

convention's "high point." Indeed, listen to him: "There is a religious war going on in this country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the cold war itself..." The cold war is over; a new war is needed. The enemy this time is within — or as Ivins interprets the new crusade, paraphrasing Buchanan's grim call to arms, America's cities are to be retaken (with "M-16s"), "block by block, from the Americans who have with fiendish cleverness infiltrated their own country." This "ethnic cleansing" proposed by the Republican rightwing and tacitly supported by Bush by his silence is a "religious war" upon the poor, the homeless (many of whom are victims of the last twelve years of Republican monetary and social policies), people who are gay and people who are not white. It is also a war against "uppity" women who demand an equal role in American affairs. "These are people who want others under discipline," Garry Wills wrote of GOP extremists, "and who want to be under discipline themselves." Wills wrote that with the end of the cold war, the Republican Party, "which took its coherence from anti-communism is coming apart," and he asked, "How is it possible for people who have an authoritarian view of society in general to be effectively anti-authoritarian in politics?"

The general perception is that the Republican and Democratic parties are converging into a single party. Yet significant differences remain. The Republicans act paranoid in their attempts at exclusivity, each campaign a further withdrawal from the incredibly and increasingly diverse mass of citizenry while the Democrats, more by default, reflect that diversity, perhaps because there is no other home for it as a result of GOP rejection and the unpopularity and powerlessness of third parties. Self-proclaimed as the "party of the people" (though once considered the party of traitors, the party of secession), of disenfranchised workers and immigrants in the early years of the century, the Democrats have in their campaigns favored such liberal causes as labor reform, busing to achieve racial integration in public schools, abortion on demand, gay rights, abolishing capital punishment, gun control, greater representation in politics by women, blacks and young people (the 18 year old vote), and though Democrats were in power in most of this century's wars in which the U.S. participated, dissenting Democrats have been in the forefront of the demands that war be abolished as the nation's major instrument of world power. Paradoxically, the only times Republicans were in accord with Democrat policies were during these wars; the power to make war is for them the essential leverage for rule over world affairs. In this the GOP shares the view of FDR and all presidents since World War II that the immense wealth and power of the U.S. makes it "responsible for world leadership." Harry Truman, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan were particularly tenacious that the U.S. be "Number One."

This, more than any other reason has split the Democratic Party the past half century — the ineffable question about the coexistence of raw power with civil rights. When, in 1972, the Democratic campaign platform said in part that all "Americans should be free to make their own choice of lifestyles and private habits without being subject to discrimination or persecution," it was not only Republicans who declared that the Democrats "had been seized by a radical clique which scorns our nation's past and would blight our future." That year more Democrats defected from the party than in 1948 when it split into two outside factions around Truman's center, the "Progressives" and the "Dixiecrats." The next great defection was in 1980; "Reagan Democrats," they were called, and they were primarily white males fleeing, as in 1972, the increasing influence of women and blacks in the Democratic Party. The party is attempting to woo them back in 1992 by abandoning its traditional base, which party leaders believe, has cost them the last five of six presidential elections.

Since 1980 the Democratic Party has been in pursuit of its primarily conservative defectors instead of shoring up its immense base of working people, racial minorities and women. When 1992 Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton proclaims a "new covenant" and says "the choice we offer is not conservative or liberal, in many ways not even Republican or Democrat," he is trying to signal the defectors,



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in the words of Ted Van Dyke, an advisor to Paul Tsongas, "that it is safe to come back home to the party because poor, black, Hispanic, urban, homeless, hungry, and other people and problems out of favor in middle America will no longer get the favored treatment they got from mushy 1960s and 1970s liberals."

Clinton would like to also open the floodgates of defection from the Republican Party by moderates who are discouraged by Bush's intense identification with the party's rightwing. Clinton thinks the future lies in the merger of moderates in both parties. Joe Klein, writing in Newsweek, concurs; he sees a "radical middle" in each party whom he calls "post-socialist activists who seek to achieve liberal goals (better education, housing, health care, environment) through conservative market-oriented means like choice, competition, tax incentives for public-spirited behavior and privatization."

Jonathan Alter, also writing for Newsweek, says that Clinton "thinks the president should use government to try and fix the economy and plan for the future, and that he should be held responsible for the results." Bush, on the other hand, claims that economic planning has been "discredited by the forces of history," a Marxist term with which he hopes to bury what he claims are Marxist economics, and, Alter writes, believes the president "should get the hell out of the private sector's way" (while preventing congress from "doing any more damage" and "signing free trade pacts") which Alter thinks is "paralysis as a policy objective."

Indeed, Bush baldly speaks of the riches which he promises entrepreneurial capitalism will bring the nation as if the past dozen years of that fiscal folly have not brought the country to the brink of economic collapse and buried it with a debt that will not be rid of in the lifetimes of the present generation's great-grandchildren, a debt which current payment of the interest alone strangles the means of venture Bush extolls.

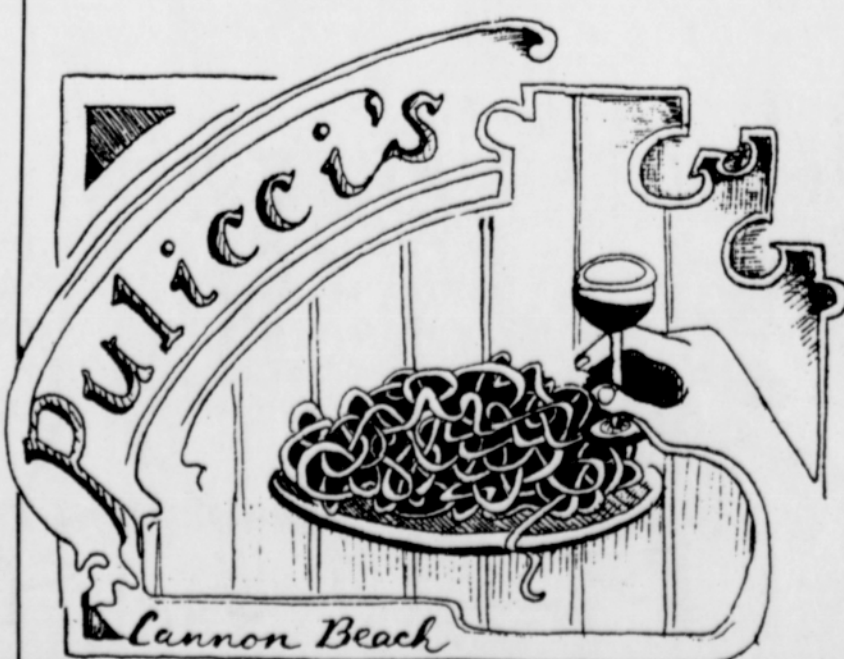
So what do we have. Once again two white men the only "serious" contenders for president of a racially and ethnically diverse not to mention sexually varied nation of close to 300-million citizens, though only half eligible seem to vote. And now the born again candidacy of Ross Perot who claims he is rich enough to buy the presidency on behalf of the people, a billionaire servant of common citizens. He reenters in the same manner as he started last spring, as a spoiler who might for the first time since 1800 throw the presidential election into the House of Representatives, a prospect that he gave as his reason for withdrawing from the campaign a few months ago but which now seems of little concern to him. Perot might have already used up the immense popularity he initially enjoyed and his resurrection little more than a pathetic joke played upon a growing number of Americans seeking alternatives to a political system that seldom represents them.

Samuel Beckett, in his reduction to the point of eradication of language, might also have found the reductive sum of presidential candidates: "no way in, none out, try for him there."

We might ultimately agree with Tallyrand when he was asked what he thought of Voltaire and Robespierre and apply his response to Clinton and Bush: "When I think of one I prefer the other."

Then again, Mae West might have been onto something when she said that if you must choose between evils, pick the new one.

Much of the information for this article is from several sources in addition to those cited in the text. Foremost among them is the book, "Presidential Campaigns" by Paul F. Boller, Jr., and Richard Hofstadter's Pulitzer Prize winning study, "Anti-Intellectualism in America." Also should be mentioned is the November 17, 1972 Life magazine article by Hugh Sidey, "The Big Win: What Will Nixon Do With It?"



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