

environmentalists, minority groups, feminists and others who might be regarded as free thinkers and heretics.

While the Republican Party generally represents the aspirations and pretensions of wealthy Tories and plutocrats and would more likely include proto/Nazis than fuzzy-headed liberals, the Democrats switched their antebellum loyalties at the end of the last century to embrace the hordes of impoverished Mediterranean and Eastern European immigrants who were imported to work in the rapidly expanding American industrial machine. The old cadre of party bosses were never comfortable with the mix of political ideas these people brought with them but liked their numbers. The "Party of the Rebellion" found its political platform from increasingly mixed socialist and so-called liberal reforms; and in the 1930s the Democrats under Franklin D. Roosevelt engineered a major redefinition of government's role in American society. Often accused since then as the Party of the Left — "The Party of Traitors" — the Democrats usually attempt to fix the national political structure after rapacious Republicans tear it apart with corruption, mismanagement and hate campaigns against political adversaries, primarily women, liberals and racial minorities. The real bankruptcy of the Democratic Party in recent times is that it has done little to stem the wild surge to the right in American politics but has instead shortsightedly accommodated it with opportunistic envy.

The general perception is that the Republican and Democratic Parties are converging into a single party. Yet significant differences prevail:

The Republicans claim to be anti-government and free market yet beef up the military/industrial mafia at the expense of domestic social programs that the Democrats support in their traditional assertion that government can and should improve the lives of poor people and help expand the middle class as a bulwark against an aristocracy of wealth.

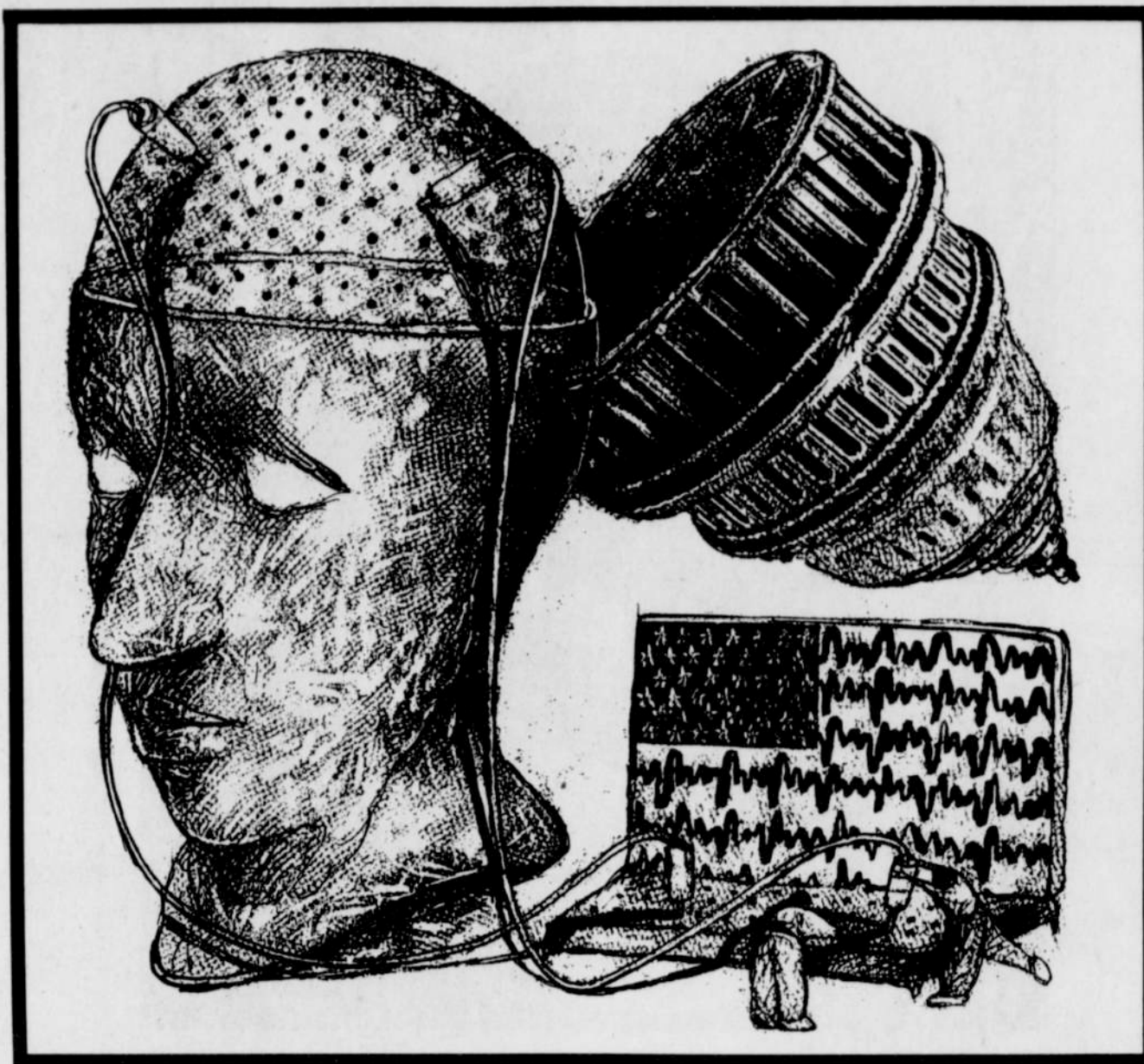
The Republicans act paranoid in their attempts at exclusivity, each campaign a further withdrawal from the incredibly diverse mass of citizenry, attacking any shift of power away from their perceived *status quo*, while the Democrats more by default reflect the diversity, perhaps because it has no other home as a result of GOP rejection and the unpopularity and powerlessness of third parties.

Self-proclaimed as "The Party of the People" (to offset the "Party of Traitors" label), the champion of disenfranchised minorities, workers and immigrants, the Democrats have in their campaigns favored such liberal causes as labor reform, busing to achieve racial integration in public schools, abortion on demand, abolishing capital punishment, gun control, gay rights, greater representation in politics by women, blacks and young people (the 18 year old vote); and although Democrats have been in power during most of this century's wars in which the U.S. participated or engineered, dissenting Democrats have been in the forefront of demands that war be abolished as the nation's major instrument of world power.

Paradoxically, the only times Republicans have been in accord with Democratic 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 USA 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 dispute 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 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," not only Republicans 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 two factions split off from the central party, "Progressives" and "Dixiecrats" that orbited outside Truman's axis.

The next great defection was in 1980: "Reagan Democrats" they were called, primarily white males fleeing, as in 1972, the increasing influence of women, people of color, *McGoverniks* and other riffraff drawn to the Democratic Party. The response was to abandon the Party's traditional base. 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. The Democratic leadership signaled runaways that it was safe to return to the Party because, a Party strategist said, "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."



HORACIO FIDEL CARDO

White voters switched from the Democratic Party to the Republicans because they perceived it as a party of minorities while Party leaders and candidates regarded such a perspective to be a liability. The political swerve to the reactionary right was precipitated by the gains of the Civil Rights Movement which set off a full scale backlash revolt against minority rights as infringements against "traditional rights". White flight was also because of the Party's sympathies for the mushrooming population of Hispanics and the flood of newer arrivals from Asia and other parts of what until recently was regarded as the Third World.

The Democratic Party leadership chased its fleeing whites into the conservative vice of the Republicans and left behind the vast majority of its rank and file. As a result the two parties appear to converge into a single interest group with a carbon copy sameness and respond to an increasingly narrow, affluent and conservative constituency. The real question is not about a third party but creating a truly second party.

With only two parties through which to realize their ambitions mainstream politicians show little interest in responding to minority interests or, in fact, to registering into the parties the millions of blacks, Hispanics or caucasian poor who seldom participate in political activity. Although their involvement would swell party ranks, it would also broaden the base of each party and threaten the *status quo*. Entrenched incumbents count on fewer people voting to maintain power and on ever larger contributions from wealthy and corporate sponsors who use their money to turn campaigns into public trials of fear and loathing.

On average, less than 50% of eligible voters in this country vote (the 1996 election was the lowest turnout since 1924; less are expected this year). The nonvoters are generally economically handicapped and suffer most from inequities and corruption. Disgust and powerlessness, not apathy, alienates citizens from the polls and are a major source of a great public discontent expressed in the movement to limit terms of political office at all levels, a sign that even those who do vote are discouraged and fed up.

That discontent might be tapped more pertinently by concentrating on registering to vote the many millions who have either dropped out of the political process or have never been given the chance to be involved in it. If these millions were to rise from their bitter cynicism and lethargy and use nothing more

than their constitutional right to register and vote they could begin a revolution as sweeping in its effects and change as the original revolt against English rule, which was as corrupt and shortsighted as the current American government. This revolution is underwritten in the nation's basic principles and is more binding than the ancient right to remove emperors in old China or revolt against kings in medieval Europe. This revolution is within the law, it is supported by the law, in design if seldom in practice; and the law not only provides its mechanics, the law in a vital sense depends upon electoral uprisings to maintain its legitimacy.

The word *revolution* causes tremors through the political culture (except when it is used to huckster a new commercial product). It was through revolution that the nation came into being — actually a painful splitting off of a colony from its mother government. The reason was an angry response to the same kind of repressive impotence that is present today. Change disrupts and the changes necessary to redistribute the power and control of the nation's wealth to a majority of the people will be dramatic and unsettling. There will not be an instant transfer of power nor will it ever be complete.

The creation of a new political party or a spawn of parties might have disruptive effects, a worst case scenario being a civil war such as occurred when the Republicans replaced the moribund Whig Party and happened in Russia's 'New Republics' whose multiple births ripped apart the Soviet womb. The risks here at home are tremendous, yet the American political apparatus needs real change which is not being provided by an antiquated two party system that represents only a privileged minority.

The current political climate in the USA is incendiary, which is reflected by condescending political parties and politicians that attempt to placate extreme rightwing ideologues and religious zealots who manipulate the democratic process to ultimately destroy it. Proto/fascists who are determined to wrest power have tapped into the old leftist/liberal/populist tactics of grassroots organizing and ballot initiatives to promote laws that deny basic citizens' rights to anyone disagreeable or threatening to them. Their grim and vengeful vision of apocalyptic subordination excludes diversity, intelligence and imagination, and blames the nation's problems on such interesting and rather progressive citizens as feminists, gays and lesbians, blacks, Hispanics and recently arrived world immigrants who hope for the future rather than cling to noxious images of the past. These dismal-souled Millenarians intend that those who have never enjoyed the fruits of liberty and prosperity, few and bitter as they are, shall never reach the tree. It might be argued that such reactionary and grossly unjust attitudes are based on fear, but the fear, prejudice and absolutism they inculcate should not be lightly dismissed if democracy is to continue as the country's fundamental structure and ideal.

Democracy evolves. Like nationalism, capitalism, socialism and communism, it is no more than part of a process of human development that is always evolving into something else. Ideas, which are usually expressions of concern that people have about the welfare of others, develop into ideologies that separate them as enemies. Ideologies do not usually translate well into reality except they often make it horrible by the fervor with which they are promoted. Governments generally violate their charters, and no matter how they wish to be considered, are most often oppressive to their populations and aggressive with their neighbors. Political rights or liberties hardwon by one generation are usually eroded by successors who take them for granted without realizing how rare, necessary and fragile they are.

The history of an age is not about solutions to problems but of the struggle between several possible solutions and the manner in which seekers for certain answers are deflected by others working for other answers. Capitalism, communism, fascism, any and all *isms*, are constantly reforming, overlapping and separating, and inherent within all of them are the human factors of power, avarice, corruption, violence and asininity. No system is foolproof, and like every other organism each moves toward decay. The farther in time a form of rule or ideology moves from its founders the less recognizable its foundations. Murray Kempton once wrote that the bearers of political myth of every era seem to carry in their hands the ax and the spade to execute and inter the myth of every previous era.

Human beings cannot escape history is the Marxist idea; but human beings make their own history. Freedom and equality, like love, begin at home.

We might remember Judge Leamed Hand: "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it."

MS. PRESIDENT 2000

"Women must get into the political game and stay in it."
~ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Despite the fact that the binary political party system seems determined to stick with two (white) males for the nation's highest office, a woman elected President of the United States in the year 2000 would be a proper beginning to the new millennium.

American women have had the vote for 78 years, an almost equal amount of time women spent fighting to attain it. For most of those years women rather passively voted the way their husbands or boyfriends voted. Women voted for the first time in equal numbers as men in 1980, and in 1982 more women voted than men; though women voted differently than men that year and succeeding years, they did not necessarily vote for women.

A significant change was made in 1992 when women campaigned in unprecedented numbers for every conceivable office in the country, local, state and federal — including at least one woman for President. Women entered politics backed by other women, finally using their majority power to elect women to public office.

Women and supportive men of the two major political parties could successfully put forward prominent and well qualified women as candidates for the Presidency of each party in 2000 if they start working at it now.

It is not an impossible idea. It is a much better idea than the knee-jerk assumptions that only two (white) males are the only reasonable choices, a form of gender apartheid by a *status quo* unwilling to see beyond its own shriveled genitals.

There is certainly precedence. Liberals and leftists have periodically fronted women for President, more often as Veep in third parties, and once in the Democratic Party with Geraldine Ferraro in 1980.

"All issues are women's issues," Ferraro said the year she campaigned as Vice President.

The quality of seekers of the Presidency have seldom been high and as the power of the Presidency increases the quality has proportionately declined.

There are many reasons a woman should be elected the American President in the year 2000. Chances are very good that she will probably be a much better leader than a male counterpart because male culture demands women possess and demonstrate superior skills simply to compete with the reigning supremacy of the killer gender.

An excellent reason a woman should be the Millennial President is that women generally represent the most generous and humane prospects of humanity. Women are literally pregnant with our future and provide the true compassion and *Giai* wisdom of our species.

A common question asked by dubious men (and some women: Phyllis Schafley comes to mind) is "Do you think a woman can do better than a man?" The response, proven by history, is that she certainly couldn't do worse.

But of course that is a piggyback negative. A woman ought to be President at the start of Western culture's third millennium simply because after all this time a woman deserves to be.

~MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

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