

The Fate of the Republican Party
Posted On: December 31, 1969

We are historically a two-party republic, a system that works in a country that is essentially centrist, electing representatives and presidents not far from moderately conservative or moderately liberal. We have found that this arrangement works for us most of the time, and has made us a more stable republic than many with a multi-party Parliamentary system.

However, we have undergone terrible periods in our history when the two major parties had irreconcilable differences. Both parties do not necessarily survive such challenges. Only one party has been part of our history from its beginning: Thomas Jefferson's Democratic Republican Party (the Democrats), although this party has had very different values over time.

The first party to die off early in the 19th century was the Federalist Party (John Adams' party), which appeared to value States' Rights rather than a strong central government. It did not survive the War of 1812, when the British tried to undo our revolution, but fortunately lost.

The Federalists were replaced by the Whigs (a counterpart conservative party that was part of England's parliamentary system too). As the Democrats were becoming more protective of the Southern States slavery system, the Whigs were edging into support of the industrialization process with free labor provided by immigration from Europe. But the Whigs were divided into those unwilling to challenge the southern slave system and those increasingly emancipationist.

Presidents and the Supreme Court of the period between the 1830s and 1860s endeavored to make any compromises necessary to keep the country from civil war. By 1860, the issue had become incendiary enough that the election of a clear emancipationist, Abraham Lincoln, a member of a new political party (Republican), made compromises no longer possible. The Civil War (the Southern Rebellion) broke out, and the Whigs were replaced by Republicans, the party that saved the country from becoming two countries.

One characteristic of America's political parties is that they are "large tent" parties, each having a range of liberal and conservative members, which permits presidents winning an election to find enough centrists in each party to enact laws. As long as the compromise is not unbridgable, this system works.

Another characteristic of our political parties is how they change over time. The Republican party started as an emancipation party, but after the assassination of Lincoln, it became the conservative party of big money, big industrial growth, and economic triumph of the northern states. Southern Democrats reversed the Reconstruction and intimidated Black voters. They later became liberal in all things except racial equality, and played a power role in the Legislative Branch.

The post-World War II period saw us with presidents, representatives, and courts, all more or less centrist, which produced great improvements for the lives of most Americans. It also made us a global model with obvious contrast with the authoritarian Soviet system.

But then something changed. The Republicans saw a demographic change that ushered in a decline of registered Republicans. This change was validated when Republicans won presidential elections only with the help of the Electoral College, not popular vote. They realized they could only win by gerrymandering and voter suppression. Then one Republican rose to power with a new movement: the "Tea Party," which declared that the Democrats were the enemy, not the colleague in government.

A demagogue congressman, Newt Gingrich, was elected and he began the wrecking ball attack on norms and civil two-party governance. From that point on, even decent Republican candidates surrendered to the practice of appealing to the underbelly of voters, misogynist religious fanatics, unrestrained gun rights, science deniers, and racists. Republicans were compelled to assume a "know-nothing" platform of supporting the dumbing down of the once educated party.

Trump destroyed what was left of the Republican Party, establishing instead a dictatorial cult that attempted, but failed, a coup to overturn an election loss. The decline of the Republican Party was long in coming, but now appears in its death throes, trying a coup to create a dictatorship.

Sensible Republicans are fleeing the party in droves. A new conservative party is needed. This one is disgraced.

682 words

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