

Seven lessons the national Democratic Party should draw from the victory of John Bel Edwards [1]

Posted on [November 29, 2015](#)

November 22 dawned with the news that Louisiana Democratic gubernatorial candidate John Bel Edwards had not merely defeated the loathsome Republican David Vitter, but totally whopped'em. And accomplished this in the deep South with the votes of a group long written off by the national Democratic establishment, the lower middle class white demographic (LMCWD until someone comes up with a better neutral acronym [2]).

For reasons elaborated below, the Democratic Party establishment quickly dismissed this as a fluke [3] explained by a spectacularly unsuitable GOP candidate. But the GOP has moved towards "spectacularly unsuitable" as a *requirement* for candidates!: their motto is "There's a demolition derby going on, Dad, let me have the car!" With the GOP heading to the hard right, anyone with a lick of sense—or reading Anthony Downs—would know that the Democrats need to make a move for the center right rather than simply further consolidating their existing base.

But that's not what we're seeing. So a few unsolicited suggestions on why this should change.

1. Accept the LMCWD as a distinct and embattled cultural minority that should be part of the Democratic coalition.

This comes first because it is going to be hardest. But if the statistical evidence presented in [Case and Deaton](#) doesn't make this point for you, I don't know what ever will.

In days gone by, this was not a controversial position, even if the connection between the LMCWD and the Democratic establishment was largely mediated by a combination of long-gone industrial unions, urban political machines, and assorted racial arrangements now firmly associated with the contemporary GOP which we most definitely do not want to revive. [4]

Eyes firmly fixed on the rearview mirror, the contemporary Democratic elite has conveniently pigeon-holed the entire LMCWD as a bunch of gun-totting racists with rotting teeth who keep a year's supply of canned tuna fish and peanut butter in the basement along with a two-year supply of ammunition and are married to their cousins. Granted, such individuals are not entirely hypothetical, and periodically the International Brotherhood of Democratic Party Campaign Consultants rounds up enough for a focus group and sends the resulting video around to scare the hell out of everyone [5] to guarantee:

- Except for a couple unpleasant months in New Hampshire and Iowa every four years, the consultants will never be required to work more than an hour from a five-star hotel
- Their base, the NPR Democrats, can continue to hold tightly to their single most valued asset, a smugly refined sense of cultural superiority
- The consultants can just keep doing the same things they've been doing since the Johnson administration.

The abject terror of the Democratic Party establishment to anyone who takes the LMCWD seriously can be seen in their response to the 2010 and 2016 populist senatorial campaign of retired Admiral Joe Sestak in Pennsylvania, where the party machine preferred subjecting the country to six years of ultra-conservative Patrick Toomey to accommodating Sestak. Heck, the Democratic establishment has made it pretty clear they'd support Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi over Sestak. This, I would suggest, is a problem.

2. Send your copy of *What's the Matter with Kansas(WTMWK)* to a recycling center.

At the height of the popularity of *WTMWK*, my University of Kansas [6] colleague Allan Cigler—who had spent his entire career actually studying politics in the state—gave a talk which went through every major hypothesis of the book and demonstrated that it was contradicted by systematic evidence from economic and survey statistics. Facts, how inconvenient. [7]

WTMWK is, of course, little more than the hoary "false consciousness" hypothesis of the Old Left, and more generally yet another

indication that the American political system is still in the thrall of three mid-20th century clusters of ideas, the awful Rs: [Franklin] Roosevelt, Reagan and [Ayn] Rand, dead hands of the mid 20th century around the throat of the 21st.

3. Acknowledge that hyper-wonkized government is a serious burden for the LMCWD

The motto of the largely Democratic wonk class is “One person’s bureaucratic bottleneck is another person’s job.” The wonks are barnacles on the ship of state, and their current preferred habitat is with any candidate whose name rhymes with “Clinton.” Which is why it took Barack Obama to create a nationalized health care system that given sufficient time may get us to the level of Bulgaria. Similarly, implementation of the hyper-wonked Dodd-Frank banking legislation began with a [192-page loop-hole ridden form](#)—presumably by now is a couple orders of magnitude more complex—in lieu of merely reinstating the Glass-Steagall Act repealed under—you guessed it—a Clinton, which could have been accomplished with a couple of sentences.

NPR Democrats, of course, are generally in positions where they are coddled by large bureaucratic structures and, in the case of the Democratic elite in their gated communities, have lawyers, lobbyists and accountants on retainer. The LMCWD, in contrast, are likely to be self-employed or in small businesses and have to deal with this ever-increasing complexity and the emerging Indian-style license Raj directly, and get very few benefits from it. Acknowledging this fact would be a major step forward.

4. Address the issues of rural and suburban poverty, and in particular the rural drug epidemic.

Case and Deaton again. [8] The LMCWD has a pretty good idea of what is wrong with their communities, and there is plenty of room for a new indigenous populism of the left, but that would affect some Democratic vested interests like Big Pharma and prison guards.

I’m not sure exactly what these solutions are going to look like, but I’d guess they will

- Be simple, innovative and decentralized, and will not provide new jobs for the vast armies of wonks and consultancies who have attached themselves to the Clintons
- Quite a few, though by no means all, will use elements of classical democratic conservatism [9]
- Quite a few of these ideas, though by no means all, will work

Though as a beginning, follow the suggestions of Paul Krugman, issue a whole lot of very low interest bonds, start up a bunch of long-overdue infrastructure projects and trust me, the talent (and consequent jobs) needed to complete these will be found in the economically distressed counties of rural America, not among the latte-sipping set who spend thirty hours a week in meetings writing mission statements and the remainder updating their Linked-In profiles.

5. Stop trashing religion.

Remember how *WTMWK* dealt with religion?—Thomas Franks found some bozo who thought he was the Pope. As did his cousin. Trust me, the average church-going Kansan does not believe he or she is the Pope. But the “religion is only for weirdos” sells, big time, with the NPR crowd.

Dealing with religion is going to be complicated: the US is clearly on a decidedly different path than post-Christian Europe, starting with having spent the past fifty years of first liberal Protestants, then conservative evangelicals, deciding—with equivalently disastrous results—that their route to continued relevance was politics, a strategy that consulting some old texts (Matt. 4:8-10; Luke 4:5-8) would have advised them against. Exactly where we go from here is unclear, though I’d suggest it will not be the European model of abandoned churches reduced to art venues and tourist attractions: that required the inflexibility of established religion. [10]

6. Sixth, fire all of the consultants. [11]

The national “Democratic Party” of course, is little more than an illusion perpetrated by a clique of lavishly compensated consultants who live in gated communities rubbing shoulders daily with hedge fund managers and CEOs who complain bitterly that the Wall

Street bailouts didn't go far enough, all supported by 79 or so families with vast reserves of wealth who dabble in politics as a diverting little pasttime rather akin to butterfly collecting. [12]

Which is to say, fundamentally we are in a post-democratic era—the subject of about a dozen future blog entries that have yet to fully congeal—and the oligarchs are just letting us live here. So far. But—the 79 families, humor me for a minute—aren't those consultants thoroughly ripping you off by leading the country into an ever-more polarized and dysfunctional system that does no one any good? If those people were your landscapers and your lawn looked like a bad case of mange, the re-routed driveway ended in a muddy ditch, and that expensive palm tree they'd recommended you plant—in Minnesota—had mysteriously died, you'd fire them and find someone else, right? And that's a pretty good metaphor for the current state of American consultant-dominated “politics”, right? So as our overlords, shouldn't you think about hiring someone new? At least consider it, eh?

7. Rebuild the state and local level parties and stop centralizing power in Washington. And northern Virginia.

I'd guess that the attitude of most Democratic voters towards involvement in state politics is currently “What do you take me for, a complete loser??” But we're embarking on a twelve-step program here, and one of the premises of twelve-step programs is you've got to hit bottom before recovery can begin, and with the LMCWD, the national Democratic Party has certainly satisfied that requirement. So now at any point you can begin the recovery, and you can start by looking at what the Democratic establishment been doing to Joe Siskak and promise to do the opposite. [13] Those strategies aren't going to come out of Washington, or from the staggering zombie legions of wonks attached to the Clintons, and certainly not from the 79 oligarchic families.

In conclusion...

Once again, the objective here is not to accommodate all of the LMCWD, just the rather sizeable segment who now realize they have been thoroughly screwed over the past fifty years by their allegiance to the GOP, which given the chance will also happily screw them over for another fifty years. If Stanley Greenberg's analysis in *American Ascendant* is correct—and Greenberg suspiciously works with facts—the GOP is demographically doomed [14], but at the current pace completing this process will probably take two decades, possibly including some quite unpleasant periods. Accommodate the center of the LMCWD and you reduce that perhaps to ten years, possibly very few unpleasant.

Think big, think 1932, think of a Roosevelt-like ascendancy that will last for half a century. Not the entire LMCWD, as you'll never accommodate people completely absorbed in the Fox/Trump fantasy world. But you don't need to: just get the reasonable ones and you've reestablished a 21st century electoral coalition that can bring about 21st century social democratic policies.

In the configuration of 2014, however, Democrats couldn't win a gubernatorial election against a man who by 2015 was the most hated governor in the country, behind even Louisiana's Bobby Jindal. That occurred, of course, in Kansas.

Beyond the Snark [15]

Alec MacGillis (NYT) “Who Turned My Blue State Red” which was the immediate impetus for this: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/opinion/sunday/who-turned-my-blue-state-red.html>

Anne Case and Angus Deaton, the other impetus: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/03/health/death-rates-rising-for-middle-aged-white-americans-study-finds.html>. For the original: <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2015/10/29/1518393112.abstract>

Another article on the white drug-overdose epidemic:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/science/drug-overdoses-propel-rise-in-mortality-rates-of-young-whites.html>

Note the observation that blacks and Hispanics aren't affected because docs won't prescribe them painkillers: must be great fun when you've got metastatic bone cancer...

Stanley Greenberg's *America Ascendant* which is the book-length exposition of the “demography is destiny” argument. <http://us.macmillan.com/americaascendant/stanleybgreenberg>

Washington Monthly's Nancy LeTourneau review of

Greenberg: http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/novemberdecember_2015/on_political_books/oneparty_fate058475.php

Dan Balz (*Washington Post*) on Greenburg, circling around some of these same points as this

essay: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/for-democrats-its-not-just-demographics-as-destiny/2015/11/28/199d3a18-9539-11e5-a2d6-f57908580b1f_story.html

Anne-Marie Slaughter and Ben Scott on the increasing irrelevance of Washington think-tanks (*Washington Monthly*) [and by implication, the zombie works: good start, but the situation is even

worse...]: http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/novemberdecember_2015/features/rethinking_the_think_tank058469.php

The Economist on Ivy League discrimination: <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21669595-asian-americans-are-united-states-most-successful-minority-they-are-complaining-ever>

Mancur Olson on why “bad things happen” when regulations accumulate unchecked: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Rise-and-Fall-of-Nations-Stagflation/dp/0300030797>

Plus a shout-out to the recently deceased Douglas North whose work headed in much the same

direction: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_North

Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*: http://wikisum.com/w/Downs:_An_economic_theory_of_democracy

The efficacy of decentralized community-based solutions: pretty much everything Elinor Ostrom ever

wrote: <http://www.economist.com/node/21557717>

Paul Krugman on the wisdom of financing new infrastructure with long-term bonds at extraordinarily low interest rates [16]: well, about every third column he has written in the *New York Times* for the past seven years: <http://www.nytimes.com/column/paul-krugman>.

Ted Robert Gurr 1994 ISA presidential address: <http://isq.oxfordjournals.org/content/38/3/347>. But it's paywalled, and so I can't tell whether the critique of Huntington, which figured prominently in the lecture Gurr gave at the ISA meeting, made it into the presumably much shorter article. It's paywalled. That, by the way, is the standard academic mode: write something interesting, give it away—with very few exceptions, academics are not paid for the articles they write; they are paid (sort of) for books—to some rapacious proprietary publisher [insert link to image of Cthulhu here...] who then locks this away so that no one except other academics can read it—though most academics are blissfully unaware that you need access to a research university-level library to read most articles, and think [JStore](#) is a public service rather than an extortion racket—then complain bitterly that their ideas are having no influence on the public discourse.

Divergent paths of religious institutions in the US and Europe: Stark-Bainbridge theory of religion: <http://www.rodneystark.com/> [or more generally, just Google that term.] The “Iron Laws” are mouseCorp, not Stark-Bainbridge.

The 158 families: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/11/us/politics/2016-presidential-election-super-pac-donors.html>

Brownback: <http://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/obama-tops-brownback-ruby-red-kansas>

Louisiana: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/23/us/louisianas-john-bel-edwards-overcame-big-obstacles-to-win-governors-race.html>

Sestak campaign: <http://joesestak.com/> Get on his mailing list for a running account of everything the Democratic establishment is

doing to try to undercut him.

Footnotes

1. So with the worrisome decline in productivity in this blog, mouseCorp—slave drivers!—has decided to impose some discipline. Seven-point blog entries will henceforth be limited (or is that “limited”?) to 1800 words—an overall average of 200 words per point plus 200 each for the introduction and conclusion. A new “Beyond the Snark” section will now be required to give pointers to some of the factual material that underlies...uh...the snark, rather than in-text links which were sometimes useful, but might also just send you off to a picture of Cthulhu. I managed to negotiate—this was tough, but had to be done—unlimited words on the footnotes, but everyone skips those anyway (joke...). There’s a backlog of about a dozen half-completed entries, and we’ll see if this improves things.
 2. “Joe and Jane Sixpack,” “single moms,” “trailer trash” and “rednecks” do not qualify.
 3. Do I have a shred of evidence to support this claim? No! But we are in the post-modern era and everybody has won and all must have prizes! Okay, so of course I’m lying, but hear me out. (An old Hollywood joke.)
 4. Contemporary attitudes towards race relations in those segments of the LMCWD that could be courted by a 21st century Democratic party, while nuanced, are arguably considerably more tolerant, and considerably more meritocratic, than those of the Clintons’ friends on Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and the Ivy League universities.
 5. Republican consultants achieve the same level of anxiety using a 30-second video of kittens playing with yarn under a picture of Barack Obama shaking hands with Pope Francis.
 6. New motto: one Vitter down, one to go.
 7. About the same time Ted Robert Gurr, in an International Studies Association presidential address, did the same to Samuel Huntington’s infamous *Clash of Civilizations*. Facts, how inconvenient.
- And no, the Paris attacks are not validation for *Clash of Civilizations*: for every unit of effort ISIS has spent attacking the West they’ve probably spent a thousand killing other Moslems and attacking Arab institutions.
8. Hey winks, that top-down Washington-led “War on Drugs”?—how’s that working for ya?
 9. That’s classical conservatism, not to be confused with the bloviator conservatism served up on the Fox Fantasy Hour—same program, merely repeated in 24 daily segments with different hosts—which bears the same relationship to classical conservatism as an elementary school kazoo band does to a virtuoso performance of the *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*. A topic to be elaborated upon in a later blog entry.
 10. The First Iron Law of U.S. Religious Movements states that the politically dominant religious affiliation changes about every eighty years—Calvinist to Quaker to Methodist to liberal Protestant to conservative evangelical—and as such we are heading towards the next transition. The Second Iron Law is that whatever the dominant sect, Baptists are number two, and Catholics number three. The Third Iron Law is that there is always more going on with new religious movements that the first three groups would like to acknowledge.
 11. The original aphorism in [Henry The Sixth, Part 2 Act 4, scene 2](#) alas, has some human rights issues.
 12. The “Republican Party”, of course, has precisely the same structure, albeit with a different if overlapping set of families, and everyone owns guns. Or claims they do.
 13. More generally, for negative policy examples, particularly those involving the sale of beer and wine, and the management of college athletic programs, it’s really hard to beat Pennsylvania. I digress.

14. Probably, but not necessarily. The GOP of Trump, Carson, Cruz, Bachmann, Huckabee and Palin is doomed. For a different but equally compelling set of reasons, so is the GOP of Brownback, Walker, Christie and Jindal. The GOP of McCain, Romney, Kaisch, Bloomberg, the Bush dynasty and Rubio probably is not doomed, and the GOP of Landon, Eisenhower, Dole and Kassebaum would not have gotten into this mess in the first place.

15. Okay, so this is a new experiment to try to get more of these blogs out the door. You see, these usually start when I've run into a series of related articles that get me writing. But once it gets going, Krans, the Demon of Snark, takes over and we end up with, well, we end up with these blogs. So I'm going to try a new section—and not just links and footnotes, particularly since the footnotes are usually be even worse than the body of the text—providing pointers to the serious stuff as well. We'll see how this goes.

16. The wonks and think tanks ain't signing on to this imminently rational proposal, presumably at the behest of their paymasters on Wall Street and in the 79 families, who have absolutely nothing to benefit from either the infrastructure—they live in gated communities and fly NetJets, remember?—or low-interest long-term bonds.

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