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Why the GOP's civil war is only going to get uglier

Again, they misunderstand Econ 101 -- and the ride they're being taken on by the Tea Party and religious right

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When it comes to explaining complex political dynamics, the media tends to adopt simple narratives rather than sophisticated commentary. This has been particularly evident when examining coverage of the Republican Party's ongoing civil war.

The battle for the heart and soul of the GOP is more than social conservatives parrying with establishment Republicans. It is a pantomime that has many actors performing on a number of stages, but with only one clown: libertarians.

Libertarians are a funny bunch. By funny I mean ignorant not only of basic economics but also the ride they've been taken on by the Christian Right and the neo-Confederates within the Republican Party.

Nullification is the common cause that drives this anti-establishment triumvirate. Nullification of the federal government is now the weapon of choice for theocrats, libertarians and white supremacists. Since 2010, state legislatures have put forward nearly 200 bills challenging federal laws its sponsors deem unconstitutional. Typically, laws the nullifiers believe challenge "religious liberty," the Affordable Care Act and gun control.

Recently, Kansas signed into law the Second Amendment Protection Act, which prohibits the enforcement of federal laws regulating guns manufactured and used within the state. Missouri put forward a bill that would have allowed for the arrest of federal agents enforcing gun laws. Similar bills have been introduced in 37 other states.

Of course, the ACA has been a high-priority target for the nullification movement with more than 20 bills introduced in state legislatures to nullify the president's healthcare law. The Hobby Lobby, with the backing of the right, is attempting to nullify the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive mandate in the Supreme Court. A favorable ruling will mean privately owned businesses are free to discriminate against gays, women and anyone else on the basis of religious liberty.

A report published by Political Research Associates says, “The nullification movement’s ideology is rooted in reverence for states’ rights and a theocratic and neo-Confederate interpretation of U.S. history. And Ron Paul, who is often portrayed as a libertarian, is the engine behind the movement.”

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Paul, who has been called the father of the Tea Party, has long been tied with reactionary neo-Confederate politics. The Southern Partisan, a blog site for neo-Confederates, endorsed Paul’s 2008 presidential campaign with the following: “Paul has given countless speeches in front of Confederate flags for Southern Heritage groups and has never faltered from his defense of Dixie.” In 2012, Paul declared secession to be a “deeply American principle.”

While libertarianism comes in many forms, its central tenet is that government should be confined to looking after the military, national security and the judicial system. David Boaz, who is the vice president of the Koch brothers-funded think-tank, the Cato Institute, defines libertarianism as “the view that each person has the right to live his life in any way he chooses so long as he respects the equal rights of others.”

In reality, libertarianism means corporations having more equal rights than people.

Libertarians are drawn to Ron Paul because he appeals to their anti-military and anti-drug war sensibilities, but they’ve been duped. “Libertarian elements of Paul’s political agenda derive primarily from his allegiance to states’ rights, which is often mistaken as support for civil liberties,” writes Rachel Tabachnick, a PRA research fellow and member of the Public Eye editorial board.

“Paul is far more transparent about his paleoconservative—rather than libertarian—agenda when he speaks to audiences made up of social conservatives... And he sponsored the ‘We the People Act,’ which proposed stripping the federal courts of jurisdiction in cases related to religion and privacy, freeing state legislatures to regulate sexual acts, birth control, and religious matters,” she added.

The South and the Christian Right is fixated on everything related to controlling race, sex, religious practice, abortion laws, and the repeal of every progressive law that has come out of the federal government. Unwittingly, Ron Paul libertarians have been swept up in this theocratic, Southern white power, nullification movement. This alliance threatens to rip the Republican Party apart, as well as the Union itself.

Ron Paul’s son, Rand Paul (R-KY), has now firmed as one of a small handful of favorites to secure the 2016 GOP presidential nomination given the scandals surrounding Chris Christie, and also for the fact the Senator from Kentucky will inherit his father’s vast nationwide political infrastructure. Moreover, while Rand Paul shares his father’s despise of federal programs like Social Security, Medicare, and unemployment insurance, he has crossover appeal with

libertarians on the left, who not only have trouble thinking, but also hear only the anti-drone, anti-NSA, and anti-foreign war messaging.

In a 2009 Gallup poll, 23 percent of Americans responded to questions about the role of government in a way that categorizes them as libertarian—up from 18 percent in 2000. If you pair that 23 percent with the 35 percent who identify themselves as evangelicals, and couple that number with the swathe of Americans who long for the South to rise again, you can see how difficult it is for any progressive attempt to deal intelligently with national problems, be they poverty, income inequality, recession, healthcare, gun control, or the national debt, given the nullification movement's commitment to obstruction.

Libertarianism and the nullification movement merge seamlessly with the Christian Right, because the “sacralized ‘lost cause’ of the South is often undergirded by Christian Reconstructionism,” writes Tabachnick. Reconstructionism, or Dominionism, is an ideology that calls on Christians to take over the federal government and then make the laws of the nation “biblical.”

Chris Hedges, author of *American Fascists*, writes, “It seeks to reduce government to organizing little more than defense, internal security and the protection of property rights. It fuses with the Christian religion the iconography and language of American imperialism and nationalism, along with the cruelest aspects of corporate capitalism.”

Reconstructionism merges Christianity with laissez-faire capitalism to arrive at a vision of government that endorses biblical law at the local level, alongside a limited federal government. Essentially that makes it the perfect philosophy for wedding theocrats in an unholy marriage with libertarians and Old Dixie.

The fusing of evangelicals with the neo-Confederacy is illustrated in a textbook used today by Christian homeschooling and private school curricula. Titled *America's Providential History*, it explains the Civil War, or what it calls the “War Between the States,” as follows:

“After the war an ungodly Republican element gained control of the Congress. They wanted to centralize power and shape the nation according to their philosophy. In order to do this, they had to remove the force of Calvinism in America, which was centered in the South at this time, and rid the South, which was opposed to centralization, of its political power. They used their post-war control of Congress to reconstruct the South, pass the Fourteenth Amendment, and in many ways accomplish their goals.”

Libertarians tend to have little regard for applying their philosophy in the context of U.S. history, whether Jim Crow laws, state-enforced slavery and sexism. Ron Paul represented this tendency when he argued that the Civil Rights Act “led to a massive violation of the rights of private property and contract, which are the bedrocks of free society.” Bam, right there—Paul concedes that in his mind, private ownership supersedes civil rights. Little wonder neo-Confederates have so enthusiastically embraced libertarians.

Ultimately, the Republican Party's civil war will be long and protracted, especially given the vast sums of money involved in determining a winner. The Chamber of Commerce's war chest and Karl Rove's epic fundraising will only go so far in overcoming a triumvirate that not only has boots on the ground in the form of enthusiastic ballot box lever pullers, but also the financial backing of America's most prominent libertarians: Charles and David Koch.