

Revenge of the Nerds

The Republican Victory

E.B. Maple (Peter Werbe)

1995

“Consider the intelligence of the average man, then realize 50% are even stupider.”

—Mark Twain

“I am nothing, a cloak of skin with a mouth saying, Don’t kill everything so soon.”

—Mick Vranich and Wordban’d

Wouldn’t the headline, “61% of Electorate Avoid Polls; Conservative White Men Elect Right-Wing of Political Racket to Power,” after the Nov. 8 Republican sweep of Congressional seats have been more accurate than those in the media which trumpeted, “Americans Vote for Change?” Admittedly, mine is not exactly snappy, nor would it fit well as a banner headline, but it’s closer to the truth.

At some level of consciousness, even the 39% of the voters who overcame the lethargy, cynicism, despair, disgust and resignation to vote, must know their ballot will do little to change daily life.

Also, the Republican victories did not represent the change in American political character anywhere near what the media pundits and right-wing talk show hosts would have it. The difference between the results of this election and the 1992 Congressional races was created by only a two percent shift to the Republicans, spurred on by the gun lobby and right-wing talk radio, and decreased participation by the traditional Democratic base.

As it was, the Republican national vote was a scant 50.5 percent of the total, but they obviously had the numbers in the right places. Most importantly, although both parties were Political Action Committee dollar driven, in the end it was the Republicans who generated greatly vaster sums which translated into victories. This is what created the so-called “landslide” for the right. The actual number of voters who wanted right-wing Republicans to run the government probably comes in at only around 20 percent of the adult population. In many ways, the election was a parliamentary-style, well-deserved vote of no-confidence in the Clinton government rather than assent to the Republican’s murky “Contract with America.”

But regardless, the rightists now have the levers of political power after 40 years of center-right control by the Democrats and although the Republicans are no less part of the reigning political racket, this is the first time in over a generation they will be positioned to derail the political trajectory of liberal statist social programs begun in the 1930s. For most of the population nothing too much will change in material terms from what would have occurred if there had been a Democratic victory. The slow economic squeeze being suffered by most of the middle- and working-class will go on unabated regardless of which party is in office.

The rich will undoubtedly get richer as Republicans vote to repeal the capital gains tax and figure other ways to get more cash to the high side of the trough. However, the most significant result of the Republican “revolution” will be that the poor will get poorer and their lives much more miserable. The fingernail grip many have on life will likely be stomped on.

The Republican victory is not just the revenge of the nerds—those resentful, goody-good, pious churchgoers who never got in on what they saw as the sex- and dope-soaked, anti-authority generation of the ‘sixties. It’s also the revenge of the Delta Sigma Pi’s—the rich, handsome, party animal, frat boys who were also out for a good time,

but who hated hippies, drank, rather than smoked dope, and whose social conscience ended at putting a buck in the collection plate at their Presbyterian church service.

Together, the Delta Sig/nerd coalition has announced plans to wage a two-front battle against the poor and the “counter-culture McGovernites,” as the new Speaker of the House of Representatives frothed before the election. The rabid Pat Buchanan already set the terms of engagement earlier at the 1992 Republican convention in Dallas when he shouted a battle-cry from the speaker’s podium: “There is a religious war going on... We must take back our cities, and take back our culture.” He’s talking about the poor and us! In Washington, giddy, newly elected Republicans are sharpening their knives to disembowel the Democratic side of the racket. In Michigan and other states, ex-paintball players run around in camo, toting exotic assault weapons forming unofficial state militias and talk of arresting the (old) Congress for treason. The stench of fascism is in the air, even if it’s not on the immediate political agenda.

But the reason for all this thunder on the right is mystifying. If it is proto-counterrevolutionary with the ominous state militias echoing the Freikorps, para-military bands which roamed post-World War I Germany attacking the left, what revolution are these current guys the counter to? Have these authoritarian statists suddenly come out of the closet with an almost anarchist apprehension of government? Is it only they who are able to discern that the Clintons are really leftists under their centrist, opportunistic, corporatist facade who mask their plans for One World Government by selling out to the corporations on everything from trade agreements to the redwoods to health insurance?

Fascism always contains a strong quantity of twisted psychopathology—exaggerated hatreds, resentments, and fears—as one of its essential building blocks, but its appearance on the historical stage in the 20th century has traditionally been linked with very specific opposition to an upsurge of the left or the trade unions or the demand for minority rights, not their collapse as we are currently witnessing. Fascist sentiment will probably remain as such, rather than be mobilized as a movement which seeks the power of the state since capitalist classes in other countries have had bad experiences with this political philosophy and only turn to it in cases of extreme emergency. They have no need to up the ante of political rule if current methods of government serve to secure their interests.

Although only a small percentage of what motivated Republican votes could be accurately fascist sentiment, it is out there in surprising numbers. Where it surfaces, it presents itself as a bizarre psycho/politics with hysteria, rage and threats reserved for phantom enemies, having no authentic ones about. This prototype can perhaps best be seen in the membership of rapidly forming unofficial state militias. However, beneath the militaristic bluster and bravado, and bristling armaments, fascist personality types are psychic chickenshits who cower before authority, ache to be submerged in hierarchies, and are spineless when it comes to confronting the real source of their economic misery and social angst. Hence, they aim at the wrong target—those in the classes below them.

At the right’s most ragged edge, you can hear national talk shows, computer bulletin boards, and newsletters consumed with whacko chatter about an imminent demonic “New World Order,” where U.S. sovereignty will be lost to the United Nations and our cities patrolled by “Blue Helmets”—UN police. Callers insist they have incontrovertible documents to show the foreheads of newborns will be imprinted with bar codes beginning with 666, that 100,000 Hong Kong cops will be brought here after the colony reverts to China in 1997, that mysterious all-black helicopters are patrolling our skies, that a government plan to totally disarm the people is at work, that road signs are already in place for a network of concentration camps for “patriots,” etc., etc.

Certainly, these nuts are not totally off the wall with their fears of centralized government; it’s a position anarchist anti-statists share. But theirs is an authoritarian and paranoid rejection of politics, one which dares not examine the fundamental character of this society, its culture, and its economy. Rather than looking at the authentic crimes of capitalism and the state they wind up with liturgical recitations of the Constitution and pathetic conspiracy theories which leave daily life intact—the job, TV, the mall—and a call for politics which only affirms everything which brought them and the rest of the world the problems we all face.

One Great Social Monster

At the “respectable” edge of this reactionary wedge are the Republicans, (and even Clinton and many Democrats) who plan to dismantle what liberals call the social “safety net”—those entitlement programs which have to do with feeding, housing and caring for the tens of millions of poor this system pushes to its margins. The Republicans, impervious to an impending Christmas season, sounded in late 1994 like a cliché from a 19th Century Dickens novel, as they called for a \$60 billion welfare cutoff to families, sending children to orphanages and re-opening poor farms. With their insistence that poverty emanates from the ill-habits of penury rather than the greed of the rich, and their triumphal, smug arrogance and loathing of the poor, they loom as a Frankenstein-like resurrection of Rev. Cotton Mather, Thomas Malthus and The Great Gatsby stitched together into one great social monster seeking the vengeance of the Lord on the least fortunate.

This is not to say that Congress and government are not a corrupt cash cow for special interests—just that the Republicans are no less a part of the apparatus and the only real special interests being served are no different than they ever were—the wealthy, the corporations and the politicians themselves. Nor should this be taken as a defense of the hideously dehumanizing, bureaucratic welfare system which liberals once correctly assailed as demeaning to the poor. But now, with the debate moved ever farther to the right, liberals are shocked about talk of its reduction or outright abolition and, rather than remain critics of welfare, have become its staunchest defenders. “What will become of the poor,” they correctly inquire?

Conservatives couldn’t give a shit what happens to them. The poor rarely vote; when they do, it’s predominately Democratic. So beating up the destitute and powerless makes good political sense for the Republicans who, in this way, can assuage the massive economic and social anxieties felt by the middle-class. The Republicans know those in the middle-class who bother to vote for them love punitive politics (the death penalty, the military, abortion prohibition, welfare cut-offs, etc.). This could mean good-bye anti-poverty stuff or at least a massive scaling down.

The liberal criticisms of the welfare system are certainly correct, but so are some of the conservative ones: huge chunks of money go into corrupt programs which amount to little more than payoffs to big city Democratic political machines with the main recipients being office holders and poverty program bureaucrats, rather than the poor. However, for those who depend on state stipends for the wherewithal of life including the basics of food and shelter (such as the Women, Infants and Children [WIC] feeding program), the pittance received, accompanied by the humiliation of the system is hardly the “rip-off” the middle-class grumbles about, but that misperception is what translates into votes for attack dog politicians.

Right-wing critics of welfare charge that everything from New Deal to Great Society programs have failed to elevate the poor, but rather have created an “enduring culture of poverty” where generations have come to expect the state dole. In conservative parlance, “the government takes from the productive and gives to the unproductive.”

This modern restatement of 19th century Spencerian survival-of-the fittest Social Darwinism is the perfect ideology for this era. Although we are assured by the corporate media that the economy is expanding domestically and within regional and international trade zones and tariff agreements, it is viewed with apprehension by many that “good paying” jobs are disappearing and the future is uncertain. In this context, it is easy to understand why advocating the withdrawal of generosity from bygone eras seems so popular.

Rags-To-Riches Mythology

This misses the seemingly obvious: poverty in capitalist society is created by a class system which distributes wealth disproportionately to different sectors. The contention that poverty is caused by poor education, lack of job skills, poor motivation or the like, gives credence to the pernicious idea that poverty is self-generated. Both conservatives and liberals think, if only they’d get a GED or some job training, they could fit right into the nearest suburb. That’s ridiculous. If somehow everyone in the country obtained a Ph.D., it would simply mean the McDonald’s counterperson would have a degree in French renaissance literature and the garbage collector a graduate degree in anthropology. Is it really beyond so many people’s comprehension that the attributes of the poor are symptoms of poverty, not its cause?

Also, the Horatio Alger rags-to-riches mythology continues—“Anyone can make anything of themselves, blah, blah.” I informed one lunkhead I had the misfortune of talking with recently that statistics demonstrate quite clearly the existence of an ironclad, permanent caste/class system. Those born into a social/economic category stay there with few exceptions—the poor are born and stay poor; the same for the rich. But no, he began, “Anyone can...”

This social blind spot acts as a convenient anchor for denial about the maldistribution of income. If the poor are responsible for their own plight, what responsibility does the hard working, white male bear in the situation? None, is increasingly the answer. The punitive nature of the response becomes even more obvious when one points out the enormous quantity of public money going to subsidize corporations and the rich. You hear in return, “Oh, I’m against that, too,” he or she will say, but then votes to deny aid to children and the elderly.

Classic fascists used to resent and fear the rich—the big bourgeoisie—as well as the lower orders; this current crop of conservo-fascists loves the rich and famous and scurries about devising rationalizations for the disparities in income. Since the number of poor is increasing and beggars and homeless are permanent features of our cities, it becomes necessary to explain why so many people are doing so badly in what we are continually reminded, “is the richest nation in the world.”

One explanation currently being debated in the media is that it’s not only social habits which disable the poor from upward mobility, but in the case of people grouped under the heading of black or African-Americans, a genetic failing as well. This canard always surfaces whenever great disparities of wealth appear. At the turn of the century, wealthy New Yorkers were convinced by science that Jews and other Eastern Europeans (the poor of the Lower East Side) were genetically deficient.

For over a hundred years, the same analysis, under a variety of pseudo-sciences, has been applied to the descendants of the slaves brought to the New World. The latest manifestation, *The Bell Curve* by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, postulates intelligence is largely controlled by genetic inheritance and that blacks have lower cognitive abilities (that is, they are dumber) than whites as measured by IQ tests.

I have no intention of refuting the scientific and social foolishness of this contention as others have done it more than adequately and thoroughly recently in numerous liberal and radical publications. In one such endeavor, Adolph Reed Jr., in a Nov. 28, 1994 highly recommended *Nation* article said, “It is both beneath my dignity and politically unacceptable to engage in a debate that treats as an open question that I might be a monkey,” and then proceeds to prove Murray and Herrnstein are (with apologies to our simian friends). [<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/looking-backward-2/>]

Even liberal commentators recognize the underlying social and political purpose of this debate: if the recipients of social largess are genetically incapable of improving their lot through the assistance of social programs, why throw money at the hopeless?

However, even if we were to grant validity to the spurious claims of these racists, what then should be made of their conclusions? If, in fact, you had a genetically disadvantaged population sector, shouldn’t they be given special consideration just as we give to those with physical disabilities? The lie of it all can perhaps best be seen when one compares the difference in IQ scores between whites and blacks the authors report and realize it doesn’t explain the much vaster differential between white and black income and wealth. Race in America is the first way income is disproportionally distributed and depends on the maintenance of theories like Murray and Herrnstein’s to perpetuate the myths of racism. Hence, the explanation and importance of racism’s indelible permanence.

Boycotting the Polls

Even though the Republican “revolution” is based on a minority of the population and perhaps could have been thwarted by the participation of only a few more “good-hearted” voters, it still makes sense that most anti-authoritarians joined with the vast majority in boycotting the polls.

Although democracy is only one variant of capitalist rule, it isn’t the worst, so the question often arises regarding electoral abstention by anarchists. Someone will always argue, wouldn’t it have been better to have swallowed our principles and sent all the Republicans down to defeat as happened to the odious authentic fascist, Oliver North,

in Virginia? Since voting is so passive, why not submit to the sequential humiliation of working followed by a trip to the voting booth to forestall the coming to power of right-wing creeps who will be around for the next two years bashing the poor, the gay or anyone not on the white, up-tight and christian right?

Firstly, the traditional anarchist, anti-statist arguments against voting are valid in this election no less than in others. This critique of voting is accurate as to how little efficacy the act contains. Also, since voting only matters in the aggregate, if we were really to be effective in the electoral arena, not only should we vote as individuals, but also organize others to do similarly. It's easy to see where this path leads: "Anarchists for Sen. Charles Robb"—North's corrupt and slimy Democratic opponent. I think not.

Secondly, the Democrats got what they deserved, much like all of the ruling parties did in Italy in 1993. And, like Italy, voters reached to the right for a solution rather than daring to take on the totality of the ruling racket. Clinton, an opportunist corporatist who has received high approval ratings from the *Wall Street Journal* for his pro-business stances on NAFTA and GATT, and the Democrats are not an opposition to the right, but its partner. This can be seen by the President and his party's post-election weaseling remarks on prayer and middle-class tax cuts (with apologies to weasels).

As the corporate media in this country witnesses the formal political power shift, it obligingly cranks out the Republican message: the People have turned to the right, they want less government, less taxes, etc. None of this necessarily represents the deep and authentic concerns of an unhappy and anxious people, but will be treated as such by those who create the dominant images and those who willingly consume them.

For our part, anti-authoritarian projects and our resistance aren't part of the ruling equation. By their nature and our desire, they are autonomous of the governing apparatuses. The challenge for us to continue building communities of resistance and confront the megamachine at the points of its worst abuses is no different than before the election charade.

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