

A Country Divided **by Dan Jacoby**

“... but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”

– U.S. Constitution, Article VI

Poll after poll suggests that Mitt Romney is up against a huge challenge – about one-third of all Americans say they won't vote for a Mormon. Some people compare this to the trouble overcome in 1960 by John Kennedy, when people weren't about to vote for a Catholic. Indeed, it seems that we've merely redrawn the line, rather than truly begun to erase religious bigotry, or any other brand of hate, from our society.

But there is another facet to the current polls that is not receiving widespread attention. Since Romney is only running for the Republican nomination, most people are focusing on whether Republicans will vote for him. But all the polls show there is very little difference between Republicans and Democrats when it comes to voting for Mormons.

Republicans have, for the past two generations, been known as the party of rich, white, mainstream Protestant men, while Democrats have been portrayed as the party of diversity. When looking at the current crop of presidential candidates, this appears to be true. Granted, roughly half of the seven Catholic candidates are Republican, but the only black candidate and the only female candidate are both Democrats, and they are currently leading the six white men in the race.

A deeper look, however, reveals what the darker side of politics. Every candidate is courting his or her “base” demographics as much as possible, and ignoring people who don't fit that mold. In just about every election across the country, from local races to the U.S. President, this same tactic is regularly employed – separate people out by race, religion, gender, ethnic origin, and any other supposedly irrelevant characteristic that may be available, and choose which of the many demographics to court.

Then, once you have picked which people you want to appeal to, ignore the people who don't fit your chosen demographics. Both Democrats and Republicans do the same thing. The only difference is which demographics the parties woo in their divisive attempts to win a highly divided election.

Is it any wonder our country is so divided?

Perhaps some day a politician will truly attempt to appeal to all Americans, regardless of their demographic breakdown. And perhaps that politician will begin to heal the various rifts that divide America. Only one thing is for certain – that person will not be running for President in 2008.

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