

The Real War by Dan Jacoby

In 1989 the Berlin wall came crumbling down, the Soviet Union followed shortly after, and a new wave of freedom swept across the world!

Not so fast.

Since the early 80s, freedom in America has dissipated. It has been the victim of a concerted conservative crusade. This attack on American freedom started slowly, quietly, with propaganda aimed at convincing us that too much freedom is a dangerous thing. One example is Ronald Reagan's relentless attack on the Miranda decision, claiming that it handcuffed the police.

The message, at least in hindsight, was clear. Never mind that the Supreme Court ruling actually made it clear whether a confession was legitimate, freeing police even more than it freed criminals (who were getting off anyway). Never mind that without understanding the rights granted by the Constitution, innocent Americans could easily be convicted, imprisoned, and even executed for crimes we didn't commit. Keep your eyes on the right-wing goal – too much freedom is a bad thing, and it must be curtailed.

The right-wing war against freedom suffered a setback in 1992 when Bill Clinton was elected President. But the conservatives regrouped, found a new leader in Newt Gingrich, and two years later resumed their assault. Four years after that, the conservatives, perhaps in a fit of overconfidence, went so far as to attempt to overthrow the duly elected President of the United States. They failed, and looked stupid in their failure, but they didn't give up.

In the 2000 election, the conservatives came up with a new twist – steal the election by denying Americans our right to vote and using mobs to stop the vote count. It made perfect sense, if one enjoys circular reasoning. After all, if free countries have free, fair and honest elections, then taking freedom away necessarily means making sure that the outcome of elections is preordained. Finishing the circle, by preordaining election outcomes, conservatives can guarantee first the strengthening and then the continuation of their power structure.

How did they steal the election in 2000? It was easy. They used their powers over voter registration databases to eliminate tens of thousands of voters in key states (like Florida) from voter rolls. If people aren't listed as eligible to vote, they can't vote. Then they brought mobs in to disrupt the process of counting the votes that were cast, and made sure the local media were kept in the dark about the organizers of those mobs (it was the Florida State Republican Committee). Finally, they turned to their friends on the Supreme Court to give their criminal activities the stamp of approval. The decision in Bush v. Gore was so outrageous that even the five "justices" who made the ruling determined (somewhat shamefacedly) that the decision could not serve as a precedent.

This plan worked well enough in 2000, but the Republican leadership realized that they probably couldn't get away with the same routine four years later. So they added a new twist – electronic voting machines, programmed with secret software created by their friends, with no paper trail to serve as a check on their election-stealing activities.

Additionally, the Republicans made sure that there would only be enough machines in areas where they expected to win; in Democratic areas the dearth of voting machines led to hours of delays – and many people simply gave up and went home without voting.

The scheme worked brilliantly. It worked so well that the Republican power elite stole millions of votes, most notably in Ohio, but also in at least half a dozen other states.

The latest twist is a law denying millions of poor Americans their right to vote, simply because they don't have, and cannot afford, the new identification required. We're talking about American citizens, most of whom have spent their entire lives here, who will show up for the next Presidential election only to be told to go home.

The beauty of the plan to steal multiple elections is that Republicans no longer have to convince Americans that their methods for destroying the Constitution are right, necessary, or legitimate. After all, if they're in power, and they're going to stay in power, then they can do anything they want.

But there's a fly in the ointment. We have an election coming up in just a few weeks, and the Republicans may not have come up with anything new since 2004. They can't win with the same tactics they employed before, and with nothing new in their bag of tricks they just might lose power. Two years is a long time for Democrats to undo some of the damage that twelve years of Republican control of Congress has done. In that time, a Democrat-controlled Congress can:

- Modify the "Help America Vote Act" (HAVA) to require voter-verified paper records, open-source software in all electronic voting machines, and audits of all federal elections. There is a bill now in Congress (H.R. 550) with 219 co-sponsors – plenty of support to win if only the Republican power elite would let it come to a vote – that does just this.
- Repeal the falsely named "Federal Election Integrity Act of 2006", or modify it to require that states not require identification until they can prove that every eligible person in the state is provided with such identification without charge.
- Amend the so-called "Patriot Act" to remove those provisions that are clearly unconstitutional, and also those parts that are clearly designed not to stop terrorists but merely to spy on innocent Americans.
- Pass a bill to ensure that the "Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act" (FISA) may not be circumvented by any person – even the President – for any reason, while upholding those provisions that make it easy to spy quickly and efficiently on those suspected of terrorist activities.
- Restore the rights of detainees to full status as prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions and a habeas corpus hearing for those prisoners held on suspicion of terrorist activities.
- Investigate the actions of George W. Bush and his administration that may be impeachable offenses. These include the lies that led to our invasion of Iraq, the no-bid contracts awarded to Vice President Cheney's former company, the deliberate refusal to abide by FISA, the rendering of some prisoners and the direct torture of others, and any other violations of U.S. and international law.

If Democrats do gain control of one or both houses of Congress, they will have but a brief window of opportunity to make sure that the war against freedom here at home is dealt a severe blow. Only by moving swiftly and surely can Democrats ensure that proper actions will be taken, and those who have helped destroy freedom in America from within are brought to justice.

Additionally, swift, sure action on the Democrats' part can only help in the efforts to win in 2008. Preventing Republicans from stealing yet another election, and exposing their activities to all of America, as Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "in terms so plain and clear as to command their assent," can only help.

Will a newly minted Democratic power structure take those steps? On their own, they probably won't. But if they get enough pressure from grass roots organizations, the very groups that are now engaged full-tilt in "get out the vote" activities and who may make the difference between winning and losing, Democratic leaders could realize that the only chance they have to remain in power will be to move on these issues.

And only then will Americans be safe and free.

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