

Throw Out the Maps

March 13, 2008

Michael Barone says it is time to throw out the old electoral maps, and he should know. Many people have called him the most knowledgeable person in U.S. politics. He is the co-author of the *Almanac of American Politics*. He has been watching the electoral scene for decades and sees some significant shifts.

The old map with red states and blue states served us well for the last two presidential elections, but there is good evidence that it is now out-of-date. In 2000 and 2004, the Republicans nominated the same man, and the Democrats nominated men with similar views and backgrounds. All of that has changed in 2008.

This time the Republicans will probably nominate John McCain, and the Democrats will probably nominate Barack Obama. There is always the possibility of a change between now and the convention, but that is unlikely. If these two men are the nominees, it changes everything.

It is clear that some of the states that went Democratic in 2004 are available to John McCain. And it is also clear that some of the states that went Republican that same year are possibilities for Barack Obama. And let's not forget the surge of new voters coming into the electoral process that are potentially available to either candidate.

The potential changes in the electorate shouldn't surprise us. Twenty years ago it seemed like Republicans had a lock on the presidency while the Democrats had a lock on the House of Representatives. At the time it seemed reasonable since Republicans had won five of the last six presidential elections, and Democrats had held the House for thirty-six years. But in 1992, Bill Clinton was elected president. Two years later, the Republicans won the House. Electoral trends

change, sometimes quickly.

It looks to me that it is time to throw out the maps, and it may be time for the candidates to rethink their strategy and not write off states lost by their party's nominee four or eight years ago. It's a new day.

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Superdelegates

February 27, 2008

In a [previous commentary](#) I talked about how the current Democratic Party rules made it possible for Barack Obama to do so well in the primaries. There are another set of rules that might cause him to lose at the Democratic Convention.

Back in 1982, the Democratic Party created a special role for party leaders. They were designated as superdelegates and were created to prevent the party from nominating an unelectable candidate like George McGovern. At first, they provided a necessary boost to a candidate already headed for the nomination. This boost helped push Walter Mondale over Gary Hart in 1984. And the superdelegates helped confirm Michael Dukakis as the Democratic nominee in 1988.

But this year's Democratic race is so close that the superdelegates may decide the outcome. There are nearly 800 superdelegates, and that represents 19 percent of all the delegates. In the past, these superdelegates were able to bring closure to the nominating process. This time they could decide who the Democratic nominee might be, and that would most likely be the establishment candidate Hillary Clinton.

If they become the king-makers, it is easy to see that there will be lots of anger and frustration. This primary season has already begun to show the fault lines of race, gender, and generation. The animosity between the Clinton and Obama campaigns is well known. If the Democratic establishment decides the winner through the superdelegates, you have to wonder if the 2008 Denver Democratic Convention might start to look like the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention.

Like the rules I talked about earlier, no one saw this coming. The Democratic Party rules for delegates has helped Barack Obama in the primaries. If the delegate count is close then it is possible that the Democratic Party rules for superdelegates could help Hillary Clinton. At the moment, Barack Obama is building a lead so this concern may evaporate. But the party may still reconsider the rules they enacted years ago.

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Presidential Experience

March 4, 2008

As once again citizens in four states go to the polls today, it has been interesting to see how the presidential campaign has unfolded. While many political pundits have made note of the number of times the words “change” and “hope” have been used in the campaign, I would like to highlight another word. That word is “experience.”

On the Republican side, John McCain talked about his experience in Washington while Mitt Romney talked about his experience running a business. On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton has made a big issue of her years of experience

compared to Barack Obama. My feeling is that experience is important, but character and values are even more important. Obviously, you don't want someone in the Oval Office who doesn't know his or her way around Washington. At the same time, the American people haven't exactly felt that experience is always a major prerequisite to the office.

In the last few decades, American voters have often put the less experienced candidate in office. President Gerald Ford was certainly more experienced than Governor Jimmy Carter. And after four years as president, Jimmy Carter was more experienced than former governor Ronald Reagan. But the American people put the less experienced candidate in office.

In 1992, you could certainly say that George H.W. Bush was experienced. He had served eight years as vice-president and four years as president. Before that he had been ambassador to China and the head of the CIA. But in spite of all of that experience, the voters elected Governor Bill Clinton.

Sometimes experience is all that it's supposed to be. One president came into office with tremendous experience. He served ten years in the House of Representatives, was minister to Russia, then served ten years in the Senate, and four years as Secretary of State. James Buchanan was elected in 1856 but served only one term because he became one of America's worst presidents. In 1860, he was defeated by an inexperienced one-term congressman by the name of Abraham Lincoln.

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Dismantling the Electoral College

January 28, 2008

New Jersey recently became the second state to enter a compact that would effectively eliminate the power of the Electoral College to select a president. In December, the New Jersey legislature approved a measure that would deliver the state's 15 electoral votes for president to the winner of the national popular vote. Two weeks ago, Governor Corzine signed the bill which has now become law.

Maryland (with 10 electoral votes) is the only other state to pass the compact into law, but others have considered it. Governors in California and Hawaii vetoed bills to join the compact. The Colorado Senate approved the proposal, but a House committee rejected it.

Sponsors of these measures argue that the compact would ensure that all states are competitive in presidential elections and would make all votes important. A spokesman for the governor said that New Jersey "has long been on the sidelines of presidential races and this measure would help put the Garden State back into competition during a presidential campaign."

But consider that this bill now may require electors from New Jersey to vote against their constituents. So who are they representing? Certainly they are not representing the voters of their state.

Because of third parties, our last four presidential elections haven't had any candidate with a popular vote majority. The Electoral College gives them that majority. It might be worth remembering that Abraham Lincoln won less than 40 percent of the popular vote and relied on the Electoral College majority for his authority.

And with problems of election fraud, we narrow the number of states where a recount can take place. Consider the 2000 Florida recount and multiply that by 50 and you can see the problem.

Even if you are convinced that the Electoral College is a bad idea, you should go about amending the Constitution. But what is happening is a surreptitious way for some states to do so without constitutional support.

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Democratic Delegate Count

February 26, 2008

For weeks commentators have been talking about the close delegate count between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. But anyone looking at the Democratic Party's rules for delegates probably would have predicted such a situation. In fact you could say that Barack Obama's sizable delegate count is due to a decision forced on the party 20 years ago by Jesse Jackson.

Columnist Ruth Marcus writes: "The stage was set for the current stalemate over five marathon days of negotiations in June 1988. In the fifth-floor conference room of a Washington law firm, representatives of Michael Dukakis, the party's nominee, and Jesse Jackson, his unsuccessful challenger, hashed out a new set of delegate selection rules." Jackson was upset that he did not have as many delegates as his popular vote would have indicated.

Jesse Jackson's assistant was Harold M. Ickes. He argued for "proportional representation rules that would award insurgent

candidates a bigger share of delegates in future contests.” Twenty years later, the rules Ickes proposed have been working against his friend, Hillary Clinton. She has won delegate-rich states like New York, New Jersey, and California. But Barack Obama has managed to stay close in those contests and pick up delegates in other contests to take the lead.

The Democratic rules give lots of weight to the losing candidate. Under the rules, three-fourths of the pledged delegates are allocated by congressional district, the remaining one-quarter according to the vote statewide. In California Hillary Clinton won 43 of the state’s 53 congressional districts but only received 207 delegates to Obama’s 163. If the Democrats used the Republican rules, Hillary Clinton would have received 316 delegates. Barack Obama would have received just 54.

It is quite possible that both parties will revisit their delegate rules in the next few years. The Democrats’ rules hurt Hillary Clinton and the Republicans’ rules helped John McCain. Now that we have seen the results, it’s time for the parties to reconsider their rules.

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Marriage, Family, and Political Views

Does our view of marriage and family affect our worldview? Obviously it does. But most people have probably never thought about the fact that marriage and family also affect voting patterns.

We are a year away from the November 2008 elections, but some trend watchers are starting to see interesting patterns that will affect elections in the next few decades. In particular, they are finding a marriage gap and a fertility gap.

Marriage Gap

An article in *USA Today* pointed out how a wedding band could be crucial in future elections. House districts held by Republicans are full of married people. Democratic districts are stacked with people who have never married.[\[1\]](#)

Consider that before the 2006 Congressional elections, Republicans controlled 49 of the 50 districts with the highest rates of married people. On the other hand, Democrats represented all 50 districts that had the highest rates of adults who have never married.

If you go back to the 2004 presidential election, you see a similar pattern. President George Bush beat Senator John Kerry by 15 percentage points among married people. However, Senator Kerry beat President Bush by 18 percentage points among unmarried people.

Married people not only vote differently from unmarried people, they tend to define words like family differently as well. And they tend to perceive government differently. But an even more significant gap in politics involves not just marriage but fertility.

Fertility Gap

When you look at the various congressional districts, you not only see a difference in marriage but in fertility. Consider these two extremes. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, a Catholic mother of five from San Francisco, has fewer children in her district than any other member of Congress: 87,727. Rep. Chris Cannon, R-Utah, a Mormon father of eight,

represents the most children: 278,398.[{2}](#)

This stark demographic divide illustrates the difference in perspectives found in Congress. Republican members of Congress represented 39 million children younger than 18. This is 7 million more children than are represented in districts with Democratic members of Congress. And it is also true that children in Democratic districts are far more likely to live in poverty and more likely to have a single parent than children in Republican districts.

This fertility gap explains the differences in worldview and political perspective. When you consider the many political issues before Congress that affect children and families, you can begin to see why there are often stark differences in perspectives on topics ranging from education to welfare to childcare to child health insurance.

Future of the Fertility Gap

So far we have been looking at the past and the present. What about the future? Arthur Brooks wrote about the fertility gap last year in the *Wall Street Journal*. He concluded that liberals have a big baby problem: They're not having enough of them . . . and their pool of potential new voters is suffering as a result.[{3}](#)

He noted that, if you picked 100 unrelated politically liberal adults at random, you would find that they had, between them, 147 children. If you picked 100 conservatives, you would find 208 kids. That is a fertility gap of 41 percent.

We know that about 80 percent of people with an identifiable party preference grow up to vote essentially the same way as their parents. This fertility gap translates into lots more little conservatives than little liberals who will vote in future elections.

So what could this mean for future presidential elections?

Consider the key swing state of Ohio which is currently split 50-50 between left and right. If current patterns continue, Brooks estimates that Ohio will swing to the right. By 2012 it will be 54 percent to 46 percent. And by 2020, it will be solidly conservative by a margin of 59 percent to 41 percent.

Now look at the state of California that tilts in favor of liberals by 55 percent to 45 percent. By the year 2020, it will swing conservative by a percentage of 54 percent to 46 percent. The reason is due to the fertility gap.

Of course most people vote for politicians, personalities, and issues not parties. But the general trend of the fertility gap cannot be ignored. I think we can see the impact that marriage and family have on worldview and political views. And as we can see from these numbers, they will have an even more profound impact in the future.

Notes

1. Dennis Cauchon, Marriage gap could sway elections, *USA Today*, 27 September 2006.
2. Dennis Cauchon, Fertility gap helps explain political divide, *USA Today*, 27 September 2006.
3. Arthur Brooks, The Fertility Gap, *Wall Street Journal*, 22 August 2006.

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High Tech Witchcraft

April 26, 2007

Mention witchcraft and most people will think of Harry Potter.

And while these books and movies have certainly been incredibly successful in promoting witchcraft, they represent only part of a larger campaign to spread the ideas of Wicca, witchcraft, and Neopaganism throughout our society.

In a recent article in *SCP Newsletter*, Marcia Montenegro talked about how witchcraft has gone “high tech.” Parents should not only pay attention to books and movies. They should also pay attention to the impact that computers and the Internet are having in the promoting of witchcraft. Here are just a few examples.

1. Dungeons and Dragons – has been a popular fantasy role playing game for many years. Now kids can play it on the Internet or in video or computer games. The player begins by choosing a character to role-play. Each of these characters have different traits and abilities. The game is supervised by an experienced player known as the Dungeon Master. The game uses a number of occult terms. These include: spell casting, invocation, evocation, and summon. And there are spells such as the death spell and the finger of death.

There are several books about Dungeons and Dragons that also give information and suggestions for spell casting. In one book, there is a warning of “The Cost of Magic.” It says, “Wizards may have to make terrible pacts with dark powers for the knowledge they seek, priests may have to sacrifice something dear to them to invoke their deity’s favor, or the spell-caster may pay an immediate price in terms of fatigue, illness, or even a loss of sanity.”

2. Magic: The Gathering – is a fantasy trading card game created in the early 1990s. The cards are linked to one of five kinds of paranormal magic: red, blue, green, white or black. Players assume the role of wizards or mages (magicians) and use their cards to defeat other players in the game. A key term that shows up in this game as well as in movies like “The Craft” is the term *mana*. It refers to a magical force or power

which is essentially a vital life force.

This card game is challenging and requires intricate strategy. It also introduces the players to scary and repulsive images. There is the Bone Shaman or the Necrite (shown licking blood off a dagger) or the Soul Drinker or the Sorceress Queen. Parents should be concerned about the occult and macabre images that players in the game will see as well as the desensitization towards the occult and witchcraft.

3. Yu Gi Oh – was originally a comic created in Japan about a boy playing a card game called “Dueling Monsters.” This comic eventually gave rise to a card game, movies, and video games.

The story centers around Yugi who is possessed by a 5000-year-old pharaoh, Yama Yugi, who is trying to solve an ancient puzzle. One Internet site suggests that Yugi is taken over by “dark Yugi” when it needs to work on the puzzle. Others point out that during duels, Yugi seems possessed by the spirit which deepens his voice and shadows him.

4. The Vampire Games – is another role playing game that introduces the players to the world of vampires. This includes the live action role playing games such as *Vampire: The Masquerade* and *Vampire: the Requiem*.

As you might imagine, these games involve dark and macabre situations, including drinking blood and killing innocent people. The vampires are predators on humans and described as killing machines who struggle with their baser instincts. The vampires also have certain powers such as telepathy, psychic projection, and bodily possession.

Players often form clubs in order to play the game. Some players even imitate vampires in real life by wearing razor-sharp artificial fangs. The popularity of these games have spawned others: *Werewolf: The Forsaken*, *Mage: The Awakening*, and *Sword & Sorcery*.

5. World of Warcraft – is an online computer war game. It includes the typical action games strategies but also adds elements of the occult and New Age. There are four main races of beings: humans (one of the youngest races), Orcs (part of a Shamanistic society), Night Elves (who misuse magic), and the Undead Scourge (thousands of walking corpses and extra-dimensional entities).

As with many of the other games already mentioned, strategy and the use of the occult and paranormal magic are key to success in this game. Powers are summoned and spells are cast.

These various forms of “high tech” spell casting are a doorway into the occult and witchcraft. The Bible warns of the dangers of divination, sorcery, and witchcraft (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19-20; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; 1 Samuel 15:23; 2 Kings 23:24; 1 Chronicles 10:13; Isaiah 2:6; 8:19-20; 47:13-14; Ezekiel 13:20-23; Daniel 2:27-28; 5:15-17; Acts 13:7-10; 16:16-18; Galatians 5:19-20; Revelation 22:15). We should not focus our minds and attention on what is dark and dangerous. We are called to let our minds dwell on what is true, honorable, pure, and lovely (Philippians 4:8).

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Global Warming: Cool the Hype

Al Gore’s film, “An Inconvenient Truth,” won an Academy Award for best documentary. And Al Gore is being treated like a rock star at Hollywood parties and when he testified in front of Congress. But has Al Gore’s hype and hysteria gone too far?

That’s what many scientists and supporters are beginning to

say. They are alarmed at his alarmism. "I don't want to pick on Al Gore," Don Easterbrook (emeritus professor of geology at Western Washington University) told hundred of experts at the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America. "But there are a lot of inaccuracies in the statements we are seeing, and we have to temper that with real data."[\[1\]](#)

Kevin Vranes (climatologist at the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Colorado) has praised Gore for "getting the message out" but also questioned whether his presentations were "overselling our certainty about knowing the future."[\[2\]](#)

Global warming is the observed increase in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans in recent decades. The argument made in many science journals and in Al Gore's film is that most of the observed warming over the last fifty years is attributable to human activities. Political activists argue we must act now to prevent a global catastrophe.

These claims bring us back to the hype that many see in Al Gore's film. He argues "Humanity is sitting on a ticking time bomb" and that "we have just ten years to avert a major catastrophe that could send our entire planet into a tail-spin of epic destruction involving extreme weather, droughts, epidemics and killer heat waves beyond anything we have ever experienced."[\[3\]](#)

Throughout the film, Al Gore invariably will pick the most extreme estimate to prove that we are on the edge of a catastrophe. For example, if global warming really is taking place, how much will the sea level rise? Gore says 20 feet, and then shows a dramatic animation of what it would look like if various locations on earth were flooded by a sea level rise of 20 feet.

Yet the most recent summary of the United Nations

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change doesn't say anything like this.[{4}](#) Even though this panel is full of policy makers who believe in global warming and argue for major policy changes, they conclude that sea levels might rise 7 to 17 inches over the course of a century. There is a vast difference between sea levels rising about one foot versus 20 feet!

Add to this the number of factual errors in many of the presentations heralding a looming catastrophe from global warming. Iain Murray documents "25 inconvenient truths for Al Gore" in his column that analyzes the scientific statements in "An Inconvenient Truth."[{5}](#) Bjorn Lomborg, author of the *Skeptical Environmentalist*, shows how the report on climate change by Nicholas Stern and the U.K. government makes sloppy errors and cherry-picks statistics.[{6}](#)

We should also mention that many scientists believe that the current warming is due to factors other than human activity. Sami Solanki (Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research, Germany) has quantitatively reconstructed the sun's activity since the last Ice Age and says the sun "is brighter than it was a few hundred years ago and this brightening started relatively recently."[{7}](#) Scientists have observed that the ice caps on Mars are melting, and Jupiter is developing a second giant red spot due to the sudden warming of our solar system's largest planet.[{8}](#)

Those who dare to criticize the global warming scenario are often compared to being the moral equivalent of a holocaust denier.[{9}](#) In the film, Al Gore compares scientists who criticize his theory to scientists at the tobacco companies who tried to tell us that smoking was not harmful. Gore and others also say that many who are skeptical about global warming are being paid by the oil companies they say are running a disinformation campaign.

This last charge infuriated Dr. Easterbrook who told the

geologists, "I've never been paid a nickel by an oil company." He went on to add, "And I'm not a Republican."

Al Gore argues that the global warming issue isn't a political issue but rather a moral issue. Yet in his film, Al Gore argues we need the political will to confront and solve the issue. It doesn't take much insight to realize there is a political agenda here.

The first step, say the activists, is to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. This treaty calls for the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions in the United States, the European Union, Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. When Al Gore was Vice President, it was brought before the U.S. Senate and defeated 95-0. It won't pass if put up for a vote once again.

But even if it did pass, it would only be a start. Estimates are that it would cost \$200 billion to \$1 trillion every year. But other Kyotos treaties would have to be ratified by the developing countries. After all, there are a billion people in China and a billion people in India, and China plans on building an additional 2,200 coal plants by 2030.^{10} One scientist speculated that "it might take another 30 Kyotos" to deal with global warming.^{11} And what would be the impact? Critics say that even if adhered to by every signatory, it would only reduce surface temperature by 0.13° F.^{12}

Even if we assume that global warming is occurring and assume that it is due only to human activity, the cost-benefit is enormous. Bjorn Lomborg established a program known as the Copenhagen Consensus.^{13} This panel (that included three Nobel Laureates in economics) evaluated strategies to deal with major problems facing humanity. When they listed these alternatives in descending order of effectiveness, things like treating communicable disease and hunger were at the top of the list while dealing with climate change were at the bottom of the list.

This suggests that *adaptation* to climate change will be more effective and less costly than *mitigation*. We need to cool the hype and let cooler heads make wise decisions.

Notes

1. William J. Broad, "From a rapt audience, a call to cool the hype," *The New York Times*, 13 March 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/2rbtvw>.
2. Ibid.
3. Al Gore, "An Inconvenient Truth," www.climatecrisis.net/aboutthefilm/.
4. United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 4th Assessment summary, www.ipcc.ch.
5. Iain Murray, "Gorey truths: 25 inconvenient truths for Al Gore," *National Review*, 22 June 2006, <http://tinyurl.com/e623o>.
6. Bjorn Lomborg, Stern review, *Wall Street Journal*, 2 November 2006, www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110009182.
7. Lawrence Solomon, "The heat's in the sun," 9 March 2007, *Financial Post*, <http://tinyurl.com/2tf6qm>.
8. Lorne Gunter, "Brighter sun, warm earth. Coincidence?" 12 March 2007, *National Post*, <http://tinyurl.com/ysnwb5>
9. Dennis Prager, "On comparing global warming denial to holocaust denial," 13 February 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/2wdpee>
10. Jonah Goldberg, "Global cooling costs too much," 9 February 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/2obh59>.
11. David Malakoff, "Thirty Kyotos needed to control warming," *Science*, 19 December 1997, 2048.
13. Bjorn Lomborg, "Copenhagen Consensus 2006," www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Default.aspx?ID=770.

March 22, 2007

Candidates and Religion

October 9, 2007

Should we know more about a political candidate's religion before we vote? That is a question that will certainly surface in this election cycle.

When John Kennedy ran for the presidency he said: "I believe in a President whose religious views are his own private affair." While that may have satisfied some back in 1960, I doubt it will be sufficient in this election.

Michael Kinsley recently wrote about this important topic in *Time* magazine as he discussed Governor Mitt Romney. Although I would probably disagree with Kinsley on many political and theological issues, I think he rightly points out that the religious faith of a candidate cannot be kept private because it affects his or her worldview.

He says it is important for three reasons. First, we need to know the details of a candidate's faith and the extent to which those details are accepted. He notes that Catholic liberal politicians since Mario Cuomo have said they accept the doctrine of the church but nevertheless believe in a woman's right to choose. He concludes that either these politicians are lying to their church, or they are lying to us.

Second, since some doctrines of various religions may be offensive to the general public, they have a right to know if a candidate agrees with those doctrines. Michael Kinsley applies this only to Mitt Romney's Mormonism, but it should also be applied to the religious faith of every candidate.

Third, candidates' religious faith also will affect their character. Voters should take character into account before they cast their vote for a particular candidate.

This election season it has been popular for candidates to talk about their faith. But how does that faith affect his or her views on social and political issues? So far, the media has been content to let them talk about their faith in a vague way, but voters deserve to know more. Back in 1960, John Kennedy dodged the question of how his faith affected his decision-making. We cannot allow candidates to dodge the question now.

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Tales From the Crypt: Do We Have the Bones of Jesus?

February 26, 2008

The last week in February started out with an incredible announcement. James Cameron (director of the film *Titanic*) and Simcha Jacobovici announced that they have found the bones of Jesus! At their news conference, they promoted their Discovery Channel special *The "Lost Tomb of Jesus"* that will air on March 4th and also promoted the book by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino entitled *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History* released by Harper-Collins.

If proved reliable, these findings would call into question the very cornerstone of Christianity: the resurrection of

Jesus. But are they true?

The foundational claim is that they have discovered the family tomb of Jesus Christ. Is this really the tomb of Jesus or his family? There are many good reasons to believe this tomb has no relationship at all to Jesus and his family. Many are asking what to think about these claims. Therefore, I put together a quick two-page summary of some of the criticisms and concerns that surfaced in the first few hours after the announcement. Before we look at those criticisms, let's first review the history of this tomb.

We have known about this tomb since it was discovered in 1980. Back then, Israeli construction workers were digging the foundation for a new building in a Jerusalem suburb. Their digging revealed a cave with ten limestone ossuaries. Archeologists removed the limestone caskets for examination.

When they were able to decipher the names on the ten ossuaries, they found: Jesua, son of Joseph, Mary, Mary, Mathew, Jofa and Judah, son of Jesua. At the time, one of Israel's most prominent archeologists (Professor Amos Kloner) didn't associate the crypt with Jesus. He rightly argued that the father of Jesus was a humble carpenter who couldn't afford a luxury crypt for his family. Moreover, the names on the crypt were common Jewish names.

None of this has stopped Cameron and Jacobovici from promoting the tomb as the family tomb of Jesus. They claim to have evidence (through DNA tests, archeological evidence, and Biblical studies) to prove that the ten ossuaries belong to Jesus and his family. They also argue that Jesus and Mary Magdalene might have produced a son named Judah. However, a number of biblical scholars say this is really just an old story now being recycled in an effort to create a media phenomenon that will sell books and guarantee a large audience for the television special.

First, does it really make sense that this would be the family tomb of Jesus? Remember that Jesus was in Jerusalem as a pilgrim and was not a resident of the city. How would his family be able to buy this tomb? As we already mentioned, Joseph (who had probably already died in Galilee) and his family did not have the funds to buy such an elaborate burial site. Moreover, they were from out of town and would need time to find this tomb location. To accept this theory, one has to believe they stole the body of Jesus and moved it to this tomb in a suburb of Jerusalem all within about a day's time.

Second, if this is the family tomb of Jesus and his family, why is Jesus referred to as the son of Joseph? As far as we can determine from history, the earliest followers of Jesus never called Jesus the son of Joseph. The record of history is that it was only outsiders who mistakenly called him that.

Third, if this is the family tomb of Jesus, why do we have the name of Matthew listed with the rest of the family? If this is the Matthew that traveled with Jesus, then he certainly was not a family member. And you would have to wonder why James (who remained in Jerusalem) would allow these inscriptions as well as allow the family to move the body from Jerusalem to this tomb and perpetrate a hoax that Jesus bodily rose from the grave. Also, the fourth-century church historian Eusebius writes that the body of James (the half-brother of Jesus) was buried alone near the temple mount and that his tomb was visited in the early centuries.

Fourth, there is the problem with the common names on the tombs. Researchers have cataloged the most common names at the time. The ten most common were: Simon/Simeon, Joseph, Eleazar, Judah, John/Yohanan, Jesus, Hananiah, Jonathan, Matthew, and Manaen/Menahem. These are some of the names found on the ossuaries and thus suggest that the tomb belonged to someone other than Jesus of Nazareth and his family. In fact, the name Jesus appears in 98 other tombs and on 21 other ossuaries.

Finally there is the question of the DNA testing. Apparently there is evidence that shows that the DNA from the woman (in what they say is the Mary Magdalene ossuary) and the DNA from the so-called Jesus ossuary does not match. So they argue that they were not relatives and thus must have been married.

But does the DNA evidence really prove that? It does not prove she is his wife. In fact, we really dont even know who in the ossuaries are related to the other. Moreover, we do not have an independent DNA control sample to compare these findings with. At best, the DNA evidence shows that some of these people are related and some are not.

All of this looks like sensationalism from Simcha Jacobovici (who has a reputation as an Indiana-Jones type) and James Cameron (the director of the highly fictionalized Titanic). The publicity s certain to sell books and draw a television audience, but it is not good history or archaeology.

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Follow-up from Kerby 2/28/07

My commentary was a brief (two-page) summary of some of the criticisms and concerns that many people surfaced in the first few hours after the announcement. Now that we have a few days of reflection on the claims by James Cameron and Simcha Jacobovici, I think we can begin to provide an even more detailed perspective.

Here are some good commentaries and blogs posted by experts in the field as well some news articles that quote these people. Some of these experts have been able to see the Discovery Channel special "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" and thus can give even more detail than I was able to do when I first wrote my commentary on Monday, February 26. The first two links are for commentaries by Dr. Darrell Bock, Dallas Theological Seminary.

He was on my radio program "Point of View" and provided some great insight. The next link is for a commentary by Ben Witherington, Asbury Theological Seminary. The following three are news articles quoting from experts:

Hollywood Hype: The Oscars and Jesus' Family Tomb, What do they share?

<http://dev.bible.org/bock/node/106>

No need to yell, only a challenge for some who need to step up and could:

<http://dev.bible.org/bock/node/107>

The Jesus Tomb? Titanic Talpiot tomb theory sunk from the start:

benwitherington.blogspot.com/2007/02/jesus-tomb-titanic-talpiot-tomb-theory.html

'Jesus tomb' documentary ignores biblical & scientific evidence, logic, experts say

<http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=25053>

Ten reason why the Jesus tomb claim is bogus:

<http://tinyurl.com/2rmj8a>

Remains of the Day: Scholars dismiss filmmakers' assertions that Jesus and his family were buried in Jerusalem:

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