

What's Really Wrong with the Republicans?

Another piece by *New York Times* columnist David Brooks is going viral. This one is entitled [“The Republicans’ Incompetence Caucus”](#).

I think Brooks’ main point is in the neighborhood of the problem with today’s Republican Party:

“The Republican Party’s capacity for effective self-governance degraded slowly, over the course of a long chain of rhetorical excesses, mental corruptions and philosophical betrayals. Basically, the party abandoned traditional conservatism for right-wing radicalism. Republicans came to see themselves as insurgents and revolutionaries, and every revolution tends toward anarchy and ends up devouring its own...”

Over the past 30 years, or at least since Rush Limbaugh came on the scene, the Republican rhetorical tone has grown ever more bombastic, hyperbolic and imbalanced.”

Yep. As I’ve written elsewhere, the Republicans have developed more of a negative identity over the past few decades – one that primarily *opposes* rather than *proposes*. That strategy can achieve some short-term victories. However, the rhetoric promoted by Limbaugh or some other conservative commentators isn’t really enough to sustain a movement in the long-term. People can’t stay angry forever. Eventually they want to hear some sort of positive vision for society, one that goes beyond “leave me alone.”

What Brooks fails to mention, though, is that plenty of Democrats are also guilty of bombastic rhetoric. The difference is that they have the culture-shaping institutions

that support their rhetoric: the education system, the news media, and the entertainment industry. The Democrat rhetoric better jives with the worldviews of Americans that have been formed by these institutions.

The Democrats, unlike the Republicans, have played the long game by not only focusing on politics, but culture, as well. Many powerful Republicans are still singularly focused on getting the right person elected and the right policy passed. Democrats care about these things, too, but they also realize that ongoing success in elections and legislatures doesn't happen in a vacuum. It requires that the groundwork be laid at the cultural level. It requires promoting *ideas* that people get excited about, that they can see having impact in their lives, and that they want to spread to others.

In the classic movie *Ben-Hur*, the villain Messala is asked, "How do you fight an idea?" His answer? "With another idea."

Republicans are still searching for that "idea."