

***Changing the Two-Party Political System in the United States:***

***The Evolution of the Libertarian Party***

***in the Context of Philosophy, History, and Politics***

**Honors Project**

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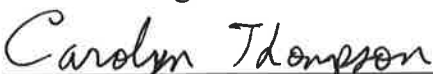
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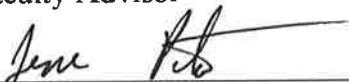
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*To my Father*  
*Terry Randall McCall*  
*who always inspired me*

## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

The topic of third parties in the context of our political system seems to always become a controversial issue. While there does tend to be some agreement that third parties do offer a diversity of ideas that are important to our political landscape, the debate seems to inevitably revolve around what party (if any) offers any real alternative to the Democrats or Republicans. While this work mainly looks at the Libertarian party, it should be noted that the Libertarian party is not the only viable option available as far as third parties go. Third parties fill the entire spectrum with their variances in structure, ideology, and central purpose. The Libertarian Party is simple one option among many. My purpose here is not to laude the Libertarian Party with praise or to show any unique superiority of purpose, but rather to point out that other options to our current two party system exist and these options should be examined.

I would like to thank the UNC-Pembroke faculty whom have helped me so much in this project. I would especially like to extend my thanks to Dr. Carolyn Thompson, whom has guided me and given direction since this papers inception. I would also like to thank Dr. Joseph Miller and Dr. William Albrecht, whose respective knowledge of philosophy and political science has given me many insights and much guidance. Finally, I extend my thanks to Dr. Jesse Peters, who has consistently helped me in working through many drafts of this project.

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ABSTRACT

CHANGING THE TWO-PARTY POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES:

THE EVOLUTION OF THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY

IN THE CONTEXT OF PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY, AND POLITICS

by

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Bachelor of Art in Political Science and Public Administration  
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The current reality of United States politics is that our political system has failed to evolve beyond two parties. For a multitude of reasons, the political landscape in America continues to be dominated by the Republicans and Democrats. However, third party options do exist that seem to offer a real difference and could potentially break through the two party system.

This paper examines the development of third parties in the United States political system, with particular attention given to the Libertarian Party. The Libertarian Party constitutes one of the few successful third party movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Using the works of John Locke, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill among other political philosophers, I explicate the primary tenets of the Libertarian movement and advance the argument of its compatibility with democratic political theory. Having established this, I explore the Libertarian movement as a political party compared to the two majority parties to show not only the political advances of the Libertarians but the similarities and differences of the party's political development to the "main" parties.

Having recognized the viability of the party both as a philosophy and as a political movement, I examine the stances of the party in several major public policy issues. This will highlight the distinct differences on policy stances that the party offers. Afterwards, I

examine the Libertarian party in light of their response to “real life” political disaster and as compared to the parties in power. This will show how the party reacts to the real world (as opposed to the abstract world of philosophy and public policy) and show a unique difference from the Democratic and Republican reactions. Having examined the party through its philosophy, history, policy stances, and its reaction disaster, I conclude with an examination of built-in barriers which work to stop the rise of third parties like the Libertarians. These barriers will serve to demonstrate that no matter how much a party strives in its idealistic and practical differences, the American political ideology continues to operate against the emergence of any third party. I conclude that the Libertarian Party is a positive addition to the current party structure in the sense that its new ideas in general give life to the political landscape of the United States.

## **Introduction**

Every nation has experimented with unique variances of government, from the Pharaoh of Egypt to the Shahs of Iran to the Emperors of China. In history, countries reaching for real democracy in government have committed themselves to a tedious and long-fought battle. Democracy's traditional idea – to transfer power from the elites to the majority, and to make the government itself an embodiment of the will of the people – has from time to time been mocked and trampled by powerful men and women determined to never let power slip from their grasps. America contains the same powerful men and women, but they do not usually act individually – instead, they act collectively as political parties. At first glance, the American political landscape would seem to suggest that, for one of the few times in the history of mankind and government, we are among the few to finally live out the democratic ideal and disperse power among the people.

Taking on a global perspective, there are many nations which appear to have “democratic” values across the globe, but few truly contain democratic governments which empower the people. It would appear that finally, here in America is a government of the people which has no divinely mandated ruler to seize all power. But on more careful inspection, the larger picture comes into view. The political process of the United States of America has become a multi-faceted and diverse arena of intellectual idealists and policymakers who fight in cohesive groups to gain control of our government. Indeed, America is not a nation ruled by a sole power: the country has come under the rule of political parties. For the most part, the “political party mentality” has replaced the “individual mindset” in the political arena. True power is no longer given to individuals,



but to parties. A single senator is powerless against his or her opposition party. The basic nature of political parties – whether they are viewed as powerful interest groups intent on only achieving their own goals or as organized bodies of the electorate attempting to instate the will of the people – is debatable. Regardless, the amount of power and prestige given to political parties in America is such that they will remain formidable entities in the realm of politics for some time to come.

But how much power and prestige do political parties really have? This too is debatable, but here we deal with power in terms of policy making ability. It is undeniable that organized political parties place their members in the highest levels of executive and legislative branches of government. These branches, of course, have the ability to make laws and therefore wield a substantial amount of power over the nation. Of course, to be ruled by organized groups who have definable and historically semi-static platforms might be seen as a stabilizing force in our political world, but the alternative view is that our two main political parties have created an unchanging realm of policy making through which no one except them can propose an alternative. Until recently in history, the vast majority of power in our political system was shared between two powerful and often very similar parties. Now, things are beginning to change through the role of third parties in our traditionally two-party system.

## **A Look at Third Parties: Successes and Failures**

Third parties in the United States have often played important roles in the American process, although the degree of power that each third party has achieved is widely disputed. For the most part, American third parties do not seem to survive beyond the candidacy of their leader that is seeking high office. Of all of the Western democratic systems, the United States appears to be unique for its highly "inhospitable" environment to political challenges offered by those movements who start outside the two-party system (Jelen 1-2). In the last century sixty five recognized minor and third parties have sprung up, each having some regional success (Ciment and Ness 23). The daunting task of covering the history of each would prove to be a monotonous affair. Instead, to consider the political and historical context within which these parties have operated, a look at a "successful" major third party and an "unsuccessful" third party would be appropriate. For the purposes of this discussion, a "successful" political party is defined as a party which has attained ballot status in a majority of the nation during the last election cycle, an "unsuccessful" party is quantified as a party which has ceased to retain a national structure. The goal of this discussion is not only to provide a comparison and contrast of political parties, but to set a standard which would define what it takes to become a thriving third party in America.

The Green Party of the United States can trace its roots back to many different Green Parties in countries across the globe. From Europe to the South Pacific, the Green Party is in many ways a global movement which has spawned national parties. In the United States the first organizational meetings to form a national party began in 1984, which lead to a local focus for organization headed by the Green Committees of

Correspondence. The first candidate to appear on a ballot occurred in 1986, and the party gained state-wide ballot status by 1990 in Alaska. By 1995, Ralph Nader set into motion the party's first Presidential campaign, and the party achieved ballot status in over 22 states ("Green Party History"). The party did obtain over 700,000 nation-wide vote count during the 1996 election ("Green Party History"). The state-level organization structure of the party was abolished and reformed into a national structure in 2001, headed by the Green National Party Committee and under continual influence by Ralph Nader before he left the party. In 2004, the Green Party achieved ballot status in over 28 states and obtained over 120,000 votes for the party's Presidential candidate David Cobb. The Green Party continues to operate as a national party today, affecting environmental policy debates in Washington through intense lobbying efforts to maintain environmentally favorable laws ("About the Green"). The success of third parties such as the Green Party seems to be dependent upon gaining national recognition and setting forth leaders to run for high office. Furthermore, if those leaders lose and/or leave the party, the party should continue to operate and argue their policy agenda. A party cannot be focused on the charisma of one leader, because when the leader leaves, the party falls apart. Parties based on people, rather than issues, do not last.

If the Green Party is a classic example of a successful third party, how does it contrast with an unsuccessful third party? A "classic" example of an unsuccessful third party is The Natural Law Party, which was formed in 1992 to "bring the light of science to politics" ("Introduction: The Natural"). Its founders: a myriad collection of educators, businessmen, scientists, and lawyers – believed that there were scientific answers to most of America's major problems that were being ignored by the government. After

achieving ballot status in 32 states, the party was granted “national party” status and its presidential candidate, Dr. John Hagelin, was granted federal matching fund status. By 2000 the party continued to run Dr. Hagelin as its Presidential candidate and achieved over 1.4 million votes for all its candidates nation-wide, although Dr. Hagelin obtained only around 84,000 votes in the Presidential race. Growing discordance within the party about how to approach the next election led to the shut-down of nation wide operations as of April 30, 2004 (“Introduction: The Natural Law”). The Natural Law party is an example of a standard third party mistake – under the rule of one single charismatic leader, the loss of an election causes unbelief and infighting inside the party as to why the loss happened. Instead of focusing on successes, focusing on failures leads to the end of the party on a national level. This situation is different from the Green Party, because while Ralph Nader was certainly a charismatic party leader, his stepping down did not result in the termination of the party on a national level. Taking these examples together, what do they mean?

Viewing both of these third parties shows a pattern. Third parties often begin with local support by individuals, who then support a charismatic candidate for high office. Often, however, that original swell of support tapers off when the said candidate loses and third party support rapidly declines or even ceases to exist. While the “unsuccessful” third parties of America seem to leave behind a legacy of dwindling support after their charismatic candidates exit the picture, “successful” parties do not depend on their candidate alone and continue to focus on their policy issues long after the election. These “successful” parties realize that even though they may lose an election, they still have time to rally support and garner attention towards their issues before the next election

cycle.

Having set the standard for successful political parties which we will use later, we must first ask if third parties are really needed. If we simply examine the current political landscape of our two-party system, it appears as though there are no "real" problems. The nation is facing no imminent disaster or problem that really shows any signs of trouble for our current system. If there are no problems with the current system, then no further discussion is warranted. Perhaps former Chief Justice Earl Warren stated the best argument in favor of the need for third parties:

All political ideas cannot and should not be channeled into the programs of our two major parties. History has amply proved the virtue of political activity by minority, dissident groups, which innumerable times have been in the vanguard of democratic thought and whose programs were ultimately accepted. The absence of such voices would be a symptom of grave illness in our society. (N.A.A.C.P. v. Button)

Chief Justice Warren notes that the entire scope of political ideas cannot really be directed towards our current two parties, the diversity of political ideas is simply too wide to fit everything into a two party system. Time and again history has shown us those who provide the most radical and (in hindsight) most admirable political change are small minority groups. If American society becomes devoid of such voices because these groups can find no place in our political system, then we face the real possibility of creating a static political arrangement, which could lead to the loss of many democratic ideas.

Third parties are extremely important to the continuance of our democratic

society. It is undeniable that successful third parties are needed if we are to continue to live in a dynamic political society that hears the voices of all its groups, including minorities. However, because the spectrum of political voices cannot be contained within our current two party system, there is a need to create other third parties which give more breath to those opinions falling outside of the Democratic and Republican parties. However, the creation of more parties runs into multiple obstacles that make the creation of any party very difficult to achieve. The current two party system in American politics must change, even as seemingly every facet of our political landscape facilitates the growth and status quo of two large parties.

It will take much to push through the barriers put in place by a system designed and controlled by two powerful organizations. To accomplish such would require a party of some difference, one that contains a larger vision of what America should be and will not simply fall apart after it achieves its goals. Such vision and passion exists within many parties, mainstream and otherwise. We could look at any of the many successful third parties for such qualities. In searching for a party to analyze we must use one that provides a variety of policy making opinions. We must use one that does not, like the Green Party, focus on only a few policy making areas. It is only through a variety of policy making opinions and a broad sense of background political philosophy that a third party could attempt to start a core shift in how the political system operates. When narrowing down the list of successful third parties that meet these qualifications, we turn finally to the Libertarian party. The Libertarians offer a grounded platform which gives an array of policy making opinions that present answers which are fundamentally different than the typical Republican or Democratic solutions. To analyze the potential of

the Libertarian party, we will examine if the Libertarian movement represents an ideological shift away from "traditional" American parties, and, if so, what the implications are for the American political landscape over the long term. 6

Before we examine the Libertarian party in depth, we must first examine the current components of our two party system: the Democrats and Republicans. So that we may fully understand the two current monoliths of political authority in America we will examine their respective histories. While comparison to other third parties shows how the Libertarian party is different, comparison to the main two parties serves to delineate that difference to an even further extent. Note that any exhaustive history of either party is beyond the scope of discussion here, and what follows is only a brief summation of the time periods where each party came into what we could describe as its "modern existence."

## **The Democratic Party**

The Democratic Party emerged as its modern formation fairly early on in American history, after the war of 1812. Over the next ten years, the party's internal structure developed and factions emerged. While some Democratic members argued against Federalist efforts to force centralized government on the American people, some centralizers thought that the formation of such a government would only work to secure individual liberties. While the former members would eventually break from the party, centralizers began to consolidate power and work toward their goals (Rutland 20). This group of Democrats knew that the popular nature of political conflict was such that political parties would be the best tool to handle policy in the arena of public politics. Democratic efforts to establish their party in the political landscape were stimulated by regional, religious, and economic fault lines that served as cross cutting cleavages throughout the Nation. These cleavages were representative of collective political problems on an individual level where people found no solace in any other political party.

The first Democratic President to be elected in the twentieth century was Woodrow Wilson. President Wilson is known as being the President during World War I, helping to establish the League of Nations, and creating the Federal Reserve Board, as well as numerous labor and child welfare laws. Wilson was an effective unifier of the Democratic Party – deeply ensconced in its traditional core, Wilson believed that progressive government used to fix problems in the social and economic system should be encouraged (Rutland 103). A generation later, Franklin D. Roosevelt offered New Deal programs that went beyond the Democratic base and encouraged citizens to believe that the government could and should help them in times of need. Continuing the pattern



of enlarging the welfare state, in the 1960s President Kennedy's successor President Johnson declared a war on poverty and began to form a series of what became known as the "Great Society" programs, which included the creation of Medicare (Brief History).

By the 1960s, diplomatic problems in foreign policy and a domestic uproar against the welfare state added even more problems to an already chaotic political scene. The Civil Rights Movement (widely supported by Democratic leadership and a small but healthy percentage of its core members) and Vietnam War lead to widespread outbreaks of protest which quickly rendered the party helpless against widespread discordance and disorganization (Rutland 157). As people became more angry with the federal government, factionist sects in the Democratic party caused the end to previously unified national platform. The party was beginning to come under the domination of eastern liberal Democrats, whose vision consisted of a humane and middle-class viewpoint. Complicating problems, African Americans and ethnic groups began filling up party seats that were once filled by European ethnic groups (158). In a time when racism was still rampant across the nation, having minorities in local politics often invoked the anger of powerful and influential racists within the party. Inner-party struggles caused by disagreements between racists and non-racist members proved to be a great thing for the platform. Because of the conflict democrats were eventually able to champion the democratic ideology of ethnic and gender equality. The democratic ideals of an expanded and powerful government empowered with the authority to ensure equality continues to be a powerful political force in minority groups today.

This general pull on certain race groups (minorities to democrats, whites to republicans) is a classical attribute of both parties and is not seen in the Libertarian party

(163). While it is certainly true that Democrats are not all minorities and Republicans are not all white, the fact is that these parties do tend to draw in one race over another. There is a definite perception that the Democrats advocate for policies that are to the advantage of minority and/or impoverished groups. In the same vein, Republicans advocate policies that are to the advantage to the of the majority and/or wealthy groups. The most obvious example is welfare policy, which Democrats endorse and want to expand and Republicans want to restrict.

## **The Republican Party**

The Republican Party in its modern sense, which constitutes the other half of the two-party "equation," was non-existent in the decade prior to the Civil War, although the time was nonetheless marked by one of the most unstable periods of partisan politics in America's history. In the 1850s, just when Democratic rule in all areas of government seemed to be an unstoppable event, a new group of anti-establishment candidates emerged to challenge the Democratic Party in late 1854 and early 1855. Some of this group was elected to the House of Representatives in 1856, and after a period of power consolidation, became known as the Republican Party. Just four years later, this officially formed party would capture the entirety of Congress and the Presidency, which would later "sow the seeds for succession and war" (Jenkins and Nokken 2).

From a historical context, the Republican Party remained divided for much of history, with its most bitter period beginning after the stock market crash of 1929. The Great Depression did not fare well for the Republican economic theory (Brennan 6). At that time, the theory was laissez-faire economics, the idea that government should completely stay out of all aspects of the economy. As such, the GOP loss of the 1932 election placed a man in office who was the opposite of everything the party stood for: Franklin D. Roosevelt. President Roosevelt laid the foundations for the modern welfare state, and vastly expanded programs that were put in place during the Progressive Era. As Republicans began to stonewall the New Deal, World War II began ensuring a further expansion of welfare state policies and a continuation of a Democratic presidency (Brennan 7).

Republicans brought themselves back into the political affairs in Washington that

they had been cast out of after the war ended. In 1946 the party gained control of Congress and blocked President Truman from further expanding New Deal programs. The party also began a political crusade against communists which quickly gathered popular support. Using communism to personify evil, the party then attacked the Democratic platform by alleging that it was "soft on communism" (Brennan 8), a bold face use of fear ideology used in an attempt to gain political support. After the election of Dwight Eisenhower in 1952, a new era dawned for the party which quieted disputes and encouraged bipartisanship. However, what appeared to be tranquility on the surface actually hid intense factions of quarreling groups. The dividing line seems to have been a continuation of geographic and socioeconomic differences, with the leaders of the party being called the "Eastern Establishment." The Establishment was made of an elite group of Ivy League men who operated many corporations under the benefits of government protectionism, all while controlling the purse strings of the party. Most of these members came from the northeast – and when common businessmen from the south and west came to challenge the Establishment power brokers, they spawned an inner party populist movement ("New Deal Era"). It seems as though while the Republicans were once again rising in power, internal factions had developed causing the party to split on public policy issues in general. While the party as a whole was swept up together in its rise to power, the rise brought about different factions who held very different opinions about how much of a role government should play in society. Some in the party believed in only a moderate level of government power - these are traditional conservatives. Others are only conservative in their social views, and advocate government expansion. This has been a general problem for the Republicans throughout history, and the result is often a non-

uniform approach to political issues.

The postwar era brought about two main ideological differences: conservatives and classical liberals. While conservatives held the same ideology as the Republican Party, advocating for some expansion of government and for a conservative approach to moral issues such as abortion and capital punishment, classical liberals continued the pre-depression stance of keeping government out of economic and closed door affairs. Throughout the 1950s, party members did not concentrate on their differences and therefore limited their impact. The eventual unifying factor of the party became the continuing anticommunist movement that was sweeping the country. Another important aid to the party came in the form of national media: as conservative media realized that all the parts of modern conservatism simply could not be combined with success, they urged the party to unify in their opposition against liberalism ("New Deal Era"). While those who would become libertarians continued to unite with Republicans on the anticommunist front, increasingly opinions were diverging on the role of government in economics and the everyday life of the citizenry.

The modern sense of what the Republican Party is began to form in the late 1950s and early 1960s as the party struggled through philosophical, geographical, and socioeconomic differences among its many members. This struggle, which would eventually transition power into the hands of more conservative thinkers, was aided by the help of conservative powers outside of the party structure. The formally exiled far right ideologues crafted a shaky alliance with mainstream politicians in the name of furthering the Republican Party's political goals. This new alliance created a vibrant movement, but the unity continued to cause strains. While all the parts of the party

worked as one when it suited them well (traditionalists, anticommunists, and conservative politicians), they overall remained committed to their individual agendas. This overwhelming concern for individual agenda setting continued to be an agent which delayed true unity until well into the 1960s (Brennan 6). Yet again, here we see that the Republican policy making capability is constantly hurt by disunity and party members who put more value on their own reputation than governance.

One of the most critical problems Republicans faced was defining themselves. With most Republicans supporting a basic platform emphasizing small government, reduced spending, and anticommunism – ideological differences became matters of degree. Some Republicans favored more government, some favored more spending, etc. Using these criteria to judge the party platform, anyone who offered ideas beyond this narrow spectrum was ignored (Brennan 17). Quite simply, anyone who voiced discontent and advocated views outside the acceptable range of disagreement had their issues ignored by party leaders.

The late part of the 1960s became a decade of true promise for conservatives. After years of fighting factions and being the minority party, Republican factions agreed to come together and as one group to finally seize control of their party. While the Republicans were viewed as a one-dimensional political party, the Democratic ignorance of growing Republican complexity and popularity was key to the party's strengthening (Brennan 38). Because the Democrats took the Republicans for granted, assuming that the party would continue to only focus on a few issues and offer no diversity, the Republicans were able to grow with no real political problems. It is important to note that this ignorance of the Republican's growing base and rising power level enabled the party

to act in a more secretive fashion. Because the party was ignored mostly by Democrats to busy with their own concerns, Republicans were able to amass much power without notice. Wide scale discounting of Republican efforts across the board led to the formation of the party as we know it today.

The Republican Party once stood paramount for the cause of smaller and reduced government spending throughout America. For example, the continual stress of non-interference from government in economic policy lasted even through the depression. At that time, such a policy was certainly no longer politically expedient, but the party continued to endorse it because of their emphasis on decreased government power. Today, the party continues to divide itself as more and more traditional conservatives move towards a policy which extends protectionism, the idea that all domestic commerce should be endorsed over foreign commerce, and security. While it is clear that many of the Libertarians today would have once found themselves in the Republican Party, the GOP has continued to evolve into ideas and public policies which are completely out of line with the Libertarian perspective that contains an emphasis on complete freedom from government interference on almost all matters. This is mainly because social conservatives achieved dominance of the party. This taking over by religious idealists would seem to be the main source of disagreement between Republicans and Libertarians. While the Republicans seem to grow closer to the Democrats on economic issues, their hard-line and often religious stance on social issues keeps them from complete unification.

Powerful antiparty forces flowed through American politics and contributed to more complications through the mid-1960s. New technologies changed the way that

politics were played, and there was wide-spread decline in vigor everywhere in American politics. As both political parties discounted one another's strength, they began moving to an ideological center, creating more similarities than differences between the two parties. As education levels continue to rise across America, the geographic and historic forces which for so long have bonded many Americans to one party or another have begun to ebb to some extent (Grantham 3). Democrats and Republicans continue to struggle within the new political world. Both parties continue to struggle with inner-disputes and break away from their basic ideologies, and they both still continue to move towards moderation in the hopes of capturing as many votes as possible.



## **The Libertarian Philosophy**

To understand value of a third party like the Libertarian Party, it is important not only to examine its life in relation to other parties, but in the light of the history of its central ideals. As with any ideology centered on an American party, Libertarianism has a history that goes beyond American politics and stretches to such historical monoliths as John Locke, Adam Smith, and anarchist William Godwin (Narveson xi).

John Locke is generally considered one of the founders of classical liberalism, although the ideas behind the concept go as far back as the ancient Greeks in Athens. Locke was a British philosopher who lived from 1632 to 1704 and advocated a political philosophy emphasizing the individual's rights. Locke's philosophy is centered around his belief that the individual rights of any person should not be interfered with and that justly acquired property should not be tampered with by other individuals or government authorities. Locke further argued that it was the sole purpose of the sovereign government to protect rights and that people had a legitimate reason to reject government in any instance where the government did not hold up the rights of the individual. Every man was equal in his right to reject the corrupt sovereign government. For Locke, government was: "A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another..." (Locke 9). Locke's argument focuses on the just powers of government and on moral rights, rights which include respectful treatment of humans amongst themselves. These rights include:

...rights to physical security, to direct one's physical energies and mental abilities without hindrance from others (except in the protection of their own natural rights), to acquire property in an asset that no one else owns at the time by making

good or productive use of it, to retain the fruits of such activity as one's property, to make free exchanges with others of property and personal services, to receive performance from others of their promissory undertakings made in conditions free of fraud and coercion, and to defend oneself, using punishment where necessary, against violations of the aforementioned rights. (Epstein)

These ideas are arguably what was at the very heart of the American Revolution, and such ideas continue to show up in the American political landscape (Dolhenty). For example, the emphasis on the right to vote regardless of race is an ideology deeply entrenched in individualism which very recently played a large role in American politics (Antle). The concept that people are at their core simply human, and that their rights should not be effected by those things which they cannot change (race, gender, sexual orientation etc.), has been the back bone concept of individualism that pre-empted the civil rights movement, and more recently, the homosexual marriage movement. This concept of individualism, as we will see later, plays a central role in Libertarian ideology and is important because individualism in the American ideology is critical.

As a contemporary to Locke, Adam Smith was a prominent Scottish economist during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and has set the framework for libertarian ideology. Known during his time as a radical philosopher, Smith drew deeply from David Hume when considering what rights were - although his basis for the foundation of an individual's rights are somewhat different. For Smith, the importance of developing rights is based on the idea that individualism in a commercial society often leads to wealth (Dolhenty). This idea concludes that because people as individuals always look after their own needs first, the implementation of a commercial market where people are free to do so without

government interference or taxation will lead to the individual hoarding goods, and thus wealth is created. A legal framework endorsing such rights will create wealth through the division of labor in a market economy: "It is the great multiplication of the productions of all the different arts, in consequence of the division on labour, which occasions, in a well-governed society, that universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people..." (Smith 7). Smith had a somewhat utopian view of a libertarian society where people's rights are respected and the problems of centralized wealth and labor coordination are solved. In this view, we have a classless society not because of the redistribution of wealth but because the market economy has seen to it that people are paid for the value of the work they put into products. In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Smith argues that issues of human well-being are naturally addressed through the marketplace. For example, there would be no need to create and maintain government institutions to insure any human need, such as food, because wealth would be generated automatically. Those that did have need of something that they could not generate for themselves could turn to charity (Dolhenty). This emphasis on private markets and non-interference by government would later become the secondary effect of the emphasis on individualism previously discussed as stressed by Locke. This stress on minimal government is central to the Libertarian Party's current platform.

Coming much later in the formation of libertarian ideology was John Stuart Mill, a 19<sup>th</sup> century British philosopher who is best known for defending individual liberty using arguments based on human rights. He argued for the independent development of the individual, holding the belief that this type of growth would eventually benefit society

as a whole. In addition, Mill argued for the allowance of a diversity of opinion, using his underlying perspective that all knowledge is fallible to some extent (Dolhenty). Many of Mill's core philosophies have become central to the Libertarian party. Mill used his argumentation to state that people should be free not because of who they are as individuals, but by virtue of their humanity. Because of this freedom, they should develop as the individuals and this development will only serve to help society as a whole. This stress on individualism and the concept that people are free by virtue of simply being human would later become the reasoning of the libertarian party as to why people have a right to be free from taxation in commercial markets, a concept that was also developed by Smith. While Locke offers the foundation of individualism that will later be used by the Libertarian Party, the evolution of individualism as an idea is much more complex.

Any appropriate discussion about the roots of the Libertarian philosophy would be incomplete without an analysis of individualism – a concept which is undoubtedly at the center of the Libertarian thought process. For Tibor Machan, author of *Individuals and Their Rights*, "...the Libertarian notion of individualism is an idea of liberty that means that we all, individually, have the right not to be content within our realm of authority – ourselves and our belongings..." (101). To permit individualism is to allow each person free reign over his life completely; to restrain them to the realms adopted for them by those more "powerful" than themselves through laws and government is a violation of the individual's rights. For the Libertarian, individualism comes before everything else, with one caveat; no matter what people decide to do as individuals, they have no right to do it if their actions harm another. This is the only "law" allowed, and in this sense Libertarians value government. While Libertarians do value individualism,

they realize that even the rights of the individual must have some basic limitation, and that limitation must be enforced by the government. Thus, Libertarians do value government highly, but only inasmuch as it acts to stop violations of individualism.

According to the Libertarian philosophical perspective, individualism seems to replace what constitutes the single highest order for human concern:

...for *any* given individual person, his own life, well-being, and happiness are the things of ultimate value. Ultimately, the only good reason for a particular individual to choose a certain course of action is that this course serves to secure and maximize his well-being...The individualist principle repudiates sacrifice, where *sacrifice* is construed not as the intelligent ordering of priorities, but as a person's surrender of what is of higher value to his life and well-being for something which is of lower value. (Libertarian Reader 4)

For each and every choice that faces an individual, if one alternative really is greater than the importance that one puts on his own life, then the value of perusing that alternative is by its very nature not really a sacrifice. It is the natural presumption of moral rights that the holder of those rights has at least some authority concerning violations against his or her person. Thomas Hobbes argued that "...by which a man is forbidden to do, that which is destructive of his life or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that by which he thinketh it may be best preserved..." (4). It seems a basic violation of our moral rights to stop us from defending against that which we perceive to be destructive to our lives. This is the foundation of the philosophy of individualism.

To take together all these roots and concepts of what Libertarianism is, it is possible to come up with a definition of the ideology:

[Libertarianism] comprises the doctrine that the only relevant consideration in political matters is individual liberty: there is a defined sphere of action for each person, the person's 'rightful liberty,' such that one may be forced to do or refrain from what one wants to do only if what one would do or not do would violate, or at least infringe, the rightful liberty of some other person(s). No other reasons for compelling people are allowable: other actions touching on the life of that individual require his or her consent. (Narveson 7)

More concisely, it is one of the most basic duties to refrain from using the resources of others without their express acknowledgment – and resources include everything at a person's disposal, including their body and mind. The evolving libertarian mindset has taken this premise and further concluded that:

...(1) we have no *fundamental* duty to provide others with what they need to survive, (2) we do have a general duty to not get involved with the operations of the market, as long as the market remains completely free, (3) as free individuals, we by nature should always choose "voluntary social arrangements" over those that are involuntary, and (4) government in general should be severely limited in its powers. (Narveson 165)

Thus, the libertarian argument here involves the use of only negative rights, or rights of non-interference: rights are not defined by what we have a right to by virtue of our humanity, but by what we do not have a right to. The libertarian ideology therefore rejects the concept of positive contractual rights, the right to receive material goods simply by virtue of being human. Outside of the concepts of basic liberty and freedom, we are not entitled to anything that must be provided to us by outside sources simply

because we are human. This is the basic libertarian argument against such social systems as welfare. While the Libertarian Party continues to advocate for the place of charity in society, members believe it should be a charity that is funded by the government.

In the interest of liberty and the individual, Libertarians feel that it is not the individual's obligation to provide others with anything that they need, even if they need it to survive. While this may seem crude and selfish, the reality is that in the Libertarian world of the market economy, all those who worked for what they needed would be able to sustain themselves. Libertarians do not consider the United States economy to be truly market based; we have too much government interference. That does not, however, diminish the value of charity. Libertarian ideology realizes that no one is perfect, and there will always be a place for charitable giving in any society. However, that giving must be completely voluntary. Further, acceptance of such charity is also voluntary: a starving person does not have a right to die of starvation. The market should act as a stabilizing force that would allow people to enjoy the basics of life; interfering with the market is wrong, unless interference is required to keep the market completely free. It goes without saying that an ideology centered around free will would also assume that human beings would prefer to choose their arrangements rather than having something forced upon them. This basic fact about the human condition should be recognized by government when considering policies that force involuntary arrangements. In the libertarian view, this consideration means that things such as euthanasia should not be outlawed by government. Instead, the government should act in the best interests of the individual and let them make their own choices.

## **Libertarianism as a Political Party**

Having briefly defined and revealed the evolution of libertarian thought from its beginnings, we turn to Libertarianism not as an ideology and philosophy, but as a political party. When people move from the realm of philosophy and normative values to form a cohesive group and attempt to press their thinking, the result is often perplexing. In the translation from the world of ideals to practical use, political parties often lose track of their goals and end up somewhere completely different and mired in personal politics. If a party is to seriously challenge the two party system, this can not happen. In order to examine Libertarianism in the context of the American political system, we now turn to much more recent history. America in the 1970s had a timid political landscape; the nation was running with two continuous themes of environmental fragility and ever-increasing demands on government, all underlying the very apparent failure of government to govern efficiently. On one side, the government was completely lacking and asleep on environmental policy which was the cause of eventual environmental disaster. On the opposite side, people believed that the government had become too aggressive on environmental policy, and this was hampering business efficiency because businesses had to spend much time and money complying with environmental regulations. At the same time foreign powers began to emerge, and the concept of what exactly "national security" meant had been changed. Nuclear weapons now brought people's concept of destruction from visions of armies to a simple bomb being dropped. Overall, many people were beginning to grow tired and fearful of the current political leadership ("1970s Politics").

In the middle of this virtual hodgepodge of political, environmental, and security



concerns, some people were becoming increasingly tired of federal government regulation across the board. As such, the United States Libertarian Party was formed in the house of Dr. David Nolan, officially coming into existence on December 11, 1971. The formation of the party was solidified after several months of extensive debate among the members of the Committee to form a Libertarian Party. The committee was formed in the atmosphere of the heated political climate of the decade, but the movement was sparked shortly after President Nixon implemented severe price controls over an array of retail commodities, a policy with which the committee members strongly disagreed. Simply put, Libertarians viewed the dominant parties, the Republicans and Democrats, to have completely deviated from the libertarian principles of America's founding fathers and believed them to be charging into a political position of authoritarianism whereby the government had gained too much power ("Libertarian Party"). By 1972, the party had 80 enrolled members and access to the ballot in two states. The party's first presidential ticket, John Hospers and Theodora Nathan, earned approximately 3,000 votes. The party also earned its first (and only) Electoral College vote from Roger MacBride of Virginia. This was the first vote to be cast in favor of a woman nominee in the Electoral College ("Libertarian Party"). The Libertarian Party began as a small grassroots movement of concerned citizens and had begun to garner national attention. While the electoral vote of course had no real political affect, it was the first instance where Libertarian Party members began asserting their influence on a national level.

At the next national convention held in New York City, the party named Roger MacBride and David Bergland to be the official nominees for President and Vice President. The party was able to achieve ballot recognition in 32 states. Two years later

the party had voted in its first legislator in Alaska. Nine years after formation, the Libertarian Party was recognized in all states, and was perhaps for the first time considered a potential threat to traditional party politics. At the next congressional election cycle, Libertarian candidate for Congress James Agnew from Louisiana received 23 percent of the popular vote. Afterwards, Congressman Ron Paul defected from the Republican Party and joined the Libertarians (“Libertarian History”). The defection of one of the “big two” party members of high ranking office to a relatively little known third party began to place a media spotlight over the party.

By 1986, the party continued to grow and ran more than 200 candidates for elections across the country who altogether received over three million votes, with Ray Cullen (Treasurer of California) receiving over 570,000 votes – the largest number for a third party in the state’s history. In 1988 Ron Paul placed third in the Presidential election, receiving over 430,000 votes: double the number of any other third party. By the turn of the decade, more and more Libertarians gained substantial numbers across the nation, with many receiving 30 percent or higher in state legislature races. In Texas, over 440,000 people voted for Court of Appeals candidate Carol Caul. In the 1992 Presidential election, the 75 person population of Dixville Notch, New Hampshire chose Andre Marrou, Libertarian, over incumbent President George Bush (“National Libertarian Party”). This is obviously a very small victory, but it was a large symbolic win, one which seems to have sent a shock wave through the national media. Also, New Hampshire elected four Libertarians to the state legislature, and the Libertarian Party again achieved ballot status in all 50 states. In 1992, total votes for Libertarians in office was over 3.7 million, with United States Senate nominees receiving over 1,000,000 total

votes – the highest recorded for any third party since 1914 (“National Libertarian Party”). While only an illusory numeric barrier, passing the one million vote mark meant even more concentrated political and media attention.

The one million vote mark helped fuel a national debate about the place of third parties in America. There was growing feeling that multiple voices in the political spectrum could only serve to increase the caliber of national issues and add something new to the age-old question of what role government should play in society. The debate eventually reached all the way up to the halls of Congress itself. In a ground-breaking move in Congress, National Director of the Libertarian Party Stuart Reges testified in 1993 before a congressional committee, giving endorsement to legislation that would make it easier for third party candidates to participate in presidential debate. By 1994, the Libertarian party became automatically qualified to nominate a presidential candidate in 23 states, the most of any other third party in the same election cycle. In the next election cycle, the Libertarian party was the only third party in American History to achieve ballot status in all states for two consecutive election cycles. That year, the party’s Presidential candidate received over 500,000 votes while the Libertarian candidates received over 5.4 million votes across the country in other races. In 1998, the party ran the most candidates for office compared to any other third party: 853 (“National Libertarian Party”). The slow progression upwards for the Libertarians had brought them to their high point – the party had finally gained a place in the political landscape.

In 2000 a Rasmussen Research poll indicated that over 16 percent of Americans are ideologically libertarian. This is important because the study defined libertarians as a political ideology that was separate from liberalism (more government) and conservatives

(some government). Before this point, Libertarianism was simply considered a subclass of conservatives. The party won two Supreme Court cases, ending what the party constituted as “unfair” election laws in California and various blanket drug laws in Indiana (“National Libertarian Party”). During the year 2000 election cycle the party ran 1,436 Libertarian Party candidates, including 256 candidates for the House of Representatives: the most for any third party in 80 years. Candidates for U.S. House of Representatives received over 1.6 million votes – yet again, a new record for any third party. In 2002, candidates for the House of Representatives received over 1 million votes in the Libertarian Party, the only party in the history of the United States to accomplish this feat two times in a row, except for the Democrats and Republicans (“National Libertarian Party”).

Beyond a mere historical account of libertarian history, all these numbers prove a decisive point: the Libertarian Party continues to grow in strength and record accomplishments unheard of among third parties. On all accounts and in every arena the Libertarian Party remains consistent and grows with each election cycle. To continue to garner so many votes in a system where people realize that, at least at this point, third party candidates have little chance of winning shows party membership devotion. The point here is not so much that the Libertarian Party has been some great success winning so many elections, because they haven't. What it does show, however, is a desire for another option. Throughout the party's short history, each and every election brings an ever increasing amount of votes for Libertarian candidates. The party doesn't even always outdo other fringe parties during these election cycles – but unlike so many parties who gain votes through groundswell movements and then collapse, the Libertarian

Party continues to increase slowly in popularity. This slow growth is essential in order to sustain not only the party itself but the development of its membership and its public policy.

One of the central signs of any permanent party in American politics is the party's ability to continue growing while addressing a wide arrange of issues. As was previously stated, the Libertarian party continues to address its ideology by challenging laws in the court system and ensuring that the party addresses a multitude of issues such that no one single issue can divide the party. It is also vital that any third party offers a real and viable alternative to the Democrats and the Republicans. To do so, a party must have an established vision and ideological difference that runs through the core tenets of the party and flows into the issues it chooses to address. For Libertarians, the continued emphasis on freedom and individuality has proven to be an issue that separates them from the traditional parties and unites party members on a single platform. It is, of course, obvious that both of the other two parties stake claim to adhering to the ideals of individual liberty, but the unique difference is that the Libertarians seem to bring this party ideology to a whole (and somewhat radical) level. While the Democrats and the Republicans do, as we will see, often break their ties to individualism and freedom in the name of politics – the Libertarian party consistently adheres to its ideology.

## **The Libertarians in Modern Politics**

An examination of the Libertarian party's history and how it compares to the main two other parties has brought us to examining the party in present day America. While the historical context of the party and its chief competitors is certainly crucial to our understanding whether the Libertarians can break the two party system, how it operates in the present day is even more important because it shows us what the party is doing in the current political climate. The current political climate in America offers a plethora of political and cultural issues to examine, but this paper will focus only on three. Here, the purpose is to see the Libertarian party not in the light of their philosophical history or compared to other parties, but more in the arena of what their contemporary stances on popular issues are. In doing so, we will see that the Libertarian party does offer a different alternative to the current political party options. This alternative is important because to consistently obtain a true diversity of ideas, which is core to our view of democracy, Americans must have options when choosing political parties.

An example is the Libertarian political perspective on a topic that has widespread implications, the issue of freedom of speech. While the Constitution has granted Americans the right to freedom of speech, since its inception the first amendment has been faced with the question of speech limitations. The political debate centers on how far is too far, how far will freedom of speech be allowed to go and are there any limitations? If we allow limitations, are limitations even constitutional and does that mean that freedom of speech really isn't free anymore?

The Libertarian view of the limits and extent of freedom of speech is very broad.

In almost all instances, the Libertarian Party upholds the right to each citizen's freedom of speech. The official libertarian party stance on the first amendment is:

We oppose any abridgment of the freedom of speech through government censorship; regulation or control of communications media, including, but not limited to, laws concerning: (a) obscenity (including [adult] pornography)...(b) reception and storage equipment...(c) electronic bulletin boards (and) communications networks....(d) electronic or print newspapers (and) websites...(e) commercial speech or advertising... ("Freedom of Communication")

Clearly, such a broad and liberal interpretation of freedom of speech is not without its problems. In the modern world, it would appear at first to be illogical to advocate for total and complete freedom of speech. However, Libertarian advocacy for total freedom of speech is deeply rooted in its ideology. To accept any limitations on what is considered to be such a "fundamental" freedom would be to the Libertarian Party an acknowledgement that on some level the rights of the individual are superseded by the rights of the majority. As the previous discussion about the Libertarian emphasis on individualism illustrates, the core of liberal ideology is individualism. This is crucial to understanding the Libertarian party platform on other related issues.

The libertarian party has no qualms with announcing its unrestricted vision of freedom of speech, proudly proclaiming that its vision rests on the principle that:

We defend the rights of individuals to unrestricted freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the right of individuals to dissent from government itself. We recognize that full freedom of expression is only possible as part of a system of

full property rights. The freedom to use one's own voice; the freedom to hire a hall; the freedom to own a printing press, a broadcasting station, or a transmission cable; the freedom to wave or burn one's own flag; and similar property based-freedoms are precisely what constitute freedom of communication... ("Freedom of Communication")

The Party clearly recognizes that such an all-encompassing and broad statement supporting freedom of speech does create problems. However, they believe that the problems that total freedom of speech creates can be controlled and eliminated using a system of property rights. If people are placed in a completely free market economy where the market can act as an authority to regulate communications, then there is no need for restrictions on communications. Because Libertarians advocate total individualism, the party recognizes that each individual has total control over their own property. In other words, anything which an individual owns may be manipulated to any extent that the owner wishes.

The party believes that the rights of the individual should be unlimited only as long as free speech is defined exercising those rights which do not trespass on the rights of someone else. Such a definition is difficult to define in terms of freedom of speech; however, the party has attempted to make a comprehensive definition. According to Libertarians, "...we recognize that freedom of communication does not extend to the use of other people's property to promote one's ideas without the voluntary consent of the owners...." ("Freedom of Communication"). In a society like America where ownership is clearly defined then, everyone is free to control their own property (property can be defined as anything, except other person's), and do with it as they wish, as long as they do



not use other people's property without consent and as long as their property does not interfere with the rights of someone else. While it may seem crude, the Libertarian extends "property" rights to nearly everything – we are the owners of our bodies, of our actions, etc. This is important because, as previously mentioned, we cannot own other people. This concept of ownership represents a difference from other political options. While the Libertarian ideology asserts that we own everything about ourselves but can own no one, Democrats support ideology that says we cannot own our actions (because our actions are influenced by others) and Republicans advocate that not only do we own everything about our actions but that in some instances we can also own others (the government can attain the right to execute someone, for example).

The Libertarian Party offers several solutions to induce an ownership-centered society where they believe true freedom of speech can exist. Government control of the airwaves would have to cease and free market control would have to be allowed. Further, the Libertarian Party believes that the government should cease ownership and subsidies to any communications organization. Doing such would encourage diversity and innovation, eventually allowing full unconditional freedom of speech ("Freedom of Communication"). The Libertarian view of freedom of communication, while radical, is not simply an ideology. The party has real ideas on how to implement their public policy goals on this issue. The first step in this process would be to abolish the Federal Communications Commission.

To outsiders, such a radical stance on freedom of speech issues poses important questions. For example, does the individual have the right to yell fire in a crowded theatre? Does the individual have the right to slander others without regards to

consequences? Such questions are essential to the issues of freedoms, and the Libertarian party admittedly has no complete answers. On such issues as these, the party and all its literature appear to be decidedly silent.

Unconditional freedom of speech is a rather lofty idea that offers much insight into the Libertarian belief system. It is, however, a farfetched goal for the current status of American politics. The central idea also lacks much controversy – both of the mainstream parties do support freedom of speech, with the only debate being a matter of degree. Certainly the Libertarian idea of Freedom of Speech is void of degrees unless it causes “harm,” but otherwise it does offer a real and unique alternative from either the Republicans or Democrats who advocate Free Speech but both with restrictions. Freedom of speech is something that all parties can agree on in principle. The difference is on how much freedom of speech should be practically allowed. On other issues, there is an even larger diversity of opinion that highlights the uniqueness of the Libertarian party.

When it comes to controlling illegal drugs, the Democrats and Republicans find themselves once again in the same arena: both parties agree to some version of drug control, with Republicans allowing for a more intense regulation and some fringe Democrats advocating for legalizing some currently illegal drugs. The Libertarian perspective is unique here, calling for a complete abolishment of the “War on Drugs” and giving all the money that is normally used to fight against drugs back directly to the people in the form of money, not welfare or charity.

The perspective here looks at the historical context of illegalizing substances in the past. In the 1920s, alcohol was made illegal by Congress through Prohibition. The result was a massive increase in organized crime as criminals quickly moved for the

chance to supply the demand for liquor. Bribery became rampant among public officials as wealthy organized crime members bribed the local law enforcement and judges. Illegal alcohol was more potent and more dangerous to the body than the formally legal liquor. After a massive groundswell movement by the people, Congress finally repealed Prohibition. As states slowly phased in legal liquor, alcohol-related criminal gangs and organized crime was reduced. The Libertarian Party treats the modern war on drugs as a repeat of Prohibition. According to some studies, approximately 40 million Americans are occasional users of some sort of illegal drug. These people won't stop, and laws will never be able to stop drug use ("Should We Re-Legalize"). Again, the Libertarian party's perspective on this issue begins by rebuking government control because the core ideology of the party is individualistic freedom.

The Libertarian Party next turns to the supply and demand marketplace to further support their argument. We know that in a marketplace any demand for a product that is made illegal always causes a black market to appear and supply the demand. Because the product is illegal prices go up dramatically and the opportunity for very large profits becomes obvious to organized crime. Criminals make millions, supplying drugs and often killing those that invade their territory – including innocent people who get caught up in the crossfire. Altered and experimental drugs are sold which cause injury and death, and because the drugs are illegal those who are harmed by them have little recourse ("Should We Re-Legalize").

It is important to note that I believe the Libertarian Party is not in the business of advocating drug use because doing so would be supporting potential anarchy. Instead, while they do not believe in banning drug use, they advocate for everyone to take on

personal responsibility. Drug abuse, just like alcoholism, is a sickness, but we do not outlaw alcohol because a few abuse it. Criminals are the only ones who benefit from the war on drugs. Taxpayers pay dearly for the efforts, with the cost of the war on drugs per year being over \$49 billion at the federal and state levels combined. As the government continues to ban programs such as clean needle exchanges (which the party supports), over 4,000 people per year get HIV infections from unclean needles (“War on Drugs Clock”). Ultimately, individuals are the ones who have a right to decide what they subject themselves to – as long as they take responsibility for their actions (“Should We Re-Legalize”). The party stance here is, if nothing else, consistent. While individuals are certainly free to use drugs, they are still responsible for their actions. Thus, if they harm someone else, they will be punished. The Libertarian position on the war on drugs is one of fiscal and personal responsibility. Again, this is at its core the very same theme that the party takes on the issue of freedom of speech.

The Libertarian Party remains consistent across the board on its popular issues, as we can see through an examination of our last issue: gun control. Gun control is one issue where the two mainstream political parties seem to differ. Generally, Republicans are for less gun control and Democrats seem to be for more, although there are always extremes on both sides. Libertarians also use the aforementioned Prohibition argument to form a basis for what making gun ownership illegal could do. Simply put: “Making gun ownership illegal will not stop gun ownership...” (“Why Libertarians Believe”). They believe what banning gun ownership will do is increase the black market price for guns and give organized crime yet another opportunity to make a very large profit. Criminals will still possess the guns, but law-abiding citizens will not. Libertarians believe that

banning guns is in a way barring freedom of speech.

In the context of freedom of speech, Libertarians put forth that in an ownership society where everyone has complete freedom over that which they own, unbarred freedom of speech would be possible. If we transfer that ownership society over to the issue of gun control then we can understand why it is that Libertarians are in agreement "...with the majority of Americans who believe they have a right to decide how to best protect themselves, their families, and their *property*..." ("Why Libertarians Believe").

The Libertarian argument is backed up with factual studies which show allowing gun usage actually decreases crime rates and banning it causes an increase in crime rates. In 1996 one of the most comprehensive studies on gun bans was released by Dr. John Lott at the University of Chicago Law School. He found that by allowing guns, states reduced murders by eight percent, aggravated assaults by seven percent, rape by five percent, and robbery by three percent. If some states had not banned gun use, then there is significant evidence that suggests we might have been spared 1,570 murders, 7,177 rapes, 60,000 aggravated assaults, and 12,000 robberies. Rationally, criminals seem to respond to deterrence threats (Lott 1). In Australia, where guns have been completely banned, the violent crime and murder rate have gone up. In other countries where guns have been banned, the laws are too recent to run any real conclusive studies. These countries, such as Britain, have at the present time produced conflicting and non-conclusive studies on the connections between gun possession and violence.

The Libertarian perspective realizes that police do not provide security to individual's homes, streets, or businesses – they show up after a crime has been committed. In other words, while the police may have guns still under gun control, the

deterrence effect is minimal. This is because police will usually not become involved until long after the criminal has escaped the scene of the crime. While it is true that many criminals are caught in the act, we know that many more are not. Banning guns will only increase the criminal's ability to victimize innocent citizens, many who previously had guns to protect themselves ("Why Libertarians Believe"). On this point, it would seem that the Libertarians do offer a rational argument. It is true that most municipalities have police forces which patrol the streets – but in a world where only the police and the criminals have the guns, it is impossible for the police to patrol everywhere a crime could be committed at the same time – there are simply not enough resources.

Once again, for the Libertarian Party this issue comes down to personal responsibility. The party proclaims that guns are not the problem: guns are inanimate objects. The problem, they say, is the owner and user of the gun. If a gun owner acts responsibly and does not attack others or negligently cause injuries, then no crime has been done. It is only when a person commits a crime using the gun as a tool that wrong has been committed. To deal with the problem, the party believes that we must impose the most severe penalties possible to those who commit crimes with guns, and hold the gun user fully liable for everything they do. The Libertarian Party believes that rather than banning guns, politicians should encourage gun ownership, education, and training programs. To them, a responsible and well armed citizenry is perhaps America's best protection against domestic criminals ("Why Libertarians Believe"). If citizens are able to defend themselves en masse, then criminals have a much lower chance of successfully harming someone through crime. This policy recommendation finds its foundation in studies like the aforementioned, which show a direct correlation between violence and

gun ownership: when gun ownership is illegal, violence goes up.

On gun control issues, the issue for the Libertarian Party is yet another issue of personal responsibility. There are undoubtedly a wide range of issues that any political party releases stances on, and what has been covered is only a small amount of the overall issues on which any political party would have an official stance on. However, the issues covered show the stark contrast between the Libertarians and the two parties in power. It is undeniable that a diversity of political opinions is needed for our dynamic society. When the two main parties continue to agree more and more on issues, it is important for a third party like the Libertarians to offer a real difference.

The Libertarian viewpoint on these issues has shown to be reasonably within a model of consistency and uniformity. The unique libertarian ideology discussed earlier has been centered on the ideas of liberty, freedom, and individualism. As the Libertarian Party begins to decipher its stance on the vast array of current political issues, that core ideology continues to flow through in a consistent pattern which seems to reflect reason, rationality, and a continued insistence on following the party's key values. It is this consistency and passion which offers a somewhat unique and different approach to politics, and I believe this approach to politics is one of the reasons that the Libertarian Party offers a viable alternative to voters, and is the reason for their loyalty. While it is certainly true that Libertarian ideology is by no means new, the pattern of consistency is.

It is essential to note that one of the major advantages the Libertarian Party has created for itself is that it remains consistent not only on its ideology but also where its issues are concerned. For many modern political parties, the basic ideology and current positions on issues seem to be vastly different, especially in American politics where the

two main parties continue to move to a more central tendency. This can be seen in the historical contexts of both the Democratic and Republican parties, where the party stance on issues changed constantly in attempts to get more votes. Eventually, both parties ended up supporting things that were nowhere near their central ideology. The Libertarian party, which continues to support its platform, gains strength through remaining decidedly away from the center.



## **The Libertarian Party and Terrorism**

In argument against the Libertarians, it could be said that the party remains so uniform and consistent because they have never had to react to a public crisis. In times of crises, politicians and parties must act quickly to appease the population, and it is during these acts of appeasement that many parties do things that seem in conflict with their fundamental ideologies. Because the Libertarian party has not been around enough to see a “real” disaster like a World War, it could be argued that we have no real proof that the party will remain stable. Up until 2001, this argument was valid. Now, however, we can turn to the party reaction during the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, it is important to examine the Libertarian and traditional party reaction in crises. While most of politics is an arguably well-scripted and well planned affair, it is only through the critical responses to crises perhaps that political parties are seen in their truest forms. Throughout history there have been countless events that have shaped the political landscape of American politics, events which have altered how politics operate and have made the political parties stand back and re-evaluate themselves. In more recent history, the event that has caused the most change in the political arena was the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. For one of the few times in American history, a successful foreign terrorist attack resulted in the deaths of thousands of people.

In the immediate aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, an overwhelming sense of unity and patriotism swept the nation. In the context of showing how this disaster has affected the political parties, we must examine the chief legislative body of our government: Congress. Disasters always mean feigned alliances and unity among political parties, because it is in the best interest of the party to appear to be in unity with their opponents

during times of emergency. Because of this, there is no real way to ascertain how this disaster has truly affected the parties individually. Whereas before political parties were discussed as separate economic and political entities removed from government as a whole, we must use Congress as our representative of the true effects of the disaster on the parties. This is because the only real way to see how the parties in power react is to examine their collective decision making capacity. The only example of this in United States government is the Congress, where each party must utilize its representatives in a collective decision making process.

After the disaster, in the United States Congress, both houses gathered to sing on live television “God Bless America” in a show of political unity and support (“Timeline: September 11”). As in so many other times in Congress, however, unity did not prevail. September 11<sup>th</sup> meant that contentious issues (campaign finance reform, patients’ bill of rights, etc.) were moved to the back burner while emergency issues such as disaster relief and airline subsidies were addressed. This meant a swift and fast moving Congress which had none of the normal diversions that add so much chaos and time to the legislative process. While these diversions – budget restraints, partisanship, and philosophical differences – were not ignored, they were severely reduced. Emergency issues were low key, only modestly debated, and quickly dispatched (Binder). But what effect did this show of legislative “unity” have on the decision making process?

Congress quickly bowed to the President’s requests almost uniformly, although a few exceptions should be noted. Congress did refuse to give the Bush administration blanket authority over how appropriated September 11<sup>th</sup> funds would be spent. However, Congress made a concerted attempt to ensure quick legislative action on all the

President's requests. Later, as public fears regarding another attack slowly waned, the public demand on congress to act in a bipartisan manner quickly declined. Once again arose pressures driven by party differences, leading to decisive and contested elections in 2002 (Binder). In times of disaster, the government does have to move quickly. However, it is inappropriate and dangerous for the government to move so quickly that it allows things that prove to be precarious to the nation. Having a third party like the Libertarians, which offers a distinct option, gives the government an opportunity to listen to different ideas which prove crucial to preserving our sense of democracy during emergencies.

Political pundits agree that it is extremely hard for Congress to unite on anything, and generally when they do, it leads to horrible consequences (Binder). Under the unity after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the House and Senate quickly passed the United States Patriot Act. The now widely known act legalized potentially dangerous surveillance and recording powers that are an obvious invasion of the individual's privacy. Among them is Section 212 which permits electronic communication and remote computing service providers to make emergency disclosures to government entities. Section 213 authorizes Federal district courts to allow a delay of required notices of the execution of a warrant. Section 505 allows the FBI to request telephone toll and transactional records, financial records, and consumer reports in any investigation to protect against international terrorism or clandestine intelligence activities. What constitutes such activities is up to the law enforcement involved ("United States"). As we can see, the two parties in power are capable of achieving things that are widely held to be political disasters when reacting to crises.

While the Libertarian Party holds no seats in Congress, it did release a statement

following the terrorist attacks. In the true tradition of political parties during times of chaos, the press release was filled with calls for unity and compromise. However, the Libertarian Party was different in its reaction because it realized how a fast acting Congress and government can lead to the disadvantage of the people. The party chairman warned that:

...we encourage the United States government to be sure that any response is appropriate and measured. Action should not be taken that will cause innocent people in other countries to be killed because of the actions of terrorists. Such a response would only continue the cycle of violence and revenge...The Libertarian Party calls on all Americans to act with tolerance and kindness in the days to follow. A natural reaction...is to find a scapegoat – [such as] Arab-Americans, or ... [those of] the Islamic faith, or those who are in some way different. We must rise above that impulse. If Americans turn down a path of hatred and intolerance, then the terrorist will have won. (“Response”)

In part, this release anticipates the soon to come rise of racism among the general public against those of Arab decent. Such a response to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks was cautioned against by the party because not all Arabs were responsible for the attack. By responding to the attacks with racism, the terrorists have essentially won because they have enabled to breakdown of our individual liberties which are not based on race.

The immediate response of Congress was to authorize use of force against “those responsible for the September 11 attacks”, with a vote of 420-1. The measure specifically allowed the President to “...use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons....[who] planned, authorized, committed, or aided in the

terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons..." ("Congress Approves Resolution"). This overwhelming resolution was passed just four days after September 11. While the Libertarian Party called for reasonability and sensibility when it came to retaliation against the terrorist attacks, Congress quickly moved to authorize the President to use *all necessary and appropriate force* against anyone who *could* have had anything to do with September 11 – or anyone who *could* have harbored anyone or anything to do with the attacks. Obviously, such a wide sweeping authorization of force represents yet again the breakdown of the two parties in a time of crises. It is undeniable that had this crises not have happened, such a measure against any foreign enemy would have never seen the halls of Congress.

We have reached a point in our political history whereby the government should be able to act rationally and sensibly in times of chaos and disarray. Congress's complete bowing to external pressure and broad authorizations after the terrorist attacks show that even under unity the two party system brings chaos and makes what now appear to be gaping mistakes. Both the Republicans and Democrats have now come out against their own resolution. Now, most representatives will admit being against the decision. Regardless, the point remains that at a time of utmost crises the government made a very irrational gesture. At a time when the Libertarian Party was calling for sensibility and tolerance, Congress moved toward irrationality. It is important to note that the reason why Congress acted in this manner is up for debate: individual members could have felt the political pressure from their constituencies to comply with the uniformity and simply not ask questions. Regardless of the reason, the fact still stands that almost no one in Congress stood against the political tides and spoke against the events which happened –

while in retrospect many in Congress do decry blank checks, they nevertheless are the very same members who approved measures which lead up to its issuance.

In reality, we don't really know what the Libertarian Party would have done had they been a presence in Congress in 2001. They could have simply followed the movement and acted just as the Democrats and Republicans. But the press release seems to make it clear that even during times of disaster the party is quick to remember its founding principles and has no problems with reminding the public that individualism and liberty should be protected for all individuals, regardless of circumstance. While the Democrats and the Republicans were quickly moving to do whatever it took to make it seem like the government was still in control, even at the cost of our individual rights, the Libertarian Party called for caution. In hindsight, the Libertarians were right with their call for caution. However, such calls mean nothing if the Libertarians cannot break into national office on a large scale.

## **Breaking the Two Party System**

The election structure of the American system is constructed such that it promotes a two party system. The American two party system is framed around the arrangement for electing legislatures: single member districts. In this process, whoever receives the plurality of votes is elected. Unlike proportional representation systems, single member district arrangements let only one party win any given district. This creates incentives to form two broad parties with sufficient local appeal to win legislative pluralities, while forcing minor and third parties to perpetual defeat. The only way to truly win is to combine forces with a majority party, but this is usually not an option because states ban so called "fusion tickets" whereby a candidate runs as the nominee of two or more parties (Bibby). These barriers prohibit minority parties from ever winning congressional elections because candidates do not have enough concentrated geographical support. Instead, many third party candidates have wide-spread but dispersed support, but such support is inconsequential when running for a congressional district.

The next institutional barrier to a third party is in the form of the Electoral College. Under this system, Americans cannot directly vote for a Presidential candidate. Instead, they vote for state "electors" who are supposedly pledged to vote for one or another candidate. Election rules for the presidency require an absolute majority of the 538 electoral votes. This makes it almost impossible for a third party to achieve the presidency because electoral votes are allocated so that the plurality winner in a state wins all of that states electoral votes (Bibby).

As the Democrats and Republicans continue to hold the reigns of power, they continue to ensure that government works against anything other than a two party system.

Both parties have enacted legislature to ensure that it is extremely hard for a new party to get its name on a ballot (Bibby). In addition, the Federal Election Campaign Act gives special privileges to the major political parties, including actually funding major party presidential campaigns at a much higher level than is available to other parties.

While these barriers are large, they are by no means comprehensive. These encompass only the most obvious barriers for third parties in the American political landscape. The American system was never intentionally set up to be controlled by two parties, yet over time as two parties dominated the political scene they enabled and drafted legislation to ensure that they would remain in power. The effect of institutional barriers on third party campaigns is well documented. Many parties, including the more recent Reform Party of Ross Perot, have shown how the institutionalized barriers against third party politics have caused severely damaged and failed Presidential campaigns (Jelen, 2). In Perot's case, wide-spread national support resulted in a failed campaign because he never won enough pluralities to gain any electoral votes and in some states was not even able to gain ballot access.



## Conclusion

On the surface, it looks as though the United States is not controlled by the people – not really – it is controlled by two dominant and powerful political parties who seem to only have minute differences and are content to do only one thing: remain in power. When dealing with power diffusions, the more parties holding power the better – at least to a certain extent. This way, a few (instead of two) parties must work to form coalitions instead of concentrating on grabbing all the power to do everything without compromise. This desire for power has led to disastrous consequences for those who should be of the utmost concern to government: the people. There seems to be less diversity of ideas and more agreement on the majority of major policy issues – everyone agrees, it's just a matter of degree. We must have a diversity of ideas if we wish to continue a dynamic political environment which allows for a multitude of voices. Different views and opinions on issues allow us to see all of our options and different voices during times of tragedy help to point us in the correct direction.

However, the proverbial deck appears to be stacked against the diversity of voices, including the Libertarians. Structurally, legally, and politically the American system is designed to continue the status quo and to discourage those who challenge it. Yet despite these barriers, the Libertarian party continues to reach new heights of growth and shatter records set by other third parties. In the face of extremely unfavorable odds, the Libertarian Party and its members have made the best of a rather bad situation. Indeed, the party and its members realize that any system run by political parties – no matter who they are – is not a system conducive to real democracy or diversity of ideas. Even so, the Libertarian dislike for the system makes them no different than any other

party in the fact that they are a political party. Such systems have historically shown to work against such things as liberty, individualism, and freedom. Regardless, the Party recognizes that this reality will not change within the foreseeable future, and the only option is to work within the system. This means that while the Libertarians certainly will not reform what it means to be a political party, they can at least show themselves as an example of what a political party “should” be. As long as we deal with a system that has political parties, parties will always tend to dominate even the most “democratic” of governments. Parties will always act differently; one single party cannot change what it means to be a political party. However, the Libertarian party offers itself as an example of how political parties should act in regards to their consistent philosophies and issues.

Over the course of American history, the political landscape has ebbed and flowed along towards its modern day manifestation of a two party system. As the Republicans and Democrats continue to be in power, they will continue to move to the center and continue to enact more disastrous legislation while making sure that they all but prohibit third parties from having any real chance in American politics.

One thing is clear: the Libertarian movement does present a dramatic shift away from this system of traditional politics. Both in context of ideology, history, and modern issues the Libertarian Party of the United States represents a core shift away from traditional party ideology. The short term reality is such that the party will have little chance for years to come as the American political structure holds firm. Looking toward America’s future, however, it becomes clear that a party of such ideological difference and management style has a profound opportunity to finally “break” the two party system of America. If the system can be broken, then the Libertarian party can serve as a third

voice in our political arenas and open the gates for others to join the diversity of ideas that is so important to maintaining our dynamic political system and our sense of democracy.

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