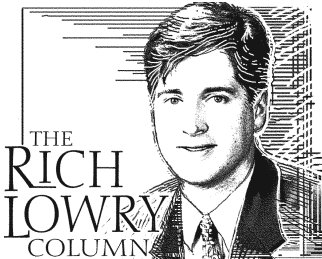


The Trump GOP Isn't All That Different

Donald Trump took over the Republican Party, but it's still discernibly the Republican Party.

The Republican National Convention was obviously very Trumpy. At least one member of the family had a slot every night, and it featured theatrical touches worthy of reality TV.

There also are notable differences of substance. Trump's party has reversed itself on trade and jettisoned concern over deficit spending. The party is much less hawkish than George W. Bush's GOP and much more skeptical of immigration than Ronald Reagan's. It doesn't have the focus of the 2004 Republican convention on terrorism or the 2012 Republican convention on out-of-control entitlement spending.



And yet there is a clear throughline between today's Republican Party and the GOP of the past several decades. Someone transported from the floor of a Republican convention in the 1980s, 1990s or 2000s to the Mellon Auditorium would unquestionably have known where he or she was.

Take Don Trump Jr.'s forceful speech, which by lineage and inclination should be most representative of the Trump GOP. Sure enough, on trade and immigration, Trump Jr. hit distinctively Trumpian notes. But much of what he said echoed high-profile speakers at past Republican conventions.

Trump Jr. argued that "Biden's radical left-wing policies would stop our economic recovery cold," in part by raising taxes.

This contrast with Democrats is a GOP commonplace. The keynoter at the 1984 convention during the high tide of Reaganism, Katherine Davalos Ortega, then treasurer of the United States, hit Democratic nominee Walter Mondale for his long record "based on the idea of high taxes, big spending and more government regulations."

Trump Jr. called the former vice president "Beijing Biden" and said he's "weak on China."

Harsh? Yes. But name-calling aside, Republicans have been hitting Democrats as weak for decades.

In his acceptance speech as vice president in 1984, George H.W. Bush referred to the "Carter-Mondale era of vacillation, of weakness, of lecturing to our friends and letting them down."

At the 2004 convention, Democratic Sen. Zell Miller scorned John Kerry as "more wrong, more weak and more wobbly than any other national figure."

Trump Jr. declared that "in the past, both parties believed in the goodness of America. We agreed on where we wanted to go. We just disagreed about how to get there. This time, the other party is attacking the very principles on which our nation was founded."

In her famous 1984 foreign policy speech, Jeane Kirkpatrick hit a similar note, saying that Democrats once "were not afraid to be resolute, nor ashamed to speak of America as a great nation."

Republicans have long promoted national pride and national strength, or as Trump Jr. put it, "this land of promise and opportunity -- of heroes ... and greatness." In 2012, Chris Christie ended his keynote speech by declaring, "together, we stand up for American greatness."

This perspective sheds some light on the future of a post-Trump GOP. In the main, it's not likely to be radically different from the current one. As Michael Barone argued in The Wall Street Journal, America's political parties are great institutions that change gradually, while preserving an identifiable DNA.

If the convention again demonstrated Trump's personal grip on the party, it also showed that the Republican Party as it has existed for decades isn't going away.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.

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The Show

I know, I know. You're really bummed out that the party conventions are over. Either that, or you're so disgusted that you want to "throw all them bums out."

Actually, as thrilling as they were, they were only the lounge act; the main show begins now. And yes, it was a four-year lounge act, beginning when the ballots were counted in 2016. Because, American tradition has it that the next presidential campaign begins a few hours after the previous election results are known.

This time around it's been a one-man show. President Donald Trump has held the spotlight more than anyone in history. That's partially on the media, but it's mainly due to Trump's incredible knack of being so goofy, so hateful, so preposterous, that all any of us can do is gasp and react to his latest outrage.

Let's face it, the remaining campaign also will be about the Trumpster. Joe Biden could be the nicest, most capable candidate who has ever run for president -- after all, he's done it three times -- but he's still "What's his name." This is an up or down poll about Donald Trump. You either love him or you hate him.

True, there will be a few high points -- or campaign low points, if you prefer -- to capture your attention. The three debates between Trump and "What's his name" should be a hoot. The first one is scheduled for Sept. 29 at Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland. But will it observe coronavirus protocol? Will there be masks worn? Assuming they are in the same room, will they hit each other? How effective will the instant fact checkers be?

Can there be two losers? Trump, because he says something amazingly bigoted, or Biden if he utters something dumb. They have both had long experience.

There's a vice presidential debate Oct. 7 at the University of Utah. A reminder that she is the first woman of color to be a major party Veep nominee. He is whiter than white and a Trump apologist, to put it mildly.

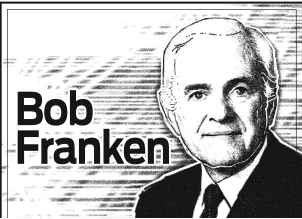
Notice, this calendar of events has now gotten into October. That means it's "October Surprise" time. That's a sensational last-minute charge against one candidate that causes a really big turnout by supporters of the other, or discourages the other side so much that it stays home in droves. Maybe it will be video of Joe Biden taking a bribe from a Ukrainian oligarch. Perhaps it will be a recording of Donald Trump actually doing what he said he did in the "Hollywood Access" tape. (Does the word "grab" refresh your memory?)

Of course, because of COVID, most Americans will have already voted by mail. The truth is, most have already made their minds up. That might be why Trump so opposes mail-in ballots. He might not have the chaos when tallying the results that many worry he's counting on so he can claim the election is rigged and not accept the results.

Then we will really have drama. Will the military support his attempted coup? Maybe the 2024 campaign will not begin on Nov. 4, the day after, because there won't be a 2024 election. Donald Trump will declare himself leader for life. Far-fetched? There are those who don't think so. Besides, what would we do in this country for entertainment without politics?

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