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What Happened to Responsible Republicans?

By Parris J. Baker
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In June 2015, just prior to his announcement to become a Republican candidate for president, I had seriously considered changing my party affiliation from Democratic to Republican. Having been a Democrat all my life, growing up in the era of social reforms, civil and human rights, and the Great Society, I began to question the authentic commitment of Democrats to change social, economic, and environmental conditions for African Americans. In my world, though, progress had occurred historically. Once again, it appeared to me that Black and brown bodies were a commodity to be traded in the open market, a currency of promises exchanged for votes.

Marvin Gaye recorded my concerns in his social commentary found in the concept album titled *What's Going On*^[1]. In this album, Gaye expressed themes addressing the Vietnam War, voter suppression and subversion, crimes related to drug use disorder, police brutality, and social and environmental justice. If you are a baby boomer, I am confident you will remember these lyrics from *Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)*:



Rockets, moon shots
Spend it on the have-nots
Money, we make it
Fore we see it you take it.

Oh, make me want to holler
The way they do my life (yeah)
Make me want to holler
The way they do my life.

This ain't livin', this ain't livin'
No, no baby, this ain't livin'
No, no, no, no

Inflation no chance, To increase finance.
Bills pile up sky high, Send that boy off to die.

Oh, make me want to holler, the way they do my life (duh, duh, duh)
Yeah, make me want to holler, the way they do my life. Oh, baby!

Hang-ups, let downs, Bad breaks, setbacks
Natural fact is, Oh honey that I can't pay my taxes.

Oh, make me want to holler And throw up both my hands.
Yea, it make me want to holler And throw up both my hands.

Oh (ow) crime is (woo) increasing. Trigger happy policing
Panic is spreading, God knows where we're heading
Oh, make me want to holler, they don't understand.

Like most individuals who identify politically as a Republican or conservative, my political paradigm was established in deeply held beliefs regarding my faith, the sanctity of life, the importance of education and the dignity found in work, the necessity for criminal justice reforms, and establishing sound fiscal management. At that time, I was embroiled, like many fellow Americans, in the national debates centered on:

1. Racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.
2. Police brutality and Colin Kaepernick's sacrificial stance to kneel in an effort to bring attention to that issue.
3. Black Lives Matter movement.
4. Abortion, reproductive rights and responsibilities, and choice.
5. Methodologies proposed to address poverty, racial and ethnic disparities, and gender identity.

There were many issues confronting Americans, issues that warranted critical thought and continual conversation. I began to recognize that former healthy debates devolved quickly into contentious and tribal arguments. I lost several friends and colleagues. I began avoiding people, which I found very disturbing. I had changed, but my change was not how I envisioned it. The Republican Party had morphed into a group of people I did not recognize, and I was conflicted about changing party affiliation. Changing party affiliation felt more like going through a hazing process to pledge fealty to a fraternity, a fraternity of Republicans.

What happened to those responsible Republicans?

What I learned, unfortunately, is they have become a cult of Christians, whose expression of cowardice is palpable and deeply troubling. Whether they wear white hoods, black robes, or red hats, they are now a group of conservatives who have paved the way for tyranny and autocrats. The darkening of America is troubling many white Americans. However, the darkening of America has less to do with the increased number of Black and brown people coming into America. The increased number of people with darkened hearts and minds is the true darkening of America:

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.[2]

Republicans, over a number of presidential administrations and Congresses, have declared, We are the party of law and order, a War on Drugs (Nixon and Reagan), War on Terror (G.W. Bush), and a War on Children (Trump and McConnell). At the center of recurrent and crucial debates has been the protection of the Second Amendment and abortion. Imagine if the National Rifle Association took the lead in organizing and executing a national agenda to protect all children, from fetal personhood through young adulthood (guns are used more often in teen suicides), as aggressively as it protects gun owners. With little thought and resolute commitment, both initiatives could be enacted.

However, the hypocrisy is incredulous. Right in front of our eyes, Conservatives and Christian nationalists have morphed into a faction of extremists. An alarming number of cultist Christians are occupying more –and more elected offices. They *Shout to the Lord*[3] for the protection and care of the unborn while leaving to fate and chance the children born into hunger, poverty, or threatened by mass shooters.

The Republican Party affirms that every individual should assume personal responsibility of self and family, but conversely demands that Americans should

trust them to make choices for you. The paradigm of small government has been replaced with the concept of huge governmental intrusions. The hypocrisy seems never-ending:

1. The party of morality endorses its leader, a man who has been impeached twice, convicted of 34 felonies who wants to be dictator for a day.
2. Incompetence and one's willingness to compromise pro-social values are now adequate substitutes for moral character.
3. Retribution now trumps love and forgiveness.
4. Love thy neighbor has been replaced with the lasciviousness of power and wealth. Selfishness and avarice have replaced sacrifice.
5. Autocracy is now described as democracy.
6. The dignity of every person has been swapped for the denigration of Black and brown people.
7. Truth is now exchanged for lies.
8. Power, violence, and hatred are preferred to love, peace, gentleness, and meekness.

How prophetic was Alabama Gov. George Wallace's sentiment, when he shouted, "I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever?" Moral Majority members have now become immoral office-bearers, where diversity is devalued, diminished in its importance in favor of white nationalism. Recently, this enthusiastic posture has been reflected in the unchallenged and many times defended Donald Trump remark, "I wish I had generals like Hitler" and the clarion call to deport all undocumented people.

Who does America want in the Oval Office? The once sacred space, designed to be occupied by someone who believes in "*We the People*" is presently being pursued by the Republican presidential nominee who declared to America, "Only I can do it," "I will be your protector," and "I will be your retribution!"

In an attempt to reestablish patriarchy, the Republican Party finds itself filled with weak men who lack character. Party members who desired to demonstrate their moral maturity, their primal instincts led them to engage in perverted locker room conversations regarding people's private parts – discussions that should remain private,. Or the pizza-eating politicians who regularly consumed pornography, or thought life under Jim Crow was better for African American families, and engaged in vulgar, risqué, and repulsive behaviors caught on surveillance cameras in movie theaters and on the floor of the House of Representatives.

What happened to the responsible Republicans? I'm not sure. Hopefully, they will emerge from the chaos engulfing America. There are a few who remain, who have put country before party affiliation. One such Republican is Liz Cheney, former member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Wyoming and chairwoman of

the House Republican Caucus who offered this direct and honest chide: "Tonight, I say this to my Republican colleagues who are defending the indefensible: There will come a day when Donald Trump is gone, but your dishonor will remain."

At the time of this writing, there are nine days left until Election Day. To state that I am anxious for the future of America is an understatement. My faith in God and my trust in Americans is definitely being evaluated. I think, under stress, I use music as mindful mediation. Once again, I find myself singing^[4]:



Don't you love farce?
My fault, I fear
I thought that you'd want what I want
Sorry, my dear!
But where are the clowns
Send in the clowns
Don't bother, they're here.

Isn't it rich?

Isn't it queer?
Losing my timing this late in my career
But where are the clowns?
There ought to be clowns
Well, maybe next year.
Hopefully, we will have a "next year."

Editor's note: Essays by Jefferson scholars are the products of their own research and views.

References

- [1] What's Going On (May 21, 1971), written and produced by Marvin Gaye, has been voted one of the greatest and most influential albums of all time. Label: Hitsville, USA.
- [2] Ephesians 4: 18-19 (New Living Translation)
- [3] Shout to the Lord, written by Darlene Zschech in 1993, this Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) song became a Christian anthem that declared the sovereignty of God over the entire world.
- [4] Judith Collins (1975). Send in the Clowns, written by Stephen Sondheim for the 1973 musical A Little Light Music, was the Song of the Year at the 1876 Grammy Awards.
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