Reading Number 73
from *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics*
by Walter Dean Burhnam

p. 511, ¶ 2, line 3– “Some elections have more important long-range consequences for the political system as a whole than others, and seem to ‘decide’ substantive issues in a more clear-cut way.”

*Ibid.*, ¶ 3– “Since the appearance in 1955 of V.O. Key’s seminal article, ‘A theory of Critical Elections,’ political scientists have moved to give this concept quantitative depth and meaning...”

*Ibid.*, ¶ 4– “It now seems time to attempt at least an interim assessment of the structure, function, and implications of critical realignments for the American political process.”

p. 512, ¶ 1– “Such a theory must inevitable emphasize the elements of stress and abrupt transformation in our political life at the expense of the consensual, gradualist perspectives which have until recently dominated the scholar’s vision of American political process and behavior.”

*Ibid.*, ¶ 3– “1. The critical realignment is characteristically associated with short-lived but very intense disruptions of traditional patterns of voting behavior.”

p. 513, ¶ 2– “Critical realignments emerge directly from the dynamics of this constituent-function supremacy in American politics...”

*Ibid.*, ¶ 3– “… eras of critical realignment are marked by short, sharp reorganizations of the mass coalitional bases of the major parties which occur a periodic intervals on the national level; often preceded by major third-party revolts which reveal the incapacity of ‘politics as usual’ to integrate, much less aggregate, emergent political demand; are marked by ideological polarizations and issue-distances between the major parties which are exceptionally large by normal standards; and have durable consequences as constituent acts which determine the outer boundaries of policy in general, though not necessarily of policies in detail...”

*Ibid.*, ¶ 4– “The precise timing of the conditions which conduce to realignment is conditioned heavily by circumstance, of course: the intrusion of major crises in society and economy with which ‘politics as usual’ in the United States cannot adequately cope, and the precise quality and bias of leadership decisions in a period of high political tension, cannot be predicted in specific time with any accuracy.”

p. 514, ¶ – “The periodic rhythm of American electoral politics, the cycle of oscillation between the normal and the disruptive, corresponds precisely to the existence of largely unfettered developmental change in the socio-economic system and its absence in the country’s political institutions.”

Note: This reading focuses on the theory of critical realignments.