

“MANIPULATION OF MIND”

At this point I wish to focus my examination of politics upon the forces that act upon elections. As I have already addressed, the two major parties have been in the throes of rallying their own bases for the upcoming election. Yet, within parties, especially within the GOP, there exists strong friction over the appropriate traits to carry the party onward. With this in mind I would like to center on the deeper forces at work here.

Primarily, I want to pinpoint the cause for the Republican Party's discord.

I am well aware that this is no light task. However, I feel that certain events have taken place over the course of the last 20-30 years that have promoted a divergence from the core values republicans held for so long.

Consider the nation's Founding Fathers on this subject. Thomas Jefferson believed it to be necessary for policy and institutions to change as the times change. He, so long ago, recognized how technological advances and what he called “the progress of the human mind” can force an adjustment in institutional behavior. Jefferson said that the body politic must make alterations to keep up with the pace of the times. Jefferson's advice should be at the forefront of the minds of those who make the decisions. Yet, what is it about the times during the last three presidential administrations that led the conservative right to sway the way it has?

First, in President Clinton's second term the United States experienced the greatest ever economic boom, over nine-and-a-half years of growth. This is what his legacy will show. This is what conservatives want take credit for. Neither is in fact responsible. Rather, the surplus of the late 90s was a culmination of events including the Fed's changing interest rates, the stock market bubble, and the subsequent employment boom. The exponential gains allowed people to spend freely. This, probably more than anything else, led to Americans' being content. But it was this unrestrained expansion which ultimately caused the 2008 financial crisis. Yet, at the same time, fault cannot be fully attributed to the perceived reckless nature of the people during prosperous times. The fact is that there was and is constant distortion of the political reality. This is done by and large by the media, as they reach the largest number of people. **Party politics pushed their individual agendas to the point where long-term consequences were ignored, so the question of responsibility is only further confused.**

Another factor to explain contributed to the Party course shift: The Global War on Terrorism(GWOT). Taking away the deeply ingrained emotions tied to the war, GWOT spread across two fronts and was directed under limited and hazy intelligence. Initially, the American people felt the reaction to the events of 9/11 was just. Yet, as the public became increasingly aware of the war's shaky ground, the public began to doubt the war's expanded purpose in Iraq and began to seek a legitimate exit plan. Widespread public support significantly declined.

These, and several other examples, show a trend over time that the public's confidence in government has steadily waned over this time. Yet this is not a new trend. Consider the examples of the years after controversies like Watergate and the Iran-Contra scandals and the periods after any of the last military conflicts. Public trust drastically decreased. Republicans have increasingly been the voice of the people disaffected from failed government policies.

However, in times of great promise such as with Johnson and the Great Society, Reagan and ending the Cold War, Bush 43 and leading America against terror, and Obama promising change for better times, trust and support surged. These facts and trends in reality show that the American people seem

fickle. But this is not their fault. At all times we are being manipulated to think, believe, and do what specific groups would have us to. With all due respect to my fellow countrymen, collectively we are sheep. We talk about not forgetting our history for fear of repeating it. But we don't actually do what we preach. Domestic reform programs traditionally do not have a good track record with success. Take for example the Great Society which arguably left African-American families worse off afterwards. The programs implemented during the campaign are synonymous with the war on poverty; yet it seems as though in reality it turned into a war against the poor. Those domestic programs, most particularly the welfare system, which was not a bailout and safety assistance but a dependence that in some cases became a way of life. This could be the case with Obamacare, or at least as certain outlets would have Americans believe. Although it will take years to iron out all of the technicalities, it poses a large threat to jobs as well as taxing millions of Americans against their choice. These liberal programs all-in-all are well founded with the welfare of Americans in mind but end up costing too much in the long run. Thus, we see the nation's long-term debt problem. Republicans, for the most part, "get this," but for awhile in the 70a-90s, too many "went along" with the good times.

We are still presented a problem, the largest: distrust of the government? Manipulation and inappropriate spin are part of the problem. And as time passes, it only becomes greater. Of course I speak about the media. Corporate media have become the primary source for most Americans to receive information about the world, about politics, about their own current condition. Gone are the days where there were three network channels without disdain and bias. **No longer are Americans comforted at the end of the day by hearing "And that's the way it is" by a trustworthy figure like Walter Cronkite.** However, these were certainly times of looking at the world through rose colored glasses.

Cronkite himself once called television the great common denominator. How far we have moved to where one can find a news outlet tailored to individual preferences. This type of commentary has altered the goal of broadcasting from delivering the facts into one of getting better ratings. Although this is no new concept, it has become more perilous for most of those people who do not have a broadened scope from multiple sources. Cronkite also once stated how the U.S. was "mired in stalemate" with the Vietnam War. This mirrors the current stalemate within the government. Again, it is not a new situation. Information is key to what and how individuals think and act. Having the capacity to distort that information provides power. The most typical use of media manipulation is through fear or exaggeration. In politics this is accomplished by vilifying the opposition and representing oneself or party the choice that will make peoples' lives better. If there is one thing that all factions of the Republican Party can agree on is that Barack Obama's greatest accomplishment has been understanding relating to the people's wants and getting himself elected. Yet, per usual with newly elected officials, it becomes practically impossible to enact everything in the platform since it is bounded by the processes of government. Yet, more than this, the parties confine candidates to what the leadership of the party determines. Therefore, candidates form their ideology around not only what their constituents require but also what their respective party requires. This, needless to say, puts them in a precarious situation. Once again, we see another form of manipulation in the political game that is expanding and acting detrimental to good governance. What it takes to become president contradicts what it takes to be president. Republicans as well as Democrats succumb to this reality.

So, the cause of Republican discord? I would say the tendency to stray from core values of a strong national government founded on fiscal restraint while also on occasion going along with national trends during good times or dividing into combative factions at other times. Correcting this course will not be easy for the media seek to sew discord on a daily basis since conflict and drama generate ratings over slow and principled policy stances and adaptations..

And so I reflect back to Jefferson's thought about progressing government to keep pace with the times. I am perplexed why we have yet to heed his instruction and moved regressively. Have we been overwhelmed by factions? Again, there is no simple, clear answer except party politics. This is a danger to the stability of the nation and needs to be rectified. What I find to be truly essential is for there to be an earnest and

sincere devotion to Jefferson's mentality which is enshrined in his memorial.

I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.