

As Donald Trump's term in the White House goes from one dramatic catastrophe point to the other, it's easy to sometimes forget that his presidency is the consequence of a deeper change within the Republican Party itself. Though the president takes the attention, the ideological journey in which the Republicans have been on for over the last decade says a more enlightening story about America.

From a party of sensible neoconservatives and rich suburbanites, it now consists of laid-off steelworkers and annoyed white nationalists. However, how did they arrive at this point?

In order to know, we'll have to use the story of the Grand Old Party that happened over the last decade. Tracing a line from the democratic mood that has destroyed the country after the 2008 financial crash, through the right-wing voices on the fringes of the party, to the racism and fear that met the election of Obama, you'll get to know how the ground was planned for Trump's aggressive takeover.

**During the 2008 Republican primaries, the anti-immigration mood indicated what the future would be like for the Republican party.**

In 2008, the Republicans had been in power for ten years. The subprime mortgage crisis was in full operation, and the Iraq War had confirmed a tragic and costly mission. If you were a Republican approaching the upcoming election, things seemed miserable.

During the primary contests, Republicans thought that the debates were going to be focused on two big problems which are endless war abroad and the financial crisis.

They didn't. When the different candidates started campaigning in town halls and stadiums across the country, they realized that the most heated topic was immigration.

In 2007, President George W. Bush enacted a wide-ranging immigration reform plan that would have enabled millions of people that didn't have official residency the right to get full citizenship.

One of the Republican presidential candidates in 2008 named John McCain, had helped enact that policy.

Now, he was meeting up with Republican voters and he was shocked by how intensely angry they were about it. Even in places where there was a little bit of immigration, it was the main issue. During one meeting, frustrated by another question on “Mexican illegals” putting the local community at risk, McCain retorted: “Ma’am, you stay in New Hampshire, what are you concerned about? A group of angry French Canadians?”

To mainstream Republican politicians, the cause of this persistent fear was obvious which is immigrants were victims for the feelings of instability that deindustrialization and free-market policies had brought to large strips of the US during the last three decades.

One of the other candidates in the 2008 contest Mitt Romney understood this. He was aware that a lot of the free-market policies that the Republicans had supported themselves had upset the industry and separated public services. Car and steel factories were shut down due to the US cheap imports. Also, basic state services had been privatized a long time ago or underfunded due to all of it being sacrificed to market ideology.

Romney was aware of all this, however, opportunistically, he played to right-wing preconceptions. He even started attacking McCain on his pro-immigration record, implying that McCain didn’t know the actual worries of working Americans. What this all goes down to was a refusal of what George W. Bush had called “compassionate conservatism.” Instead of the open, internationalist worldview of the Republican Party creation over the last three decades, Romney was fueling nativist prejudices for political gain.

This theme would come back over and over again in the coming years.

The 2008 financial crisis created an ideological conflict in the Republican Party and the commencements of a populist mood in the country.

Lehman Brothers which is the investment bank filed for bankruptcy on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2008. Afterward, global markets started to crash. The financial crisis, which had been gradually smoldering all summer, had suddenly caught fire.

The president, George W. Bush, reacted immediately and gathered a plan that would balance the markets.

But, libertarian voices in the Republican Party wanted the markets to be allowed to flop and self-correct. They didn't want the government to intervene.

When Bush declared his plans, conservative congressmen like Mike Pence of Indiana and Jim Jordan of Ohio, were annoyed. It was against their entire political drives to enable the government to jump in and intervene with market logic. They questioned if the Republican Party was still conservative at all and if it was willing to device a statist policy like this.

With Bush ready for huge government intervention, Republicans were bothered that there would be little remaining in their political program to differentiate them from the Democrats. They inquired: What do we represent now?

However, Bush was determined on his plan of government intervention. At that moment, he was more concerned about parents being able to withdraw money from ATMs than he was abstract considerations about market ideology. Hence, he created the TARP, which is the acronym for the Troubled Asset Relief Program, which meant bailing out Wall Street banks as well as investment firms with \$700 billion. This stabilized the worst of the crisis, which still cost a lot of people their source of income, homes, and dreams.

The TARP program turned out to be a point of fiery dispute within the Republican Party. It kindled a revolt against the big government from the entire wings of the party. When it was brought forward to Congress, Republicans voted against it 133 to 65, before the threat of financial pandemonium ultimately scared them into enacting the program. Yet, they were furious that the major principles of the free market had been broken.

Also, outside the party as well as these ideological questions, there was a common story: Wall Street had been saved, however, every other person had been screwed. From that point on, a

populist mood hostile to government, Republican and Democrat alike took charge of the country.

This would have significant outcomes in the following decade.

## In reaction to Barack Obama's presidency, the political right was full of racism and ideological zealotry.

Stressed by the economic crisis and the continuous Iraq War, John McCain's Republicans were defeated by Barack Obama in 2008. It was a certain way, the type of landslide victory that indicates a generational change in the political mood.

The political right was whipped into a rage that became increasingly racist during the campaign.

For example, preparing for a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, the chairman of the Lehigh County Republican Party, Bill Platt invited the multitude to think about their reaction if they woke up after polling day and saw that Barack Hussein Obama became the president.

Also, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October at another rally in Minnesota, John McCain was catcalled for telling the audience that they didn't have to be scared of Obama. One woman stood up and spoke at a point that, "I can't trust Obama...he's an Arab." John McCain responded by saying, no, Obama was a decent family man who he just disagree with. And he was booed and jeered even more. It was a terrifying setting for the Obama campaign team.

Immediately after Obama's victory in the fall of 2008, George W. Bush requested a special meeting of right-wing radio hosts and, detecting what was to come, told them to "go easy on the new guy."

However, as Obama's first term continued, Obamacare, his healthcare development program, stimulated new ideological responses from the right. Still upset by their landslide downfall, The Republicans turned against Obama's proposals with hysterical anger.

Obama's very moderate modifications were extensive socialism from their own point of view. This was totally a baseless assumption that the government was going to subsidize healthcare for illegal immigrants. Another wild rumor, which spread like an infection across right-wing radio shows, was that Democrat healthcare legislation signified that there would be "death panels" to judge on which patients would be worthy of lifesaving treatment.

It was an intuitive reaction, centered more on a right-wing fantasy of the president than on anything that related to the actual man. The actual truth was that Obama was a moderate centrist, careful with his modifications, rather than the far-left specter they predicted.

All of this hostility to Obama would form the political right and provide it with a new drive. Also, it would make it far uglier and more ideological. Bush's "compassionate conservatism" looked a thing of the distant past.

## The Tea Party movement was a sign of how the Republican Party would be changed in the years to come.

Ironically, the election of Barack Obama gave the American right its energy back. Weakening after the defeat of John McCain's and still without route after Bush's presidency, the right was terrified into action by Obama's election into office.

Therefore, the "Tea Party" movement was created on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2009, after Rick Santinelli the CNBC reporter called for a "tea party" in reply to Obama's economic policies. This was a reference to the initial Boston Tea Party of the American Revolution.

Although the movement started in conflict with Obama's economic policies, it grew into a much wider set of right-wing values. These values characterized one side of the culture's conflict that was developing in America.

In conflict with the social liberalism and internationalism of those who identified with the Democrats, the Tea Party movement consists of reactionary sentiment. It highlighted the rising dividing lines in American society, like those involving gay marriage, immigration and race.

Certainly, Tea Party rallies were regularly destroyed by the ugly racism that John McCain revealed during his campaign in the 2008 election.

Also, a lot of moderate Republicans were worried by this rebellious movement. Their brand of conservatism was in the tradition of Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke and was less anxiously ideological. It was known by prudence and deliberation, therefore, the Tea Party radicals came as an unwelcome interruption.

The Tea Party was backed up by think tanks and donors as it grew. These were ideological libertarians such as businessmen like David and Charles Koch, whose advocacy group, Americans for Prosperity, became a key force behind the campaigning.

These people detected that the Tea Party's energy could be used to attain its political aims. Different from some of the ordinary supporters of the movement, they weren't excited by social and cultural worries. Rather, they noticed a chance to push their ideal fiscal policies such as low tax, deregulation, and opposition to publicly funded healthcare.

As a matter of fact, the Kochs wanted to evade the social challenges of the movement altogether; they made them uncomfortable. However, without these cultural challenges, the movement wouldn't have had the volatile energy it had. The donors, then, were basically joining a ride.

These two themes which are the culture conflict and the rich backers riding populist energy would play out again in the coming year. It would all merge in the shape of the 2016 presidential contender, Donald J. Trump.

## The presidential campaign of Donald Trump changed the Republican Party.

In 2015, when Donald Trump got into the Republican primary race in 2015, a lot of people inside the party establishment thought that it was just a stunt. They thought that his candidacy was a strategy to support his public image as well as his hotel chain and that he would withdraw before the end. They couldn't have been more wrong.

When Trump got into the race, he thought that the Republicans had become very weak in campaigning and policy. In retrospect to the failed campaigns of John McCain and Mitt Romney, he believed that the party didn't have a killer instinct.

His key complaint was that they abided by the rules, that they were too modest. He was specifically referring to Mitt Romney's effort to throw out Obama in 2012, he assumed that Romney had been "too respectful" toward Obama when he ought to have attacked him with a lot of spite as the Obama campaign leveled at the Republican. He believed that the party would be better aided by whipping up the right-wing base, giving them "red meat," by demonizing immigrants and criminals.

And Trump also assumed that the normal Republican policies of globalization, deregulation and military intervention abroad were wrong. These problems didn't say to the primal feelings of the right-wing base – in order to attain them, there is a need for a much more nationalistic platform. He had learned from the Tea Party in this sense.

Trump polished his message as his campaign grew. In his electoral slogan, "Make America Great Again," Trump refined the anger that a lot of the voters on the right experienced. His campaign aroused a lost America, an America of stable jobs, white picket fences and 1950s social attitudes. It implied significantly at a much whiter America.

In 2016, Outside a Trump rally in Arizona, these attitudes could be seen in richness. One woman named Pam McKinney, said, "When I pay attention to Donald Trump, I hear the America I grew up in. He wants to make things the way they used to be before." She recently migrated from California with her husband, as she sensed that the regional government was pandering to illegal immigrants. She assumed that immigrants weren't "adapting" to the culture of American. She said, "They're celebrating their holidays instead of ours."

Trump recognized these attitudes, which had been there for a long time and he made them the focus of his campaign. What had previously been unspoken bias, he said through a loudspeaker.

## Trump crushed Republican Party orthodoxy during the 2016 election primary debates.

As the primary competitions started, Trump was unique from his contenders.

Although they are different from each other, contenders such as Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, and Jeb Bush were still identifiably establishment Republican politicians. They were altogether devoted to the libertarian, free-trade agenda of the political right, led themselves with some modicum of civility, and all had at least a passing knowledge with the simple purposes of the state.

On the other hand, Trump was alone. His visibly nationalistic populism and no-holds-barred campaigning style were different from all of his other contenders. Also, he didn't have a basic command of governance and he wasn't worried about facts, which troubled his rivals.

One occurrence was extremely disturbing for the Republican establishment. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2015, during the Las Vegas primary debate, Hugh Hewitt the moderator asked Trump to talk about America's nuclear triad – the country's skill to launch nuclear attacks from the land, sea, and air.

This was something Hugh Hewitt had asked Trump before during a radio show interview, earlier in the campaign. At that moment, Trump had stumbled over the question; however, Hewitt thought that he'd be very sure now. However, the reply Trump gave surprised him, the other candidate as well as the lots of Americans watching. Instead of talking about the triad – something any presidential contender should be able instantly– he stumbled again, ending with: "In my own view, nuclear is just...the power, the destruction, is very significant to me."

Earlier during the campaign, Trump had also started praising Putin, which showed an actual departure from foreign policy consensus. In November 2015, Trump said in the television show Face the Nation that he would possibly get along with Putin very well and that any tensions between the US and Russia would be very smoother if he were president. Afterward, he commended Putin's strong leadership, and when faced with the Kremlin's record of killing journalists, he shrugged it off and he said that America also does a lot of killing too.



This surprised the Republican establishment as well as other presidential contenders. Prospective American presidents didn't praise Russia's authoritarian leader. However, Trump's campaign team was aware of what they were doing: a large mass of the American right like Putin's machismo. Also, they also liked his affront to liberal values.

And to the surprise of the Republican Party establishment, irrespective of the number of rules he broke, Trump kept climbing in the opinion polls.

## The results of the 2016 election showed America's new divides.

As the first results of the election came in, what had looked like hopelessness for months now seemed believable: Trump was winning in specific main areas. Mainstream Republicans such as Paul Ryan had anticipated a terrible wipeout and he had written a lot of speeches getting ready to condemn the entire Trump campaign as a dark moment in the history of the party.

Meanwhile, at Trump Tower, Manhattan, Trump with his campaign team viewed the results on a streaming feed.

What they saw showed the new divide.

The television networks called Florida for Trump immediately as evening was approaching, which came as an actual surprise. This signified that a victory was possible. Afterward, North Carolina was taken by Trump. They noticed a constant trend in these states: the Republicans were winning the white rural areas, while the more diverse urban centers were won by the Democrats.

In order to stamp his victory, Trump took Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin – blue-collar states that were overwhelmingly white. The most diverse was Michigan, however, 77% of its population was still white.

However, Hillary Clinton's Democrats won over just 37% of all white voters. She had been expecting to do more better with minorities, and even though she did better than Trump with these demographics, she didn't assemble a lot of them to counteract Trump's power among white voters.

However, this racial divide was not just the only one that was developing; there was also a cultural one. David Wasserman from the Cook Political Report newsletter created an ingenious technique to show this. Using corporate brands to show the split, Wasserman concluded that Cracker Barrel, the Southern-themed restaurant was the most likely brand to be seen in a Republican county while Whole Foods grocery stores were most likely to be seen in a Democrat county.

In the rural and provincial areas with lesser population density, less diversity, and lower education rates, Cracker Barrel was most likely to be found there. These areas are affected by deindustrialization and people have the tendency of moving out from there. In contrast, Whole Foods was focused on upscale urban settings with a lot of graduates from college. People tend to move to those areas.

Wasserman had been using this approach since the year 1992 to measure the culture gap in contemporary America. During that year, Bill Clinton had won 40% of the "Cracker Barrel counties" and 60% of the "Whole Foods counties." However, in 2016, Donald Trump won 76% of the Cracker Barrel counties and only 22% of the Whole Foods ones.

The truth was glaring: America was turning into a more polarized at every election, and Trump had hastened that divide.

## The culture conflict that was consuming America ended in a disastrous occurrence.

The political polarization that had damaged the campaign only got worse after the victory of Trump.

Steve Bannon his chief strategist liked this culture clash, which he viewed as a battle for America's soul: on one side were liberal elites who had enabled the country to slip toward relativism and deterioration – while on the other side were the white working class that was the pillar of the country.

Only a year after Trump's became the president, in August 2017, this culture conflict came to a climax, in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The entire war started when the city council recommended the removal of a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee from Lee Park, which the name was to be changed to "Emancipation Park." This irritated the far-right forces in the county and it led to a fight of symbolic significance. Charlottesville was the heart of the Confederacy, a settlement built on slavery. The South's most famous general, Robert E. Lee was a symbol of the old slave-owning order. The bronze statue of Lee, high on his mount, appeared to mock the forces of progress that wanted his fall.

In an illustration against the removal of the statue, white supremacists and neo-Nazis were ready to assemble for a rally named "Unite the Right" in Charlottesville on the weekend of the 12<sup>th</sup> of August. A lot of white supremacists performed a march around the University of Virginia's campus, holding torches and saying, "You will not change us! Jews will not substitute us!" The members of the KKK and right-wing militia joined the protest the following day. The previous Grand Wizard of the KKK, David Duke was also there, hailing Trump for wanting to "take back our country back."

There were interfaith leaders, students from college, UV faculty members, local residents, members of Black Lives Matter and the anti-fascist movement at the counterprotest. A disaster happened at the end of that Saturday. James Alex Fields a twenty-year-old neo-Nazi drove his Dodge Challenger at high speed into a multitude of counterprotesters in which he injured twenty-eight people and he killed Heather Heyer a thirty-two-year-old woman.

Reacting to the attack, President Trump gave a shocking commentary. He condemned the violence on both sides. Afterward, he went on to support the “Unite the Right” crowd, affirming that they weren’t entirely neo-Nazis, and saying that there were “very fine people on both sides.”

For a lot of disturbed Americans, it looked as if it did his electoral purposes, Trump wouldn’t condemn this extremism. As this trend looks set to carry on, we can be certain of just a thing which is the Republican Party is in the grip of a revolution. The question is: Where will it end?

## American Carnage: On the Front Lines of the Republican Civil War and the Rise of President Trump by Tim Alberta Book Review

Over the past decade, the Republican Party has been a battleground for ideological war. The party’s more moderate creation, together with its policy platform of globalization and free trade, has been defeated by the ideological right, in the shape of Donald Trump, who has created a far more nativist and divisive agenda to the party. As the presidency of Trump carries on, the GOP is prepared to even change more.

<https://goodbooksummary.com/american-carnage-by-tim-alberta-book-summary/>