

Religious Fundamentalist and Racist Tendencies in the Electoral Arena in the United States: Political Fringes or Mainstream America?

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"I believe, and I hope, that one day we can take America back. That is why we are building this Gideon's Army, and heading for Armegeddon, to do battle for the Lord."

Patrick Buchanan, Greenville, South Carolina, September 19, 2000

"In a true Christian society, we would only need the laws given to us by God, because he covers all the bases." "The Fundamental precepts of the Party must remain entirely Christian."

The Christian Alliance

"Sovereignty and self-determination will finally allow Southerners to be in charge of their own destiny for the first time since our freedom was stolen from us at Appomattox in 1865."

The Southern Party, Statement of Founding Purpose

Giriş

The 2000 Presidential Election in the United States became a major fiasco when the electoral system crashed in Florida and it took an extra five weeks for the US Supreme Court to usher George W. Bush into the White house more as a "President Select" than a "President Elect." Outdated technology from the 1950s, such as the punch ballot system, was used to discriminate against black and Hispanic districts and the poor, in Florida, biasing the vote in the Republican's favor. Meanwhile, some upscale white communities voted using the latest computer-based systems. George W. Bush's brother Jeb, as Governor of the state with the needed 25 electoral votes, had already promised to deliver Florida to his brother. It was a bit harder than anticipated, however. In the end, big capital and the courts pulled out all stops to put George W. Bush into the White House. Statistically, the election was a tie. Around the world, people were shocked at the apparently primitive state of voting procedures in America and how an election could go off track so completely.

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America has an antiquated electoral system with the electoral college still in place to protect the voters from themselves. In fact, Al Gore won the popular vote getting 50,996,039 votes (48.38 %) to 50,456,141 for Bush (47.8%). This is a plurality of 539,898 votes for Gore. Ralph Nader polled 2,882,807 votes (2.73 percent) for the Greens Party. In Florida, the key state, as it turns out, Bush officially polled just 537 votes more than Gore, but there are many indications that Gore actually received more votes, could they have actually been counted. Or if the US Supreme Court had allowed the count to go forward. It is certain that Gore would have won Florida and the Presidency had Nader not run, polling some 97, 488 votes in Florida. The official result gave Bush 271 electoral votes to 266 for Gore. Many questions need to be explored. At the most elementary level, it is difficult to call a result democratic that rewards the office to the candidate who got fewer popular votes. In the opinion of the US Supreme Court, in this case, the US Constitution does not guarantee the individual the right to vote. The electoral votes of Florida, and thus the winner of the Presidency, need not depend upon the people but can be decided in other ways. This seems to render elections to be cosmetic exercises. In quite significant ways, the 2000 election result was largely engineered by various techniques of disfranchising blacks, minorities and the large prison population that would have voted overwhelmingly for Al Gore. In the end, the Supreme Court decision was needed to tip the balance and end the confusion.

America also has the best elections money can buy, as seen in the spending for Congressional races. Candidates raised 801 million dollars and spent 683 million dollars in the 2000 election. This is an increase of 42 percent in spending over 1998. The Presidential race also depends upon money, backing by big corporate money even to get to the party nomination.

While the implications of the 2000 election will be discussed long into the future, this article looks at some enduring tendencies in the US electorate, namely religious fundamentalism and racism, that suggests the persistence of parochial thinking largely out of touch with the larger world of globalization and neoliberalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century. America rules the world, increasingly by force, but the broad mass of its population is deeply parochial and even appallingly ignorant of larger global currents. While seemingly obscurantist, religious fundamentalism and racism have deep resonances in the American population.

This article briefly explores the political agendas of two "third political parties" in the United States, The Christian Alliance, and The Southern Party. The Christian Alliance is a Christian nationalist party that seeks to use the electoral process to bring about a "Christian theocracy" in the United States. The Southern Party is a separatist party working to elect individuals primarily to state, county, and local offices. Its purpose is to establish an independent "southern nation," similar to the historical Confederate States of America, established in the 1860s. While the first

party has potential national appeal, the second has largely regional appeal, with nevertheless broad and deep resonances outside the South. The party might also serve to encourage separatist tendencies based on identity politics in other parts of the country, such as the anti-Washington libertarian tendency in Alaska. While the Christian alliance has not yet fielded candidates, there are many candidates who run on similar themes. The Southern Party did field candidates for local offices in the 2000 election.

Another Christian political organization, The Christian Coalition, has also worked to elect "born-again Christians" to public office and had a significant impact in recruiting voters for Republican Party candidate, George W. Bush, in the November 2000 election. The Christian Coalition (CC), founded by Minister Pat Robertson in 1989, claims to have some two million supporters in 1500 local chapters in the United States. The CC distributed some 70 million voter guides in all 50 states with several million printed in Spanish. This organization is based upon political mobilization of church based groups including fund raising. It urges its members to "pray daily for our nation and for its leaders." It also encourages those with a Christian religious agenda to actually go into politics and run for public office. With national headquarters in Washington, DC, the organization has joined the ranks of thousands of other lobbyists, some 25,000 strong, who swarm across the capitol city. Claiming a so-called "pro-family" agenda, issues of the CC focus on the socially conservative issues of anti-abortion, anti-pornography, private home-based or religious education, and tax policies which encourage marriage. The group's claim to "promote free speech" is actually based on the concept that "money is speech," as ruled by the US Supreme Court, and the group has opposed efforts at campaign reform in Congress under the reasoning that its funding of Christian-oriented candidates would suffer. Clearly abortion is the one big issue for the CC with the distant goal of a Christian theocracy. [1]

An exploration of these two political tendencies at the beginning of the twentieth century shows that both fundamentalist Christian and Southern separatist tendencies have deep resonance in quite large numbers of people in the United States, and often overlap. These agendas are also a reflection of global trends toward religious nationalism and regional separatism, often grounded in ethnic or race purity. Religious nationalist sentiments in the United States are also voiced in a number of other third parties, such as the Reform Party, the American Party, the American Heritage Party, America's Party, the Constitution Party, the Family Values Party, the Prohibition Party, and the Constitutional Action Party. It may be that severe economic exploitation under neoliberalist agendas are exacerbating such tendencies both in the US and across the world.

While almost all the news and reporting about local, state, and national elections in the United States centers around the national Democratic and Republican parties

and their candidates, there are more than thirty third parties that fielded candidates in the US elections in November 2000. There are at least 48 political parties in the United States listed on the website of the Federal Electoral Commission. But there are only a handful of third parties that one is likely to come across in the US media.

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These are also the third parties that are most likely to be on the ballot, as many states have restrictive laws that make it difficult for third parties to get listed. These include the Greens Party, the Reform Party, the Libertarian Party, and the Natural Law Party. Greens Party candidate and consumer advocate Ralph Nader received the most votes of any third party, as noted above. [2] Reform Party candidate, Patrick Buchanan, however, polled less than one percent of the national vote. While these national parties were conducting national campaigns, they were excluded from the Presidential debates by the Federal Election Commission. Most candidates elected on third party tickets are elected to state and local offices. For example, the New Party has won some 200 out of 300 local races over the last five years. The Reform Party had won seven races at the state, county, or local level; the Greens had won 72, and the Constitution Party one. What the success of these parties could be if they were given a fair chance in a country starved for alternatives can only be guessed and the powers that be lack the courage to allow the people to find out.

Clearly, the political parties that exist in the United States, represent a broad range of political ideas across the political spectrum. A look at these parties is instructive and suggests that politics in America could look more like that in Europe, with the normal range of representation across the political spectrum, if the electoral system in the US could somehow be modernized similar to electoral systems in Western Europe. Who do the people who protested the WTO meeting in Seattle vote for, for example? Some for Nader, of course, but the growing anti-globalization trends can find no voice in the American political system.

One problem, of course, is that most people in the United States are not even aware of how a proportional representation system operates. For most Americans, it is merely assumed, uncritically, that the American two party-system is the best system. American voters, nevertheless, are largely alienated by the lack of viable choices and by the system itself. Votes for a third party candidate are generally "wasted" in a winner-take-all system. While the American electoral system effectively vetoes the participation of extremist parties, such as the two discussed here, it also does essentially the same for parties such as the Greens and the Social Democrats of America with progressive ideas. Modern electoral systems using proportional representation and the D'hondt system go a great distance in eliminating the wasted vote problem, depending upon the threshold required for winning, and generally make electoral systems more democratic.

When looking at the range of third parties in the United States in 2000, one sees several major tendencies. Among these are the green or environmental tendency, the

libertarian tendency, the right-wing populist tendency, the Christian nationalist tendency, the southern separatist tendency, the soft left tendency, the left populist tendency, and the traditional hard left tendency. In other words, there is a healthy range of ideas in the political arena, but these tend to be drowned out in the big-media preoccupation with the two center-right parties. Indeed, even the Greens Party candidate Ralph Nader was largely ignored by the press. Third parties practically go unmentioned in the press, for the most part. Compared to European political systems, it is clear that the American political spectrum is skewed sharply to the Right, with the left parties largely small and marginalized. It can be argued that the US political system is actually a one party system with rule by one or the other wings of the "business party" that represents the interests of corporate America. The winner take all, first past the post, system admirably guarantees that whoever wins, big business wins. There were some indications in 2001, however, that the popularity of the left in the US was on the rebound as opposition to the World Trade Organization and corporate-control globalization gained strength in the United States, Europe, and indeed around the world. In any event, it can no longer be plausibly charged that ideas about helping workers and the poor emanate from the Kremlin, as during the Cold War.

The Christian Alliance:

The Christian Alliance was previously named the Puritan Party and is founded upon a platform of "re-establishing the moral law of God as the foundation of our civil government." The Party is based in Rochester, New York, from where the party has hopes to build a national headquarters and enter campaigning seriously with a run for the New York governor's office in 2002. Perhaps not surprising, coming from a Puritan base, the party's concerns tend to center around issues of sex and taxes. The agenda of the party includes rolling back the right of women to an abortion, encouraging sexual abstinence, opposing the extension of rights to gays, limiting the use of drugs, rolling back income taxes, bringing about universal health care, and "protecting the environment." It is necessary to examine these issues in more detail as a number of serious contradictions arise between the planks of the party platform.

It is clear that this group has broken off from the Republican Party, which most members have supported in recent years, but are now disillusioned with a party they see pursuing an agenda that is too secular for their liking. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that most of them voted for George W. Bush in 2000. The party claims that its adherents' lives are "God-Centered" and that they are "born again." [3] In terms of where their followers come from, 61 percent are from the Republican Party, six percent from the Reform Party, some 33 percent from no party affiliation, and none from the Democratic Party. So clearly they come from right-wing parties. In terms

of denomination, one-half of the group claims to be non-denominational. Of the rest, heavily represented are Baptists, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics, with smaller numbers from the Church of God, Methodist and Mormon churches. The figures given for the various denominations, however, do not add up, so the relative percentages are uncertain. It is also significant that 78 percent of this group say they vote, which is considerably higher than the average of less than 50 percent in the entire population. [4]

The principle evils which the members of the Christian Alliance see in America are gun control, abortion, Democrats, who are actually "socialists," the sixties rebellion, government regulation, government (public) education, the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, "humanism," the Federal Reserve (national bank of the US), homosexuality, the ban on prayer in public schools, the weakening traditional family structure, culture wars, "political correctness," and the content of film and TV. Increasing poverty of the "poor and working poor" in the US is decried as unjust, and "the shame of our nation" when there is so much economic gain. The party sees the problem as lack of access to education and support taxpayer-supported four-year university education programs. [5]

The Attack on Secular Humanism:

There is a trend seen in the Christian Alliance that is similar to religious nationalist parties in other parts of the world, such as the Islamist Parties in Turkey and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. [6] While denouncing secular humanism and its principles in the strongest terms, it claims to be the only de facto secular party in the country. This is similar to the argument that one finds in the religious nationalist parties in India and Turkey. So the Christian Alliance adherents claim to be the real supporters of church and state. However, the party goes on to distort the historic meaning of this principle as well as the interpretation of the courts in the United States.

In its platform, the Christian Alliance claims that its members are the real supporters of separation of church and state, accusing the US Government of violating this principle by "meddling" in religious affairs. In the platform, party founders cite the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, authored by Thomas Jefferson. This, they note is "one of the most important separationist documents of the eighteenth century." But they argue that the Government violates the principle by (a) defining what a religion is for tax purposes (b) interfering with freedom of assembly, where Christians just want to speak their minds freely and (c) legislating "anti-religious laws, that effectively prevent citizens from practicing their religious faith at all." While it is not always clearly spelled out what these objections refer to, it is clear that prohibitions on prayer and biblical teaching in public schools is a central objection. Also it refers to the right to wear and display religious articles in

public schools and in the work place. Public property must be made available for religious gatherings and also the right to display religious art on public grounds.[7] Here the party is referring primarily to the Christmas creche scenes on courthouse lawns. They qualify this last position with the statement: “provided the particular representation does not imply a government endorsement of what it represents.” Yet if the scene appears on government property, it is difficult to see how it would not imply just that. The thrust of the argument is that Thomas Jefferson is on one’s side if one is religious and wants to run for public office as a Christian. “If you are a Christian, you may even speak as a Christian and perform as a Christian in service to those who elected you.” As we will argue below, this turns Jefferson on his head and actually reverses the purpose of his famous statute for religious freedom.

The interpretation of separation of church and state by the Christian Alliance is not at all consistent with that of the US Supreme Court. The Christian Alliance asserts that “Separation of church and state does not mean to stop politicians from religious [practice] while they are on duty. It doesn’t mean that you cannot speak at a [public school] commencement if you refer to God. You can preach the Gospel if you choose to do so. All that you must be careful of doing is [not] causing physical injury to someone.” However, this is far from the US Supreme Court rulings that the Government cannot aid the propagation of religion with public moneys. The US Supreme Court has consistently ruled that the Government cannot sponsor religion.

In fact the trend to smuggle religion into the public sphere is all too common from the center to the extreme right of the political spectrum in the US. For a number of years the Republican Party has benefited from the votes of fundamentalist Christians, even while being dominated by secular “country-club” wealthy officials and members who use the religious right-wing fringe as a vote bank. The Democratic Party’s choosing of a Jewish candidate, Senator Joseph Lieberman, as Al Gore’s vice presidential running mate was another aspect of this trend. The Republicans should not have a monopoly on the religious card. The Jewish vote is very important to the Democrats. Shortly after being nominated at the Democratic National Convention, Joseph Lieberman stated that “the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.” [8] He argued that the US Constitution does not outlaw government endorsement of religious ideology in general.

But these arguments actually turn Jefferson on his head. Jefferson and those lobbying for a “religious freedom” bill were “dedicated rationalists” and “disciples of the Enlightenment.” Freedom from religion was very much a part of what they desired. What the “Establishment Clause” and the “Free Exercise Clause” of the US Constitution say is that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Jefferson’s famous 1802 letter said that the purpose was to build “a wall of separation between church and state.”

For Jefferson, and others who wanted to limit the power of established sects, the problem was the government-established churches in the colonies. As a result of most colonies having established churches, other denominations as well as rationalists like Jefferson, were not free from the clutches of the church. Many, such as Catholics, were persecuted and harassed. Quakers were sometimes sent to jail. The Baptists were out of favor with the dominant Protestant sects. If a sect was a minority in a certain area, members were likely to be persecuted. Everyone had to pay tithes and taxes to the official church, whether they believed the doctrine or not. The established churches preached inflammatory sermons against the non-official denominations and their members.

For James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, freedom of conscience and religion were inherent rights of the individual. As a result of Madison's Bill, "Virginia's Declaration of Rights," which was passed in the Virginia Assembly, the Episcopal Church was denied its tithes, previously collected by law. In 1784, after the Revolutionary War, the Episcopal Church attempted to get its taxes back through an assessment bill. The bill provided for a religious tax to support education but the taxpayer could designate which church was to receive his tax. In other words, the bill provided for "freedom of religion" but not "freedom from religion." One of the strongest supporters of the Assessment Bill was the famous patriot Patrick Henry.

It was this bill which Madison radically opposed in his published "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments." It is exceeding clear, in this document, that Madison is indeed talking about "freedom from religion." Madison asserted that "religion... of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as he may dictate. This right is in its nature an unalienable right, It is unalienable, because the opinion of men, depending only on the evidence contemplated by their own minds, cannot follow the dictates of other men." Accordingly, "in matters of religion, no man's right is abridged by the institution of civil society, and that religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance." He continued to assert that "rulers who are guilty of such encroachment" are "tyrants" and "people who submit to it...are slaves." So government sponsorship of religion, in Madison's view violates "that equality which ought to be the basis of every law." Further... "we cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yielded to the evidence which has convinced us."

While the Pilgrims came to America for "religious freedom," that religious freedom was interpreted in many of the individual colonies as meaning the right to establish an official religion and pass legislation compelling others to pay taxes to support that religious denomination and even to attend church services periodically. At least eight of the thirteen colonies had established churches. There were established religions in four of the other five colonies. For rationalists, such a situation was intolerable in a free country.

Instead of the Assessment Bill, it was Thomas Jefferson's bill, "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom," that was actually passed. This law provided "that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened, in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or beliefs." This law became the basis for the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Tracing this history makes it abundantly clear that indeed it is exactly freedom from religion that the First Amendment provides.

This has been made clear, moreover, in many US Supreme Court cases. In the case of *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) Justice Hugo Black explained that the Establishment Clause means at least that a government "neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion...Neither a state nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa..." And "the US Supreme Court has refused to tolerate any governmental preference for religious views over non-religious views."

It is clear that the arguments and positions of the Christian Alliance depart radically from US Supreme Court decisions going back more than fifty years. The court has consistently struck down prayers in public schools funded by moneys from taxpayers. In *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) the Court invalidated a New York law that mandated a "non-denominational" prayer at the beginning of the school day. In *Epperson v. State of Arkansas* (1968), the Court ruled that an Arkansas law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in public schools is unconstitutional. The Court stated that the "Government must be neutral in matters of religious theory, doctrine and practice." In *Wallace v. Jaffree* (1985) the Court ruled that an Alabama Statute authorizing a daily period of silence in the public schools violated the Establishment Clause. In another case, *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, the Court ruled that a public High School cannot allow voluntary student prayers over its loudspeaker systems at football games. In the latter case, there were three dissenting judges. However, a small change in the composition of the Supreme Court today could possibly tip the balance to the type of rulings the fundamentalist Christians desire in terms of prayer in tax funded public schools. This may well happen under President George W. Bush.

Clearly a central concern of fundamentalist Christians in recent years has been the US Supreme Court's rulings in these cases, frustrating their efforts to get "God back into the public schools." But in their arguments on what the First Amendment means, their arguments are totally out of keeping with either its historical origins or the rulings of the US Supreme Court. While the Christian Alliance asserts in its platform that the Government has turned the First Amendment upside down, it is quite clear that it is the fundamentalists who desire to turn the First Amendment

upside down. The Christian Alliance charges that the Government is not only hostile toward Jewish and Christian faiths, but toward Islam as well, which constitutes persecution. This is a similar theme seen in religious fundamentalist parties elsewhere as well.

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Curiously, however, while arguing that the First Amendment covers all they desire for the practice of religion in political life, the Christian Alliance puts forward the proposal for a constitutional amendment that would further define the First Amendment. This, in fact, is the function of the courts, in the US governmental system as it has historically operated. This amendment would prohibit all branches of government from interfering in the religious practices of people and recognize the right of individuals to worship and practice religion in whatever manner they so choose. These are, in fact, what the First Amendment has guaranteed, with some exceptions such as ritual sacrifice and smoking drugs, such as peyote, for religious purposes. When one looks further at the agenda of the Christian fundamentalists, one understands that their demands actually go beyond separation and center around using religion in the public and political sphere.

For example, there would be a mandated five minutes (no less) "moment of silence" in all public schools. Teachers or school officials may not lead the class in spoken prayer or contemplation during this period. This provision has already been ruled unconstitutional in the Alabama case. A relevant question is how to keep students, who are supposed to be praying or meditation, quiet for a full five minutes, which is not a short time with young students. It is not clear why this activity should not be carried out elsewhere or privately in the home if the parent believes it necessary for their child.

In fact, it is abundantly clear that the Party has no intention of separating church and state. This is made very clear in the statements of the party. The statement of principles reads: "We, the members of the Christian Alliance, challenge the cult of the secular state to recognize the inherent order of nature and the ingenuous authority of nature's God...without the light which the Gospel of Jesus Christ sheds upon both God and man, societies very easily usurp their natural order and embrace tyranny." [9] The Party claims that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a necessary guide to ensure the "natural order" and a "just society." A just society "guarantees that individuals and groups attain what is due to them according to their nature and calling." While it is not clear exactly what individuals would be entitled to, the Party claims to want a "just society." Christians not only are free to "interact with government"; they have an obligation to do so.

While some of the arguments made by the party are confused and not well thought out, it is clear that the party believes that there is a place for legislating "morality" as long as it is the right morality. The problem, in the Party's view, is that the "morality" that the "government legislates" at the present time is the wrong one.

While claiming to be liberal, the Party's rhetoric is misleading on other questions such as a secularism and homosexuality. While the party supports a "right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," it does not approve of gays, the guarantee of a secular curriculum in schools, freedom in films and TV and the dissent of the "sixties generation." However, the party also speaks of a system that would not only guarantee property, but a good degree of social welfare, but perhaps only as long as one is a Christian believer. One has the right "not to be the property of another" and to determine one's self interests. Also one is to enjoy the "Right to safety and bodily integrity from the moment of conception to natural death." This means, of course, no right for a woman to an abortion but neglects the case where the life of the fetus must be sacrificed if the life of the mother is to be saved. Party founders also speak of the right to food, clothing, shelter, education, and medical care. Also the right to work for a just wage, the right to rest from weekly labor, and the right to property is supported. The Party claims the right to worship, think, and speak in accordance with one's conscience. The right to assemble, freely associate with whomever one chooses, to form social organizations, and move freely within society. As with other religious parties, these planks tend to make the party appear to be more liberal than it is in practice.

Numerous articles and position pieces on the Christian Alliance website make it clear that the party agenda is to bring religion and religious teachings into the public and governmental spheres. The founders argue that "we must allow God (through our party if it is his will) to raise up a holy standard through righteous leadership...God leads, we obey...David was picked as a lowly shepherd to become king...the individual or group are placing themselves and their platform under Christ's scrutiny in every tiniest detail...his commandments will keep us on course..."

According to the Party's "Principle of Solidarity," power comes from the ground up, the grassroots, with the right to participate in making decisions. Collectivism, however, is outlawed, as it is "incompatible with civilized society as the individual is subordinated to the state." The only means of social change is "inner conversion" by "God's Grace" that "enables "justice and compassion." The traditional family is the building block to lasting civil order. Marriage aims at "producing and raising children." It is the "basis for a free society." Therefore, "the institution benefits all persons, regardless of lifestyle, and must be legally protected." While it is not clear what this statement means, it clearly reflects the social conservatism of the Party.

The "principle of solidarity" states that "the individual is responsible for the well-being of society through morality and charity, while society has reciprocal duties to the individual person." This would seem to relieve the government of most of the responsibility for social welfare. It is stated that "all forms of racism and hate are intolerable" as well as anti-Semitic and anti-Christian bigotry. However, in

practice, the Party itself engages in a good deal of bigotry against secular humanists and those with a gay lifestyle.

Further, "Christians must follow the teachings of Christ in faith, words and behavior." The Party speaks of the "inherent dignity of humans," which must not be diminished. "Individuals cannot be made to pay for the "degradation of society." This seems to be a reference to tax money that goes to practices the Party does not approve, such as abortion clinics, or even public schools that teach "secular humanism."

The "Principle of Stewardship" also leads to ideas about the preservation of the environment. The individual and society is "responsible for the material wealth in their possession." The Party states that "individuals and societies must not use property and produce such that it harms the property or produce of others." Care must be taken against pollution of the soil, air and water, "within all reasonable means while simultaneously promoting greater individual freedom in providing alternative means which are less harmful." It is not possible to know what this means. The principle, fine in itself, can readily be abused when the bottom line of capitalist society is profits.

Also, "human charity must be promoted that does not prohibit nor restrict the freedom of groups and individuals." This is clearly meant to imply less taxes for welfare. The highest degree of care must be taken in the use of taxes, with accountability and not waste. It is not clear how the group would deal with the fact that some 200 billion dollars a year of the federal budget in the US goes to large corporations as subsidies.

There is also a "Principle of Precedence" by which "higher rights outweigh the lower rights of another." An individual's right to pursue happiness (fulfillment) may be outweighed when such pursuit infringes upon the life or liberty of another. "The individual's right to life may never be outweighed except when it directly infringes upon the life of another." This is, apparently, meant to be a restriction upon abortion.

In sum, many of the Party's principles are not well thought out and often contradictory, but tend to parallel the trend found in fundamentalist parties whether Christian, Islamist or Hindu in different parts of the world. While claiming to uphold liberal political values, the Party pursues a conservative social agenda that militates against individual freedom. The Party, while criticizing the secular state is ready to use the state to enforce its own version of morality on the population.

The Southern Party: A Southern Nationalist Party

There is more than one regional party in the American South that still has visions of an independent south. This southern nation would embrace all of the states of the historical Confederate States of America and more. The goal of the party is complete

independence from the United States. So to the extent that a member runs for national office, it is primarily with this purpose in mind. Jerry Baxley, Chairman of the Southern Party, openly advocates the creation of a new "southern nation." The slogan of the Party is: "A Real Choice for the People of Dixie." [10]

Jerry Baxley, the Chairman of the party is described as a "Native Virginian," from Richmond, Virginia and claims to be a descendent of Thomas Jefferson. He attended a community college and took courses at the University of Richmond and also received an auctioneering license from the Mendenhall School of Auctioneering. He is a gun dealer who owns and runs several businesses, a Southern Baptist who teaches Sunday school classes and was a Republican under Ronald Reagan.

A major statement of the Party was laid out by its founder, George P. Kalas, at the inaugural kick off at Flat Rock, North Carolina, on 7 August, 1999. Kalas asserted that "...134 years after the shotgun wedding at Appomattox, the Southern Nation is rising again." The old saying that the "South will rise again" is a prophecy of Jefferson Davis, the President of the old Confederate States of America. There is also the claim that "southern freedom" would reassert itself, which signifies freedom from the US Government.

The Southern Party draws inspiration from the rise of The Parti Quebecois in Canada for Quebec independence. The Southern Party claims that only eight percent in Quebec favored independence when the party was launched but the vote increased to 49.4 percent in 1995. In the South, the Party points to a University of North Carolina poll which asked the question: "If it could be done without war, the south would be better off as a separate country today." The result showed that some 17 percent of southerners agreed, while another seven percent said they were not sure. This leads the Party to believe that about one in five would like to be free from Washington. The argument is that the South has a right, like the independent states of the former USSR, to independence, and like Quebec in Canada. They argue that if Britain can give the right to Scotland to secede, then the US must also admit to the right. They are inspired by the Parti Quebecois and the Scottish Nationalist Party. The Party also argues that for the immediate future, the model should be the Welsh Nationalist Party, which advocates home rule. And if the South was prevented from exercising this right, it would mean that the people of the US had less right of self determination than the people of the former Soviet Union in 1991. The Party claims that it does not favor the overthrow of the US Government but would like to encourage other regional parties in New England, Alaska, Hawaii, and the Rocky Mountain States to press for independence.

The Civil War (1861-65), in the Party's view, was "the war of northern aggression" in which the South fought to "defend its independence from an invading foreign power." The Party points out that for over half a century, the US Government

refused to recognize the forced annexation of the Baltic nations to the USSR, because they did not join the Soviet Union freely. But this is exactly what happened to the South in their view. They see the destruction by Lincoln's armies, burning of towns and the University of Alabama, for example, as similar to the unlawful overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy by the US Government in 1893. The Party argues that the constitutionality of the act has never been tested in the US Supreme Court. What the Supreme Court did rule, however, was that the South was never, de facto, a separate nation.

According to Kalas, "...our people have been subjected to 134 years of relentless propaganda designed to instill in each of us the false doctrine that state secession is prohibited." But it is claimed that the southern people have not lost the sense of "national identity." They speak of a "renaissance in Southern heritage." "Dixie took its rightful place amongst the family of nations and struggled violently against incredible odds to defend its right to self determination." [11] Clearly, many in the South are still fighting the Civil War.

What sort of nation would a separate south be? The Party clearly intends to go back to the old constitution of the Confederate States of America, except for the references to slavery, they claim. This constitution would be more free, they claim, than the present regime. They also claim that the Party is not racist and that the Confederate flag will stand for everyone in the South, not just for whites. The Party also claims to denounce hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). However, it is likely that one would find that many who are the leaders of this Party are secretly members of the Klan. The organization remains widespread in the United States.

The Southern Party is involved in the campaign to display the confederate flag (St. Andrews Cross). This was the historical Confederate Battle Flag and many southerners claim the right to display it anywhere. To many southerners, it is considered a Christian Cross. The Southern Party claims that it is a symbol of Southern sovereignty, valor, and independence. It appears on auto license plates and state flags in some states of the South. Individuals replicate it with stickers placed on automobiles, toolboxes and clothing, and also flags over businesses. This frequently leads to confrontation as it is directly considered a symbol of southern slavery by many, particularly blacks. Display of this flag is opposed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and a struggle continues with an organized boycott of businesses run by the NAACP. White Southerners have reacted with demonstrations in front of NAACP offices in several southern states. This sort of racism is just what one would expect in the South and gives the lie to the Party claim that it is for "all southerners" and not racist. Anyone who stands up for their rights against the traditional southern planter aristocracy is quickly ostracized. In the old days blacks would have put their lives in danger in any sort of protest and still do to a considerable extent. [12]

Another aspect of the ongoing struggle is the practice of flying the Confederate Flag, or versions of it, over the state houses in some southern states. In fact, some of the state flags were changed, after Reconstruction, to incorporate the Confederate Flag. This is true of South Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida and Alabama. The emblem that is offensive to blacks and the NAACP is the St. Andrews Cross. Civil rights leaders see the cross as a symbol of slavery and racial hatred and have launched efforts to change the flag in Mississippi and Georgia. In fact, the state of Georgia included the Confederate Flag emblem only as recently as 1955, after the US Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. This decision ruled that the southern system of separate public schools for blacks and whites was unconstitutional. The state legislature at this time was all male and all white. At this time, blacks and civil rights leaders launched a city bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. In the case of South Carolina, the state started flying the confederate flag in 1962 as a celebration of the Civil War Centennial. In Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi, the inclusion of the St. Andrews Cross, in the state flag, dates from the 1890s. In Mississippi, there is a movement to change the flag to the "Magnolia Flag" which was adopted on March 30, 1861 when the state joined the Confederate States of America. This says something about the psychology of the movement. It is also significant that the Confederate Flag is often used by the KKK and racist skinheads.

Today, the Confederate Flag is flying over a confederate memorial ground at the South Carolina Capital, instead of on the Capitol dome, where it flew until recently. [13] The Southern Party claim to not be "racist," is clearly misleading. Race is still the issue that drives even mainstream politics in the south of the US and the Southern Party on the right wing fringe is driven even more fiercely by this issue. The party accuses the NAACP of waging "economic warfare against the people of the South of all colors." While it is racists who have flouted the Confederate symbol, now the party tries to turn the charge around and accuse the NAACP of "blatant racism of the worst stripe" against whites. They charge that the attack on the Confederate Flag is "ethnic-based culture cleansing" and that it hurts blacks as well as the whites. However, it must be said that whites do not have a good record of being concerned with hurting blacks, in the South. This is disingenuous as southern politics has always been driven by race and race hatred and this gave rise to organizations such as the NAACP. Historically, states such as Mississippi have bent over backward to deprive the black population of their rights to benefits from the Federal Government, such as the benefits provided by the New Deal of the 1930s, funneling payments, instead, to the white landowners.

The Southern Party has called upon everyone to fly the Confederate Flag from homes and businesses. They argue that the flag should not be abolished just because of its historical association with slavery. They point out that under the US Flag, the US Army prosecuted a war of extermination against the Native Americans in the 19th Century. This is historically accurate. According to Kalas, the "...flag of Dixie

stands as a powerful symbol of opposition to the tyranny of the majority and centralized government." For the Party, efforts to ban or curb use of the confederate flag is "cultural genocide." A "...ceaseless campaign of cultural genocide against the revered, historic, symbols of Dixie's national sovereignty." It is "politically correct fascism."

One can observe the confused thinking of the Southern Party by looking at the statement of a Southern Party Candidate for the US House of Representatives in the Third Congressional District of Oklahoma. The area is also known as "Little Dixie." The candidate is Argus W. Yandell, Jr. of Stillwater, Oklahoma who was in the US Air Force for four years. He talks about the Dust Bowl days in Oklahoma in the 1930s and says that Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal of assistance to rural areas saved Oklahoma. But he believes that in the long run, it has left a negative legacy. He sees rural assistance during the Great Depression as "Socialist." In reality, of course, Roosevelt was acting to save the capitalist system. Yandell believes the Dust Bowl assistance brought "the absolute power of the Democratic Party," as "huge government agencies come into the state and saved the day." He argues that the assistance was "simply handouts paid for by the taxpaying citizens who worked hard for the freedom of capitalism and individual sovereignty."

Here, it seems, there is a failure to understand the workings of the US economy as capital was accumulated to build industry on the backs of the surplus raised by farmers, like those in Oklahoma. The land was foreclosed and the farmers were forced to migrate to California for work to survive after losing their land. John Steinbeck showed that the farmers were alienated by the capitalist economic forces which they had no control over.

For Yandell, "These socialist and un-American hand outs have continued today instead of making a commitment to better Oklahomans." In light of this, a rather odd statement follows. "They are now living in a Third world state that leads the country in child poverty." Undoubtedly, an honest and accurate observation, but one wonders how this was caused by any sort of "socialism". The implication is that without the New Deal, this corner of Oklahoma would be fat and prosperous. The dynamic of depleting local areas of capital might be found in the dynamics of US capitalism itself, and the new deal actually recycled an insignificant part of the capital back to the local areas. A drop in the bucket compared to the accumulation over the years of continued market exploitation of the local farmers.

Continuing in this vein, former US Speaker Carl Albert, who occupied the seat for some thirty years (1946-56) is said to be at fault for government "bureaucracy of inefficiency and largesse." Yandell claims that it is a high tax rate that caused the poverty rate to rise to 47 percent in Choctaw. As in large stretches of small towns in rural America, many homes in this area of Oklahoma are literally falling down. It should be noted, however, that this trend was greatly accelerated during the Reagan

era of the 1990s when subsidies to farmers were cut back drastically. Drugs (methamphetamine labs) have appeared in the area and the divorce rate is said to be 60 percent. He notes that "both parents work for little or nothing and rely on the Government to get by." The educational system has grown worse. Why? "As a result of immoral socialist policies, we must now tear down the government and rid the people of these evil taxes that are disguised as holy and good." He goes on to assert that "...the extreme socialist and immoral policies of the Democrats in economics relies on high taxes and redistribution of wealth." It sounds like precisely what his county could use, if indeed there was some redistribution of the wealth to the people. In fact, the major result of the capitalist system has indeed been redistribution of wealth; not a leveling but in the direction of greater inequality.

The Democrats are accused of being immoral. "Even more extreme is the Democrat's insistence on tolerance of evil." The Democrats "promote homosexuality, abortion, contraception, and evolution..."

It is also interesting that such parties have expressed outrage over the US bombing of Serbia on the basis that it is "a Christian and white population" when no such protest was heard over such countries as Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Vietnam and so on. They (the federal government) "have the temerity to bomb the sovereign nation of Serbia killing and maiming innocent women and children." Were the Party to apply the insight consistently, it would indeed be a useful observation.

Yandell claims to believe that voters will rally to the Southern Party ideas of low taxes, morality, maximum individual freedom, and southern nationalism. Of course, at least three of these are claimed by both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party as well. Southern nationalism, which means southern independence, seems to be the only distinction.

The contested seat was held by Wes Watkins who had been there since 1970. A Democrat now turned Republican, his policies, as would be expected, mirror those of Yandell except for secession of the "Southern Nation" and his acceptance of social welfare. Conservative on the military, tax cuts, morality; favoring the right to fire arms; and liberal on education, health care and social security. But in spite of the social welfare, it is claimed that child poverty went from 8 percent to 17 percent under Watkins and may be as high as 30 percent in rural areas. Yandell also points out that his opponent is spending some one million dollars on his reelection campaign. One must agree that this is one of the more obscene aspects of the system when such poverty exists in many such rural districts. It is less than clear, however, why we are supposed to believe that things in this quarter would be better under Yandell, the Southern nationalist, but he clearly believes he is on a divine mission. "Our crusade is God blessed and cannot be stopped. God Save the South and God Save Oklahoma." "The Southern Party is everything...our goal is saving our heritage and our people."

While the Southern Party has no official platform, the party takes the following positions on issues near and dear to them. Most followers are extremely conservative. The two overriding objectives are states rights (expanding of the 10th Amendment which reserves rights to the states) and "restoring the unique cultural, social, and religious foundations of the Southern people." The list of objectives include: 1. The devolution of power to the states. 2. "Defending the Bill of Rights." 3. "Moral Leadership." 4. No wars without a Congressional declaration of war. 5. A policy of neutrality in the world. 6. Overturning *Roe v. Wade* (the US Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in 1973). 7. The Right to own guns. 8. Freedom of Association. 9. Property rights. 10. Ending income tax (16th Amendment) and abolition of the IRS. [This would be a blow to the big farmers of the southern state of Mississippi who collect up to a million dollars a year on federal subsidies.] 11. A moratorium on immigration. (Even though more and more labor is being done by cheap Mexican labor in the south.) 12. Home schooling and other private schooling. 13. Freedom of Religion from government. 14. A sound monetary system, backed by tangible commodities. (Presumably meaning the gold standard.) 15. Opposing schemes of the radical environmentalists as these deny citizens their God-given dominion over the land and all its creatures. The Party speaks of "sound stewardship...against paving over with shopping centers. (The Party does not mention big private business as a factor.)

While the goal is independence for the Southern Nation, the Party believes it could take decades or, on the other hand, come relatively rapidly. "God will work his will in his own way." There seems to be a sort of Christian historicism going on here. The party leaders, as noted above, believe they are on a divine mission. This will be pursued by electing Southern nationalist candidates for public offices at state and local levels in sixteen southern states. "The overriding goal of the Party is to secure popular, electoral mandates for peaceful, lawful and orderly secession from the American union by each of the sixteen states. Once achieved, it is the Party's further intention to orchestrate a constitutional convention of the seceding states so that the Confederate States of America may be restored as the lawful confederate government of the southern nation." Until that time, the "Southern Party is dedicated to advancing the national interests of the people of Dixie....working tirelessly for the devolution of power from the Federal Government back to the states." They "...demand that the federal government operate as a Republic and not like an Empire...[and] guard our unique Southern cultural heritage and national character...We believe that the Southern nation, in the absence of full independence from the Yankee Government in Washington, will ultimately be homogenized out of existence by social and political forces that we cannot successfully resist so long as we remain a political minority within a Yankee, mercantilist empire, where Dixie's political representatives in the US Congress are always outvoted by two to one margins in Washington." This statement reminds one of the concerns and fears of

such communalistic parties that fear secularism such as the BJP in India of various Islamic religious nationalist movements who fear the loss of their religious identity under modernization and secularization. "Only through full political independence and the establishment of a new Southern Confederacy can the Southern dream of peace, prosperity and liberty be fully realized."

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Another small party of similar goals calls itself "The Confederate Party." It is for "states rights and abolishing the IRS. This party claims to believe "in a government that our founding fathers designed." "Americans should not be enslaved," they assert. Perhaps they forget that this is exactly what the founding fathers allowed, particularly under John C. Calhoun's principle of states rights in the South. They speak of the "unalienable right to life, liberty, property and pursuit of happiness by defending the Constitution of the United States of America." The Southern Party would abolish the IRS and establish a national sales tax. This method of taxation, of course, is very regressive and tends to militate most harshly against the acquisition of property by the poorest members of society.

Both the Christian Alliance and the Southern Party have charged that the Democratic Party is "socialist." In a similar way, the Refah Party (Welfare Party, closed in 1998) in Turkey claimed that all other parties in Turkey, even the right-wing ones were "socialist." Antistatist when it comes to the secular state, such parties conceal an antiliberal agenda and a totalitarian mindset. They wish to use the machinery of the state to enforce their agenda upon others once power is grasped. While using the language of "democracy," they are, in fact, deeply hostile to the values of democracy.

Conclusion:

The Christian Alliance and the Southern Party are two parties in the right-wing political fringe of the American political spectrum. They represent obscurantism, social conservatism, a yearning for theocratic rule and political reaction. The sentiments of these parties are based upon broad and deep ignorance, in general, and of the larger world; they are deeply parochial. Given the electoral system, these tendencies that are broader and deeper than is evident, must play themselves out in the Democratic and Republican parties. But while marginalized, the sentiments represented by these parties resonate broader and wider than the influence of these parties would indicate. The religious profile of the United States, which is largely cut off from more secularist currents from Europe, resembles closely that of a poor third world country with a repressed and alienated population (namely Iran). Political reaction has also strengthened with the skewing of the political spectrum further to the Right. The two parties coalesce around the agendas of private religious schooling and the reduction of power of the secular federal government. It is clear that the religious tendency has had some significant impact on the George W. Bush Presidency.

While these tendencies seem to be quite marginal to the political spectrum, they are broader and more central than is generally acknowledged. Southern politics is still driven by race and George W. Bush has moved to cut back social spending and urge "faith-based initiatives." These may violate the US Constitution but are close to the heart of the Christian nationalists who have much to do with George W. Bush's base of support. Ignorance and the loathing of intellectuals, as well as learning and thinking, in general, resonate deeply among the mainstream of southerners; they are naturally attracted to such traits. It can be argued that the two political tendencies explored here have deep roots in mainstream America.

Notes:

<http://www.cc.org>

Federal Election Commission. <http://www.fec.gov>

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Nitish Dutt and Eddie J. Girdner, "Challenging the Rise of Nationalist-Religious Parties in India and Turkey," *Contemporary South Asia*, 9 (1) 2000, pp. 7-24.

Eddie J. Girdner, "The Twilight of Refah: Turkey and the Islamist Welfare Party," *Scandinavian Journal of Development Alternatives and Area Studies*, 18 (4), Dec. 1999, pp. 31-49. Refah (Welfare) Party was closed in January 1998. The Fazilet (Virtue) Party was closed in July 2001 and has been reorganized as the Saadet (Contentment) Party. The Party split in August 2001, the new party named the Justice and Development Party (Ak Partesi).

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The following material is taken from documents on the website of the Southern National Committee, which includes issues of *The Southern Party Newsletter*. Aug. 1, Aug. 7 and Sept. 2, 2000.

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Dave Williams, "Flag Debate Spreading Across Deep South," *Savannah Morning News*, (no date).