

Agitate

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VOTING THIRD PARTY

Are you a liberal looking for change, but you just don't buy the Obama rhetoric? Or are you a conservative looking for a maverick, only to be woefully disappointed by the re-heated status quo politics of John McCain? Perhaps you are one of millions of voters who will go to the polls to choose the lesser of two evils. Or worse, you are one of millions of Americans who won't even bother to show up on election day.

I've talked to many, many people who are seeing through the hype of historic campaign 2008 and are lost. They recognize that neither candidate offers a significant departure from what we are already tired of. We all recognize, whether we are liberal or conservative, man or woman, young or old, that our current political decrepitude requires radical attention. Yet the candidates offered do not represent our needs. They both feed from the same corporate trough. They both present plans that serve elite interests or are at most a lame attempt to pacify their constituents.

We voters want more. We deserve more. And many of us are fatigued and apathetic. There doesn't appear to be any hope.

But there is hope. It comes in the form of third party candidates. Every state ballot has some third party participation at many levels. There are four third parties with significant ballot presence. They represent both sides of the political spectrum. Conservatives who are wary of McCain might look at Chuck Baldwin of the Constitution Party, or Libertarian Bob Barr. Liberals might be interested in Cynthia McKinney of the Green Party or the indefatigable Independent Ralph Nader (yes, that Ralph Nader). Regardless of where you stand, there are alternatives to the tired status quo.

Why Should I Vote Third Party?

"But, Mike," I hear, "voting third party is the same as throwing your vote away." Or I hear, "third parties don't win." Hopefully, by the time you get to the end of this newsletter you will be convinced that these arguments are false.

This false consciousness is the result of socialization and a cynical

political evolution. Many of us vote for Democrats or Republicans out of tradition despite that the two party system is mostly an elite good-ole-boy club that excludes us. We have evolved ingroup/outgroup mentalities with regard to the two party system and see ourselves as part of a team, or reference group based on Democratic/Republican identity. But we are not on the team. This team mentality devolves into a desire to be "winners," to get "our" guy in office, despite the fact that when we do so we end up losing.

The false consciousness above distracts us from what voting is really about. When we vote we should represent our interests, not a party, not a charismatic candidate. Our vote should represent principle over party loyalty. But instead of debates on principle and plans for the future, elections have devolved into popularity contests with no more relevance to the American character than a season of American Idol.

By turning to third parties we can reverse this trend, we can make elections meaningful. We can participate in social movements rather than a pointless ritual of pseudo-democracy.

Voting for a third party is throwing your vote away

It's as if someone decided that Democrats have the liberal vote and the conservative vote belongs to the Republicans. But your vote does not belong to any party or to any candidate. It is your vote and you can use it for whatever reason you want.

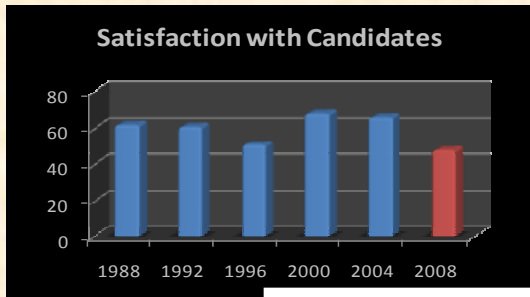
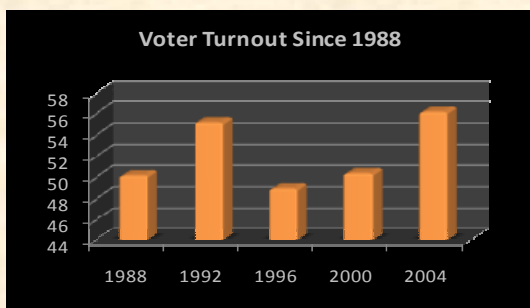
In 2000 those of us who voted for Ralph Nader took a considerable amount of heat for "costing Gore the election." We might as well have voted for Bush, we were told. Many people I talked to believed that Nader had the better platform, but they didn't want to throw their votes away.

Balderdash! Election Day is the one day that the citizens en masse can express their principles and their expectations of government. We shouldn't repress these principles for the sake of participating in a pre-fabricated popularity contest.

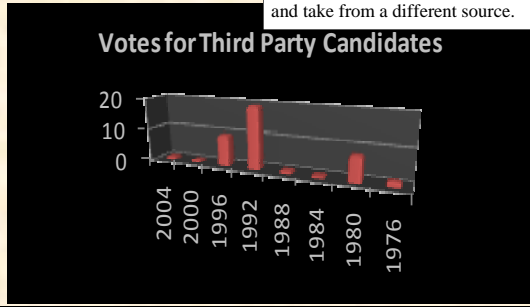
Party loyalty makes no more sense than brand loyalty. There's nobody out there who will continue to purchase a product that does not work. The same rule should apply for politicians. If the product is faulty, don't buy it.

My vote didn't belong to Al Gore. It belonged to me. If Gore wanted my vote then he should have earned it. Despite Gore's remarkable post political career, in the 2000 election he did not earn my vote. This was

a measured strategy on the part of the Gore campaign, as campaigns do not make a move without strategy. By offering stagnant policies



*Stats for 2008 are not complete and take from a different source.



Despite the fact that voter turnout rarely ever passes 50% and between 30-40% of voters are dissatisfied with their choices every year, votes for third party candidates hover around only 1%, only rarely reaching 10% or more (as with the exceptional runs of Ross Perot in '92/'96 and John Anderson in 1980).

that represented the status quo over radical and new ideas the Gore campaign focused on winning the centrist vote. And they did just that. But they did not win my vote.

They did not offer policy platforms that appealed to the likes of me. I was concerned with corporate greed, the influence of money in politics, growing class inequality, environmental injustice and protection, education and labor reform. The only candidate who was talking about these issues and had a platform worth voting for, from my perspective, was Ralph Nader.

The Gore people knew that they were taking the risk of losing people like me and hoped to appeal to ingroup loyalty to keep my vote. In my case, and in the case of 2.9 million Nader voters, they were wrong. There was no sense in remaining loyal to a party that showed no loyalty to me. I voted on principle. I voted for the candidate that represented my interests—and I don't for a second regret my vote despite the horror show of the last eight years.

By voting on principle our concerns become record. The political analysts that are a part of all administrations count all votes, regardless of where those votes go. If large numbers of people vote third party, that gets noticed even among the winning administration. When the numbers represent a trend, or a social movement, the consultants and advisors respond. Policy changes are adopted to plug the gaps. If we vote along conventional lines, however, our point of view is lost in a false statistical measure that is translated into a false mandate for a candidate who does not represent the will of the people. Talk about throwing your vote away!

For instance, a majority of Americans support universal health care (CBS/New York Times Poll, ABC News/Washington Post, New York Times), but neither candidate has this on the agenda. Both Obama and McCain offer variations on the failed system already in place. Yet almost all Americans will vote either Democrat or Republican and create the illusion that when it comes to health care, they support minor changes to the status quo.

If health care voters turned and voted for third party candidates who supported universal health care, in this case Nader and McKinney, then they would be heard. Voting for Obama/McCain reduces the healthcare movement, with most grassroots movements, to silence.

This is true for many issues in which the major candidates hold positions contrary to the electorate: The Patriot Act, The Iraq War, Banking Bailouts.

Voting for the Winner

Despite the fact that contemporary campaigns are presented in the same way as sports or entertainment, a democratic election should not be comparable to a sporting event. It's easy to get confused. The mainstream media treat Democrats and Republicans as if they are the Yankees and Red Sox. They quote statistics and campaign strategies. They keep score by quoting polling trends. Who's ahead? What does the opponent have to do to catch up? McCain must appeal to independent voters, sounds strangely like McCain needs to look for the high hard one on the three and O.

Elections are not sport. Voting is a key element to the preservation of liberty and democracy. Politicians are not hitting balls with a stick, they are making decisions that determine the quality of our lives, often decisions of life



and death.

Candidates are pitched to us much like sports teams. And we follow "our" candidate just as we follow "our" teams. When watching sports, we have no expectation of reading the playbook or giving the coach our input as to how the game is played. During an election, however, we should expect just that. We have become spectators when we should be the people calling the shots. And just like our delusional claims that our third place team is really number one, despite all evidence to the contrary, our blind support for political candidates is undeserved.

By presenting political campaigns as if they are sporting events, or a source of entertainment, voters are reduced to being a passive audience rooting for a team to "win." My party is number 1, even when it isn't. The other party is bad and wrong and dishonest, even when it is no worse, wrong or dishonest than my party. Principle loses its meaning. It becomes more important that my team wins, wins, wins. And in the end...I lose.

Voting should not be about winning and losing. Voting is just one aspect of political action. An election should be an integral part of building and maintaining a social movement, of enhancing the social discourse and furthering the debate on human freedom. We won't ever get the things we want, like universal health care, if our votes and our actions do not reflect this desire. Voting must be part of something larger.

Building a movement is often a slow process resulting in short term losses, but evolving inexorably to long term success. If voting is about building a movement, then our emphasis on being on the winning team must take a back seat to our principles. We must vote our principles, but also discuss our principles, debate our principles, expand our principles, accommodate input from others and network with people who think similarly and bring them into our movement. Voting to "win" is detrimental to this end. Only third party candidates are committed to principle.

I'll be voting third party this election in every race that I can. For races in which there is no available third party candidate I will vote against the incumbent, regardless of party affiliation. I'm going to use my vote to shout out that I am dissatisfied with politics as usual. I am fed up with the Democrats and the Republicans. Politicians, once entrenched in power, never fulfill the promises that they make during the campaign. It is the responsibility of the electorate to ensure that no person and no party becomes entrenched in the seat of government. No politician should be able to "count on" our votes due to party loyalty or the desire to be on the winning team. They should earn our votes.

Take Action!

STOP VOTING FOR THE MAJOR PARTIES!
It's really that easy. Do your research into the third party platforms and candidates. The chances are you will find someone who meets your expectations better than the convention approved robots who are being paraded in front of you. See the Activism page at www.madsociologist.net for links to third party candidates.