

The Rift in Politics

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Since the presidential election of 2000, the political parties of the United States have never been as divided as they are now. Over the past six years, political dialogue, although never very intellectual or civil, has degenerated into verbal battery designed to make each side appear worse than the other. Liberals will not associate with conservatives on an affable basis, and Republicans will not associate with Democrats unless some kind of a political truce is declared. Our friends and neighbors have ideologically entrenched themselves and thrown up barriers of talking points or cold shoulders.

The origins of this renewed partisanship can be traced to the months following September 11, 2001, and its explanation is simple. As a herd animal, human beings tend to coalesce when threatened. The attacks on that day, if we can believe what we are told by the media, obscured the political divide between us because we all felt equally threatened. However, during the buildup to the invasion of Iraq, President George W. Bush misjudged how far he could take this new sense of unity.

Using the time tested method of fear, his administration tried to scare the newly unified populace into supporting a second war. Unfortunately for him, about half of the population was not afraid of Saddam Hussein and began to feel threatened by the Bush administration's curtailing of rights and flippant use of invented facts and associations to build his case for war.

Suddenly, liberal Democrats joined together in common distrust of the Bush administration and conservative Republicans in general. As Republicans accused liberals of treachery, Democrats, under attack, did what people do: they united and positioned themselves in opposition to their attackers and then attempted to strike back. Conservative Republicans, sensing themselves to also be under attack, came together for their common defense and lo and behold, a new divide was quickly (almost within a few months) born.

Despite what pundits and politicians say about bipartisanship, all you have to do is read the comments left on Internet news stories to see how visceral the hatred has become between the adherents of these two ideologies. There is no room for compromise or debate. Liberals and conservatives appear diametrically opposed, with each side accusing the other of misdirecting the country as if they were two firemen fighting over who lit the building on fire, while no one is paying attention to the flames.

This is not new, but the more the two parties fail to see their common interests, the more likely it becomes for the country to fracture along political lines, which makes it all the more important to engage in meaningful, productive discussion. Without that, there is no going back.