

once considered the 'Party of Traitors', the party of secession), of disenfranchised workers and immigrants in the early years of the 20th century, the Democrats have in their campaigns the past century 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 the last 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 2 that the immense wealth and power of the U.S. makes it "responsible for world leadership." Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and the latter-day Bush have been particularly tenacious that the U.S. be "Number One."

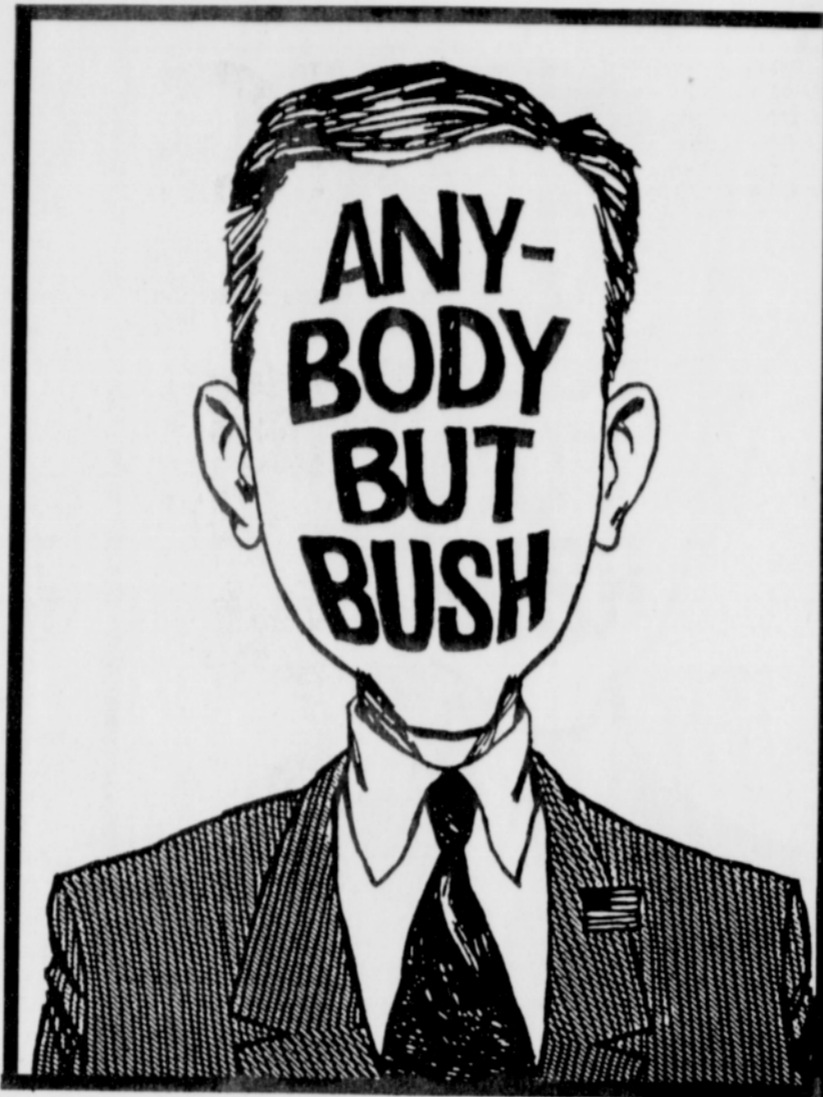
This more than any other dispute has split the Democratic Party the past half century — the ineffable question about the coexistence of raw power with civil rights. When in 1972 the Democratic platform said in part that "All Americans should be free to make their own choice of lifestyles and private 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 then 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."

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 fullscale 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 mass majority of its rank and file. As a result the two parties appear to converge into a single interest group with a symbiotic 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.

The degeneration of the Democratic Party intensifies the problem and leaves a black hole at the center of American politics. A kinder assessment might be that it is second rate, and that it must acknowledge it has failed as an alternative to the GOP since Nixon transfigured southern Democrats into Republicans. The response of the Democrats has been to imitate the Republicans, which characterizes the Clinton years. The Democrats are a dying party this centennial of the birth of the Republican Party from the corpse of the Whig Party in 1854.



DAVID HORSEY

The Democratic revival this year is based less on a vigorous platform that embodies its old traditions than on the surge to elect anybody but Bush. If 1964 was the "founding defeat" of the Republicans, 2004 might prove to be a shallow resurrection for the Democrats, their "kismet" instead.

Perhaps the Southern white (male) flight that mangled the Democratic Party can be traced back to the 1948 election when Strom Thurmond split his "Dixiecrats" from the Party to

oppose Harry Truman's nomination as the Democratic candidate for President (as did Henry Wallace and his 'Progressive' wing), the office he inherited after FDR's death in 1945.

George W. Bush is diametrical to Harry Truman who proclaimed the "Buck stops here." He might wish to be thought of as a person of honesty and candidness as Truman was, and he might admire some of Truman's policies: Truman is blamed for the "loss of the American republic" when he imposed "the national security state."

Bush should heed the 33rd President's opinion of the Republican Party rendered after his long-shot triumph for reelection in 1948. The reason Truman won against long odds, bad polls and a hostile press, he said, was because "the people know the Democratic Party is the people's party, and the Republican Party is the party of special interests, and it always has been and always will be."

How would Bush answer Truman when he asked, "Is the United States going to run in the interest of the people as a whole, or in the interest of a small group of privileged businessmen" (whom he called "gluttons of privilege" and "bloodsuckers with offices in Wall Street")?

Can Bush claim with candor as did the feisty Truman, "We told the people the truth. And the people are going to win this election."

When asked about his 1948 victory, Truman said, "Labor did it." But so did farmers, blacks, ethnic minorities and a then as yet unacknowledged voting bloc, women — a coalition Reagan and Father Bush broke in the 1980s but whose disrepair was noted as early as 1964 and which was capitalized on by Nixon and his successful Presidential campaign of 1968.

Garry Wills, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, suggested that Barry Goldwater's 1964 loss to incumbent Lyndon Johnson (like Truman, an inherited President) was the Republican Party's "founding defeat" and that Nixon in 1968 "profited from insights... (that) even running against a southerner, Goldwater had won five southern states." The formerly Democratic 'Solid South' was falling apart under pressure of the Civil Rights movement, the backlash of white supremacists and defecting white Democrats to traditionally Jim Crow Republican Party locals.

George McGovern, who lost to Nixon in 1972, said his humiliating defeat was the result of a "so-called Southern strategy" welding Republicans with white-flight Democrats. Nixon, McGovern said, "really tapped the seeds of racism, the fear of change, the fear of the young, the fear of the black."

A 'Confederate Bloc' contained in 1968 nearly 40% of the electoral votes necessary for the Republicans to win the Presidency. Nixon built on that base in 1968 and 1972, as did Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush in the 1980s.

Jimmy Carter, whose single term Democratic Presidency was squeezed between fourteen years of GOP control of the White House, lost his 1980 attempt at re-election to the senior Bush's predecessor and mentor, Reagan. Carter, former governor of Georgia, accused Reagan of being both a warmonger and a racist. Under Reagan, Carter warned, "Americans might be separated, black from white, Jew from Christian, North from South, rural from urban." Buzz words such as "states rights," he said, really meant segregation.

Reagan made it clear from the start that he intended to be an "FDR of the right," and he immediately began dismantling "the welfare state" built during the Great Depression of the 1930s by Roosevelt's New Deal. He reduced federal spending for social services while drastically increasing defense spending and stepping up the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union, and lowered taxes especially for the wealthy. He rolled back civil

# KERRY

For the first and most likely only time in my life I personally know a Presidential candidate. John Kerry and I were in the Vietnam Veterans Against the War together. He spoke to the Senate; I spoke to the House. We both threw our war medals at Congress in open protest of the war we fought in that killed and maimed our friends for no good purpose history has been able to sort out a generation later, even though we are considered traitors for having opposed it. He did not join 20 of us vets a week after the visit to Congress when we festooned the Pentagon with several pounds of freshly gathered chicken defecation, which I consider the last major attack upon it prior to 9/11.

Most of us in VVAW knew from the start Kerry was politically ambitious and had his eye on the Presidency. It is difficult to assess what sort of person might make a plausible President, in particular someone familiar whose faults are as known as his/her virtues. Kerry's political record is not quite as dramatic as his war record, which has been unfairly maligned by hired mercenaries who claim to be veterans. His Senatorial accomplishments are not much advertised, yet he is greatly responsible for the country's rapprochement with Vietnam (with fellow Senator and war veteran John McCain), and he helped smoke out the internationally corrupt BCCI bank that many of his colleagues attempted to protect.

Bush ads are calling Kerry a traitor, a most vile form of campaigning: the people who highjacked the Republican Party the past four years have seized the low ground and intend to keep it, accusing anyone who opposes them as betraying the country. If indeed the word traitor is to be used it would more likely be on target to accuse those who are dismantling the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and desecrating the culture of democracy.

The contention over Kerry's Vietnam war record and subsequent public opposition to that war has, I think, served mainly as a smokescreen to obscure Bush's choice to avoid war service and the fact that our self-described 'War President' can justifiably be classified as a deserter (more than a year AWOL) from his National Guard unit in wartime.

Perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on what Kerry and Bush did in a long ago war that never quite leaves the American conscience. But how they responded personally to that war has much to do with the type of character development necessary for the war we are now engaged in.

Bush pretends to be a bold President by making war, but he takes little risk — young American men and women as well as countless innocents are paying the costs of warfare that he refused to pay when it was his chance. Kerry, who staked his life at war has far more clarity about the costs and consequences of war. We are, after all, choosing a 'War President'.

Both Kerry and Bush are sons of privilege: Kerry seems to have accepted his as a debt and attempted to provide some payment; Bush primarily manipulated his privilege as a way to dodge obligation and make money.

It is necessary to replace Bush if we wish to retain our chances at democracy, at best an unfinished business that will never be fully realized. The question is if Kerry is the right person to supplant Bush. There would be greater choice with more political parties but all we have is Kerry opposing Bush.

Kerry is generally liberal minded (though the 'L' word is anathema to the far-right, its root is "liberty"), and he is not a zealot of any discernible dogma; he is not, in short, a frenzied millenarian.

"Politics is about policy, not about passion," Howard Dean has said endorsing Kerry.

I am critical of Kerry. I am not sure if in ordinary times I would choose him for President. But I have to say, in the manner of George Orwell who wrote a very critical epitaph of Gandhi after his 1948 assassination, that in comparison to his disingenuous opponent, Kerry smells so much cleaner.

~MICHAEL McCUSKER



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**NORTH COAST TIMES EAGLE**

A JOURNAL OF ART & OPINION

PUBLISHED IN ASTORIA, OREGON

757 27TH STREET 97103

MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

EDITOR & PUBLISHER

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