



BY JEFFREY E. GARTEN

Uniting, Not Dividing: A Blueprint for Bush

It's hard to imagine a more polarizing election season than the one that has just ended. According to Yale University historian John Gaddis, we may have to go back to America's colonial days to find so nasty a Presidential race. Going further, Columbia University's Alan Brinkley says the vitriolic campaign reflects the deep divisions that have been widening since at least

2000, and he feels that such differences may be unbridgeable for a long time.

The pessimism of these distinguished historians is understandable, especially given the powerful victory of the Republican Party in the White House, in Congress, and in state capitals. Now President George W. Bush faces a choice: He can use his Republican majority as a battering ram to get his way, widening national political divisions even more. Or he can make a special effort to forge bipartisan cooperation, as other Presidents have done.

I hope Bush chooses the latter course, however unlikely it seems in the aftermath of the election. I believe that without cooperation, none of the big issues—not Iraq, not homeland security, not the fiscal mess, not the lackluster jobs situation, not health care—can be effectively addressed.

WHAT, THEN, COULD BUSH DO to maximize his chances of successfully dealing with these problems? He could make some key Cabinet appointments from the ranks of the Democratic Party. Yale's Gaddis points to two precedents. In the highly charged political environment of World War II, Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt picked Henry L. Stimson, a prominent Republican, as Secretary of War. Years later, amid Cold War tensions, Democratic President John F. Kennedy chose Republican Douglas Dillon as Treasury Secretary. What about the President asking Senator Joseph Biden (D-Del.) to be Secretary of State or former Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) to take over Defense?

President Bush could select one or more high-profile Democratic emissaries to help with particularly difficult challenges abroad. Gaddis recalls how FDR asked Republican Wendell L. Willkie, the man he defeated in the Presidential election, to go overseas as a special ambassador to demonstrate bipartisan support for the nation's foreign policy. What about asking former President Bill Clinton for help in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Or former U.N. Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke to oversee a new global nonproliferation effort?

The White House could establish bipartisan groups to examine critical challenges—such as the financing of the upcoming retirement of 70 million baby boomers or the

ramifications of the escalating trade deficit and foreign debt. An excellent precedent: In 1982, President Ronald Reagan established a bipartisan commission under Alan Greenspan, then a private citizen, to fix the imbalance between payroll taxes and future Social Security benefits. The President didn't want options; he asked for a consensus. As a result, an agreement was hammered out and then implemented.

President Bush also could identify important bipartisan initiatives that are ready to be enacted into law. Case in point: Former U.S. Housing & Urban Development Secretaries from both parties, Democrat Henry G. Cisneros and Republican Jack Kemp, have recently produced an impressive blueprint for a national housing policy for low-income citizens.

The President could appoint a moderate to the Supreme Court when the first vacancy opens up. Almost nothing else would better signal the President's intention to unite the country rather than further divide it. Bush could build bridges to centrist leaders from both parties. This group includes Democrats such as Senator Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm, and Senator-elect Barack Obama (D-Ill.). It includes Republicans such

as Senators Chuck Hagel (R-Nebraska) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), as well as Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney.

A disunited America, says Columbia professor Brinkley, not only will fail at home but also will be unfit to deal in the complex global arena. I know it's a long shot to believe that President Bush will move the nation toward what historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. once called "the vital center," given his recent record and his new mandate. But since President Bush has the luxury of never having to run again for office, and since I think he cares about his legacy, I fervently hope that he will at least try to bring the country together. ■

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