling gun, which their opponents didn't. That gap closed across much of the 20th century, it now appears to have opened up again in the era of the smart bomb. It will close again, the question there is perhaps how, when and by whom. So this is much debated. In other circles, the economics, including on many levels the startling economic weakness of the United States, is much debated and in yet other, in many ways overwhelmingly academic, circles, what are often described as the cultures of American imperialism are much argued over. These different spheres though, exist to a quite disconcerting extent, as separate universes of debate. What I'm pointing to here is something impossibly grandiose. I certainly don't know how to do it, the need to try to pull these different dimensions of power and the perceptions of power together. But there obviously is, I think, a burning necessity to try to do something, to try to relate it also to ideas about race and ethnicity, both within the United States, and globally. Now many of these cultural and literary studies of empire, of the US's global role, not only do put ideas about race at the centre but often seem to assume, almost without argument, that that's what it's really all about, whereas

by contrast most of the strategic, military, economic, and indeed diplomatic studies and polemics, say nothing about this, appear silently to assume that it's not terribly relevant. Again, I'd be intrigued to have anyone else here's thoughts. but I'm still looking more broadly for attempts to bridge that gap.

Most historians of the British empire, indeed of the majority of European empires of the 19th and 20th centuries, have concurred, though there's much dispute over this, that much of the time, the mass of the populations of the colonising powers weren't very keen on, interested in, or knowledgeable about, their country's global roles, except when some particular crisis aroused strong but shortlived passions over it. Domestic and above all economic issues continued to predominate. There wasn't, I think one can safely say, a single British general election, during the lifetime of Britain's empire, that was settled on colonial issues. Now it seems to be the case that self-conscious patriotism is stronger in the US than in most western European countries, and has been given a new weight since 9/11, but it's likely that there too, electorates are far less intensely engaged with global or foreign policy questions than is often thought, less perhaps than their leaders might wish: if that is, we think that a global or an active interventionist global role depends on large scale and active support for it. Now, I mean, the lessons, though I hate this phrase, of British and American imperial history might suggest that it's not necessary; that a global power can, at least for quite a long time, get by quite happily with only a relatively small proportion, perhaps only a few key elites among its own population, being actively supportive of that role, but, even if it may be the case, that a global role doesn't depend on mass, active support for it at home, it does depend on a mass of local ties.

The key to understanding any system of international power surely lies always in the bargains that are struck between the centre that projects that power and local clients, allies, collaborators, to use a word from Second World War Europe which usually has negative connotations, but which can be and perhaps should be used in more neutral ways. Thinking about the shifting nature of those bargains, present and future, will, it would follow, be the key to thinking about the future of America's global role. "A" key, I shouldn't say "the key", a key to answering the series of questions that Ziba has posed for us.

Now this very clearly and obviously, applies to citizens of, and above all, actual or potential power elites within the places where US power is being directly projected. Most strikingly and obviously in the middle East, here too it strikes me, not only how alarmingly little we, but even more alarmingly how little most US policy makers seem to know about the potential balances of force in those places, amongst those potential clients, potential allies, potential opponents, and even more, how actively hostile the atmosphere is in some US circles, towards the search for such an understanding. And here I do think the bitter current battles in and around academia, especially about the shape of Middle East studies, are more important than they might look. These are not just parochial, ivory tower battles. They say a lot about the politics of knowledge, and how that relates to the more obvious overt politics of [inaudible].

But these kinds of questions and dilemmas don't just, of course, relate to the places to which power is directly projected. They also relate to other actual or potential allies, and/ or rivals in the international arena. Here to finish I think I'll just single out one. Now, relationships between the US and Europe, are fraught in a way in which they have not been for decades. They're debated in ways and with a heat that they have not been for decades. You'll all know that, if we can trust a rather unsystematic set of opinion polls, Europe would have voted overwhelmingly for Kerry. Within that, the problem is often seen from Washington as being, above all, France. And there are good and powerful reasons for that. But there also may be reasons to think that that relationship too, has a potential to shift dramatically. Francophonie is in deep trouble. Most obviously and startlingly, France's informal continuing empire, in Africa, is in deep trouble, with the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire as a symptom, in a sense, only of something much wider. The kind of informal empire that France was able to exercise, and in many ways to extend into places that hadn't been French colonies through all the decades when the shadowly Jacques Focart was pulling the strings, is collapsing. The need, or the felt need, to resort to overt intervention, direct use of French military force in Cote d'Ivoire, is therefore a symptom of this crisis. Even Chirac, let alone any likely successor, will therefore have powerful grounds to be looking for a new kind of relationship with Washington. But, just as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where the phrase about 'needing a partner for peace' has been a weary cliché for [inaudible], Chirac's successor needs a partner for peace in Washington. And I must admit, I'm extremely sceptical, about whether the present Administration would be, even has the imagination to try to be, such a partner, and that I think also relates to the last question. Does George W Bush care about his place in history? Surely yes, but, does he care, does he even think about how he will appear in a few decades in Vietnamese, or Tanzanian, or Nicaraguan, or even French or Chinese history books? I fear not. I think, if he thinks at all, as I suppose he does, it's only how he will appear in US history books, and some of those, some of his allies are trying to rewrite at the moment. That limitation is I think at the heart of our problem about the US's global role after the election.

ZIBA NORMAN: Thank you very very much for that, Stephen.

I don't want to take questions in the middle, I thought we'd just do that at the end, so, your turn...

GREG KATZ: OK, I'll try and be brief... [inaudible] can you hear me back there? I had the pleasure of spending two months in the States during the election, [inaudible] it was really wonderful to spend two months in the States during the election, I got to go from London and reading the British press and the European press to spend two months there and it was like entering a completely different world and I think I can share some of that perspective in kind-of an interesting way, In Europe obviously, and in Britain, where opposition to Bush's war may be 70%, 80%, 90% maybe, he's seen as a villain who's destroying the planet, and America's seen

as an evil imperial power, as Stephen was saying. Inside the US, particularly among republican voters, but in general inside the US, the last thing on people's minds is imperialism, projecting power, trying to establish new outposts – people aren't thinking "It would be great if we could control those oil wells in Iraq and get some oil revenue on stream" – the people in the street are thinking "For God's sake just keep anybody in an airplane from flying into a tower, we don't want anything hijacked, we want to protect what we have and that's absolutely all we care about" and so there's no real imperial instinct in the people at this point. The last thing they want is more influence in Europe, more influence in Israel; they would be thrilled if the Palestinians and Israelis were not looking to the White House to be an interlocutor in Israel, they would just like to wipe their hands of the whole thing and turn around back to pre-9/11, be able to fly safely, be able to go about their business safely, not have to worry about how the rest of the world and in particular Arab Islamic militants view the US. And so there's almost a complete and total disconnect between the European view and what's happening domestically, and I think that was why it was so hard for Europeans to perceive and Britons to perceive that Bush was going to win.

After I spent two months there it was fairly clear to me that Bush was in better, Bush was more in touch with what the people were interested in than Kerry. It wasn't clear cut, it wasn't a landslide, it wasn't that Bush was a great candidate and Kerry was lousy; but the Bush people had a much better sense of what people cared about. And, yes, you can say that they played on the people's fears, which they did, but it was done very shrewdly, and very coherently and it was a very powerful campaign that Bush ran but to European eyes it looked like "Well, who's this hokey guy pretending to be a cowboy?" but when he was out on the stump, he was speaking in a very casual simple way, he was addressing people's fears and he was reassuring them; it was very effective politics and it let him win by about 3%. So that's my overview – the other thing that struck me was, I'd spent a lot of time in Britain writing about all of the various inquiries going on in the US, about the reasons for 9/11, the reasons for the intelligence failures, about Bush's culpability in these intelligence failures, about the faulty intelligence that led to the invasion of Iraq. All of these things that got tremendous attention in Europe, were 100%, well almost 100% ignored by US voters. These issues were covered in the US press, particularly our serious broadsheet press and the New York Times, the Washington Post, they were covered on network television; the voters, particularly the Republican voters, they tuned the whole thing out; the press stories questioning the Administration's role in this got zero attention, so, again, the debate that was going on here was not going on in the United States, it was entirely different.

So, given all of these things, my answers to some of the questions that Ziba raised, and then I'll pass on the microphone, I don't see this election as a turning point in America, I don't see this as a rollback of civil liberties, I see this as a natural swing to the Right, people are scared to death after 9/11, the Republicans ran a shrewder, smarter campaign, they won, they do get to pick some Supreme Court justices, that is going to have a long term effect. But the natural

pendulum of American politics will swing back, I do believe the Democrats have an excellent chance the next time around unless by some surprise George W Bush has a successful second term, but I think you've seen the pendulum swing out here and the emphasis on civil liberties, due process, freedom of the press, has been rolled back to a degree, you have Americans by a margin of 3% backing this idea of preemptive war against Iraq and perhaps against other countries, I think it's going to swing back and you'll see a commitment to more traditional values of America — that's what I believe.

A few of these other questions I just want to sum up my reaction to. Ziba asked if Americans care about their image worldwide: they couldn't care less [laughter], [inaudible] furthest from their mind, absolutely zero interest, in fact when John Kerry tried to suggest during the campaign "You know it'd be really good to build alliances with Europe and with our traditional friends, and try and do things in a more concentrated way" it probably cost him votes, even the very idea that European views are important is rejected in the middle of the country by a large group of people, and the Republicans understood this – it was just good politics for the Republicans to understand this, they had a slightly more sophisticated understanding of just how angry voters were about September 11.

The final question, whether Bush cares about his place in history, is really interesting, my instinct is that he does not care, that he views history as fought out by historians which is not his favourite group of people [laughter], I think George is, I think the President is interested in how the religious constituency will view him and I think, I know this sounds corny, but I think he's interested in how his God will view him, I know he has a relationship with the Lord, in his mind that's more important than anything else, than any other relationships, and I think he wants to be true to that vision. And I know to European ears that's a very alien idea, and very frightening to a lot of people, but that's what he cares about.

And finally, I know this sounds like humour but I really believe this, I think George Bush wants to be Commissioner of Baseball [laughter] — [inaudible comment from audience] I want to be Commissioner, yes – he owned a baseball team, after the Presidency I think it's much more about being Commissioner of Baseball than about how historians are going to view him in a hundred years. Thank you all for coming.

ZIBA NORMAN: Thank you very very much for that insight. Dominic, you next.

DOMINIC HILTON: How can I follow that other than to say I think Bush would make a better Commissioner of Baseball than [inaudible] but never mind. First of all I want to apologise, I've been rather ill this week and so my brain's a bit stuck, and so if I say I don't think America is going to invade Iran, I mean, Iraq — I actually mean Iran because they already invaded Iraq, if you hadn't noticed that one. [laughter]

What I want to do is to split this between the international and the domestic and we've already heard about the international and I just want to throw some very quick theories down on this. I see Bush as, he's broken all the rules, the rules that we got very used to over about 50 years, he's stopped the card game and he's thrown all his cards on the table when you're supposed to hide your hand, and nobody else knows what to do as a result.

He's rocked the status quo and he's done this both domestically and internationally, given that we're not in the States right now, I'll start with the international, what he's done, as I see it, is he's come out for democracy, and once he's done that, we are all left in a position where we have to decide whether we stand for or against it. Because before we were all very used to using rhetoric that now has gone right out of the window. Bush actually acts on what he says. He doesn't act completely on everything he says, and that's a frustration, and he doesn't necessarily see everything through to the end, which is a shame, but he actually does act, which is a real surprise, because we're used to politicians talking rubbish and then not actually doing anything about it. Crucially, it's also, this issue tonight, as Ziba's questions prove, it's very very complicated, it's frustratingly complicated, and what Bush does, he makes it sound very easy, which is very appealing, in my mind [laughter]; and his "I don't do nuance" thing, well I don't want to do nuance, actually, either [laughter], so I think he's really onto something there.

As a voter one feels that, and generally I think we've all been shaken by the fact that he doesn't do nuance, and what this has done, what he has done and what his Administration have done, is to group together what is effectively an old guard, which is mainly comprised by, composed of liberals, but also includes, you know, the epitome of the status quo, like Jacques Chirac. The other evening he was interviewed by Newsnight, I don't know how many of you saw this. This was a very interesting interview I thought, he didn't actually seem to have any arguments, he didn't have any arguments against the neocon position, what he was doing was acting the role of the statesman, and he sat there and he said "France will always manoeuvre, to support the sovereignty of Iraq, to support the economy of Iraq, and the democracy of Iraq" and I thought "That's complete nonsense, you do nothing of the sort, you [inaudible] to do those things" unless he was coming out and saying "We did that for Saddam" and I don't think that was his point [laughter]. I think he was saying we support everything but then he wasn't actually willing to do anything about it, so in that sense, he stands for that status quo that Bush has really rocked down to its foundations, and nobody really knows what to do, and I believe quite strongly that most people were waiting for him to get voted out and now that he's in, they're going to have to do something about it.

This is an opportunity, whatever position you take on this, we're in a time of opportunity, in a time when the issue of democracy, which the neoconservatives in America have pushed out there, it's up for grabs. What do we mean when we say we're "for democracy"? do we actually want to give it to people, do we think it's just our preserve, do we like it ourselves, and my

feeling is that a lot of the people who are so opposed to the spread of democracy, militarily or otherwise, have actually got a problem with democracy, in the sense of, they don't like it very much, and I think that's the bottom line because part of it is a fetishisation of the exotic; and democracy is wonderful and we're ghastly, and we're boring, so you're bored by your own scenario, so you say we've had that for a few years and I don't agree with the current government so I've somehow got a problem with democracy... sorry, I'm going on about something else now [laughter].

Part of me, I can understand the idea that we don't like our status quos rocked. The fact that it's being done by a conservative administration is relatively ironic. I think that we're all very nostalgic for the Cold War, I think that we miss the Cold War, and we think "Wasn't life easy" and you knew who the enemy was, whether it was the US or the Soviet Union. There was an item on the radio the other day, about Naples, and gangs in Naples, which I thought was very amusing because it said there used to be two families that ran everything here, and now there's been a dispersion of violence and so the violence we have these days is considerably less professional [laughter], and I thought "This is what we're facing as a world, actually [laughter] because we used to have professional violence, the detente was quite nice, we had great movies [laughter]" but now we've got a situation where we're actually in trouble, and we're threatened with the silliest domestic, you know, "should I take the tube tonight" sort of issues, and we've also got a President in the White House who's actually going all out to transform non-democracies into democracies, and that, in itself, is a dispersion of violence, so we're not quite sure what to do now.

For me, the status quo meant, stagnation in the Middle East, it meant we got Srebrenicas, we got Rwandas, then we got 9/11. The status quo needed to be broken. It has been broken. 50 years of realpolitik ended up with September 11th, and that is really very unimpressive. So we needed to do something. The miracle about Iraq is not that we invaded it now, it's that it wasn't invaded before, actually. There were seventeen UN resolutions, nothing was done. And Saddam was a fully-fledged member of the United Nations, this is what we must keep remembering, when we're nostalgic for the status quo, well the status quo sucked, actually. And something needed to be done.

ZIBA NORMAN: Thanks very very much for that.

DOMINIC HILTON: Sorry, sorry, is that it?

ZIBA NORMAN: No I just thought you looked as if you were tired [laughter].

DOMINIC HILTON: I got stuck on the status quo thing. I just wanted to say some stuff about the domestic thing because Bush has been doing the same thing domestically. With the appointments that he's made in the second Administration, he's doing the same thing, he's

bypassing the bureaucracy, he's effectively, again, moving on from the status quo. The trouble is that if people didn't agree with him, the status quo and the institutions of the status quo meant they could stop that. But it is a challenge because everybody was getting a bit fed up with politics and so the same people who were complaining about stagnation are now complaining that things are getting done.

And America actually finds the same problem internationally, I mean, in my perspective, because if it acts, it's "guilty of war crimes", if it doesn't act it's "guilty of isolationism and not caring about the world." So you have to ask yourself whether you'd rather they were doing deals with Saddam, or whatever, that's the basic principle behind this. How the execution of the war has taken place, as far as I'm concerned, is a different issue. You have to separate out the fighting from the democracy. The fighting that is still going on does not mean that one gives up on the prospects for democracy. The two things, I believe, are separate, and the majority of people in Iraq want democracy, there was a very moving statement in Ukraine, in the square, this week, a guy from the BBC said "This country deserves democracy" and I think we have to ask ourselves what we think about that. I mean, do we think, Nothing to do with me, I've got "my" democracy? Personally I don't think we should, I think he's probably right. Ukraine does deserve democracy and they should be supported, and the people of Iraq deserve democracy.

Crucially, in Bush's actions, in the way that he behaves, he behaves almost unilaterally, as a man, never mind the lack of respect for international law, I think he's changing the presidency, this has taken 40 years to happen, and now it's finally happened. One of the big surprises about President Bush is that we think he's not very presidential. John Kerry was deeply presidential, John Kerry we looked at and we thought, he's the guy in the movies that is going to stand up to the world, or at least save America, whereas we see Bush, either as a cowboy, or as I wrote recently, more dog-catcher than senator. [laughter] This is deeply troubling for people, actually the last time a senator got elected as President of the United States was Kennedy in 1960, and so this has been, I think, a long time coming, and now it's happened, the Presidency has changed. You've got a situation for the Democrats where they put up a patrician, effectively this time around, a Boston Brahmin, as their candidate. With Bush you had a sleeves-rolled-up guy, you had the dog-catcher against the senator, and the moment you saw guys in Arizona and Ohio saying "I'm going to vote for Bush" I thought "Wait a minute, Kerry just isn't going to play to this audience". There is something fundamentally important about the fact that the office itself is changing, so whoever's going to appeal to it has got to appeal to that."

It was an incredibly cunning move by the Bush administration, by Karl Rove, which is effectively to have moved the New Deal from — the Democrats always had a very sort-of dependent vote, I mean, anyone that was dependent on the state was definitely going to vote Democrat and that was fine. The Bush administration have done a very cunning thing, which is to have moved a lot of this into faith-based welfare, which means that the churches now are

going to do a lot of the State's work. The church vote is moving more and more solidly Republican, and so it's the same thing – people are very critical of this move, but I find that very hard to do given that that's what the Democrats since the war — since the New Deal— and everyone's talking about moral values as the key issue here, but the stats don't add up on that. It's just not true. [inaudible] percent voted on moral values, but there were I think 35% last time, and 40% in 1996 who voted on moral values, and both of these elections didn't have abortion as part of moral values, which means that over 50 or 60% were on moral values then. So there's not much of a profound shift in that sense, it's not an evangelical thing, as everyone's trying to portray it. The evangelical vote stayed pretty much rock solid, across America this time, as it did in 2000. And so did Bush's vote, and Bush's vote went up 3% across the board. And he gained votes in New York, in Massachusetts, in Connecticut, it's important to remember this, this isn't just a Red state/ Blue state thing. There is not so much a divide within America, I don't believe in the “urban enlightened versus the country hick” story. Complete nonsense. America is as diverse as ever, there's disputes within families, within communities, even within churches, so it's not that nothing can be done about it ever, America will go back and forth, it is a democracy, we have to accept this as a democratic result.

The gay issue, 60% of people in America are on record as saying they want some kind of legal recognition of gay partnerships. It's wrong to say “How can these bigoted Americans...?” 60% are for for legalisation of gay partnerships in some form, I think it's incredible, it's incredible compared with where we've come from, over the years, and to say it's all bigotry, you're not for gay marriage, it's very easy to do this, particularly in Europe, it doesn't wash, it's not Ukraine, it's not divided, it's not Poland on one side and Russia on the other [laughter].

No Americans want to be Russians, trust me. If Teresa Heinz Kerry says “They're Neanderthals, anyone that disagrees with my husband's foreign policy” this is not going to wash. You're not going to get voted into the office if this is the kind of politics you're going to play. The Republican coalition is very diverse, even on the foreign policy side the divide between the realists and the neocons is profound, absolutely profound, so the division within the Republican party goes all over the place, but it's just an incredibly well-made coalition. Which is what you need to win elections. The 9/11 attacks ended up having, I think, very little effect on the vote, there's certainly no evidence for them having had any effect.

I truly believe for the reasons I just outlined, that the American public supported Bush, very strongly, they supported his character, they supported his moral clarity as they see it, and there is no way they would have voted for a candidate in this Presidential election, who incidentally got more votes than any other candidate in US presidential history— there's no way they would have voted for him if they had not supported his wars in the Middle East, no way. If they had thought it was nonsense, he would have been kicked out. This was, I think, support. It was a declaration of support. And we have to face up to that. He's a popular guy, he's popular and he's changed the office and the only way the Democrats are going to dream of winning

back this office, any time soon, is that they tap into this, if they stop the condescension. Jack Kennedy, if he was running for office these days, would probably get about 15% of the vote. You can't have that level of disconnect, you just can't do it. The Democrats are going to have to go for a southerner, they're going to have to go for someone working class, because Bush is doing the populism thing so well. He does it brilliantly and I think we have to face up to that. And the Democrats are never going to do it, they couldn't pull it off.

But finally I'd just like to say that the crucial issue over time, is that Bush is least popular with the under 30s and this is absolutely crucial because if you look at the views of these people they are socially very liberal, economically conservative. I want to tell you that the future is Arnie, because I think it is [laughter]. Whether it's him in fact or whether it's someone else who is a libertarian conservative, I do think that's the way things are going. This election was very surprising, in one major issue, because it didn't have a "small government" candidate running, that's very rare, both candidates are spending money like a drunken sailor as John McCain put it — or John Kerry would have. [inaudible]

ZIBA NORMAN: Thank you very much. But we're not done yet. Ben, you can answer on the liberal side.

BEN RAMM: Thank you for that, some very stimulating thoughts. I'm going to slightly react against it and make the case for nuance because I think that nuance is extremely important. John Kerry spoke about nuance in his Democratic National Convention speech and then went about not actually acting what he was preaching. Unfortunately, I would concur with Dominic when he says that the evangelical element wasn't as virulent as many Democrats would like to believe. But I will use it because I was reminded at the second coming of George Bush of the lines from Yeats, and I'm sure I wasn't the only one, "The best lack all conviction while the worst are full of passionate intensity." Lacking all conviction is very much a Democrat problem; and as a liberal and as a democrat I sort of want to make a slightly partisan case for what the Democrats need to do and where they went wrong, I have a slight problem with Dominic attempting to take the mantle of action as a Republican one because I have a certain amount of sympathy with what has been branded the pro-war left, or the liberal hawks, people like Paul Berman, Christopher Hitchens, I was slightly horrified when Hitchens came out for Bush in the Nation recently.

ZIBA NORMAN: He changed his mind.

BEN RAMM: Oh, did he really?

ZIBA NORMAN: He's been changing his mind for quite some time recently. [laughter]

BEN RAMM: ... Getting the sense of nuance away from “flip flop” is going to be quite important. Ok, a couple of things, I was in Boston for the election, and staying with a friend who’s studying at Harvard, who regaled me with a story of a Harvard don who told his history class that he proposed a secession movement for the New England states, but actually the great disadvantage of the secessionist movement for the New England states is that they would have the neighbouring country run by George Bush [laughter]. But there is this problem of a certain aloofness amongst Blue state circles and I personally think that Teresa acutely harmed the campaign, I’ve got it in for her on a number of reasons.

I think one of the most interesting things about the Democrat campaign is that it rose-tinted and anointed Bill Clinton, and some of the articles about Clinton that appeared in the liberal press during the election, to liberals even a couple of years ago they would have been quite surprised, and the troubling thing I think for Democrats about this is that it demonstrates a lack of imagination. Clinton very much went with an “it’s the economy stupid” attitude which had played well for two elections. But I have my own idea to push and I want the Democrats to be speaking about things apart from the economy that can mobilise voters. Social Security, Healthcare, Education.

I’d like to see them in the long term, though I realise this is not eminently practicable, challenge the sort of uber-militarist consensus that has gathered around left-leaning circles even despite the war. Kery was caught out hunting a couple of days before the election; and in a scene which absolutely amazed me, I’m sure the Americans in the audience and on the panel weren’t surprised by this, but when he stands up at the Democratic Convention and his first words to the country are “Reporting for duty!” I find that remarkable. Yes, I understand that he believed that the election was going to be played out on 9/11 ground, tactically I don’t know how correct he was, the Vietnam thing backfired, and perhaps there should have been better planning against that.

But I do think there is the case of the little America of which Dominic talked and of which George Bush himself talked. Let’s just remember that George W Bush ran on a ticket of small America, he ran on a ticket of anti-Democrat-interventionist-engaging-with-the-world ticket. 9/11 very much changed that and I think that Kerry, occupying the traditional role of the Democrat, Kerry came out very strongly against North Korea, much more vocally than Bush, Kerry came out vocally against Iran, more vocally than anyone in the White House would have done. I also like to think he would have acted in Sudan and certainly on the Middle East as well.

I’d like to suggest also that amongst the Republicans it’s not all happy reading. Because I think the sort of Arnie-Republican that we’re seeing, the sort of extremely socially libertarian/ extremely economically conservative figure, is actually going to cause a schism in the Republican party, and I think the fascinating thing that we saw in Ohio and in other Republican

areas that were more affluent, is that the Republican party has not realised that it's facing a head-on collision between two people, two groups of people who really aren't very compatible. They both agree with what I would call a "to hell with the world" mentality, the social libertarians and the buccaneer cowboy economic Republicans say "to hell with the world because I want low tax, I want no state interventionism, I want America to be America again, but not in the Kerry or Langston Hughes sense of the word, but America to be powerful and bold and not give a hoot what anyone else thinks"

Then there is the deeply conservative, almost 19th century image of the Mid West, where by that form of, you know there is almost a sort of piety about it— you asked in one of your questions, do Americans care about their image in the world? well, nowhere cares more than the Mid West, which was horrified by 9/11, simply because they came out with this brilliantly innocent image "I can't believe that people don't like us—I can't believe that people hate us so much" and I think there was the idea of glass being broken there. Does Bush care about his place in history? I don't really think that Bush has a teleological view of history but I do think he intensely cares about his place in eternity. I actually think that Bush looks at it through evangelical eyes, and he is very interested, for him, it is myopic, it is black and white, it is "you're either with us or against us"; and he does care about his consecrated place, his actions do matter, and in that sense he's very much on the divide, he's very much with the Mid West on this— the Arnies, and I'm not sure Arnie would care very much about his place in history, although I'm sure he'd come up with a wonderful three-liner that's given to him by a great Hollywood script... just a couple of other things, I'd be interested to hear what people think about John Edwards because Edwards is that southerner that is needed in the Clintonian mould, I think; Barack Obama has been feted at the DNC, and everyone's been talking up Hillary Clinton.

I guess just one last thing before I stop rambling, which is that Ziba also asked about how interested is America in helping in its allies' domestic concerns, I think one interesting thing which we're going to be seeing in Britain and possibly with Murdoch and the Sun newspaper, is that we're actually going to be seeing Republicans backing British entry into the EU [sic] because Republicans are basically very much against the Franco- German alliance of what they called "old Europe" and they would much prefer a sort of "you've got to be in there to change it" attitude, and so they're going to encourage Blair and the British government to go into Europe and battle against this Chirac mentality and the reactionary anti-Americanism in the EU. I guess that answers the other question about how America views international institutions, and it's a vicious circle, America has a contempt for them and so those institutions react with contempt; and one must understand the American position when Syria is put in charge of Security at the UN; and there is a problem, that the UN is often more interested in, and I do very much believe in the organisation, but it often seems that the UN is more interested in reacting against America for the sake of reacting against America. I think that's pretty much it.

ZIBA NORMAN: Well thank you very much all of you, I think that was brilliant. We have enough time for maybe fifteen minutes of questions...

[questions]