

The Right-wing Imperative, the Republican Party, and Trump By Steven Jonas

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Introduction: Trump's racism, misogyny, Islamophobia, xenophobia and homophobia: anything new, for a Republican? No, not in terms of policy. But the attempts have always been made to cover these things up, to introduce "deniability." The strategy/tactic goes back 50 years, under the hood of the "Rightward Imperative." Trump has just undressed Repub. doctrine in public, taken the hood off as it were, bringing it all out into the open.

In the wake of Charlottesville and the Trumpite response to it, the question can be asked, how far back does racism go in the Republican Party? In 1962, a young Republican lawyer named William Rehnquist was personally found, by a U.S. Assistant Attorney and an FBI agent, to be attempting to interfere with the voting rights of minority persons in Phoenix, AZ. He was not charged. Rehnquist, who became a prominent supporter of Barry Goldwater of Arizona in the 1964 Presidential election, denied that the incident ever took place, although there is written evidence that it did.

In neither of his subsequent confirmation hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, on his nomination to the Supreme Court by Richard Nixon in 1971, nor his nomination for Chief Justice by Ronald Reagan in 1986, was he questioned about the incident. If he had been, and he had denied that it happened, a future Chief Justice of the Supreme Court apparently would have been committing perjury. But his support for Goldwater, the Republican Presidential nominee in 1964, was entirely consistent with his racist activities in 1962. For one thing, Goldwater had famously voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Beginning shortly after he was first elected President in 1968, as is well-known, Richard Nixon began implanting what he openly termed the "Southern Strategy" into the marrow of the Republican Party. It entailed moving the Party in the direction of making racism central to their policy-making (while all the while denying that that is what they were doing), so that, following the Democrats' enactment of strong civil rights legislation and subsequent policies, the Repubs. could take over the South politically. Then, in his confessional after he was released from prison, John Erlichman, Nixon's top domestic policy advisor, admitted that the so-called "Drug War" really had nothing to do with drugs but rather with being able to actively discriminate against and imprison significant numbers of African-Americans without appearing to do so: a furtherance of racist policy, but still at least in part sub rosa.

The first campaign stop that Ronald Reagan made following his nomination for President by the Republican Party in 1980 was to the tiny hamlet of Philadelphia, MS. The village is significant only because it is the place that three northern civil rights workers were murdered by a white gang, including members of law enforcement, in the "Freedom Summer" of 1964. (I happened to know one of them a bit, a younger high-school mate named Andrew Goodman.) Nothing outright, but very symbolic to those Southerners who took note of such things.

That was followed by his usage of such terms, during his Presidency, by such terms as "welfare queen," and "young bucks" when referring to young black men. (When following the shooting of Ronald Reagan by John Hinckley, Jr. on a Washington, DC street, when one African-American passerby was asked by a radio reporter if she thought that Hinckley had done anything wrong, she replied, "he missed." African-Americans knew which side Reagan was on.) Furthermore, Reagan was the first Republican President to open the Party's doors to the Religious Right, eventually leading to the famous, wide-open "culture war" speeches of Pat Robertson and Pat Buchanan at the 1992 Republican National Convention (see Chapter 4 of my book, *The 15% Solution*).

And so it went. Beginning with Nixon, potential Republican candidates have found that the best way to secure their party's nomination for virtually any position was to move steadily to the right, continually attempting to outflank their intra-party opponents on those issues. In the event, the "moderate" Republicans of an earlier time, like Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Senator Jacob Javits were left far behind. And numbers of Republicans who out-flanked the Rockefellers

and the Javits' to the right, were themselves outflanked in later years. The Rightward Imperative became the key to success in intra-Republican Party politics. I have been writing on this subject for many years. But why has this occurred? As I said back in 2010 (modified a bit for this column):

"The Republicans do have real policies on many of the serious, substantive, problems facing the country. The problem for them is that they can hardly run on them. The GOP represents major sectors of the US economy: the extractive industries, the military industrial complex, the prison-industrial complex, corporate agriculture, the "health" insurance and pharmaceutical industries, and so on. But [at least until Trump --- see below] they could and can hardly run on a platform of 'let the oil and coal companies do whatever they want to, we want the rich to get richer, donchaknow,' "we want to export as much American capital overseas where it can make larger profits than it can here, so we really want to de-industrialize our country," "we don't care about the health of the American people but we do care about the profits of the health care industry," "we would like to have permanent war if we can get it," "we want to convert the US economy from industrial capitalism to finance capitalism," and so forth."

And so successful Republican candidates have consistently run using the cover of the ever-Rightward Imperative on such "issues" as "big government," "cut 'entitlements'," "cut taxes," "deregulation," and not in quotes, suppressing/repressing women's and LGBT rights. But in addition to the open adoption of the latter, the underlying message of the Party, going back to Reagan, has increasingly been based in racism, xenophobia, and religious authoritarianism. Nevertheless, for the most part, down to the present time, it has been an underlying message, often presented in code words. (Interestingly enough, xenophobia goes back to the founding of the party in the 1850s: The American Party, popularly known as the "Know-Nothings," was one of its original incorporators.) And then came Trump.

In his quest for the Republican nomination, as a totally unqualified person with no experience in government, a very shaky history in business (for example, despite his apparent wealth, he has been unable to obtain US bank loans since 1996 or so), and a notoriously small knowledge-base, he has almost singlehandedly taken the Rightward Imperative from a tactic and strategy that almost always had "deniability," to one that he put forth openly, beginning, of course in 2011 with "birtherism."

With birtherism and then the open xenophobia, the Islamophobia, the anti-LGBT rhetoric and policies, the open adoption of religious authoritarianism (going as far as to propose imprisoning women who have had an abortion) and the selection of a known Dominionist to be his Vice-Presidential nominee, Trump has continued to follow the Right-wing Imperative, except that it is now all out in the open. It has led to what he himself, not some script-writer for him, has really said about the tragedy of Charlottesville. And so the Kluxers, the neo-Nazis, the anti-Semites (who are now surfacing), the Far Right Religionists, led by the likes of David Duke, are coming out in the open, declaring their allegiance to Trump.

Trump presents a problem for the Republicans. These themes go back 50+ years, but their clothes have been taken off, if, that is, they stick with Trump. And that's a toughie (see Jeff Flake). "Being primaried" by someone further to the Right, which is at the essence of the Rightward Imperative, is now very much a possibility for any Repub. who leaves Trump behind. Privately, it is likely that many are hoping (praying[?]) that Robert Mueller will solve their problem for them. But then the Repubs. could face another serious problem that I described briefly in my previous column: Trump pardons everyone including himself, resigns, and then sets up a new Far Right Party, with Steve Bannon as his Chief of Staff and the True Trumpites, like Corey Lewandowski, Kelly Anne Conway, and Roger Stone, quickly signing on.

Trump is a different kind of Repub. only because he lays it all out there. He is a product of the 50-year-old Republican Rightward Imperative who just doesn't bother with coded words and actions. In ripping the mask (or the hood, if you will) off the real modern Republican Party, if this leads to the development of a Popular Front of opponents to these Repub. policies, in that sense he will have proven to be invaluable for the U.S. historico-political process.

