



## How the Republicans Blew It

For Republicans, it might have been a good night to watch *Casablanca*. John and Cindy McCain are not Bogart and Bergman, but they made a handsome couple facing a grim reality in what must be the American war hero and Arizona senator's "last hurrah."

For Barack Obama and his fellow Democrats, it was an ascent to dizzying heights made possible by the long, painful, and sometimes fatal struggles of many who did not live to see the day when America elected a black man to the nation's highest executive office. The trappings, the functions, and the legitimate powers of the office will be the same. A new and different kind of occupant has already made significant history. As President John F. Kennedy said in his Inaugural Address:



"We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom — symbolizing an end as well as a beginning — signifying renewal as well as change." Whether we will have as much freedom to celebrate at the end of the Obama presidency as we do at its beginning is an outcome to be hoped for and a result to be awaited.

There is no question that freedom has been under siege for the past eight years under the Bush-Cheney reign. Domestic spying, monitoring private international communications without warrant, running secret prisons, sanctioning and even "outsourcing" torture, while denying the privilege of habeas corpus, even in some cases to American citizens arrested on American soil, are all part of the ugly heritage that will be the Bush legacy. How many of our constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, eroded by usurpation and abandoned by neglect, Obama will either attempt to rescue or abandon in a "spirit of bipartisanship" remains to be seen.

"Each age is a dream that is dying," wrote an Irish poet long ago, "Or one that is coming to birth." Those of us who attended the wildly premature but nonetheless exciting Goldwater Victory Rally at New York's Madison Square Garden in October of 1964 have often looked back fondly on the days when the seeds of the "Reagan Revolution" were planted in the ashes of Goldwater's defeat.

Largely forgotten in the election-night celebrations was the cagey architect of the 1964 Goldwater defeat, President Lyndon B. Johnson. When he signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Johnson, a Southerner, reportedly confessed to an aide that he feared he had given the South over to the Republicans for a generation. It turned out to be longer. But the Voting Rights Act he pushed through Congress and signed the following year made possible the Obama phenomenon. With millions of black voters enrolled and energized all through the South and in large urban areas throughout the country, Obama was able to bring parts of the once "solid South" back into the coalition that was built by Franklin D. Roosevelt and which had nurtured Democratic presidents from the New Deal through the



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Great Society.

The Nixon election of 1968 joined a significant portion of the formerly Democratic South to the Western sunbelt states in a union that would produce victories for Republicans in seven out of 10 presidential elections from 1968 through 2004. The Republicans had a “lock” on the Electoral College. Then they lost the key.

The party has rather thoroughly defaulted on the golden promises of both the Reagan and Gingrich revolutions. White Southerners, being mainly conservative, have today less reason than they once thought to vote Republican. With the power of both the White House and the Congress at their disposal for six of the eight years of the Bush reign, Republicans managed for a time to beat the Democrats at their own game. Then they far exceeded their rivals. Fighting no-win wars while building a bigger, more costly, and more wasteful government was how the Democrats squandered the Roosevelt coalition. The Republicans have aped them, and now they’ve paid the price.

A New Hampshire voter said on election day that he was tired of voting Republican to achieve a smaller government, only to see the Republicans exceed their Democratic counterparts at making government ever bigger, costlier, and more intrusive. New Hampshire, arguably the most “red” Republican state in the nation in the Reagan era, has now been repainted almost entirely Democratic blue. Looking at the map on election night, John McCain might have whispered to Cindy a slight revision of a famous line from *Casablanca*: “Well, we’ll always have Utah.” Maybe.

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