

Inside the Inauguration

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WITH THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION APPROACHING, *Sh'ma* invited a few discerning voices to write letters to President Bush (see page 7) — suggesting what the administration might address in the next four years. Also included in this issue are probing reflections on the divisiveness of the election, the role fear played in the campaign, questions about whether Jews should align themselves politically with the evangelical Christian Right, how Jewish values influenced political decisions, and how we might approach politics in 2008.

America: A Religious Country

Alan Mittleman

THE 2004 ELECTION will be remembered for its emphasis on values. The Democratic strategy to stay focused on the economy was unsuccessful. And while the Republicans emphasized the war on terrorism and steadiness in Iraq, they presented themselves as the party of values. This meant mounting a forthright defense of traditional institutions such as marriage and, suppressing dissent within their ranks, presenting a coherent opposition to abortion. Republicans painted the Democrats as unprincipled secular elitists, out of touch with the conservative social values of the American people. Although this charge was exaggerated, the Democrats were an easy target because of their ambivalence in speaking about faith, their nuanced or, less charitably, contradictory approach to gay marriage, and their solid support for abortion rights.

The Republicans took a risk in emphasizing traditional values to such a great extent. Stem cell research, for which the President restricted federal funding early in his term, is relatively popular outside the Republican base of conservative Evangelicals and traditional Catholics. California's passing of a \$3 billion funding initiative for stem cell research shows that it plays rather well in the general electorate. President Bush's support for a constitutional amendment defining marriage in traditional terms, although it went nowhere in Congress, proved a rallying cry. Eleven states passed referenda amending their constitutions to protect the traditional definition of marriage. Democrats could not take a clear progressive line on gay marriage without offending elements of their base. Although Jews, for the most part, are supportive of gay marriage (52%), blacks are not. Nor are Hispanics. Forty-four percent of Hispanics voted for the President. They can no longer reliably be counted on as a Democratic constituency. Milton Himmelfarb's classic *bon mot* — the Jews earn like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans — needs to be amended. Jews continue to earn like Episcopalians but Puerto Ricans no longer vote like Puerto Ricans.

Jews, like Democrats, can either define themselves as a permanent opposition, consolidating on the left and delivering jeremiads to the culture, or they can come to terms with America's durable and politically expressive traditional religiosity.

In the two decades since the Reagan revolution, the Republican Party has become the majority party. The Democrats are dispirited, casting about for a, *mirabile dictu*, progressive yet traditional vision that will enable them to reconnect with the religiosity and values that a majority of voters apparently hold dear. For Jews, this is especially galling. It represents the end of a long period where an essentially secular discourse about public affairs marginalized religious voices. All public issues were technical problems; liberalism provided a progressive, civic faith. Religion was expected to play by a set of rules put in place by



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1654-2004

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