

Political Parties Are Not Permanent.
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That the Republican Party is heading toward a demolition is no surprise by now. This is not the first time a major American political party fell apart. In the 19th century, between the 1830s and 1860, the Whig Party was the political rival to Jefferson's Democratic Republican (Democrat) Party. The Whigs ran candidates every election, but elected only two to the presidency.

Political parties are not cast in stone; they change over time. The Jeffersonian Democrats began as an elite party of landowners (mostly slave holding). They supported the equality of white propertied males, plantation owners versus city dwellers.

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson, a Democrat, changed all this. He pushed for the enfranchisement of all White males, property and literacy not required. American politics in the 19th century reflected this sort of democracy, the best democracy that a free flow of liquor on election day could buy. This is the origin of "populism" that roils American politics even today. Power to the people!

The Democrats split further in giving birth not only to rabid populists, but to populists who rejected learning, science, and education: the "Know-Nothings" and "Mugwumps." If this sounds familiar, they are indeed alive and well in today's angry supporters of the likes of Donald Trump and most of his current fellow candidates.

The Whig party, which rose during the 1830s, represented a new kind of elites, captains of industry as the industrial revolution transformed the north. It also appealed to a growing middle class in the north who were beginning to rue the institution of Black slavery. The party wobbled between big money interests and anti-slavery moralists, failing to convince the electorate well enough to win the White House more than twice in 30 years.

By 1860, the Democrats dominated the southern slave states, which promoted "states' rights" and disdained any interference from the US government. The slavery issue then dominated all political rhetoric until the anti-slavery faction of the Whig Party finally defected and created a new party, the Republicans. President Abraham Lincoln and most of his cabinet began as Whigs and became Republicans.

For the rest of the 19th century, Democrats were the conservatives, the embittered Southerners who mourned the loss of their "states' rights" to agricultural slavery. The slaves were emancipated, but remained as sharecroppers deprived of political participation.

The Republicans lost their progressive edge after the Civil War ended. It became the party of industry and big money power until President Theodore Roosevelt reawakened its "progressive" roots, providing a more equitable playing field for the growing Middle Class. He was the last Republican president to do so until Eisenhower.

The New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt picked up the progressive movement of the earlier Roosevelt, as did Presidents Truman, Kennedy, Carter, Johnson, Clinton, and Obama.

The Republican Party, which began as an anti-slavery progressive party under Lincoln, became over time the "conservative" party, representing those segments of society that feared too-rapid change, believed in conservative and traditional religion, and trusting educated elites rather than populist ignoramuses. Until the end of World War II, a vast majority of university intellectuals considered themselves conservatives as well.

Today, both political parties are rife with internal divisions, much like the period of the Civil War. Most Democrats stand for moderate progress, social justice, and strong central government to protect us from our less noble instincts. The minority, largely found in and around the academic world, have raised the standard for radical change, "multiculturalism," and elimination of such "outmoded" values as religion, polite speech, clothing, and manners. Vulgarity has become bipartisan, and both Democratic and Republican extremes detest government.

The Republicans are now divided between mainstream fiscal conservatives who can work with their counterparts among Democrats, and a resurgence of "Know-Nothings" who wildly support any demagogues who inveigh against "government," science, and the rising tide of female equality. One of these pretend Know-Nothings may force the

nominating process to accept him, which will lose them the election and send reasonable Republicans looking for a new party. Not a moment too soon.

674 words

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