

United We Stand?

"One Nation, Slightly Divisible" by David Brooks, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (Dec. 2001), P.O. Box 37585, Boone, Ia. 50037-0585.

On election night 2000, Americans were transfixed by two spectacles: one in Florida, the other on the electoral maps shown on the TV newscasts. The maps seemed to depict two Americas: The coasts were colored blue, indicating states that had voted for Al Gore; the heartland was almost entirely red, indicating support there for GOP candidate George Bush.

There are two main theories about what divides Americans, and both took shape long before the 2000 election, explains Brooks, a senior editor of the *Weekly Standard* and the author of *Bobos in Paradise* (2000). Liberals such as Gore pollster Stanley Greenberg tend to point to a "division along class lines, between the haves and have-nots." Thus, Gore campaigned on the slogan "The People versus the Powerful." Conservatives, such as historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, see America as "divided between two moral systems. Red America is traditional, religious, self-disciplined. Blue America is modern, secular, self-expressive."

Shuttling between his home in Blue America, the upper-middle-class Washington suburb of Montgomery County, Maryland, and the Red America of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, about 25 miles west of Gettysburg, Brooks found little to support either theory of sharp division.

Franklin County is a rural, virtually all-white area where people work at modest jobs at banks and plants along the interstate, earning an average of \$51,872, just over half as much as folks in Montgomery County. It should be fertile ground for a Gore-like appeal to class resentment and feelings of powerlessness against big corporations and other distant forces. It isn't. (Ironically, Brooks observes, that appeal had much more resonance in affluent Montgomery

County.) Yes, local people said when pressed, there is a divide between the haves and have-nots, but "the people saying yes did not consider themselves to be among the have-nots." And they aren't kidding themselves, Brooks adds. The inhabitants of Blue America don't realize that it costs a lot less to live comfortably in Red America. Few live lavishly, but there is "little obvious inequality."

What about a moral divide? While Franklin County is full of churches and religiously oriented bumper stickers (WARNING: IN CASE OF RAPTURE THIS VEHICLE WILL BE UNMANNED), Brooks didn't find much evidence of a wide breach from the more cosmopolitan Blue America, except on issues such as abortion and homosexuality. It has most of the same problems, from teen pregnancy to heroin addiction. None of the local clergy he interviewed said they would condemn a parishioner for having an extramarital affair.

It's "sensibility, not class or culture," that separates the people of Franklin and Montgomery counties, Brooks says. They are divided by an "Ego Curtain." "In Red America the self is small. People declare in a million ways, 'I am normal. Nobody is better, nobody is worse. I am humble before God.' In Blue America the self is more commonly large." Blue America is the land of big résumés and big SUVs. To put it another way, each America embodies one of the two strands of the national character: egalitarianism and achievement.

These differences don't make for a fundamental divide, in Brooks's view. And the events of September 11 closed part of the gap between Red and Blue America. "America is in no mood for a class struggle or a culture war. . . . There may be cracks, but there is no chasm."

Hazarding the Constitution

"Presidents, Congress, and Courts: Partisan Passions in Motion" by Joyce Appleby, in *The Journal of American History* (Sept. 2001), 112 N. Bryan Ave., Bloomington, Ind. 47408-4199.

If the Framers encouraged one principle in the presidency, it was the independence of the office, even at the expense of a smooth transfer

of power. They were willing to require three elections to choose a president: one popular, one in the Electoral College, and, in case of a dead-

lock, another in the House of Representatives. Yet almost from the beginning, partisanship and political parties have “played havoc with the Constitution and the independence of the president.”

Appleby, a historian at the University of California, Los Angeles, says the Framers looked with dismay on the state governments created during the Revolution, with their weak executives and large, powerful legislatures that were cauldrons of factionalism and populist sentiment.

The Framers conceived of the president as a leader above politics; they did not imagine the rise of political parties. “So little did the Founders expect candidates for president to compete on the basis of ideology,” Appleby writes, “that they conceived of the vice president as a runner-up presidential candidate.”

Whatever illusions remained were dispelled by the election of 1800, which resulted in an Electoral College tie between two Democratic-Republican candidates, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr. Federalists John Adams and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney trailed. The decision was thrown into the House of Representatives, with each state casting a single vote. That scheme strengthened the Federalists’ hand, and for 35 rounds of balloting they attempted to elect one of their own. Then, Appleby says, “someone found the courage to act honorably.” Representative James Bayard, the

sole congressman from Delaware and a Federalist, withheld his state’s vote from Burr, allowing Jefferson to prevail. Bayard explained that he had acted “so as not to hazard the Constitution.”

Yet the presidency would never achieve the independence the Founders imagined. For much of the 19th century, Congress more or less ruled the roost in Washington, and until the 1960s the political parties selected their presidential candidates with barely a nod to the public. It was “de facto parliamentarism.”

President Richard M. Nixon’s decision to finance his 1972 reelection through an organization separate from the Republican Party “signaled the beginning of the end for party power brokers.” Yet this change did not produce political nirvana. Presidential candidates grew more responsive to big campaign donors, and the public turned increasingly apathetic toward politics. Which brings Appleby to the 2000 election, in which she says partisan passions found a new home: the Supreme Court. In a sense,

there is something natural about this: “The issues that Americans cared most about in 2000—abortion, school prayer, environmental protection, *Miranda* rights, workers’ safety—had already migrated from Congress to the Court.” Appleby wishes, however, that the Court had allowed the House to decide the election, acting “so as not to hazard the Constitution.”



Rep. James Bayard was the hero of the election of 1800.

Who Follows Black Leaders?

“White Residents, Black Incumbents, and a Declining Racial Divide” by Zoltan L. Hajnal, and
“The Effect of Black Congressional Representation on Political Participation” by Claudine Gay,
in *American Political Science Review* (Sept. 2001), American Political Science Assoc.,
1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Does having a black representative in Congress, such as John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.), or Albert Wynn (D-Md.), encourage their black constituents to become more politically involved? Does having a black mayor make white voters more like-

ly to vote for black candidates or affect their views on racially charged issues? Two studies yield some intriguing, but disparate, results.

Hajnal, a political scientist at the University of California, San Diego, examines