



The election ended two weeks ago, and I must be the only voter in America who could still call herself “undecided.” I may not look it. To judge by the voting patterns of most of my family and friends, the voting patterns of my gender, the voting patterns of those with my educational background, and not to mention my own voting history, I was a shoo-in for Obama from the start. I shouldn’t have needed to deliberate at all.

But deliberating is all I’ve done since the campaign sputtered to life two years ago. Not deliberating whether to vote for Obama or for Romney. I have a number of conservative friends whom I don’t want to offend, so I’ll suffice to say simply that the prospect of voting Republican didn’t enter the equation. And I’m pretty sure my Democrat father would have risen from his grave and shooed me from the polls with one of his famously disapproving stares had I even considered it. No, the question that vexed me was whether I should vote for Obama or instead lodge a protest vote in the form of a write-in. (Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate, wasn’t on the ballot in my state or else I would have also considered a third-party vote.)

The reasons why I might have chosen to write in my candidate? Well, if you’ve read many of my previous Zephyr articles, you’ll know I’m not a devout parishioner in the church of Obama. I voted for him, somewhat reluctantly, in 2008. He was well-spoken and intelligent. I hoped that his academic history spent studying constitutional law might move him to reject the unconstitutional excesses of his predecessor—namely, the Patriot Act, pre-emptive wars, drone attacks, indefinite detention, Guantanamo Bay, rendition, torture, etcetera...(The usual liberal hate-list. You get the idea.) He had spoken against all these acts while he was campaigning, but even then I couldn’t shake the feeling Obama would disappoint me. He was too slick—too excellent a politician. And a glance at his campaign donor list was enough to tell he would prove no saint. I knew that a real Leftist would vote third-party.

But then I remembered my horror, as a small child, upon discovering that my parents had voted for Ronald Reagan against Jimmy Carter in 1980—the betrayal I had felt, of all the built-up liberal heroism I had ascribed to them. And I imagined myself being asked, some years in the future, by some small child, (who had unknowingly put their big-hearted liberal faith in me,) whether I had voted for the first Black President of the United States. How could I break the heart of that little kid? And, yes, he was a likeable man. And perhaps he would disprove my suspicions. So I voted for him.

And we were off. Soon Obama’s civil liberties positions were not so much “Bush-lite” as they were “Bush-enhanced.” The same far-reaching policies, but this time without the counter-balance of opposition from the Left.

Of course, merely days after the 2009 inauguration, my suspicions as to Obama’s lack of constitutional fervor were confirmed. In a series of Executive Orders, which were lauded by the press for their strong condemnation of “enhanced interrogation” and secret CIA black sites, Obama allowed for the continuation of the CIA’s program of “renditions,” whereby detainees captured abroad are shuttled to prisons in US-friendly, (if not human rights-friendly) countries to face indefinite detention and torture at the hands of our “allies.” Within two weeks of the inauguration, the Obama Department of Justice had reversed his campaign position on secrecy, and invoked “State Secrets” to avoid exposing those parties responsible for the wiretapping of American citizens to litigation.

And we were off. Soon Obama’s civil liberties positions were not so much “Bush-lite” as they were “Bush-enhanced.” The same far-reaching policies, but this time without the counter-balance of opposition from the Left. Anyway, I wrote up all of this in an article two years ago.

What surprised me most of all, after eight long years of the Bush presidency, during

which time liberals like myself grew increasingly dismayed at the actions of the government, was how quickly those same liberals flipped their positions. Suddenly I heard my fellow liberals claiming Obama as a national security “genius.” With the growing number of drone attacks, America could reduce the risk to its soldiers to virtually nothing. We could withdraw from all wars! (Never mind that, without American casualties to weary the public’s bloodlust, we could also enter all wars and continue all wars indefinitely.) They weren’t nervous about the lack of oversight. Obama was a good man, they knew, and he was certainly privy to information justifying any attacks.

Besides, (and this was the argument I heard most often,) wouldn’t a McCain presidency have been worse?



And, as time passed, I wondered if it truly would have been. Yes, McCain would have certainly claimed the same right to detain citizens indefinitely. He wouldn’t have closed Guantanamo Bay, (whatever happened to that controversy, by the way?) He may not have withdrawn from Iraq. He would have let the banks and insurance companies run roughshod over any proposed regulations. He would have appointed conservative justices to the Supreme Court. He wouldn’t have expressed support for gay marriage.

In short, he would have been a little worse. The domestic landscape would look a little different, with Don’t Ask Don’t Tell still intact and without Obamacare.

But, and I know this is a controversial statement, the Left would have been better for it.

Consider this: In 2006, only 57% of Americans supported the continued use of Guantanamo Bay. By 2009, when Obama was still professing a desire to close the facility, the percentage supporting Guantanamo dropped even lower, to 40%. But, by February of 2012, after Obama had made clear that he would not be closing Guantanamo, the support for maintaining the facility reached 70%. Even among liberal democrats, the majority (53%) supported keeping Guantanamo open. And, even more telling, a full 77% of liberal democrats support Obama’s drone program.

In short, the American Left only cares about civil liberties when the Republicans are in power. Under Bush, the Patriot Act was an unconscionable violation of the constitution. In 2004, only 33% of Americans felt the Act was a “necessary tool that helps the government find terrorists.” By 2011, Obama extended the Patriot Act with little opposition from his own party. Public support had even ticked up to 42%. Can you imagine that liberal support for the Patriot Act would have increased under a Republican president? Would 77% of liberals cheer for drone attacks on Pakistani funerals if McCain were sitting on the Targeted Kill List?

In short, No.

And so, while I could never have voted for McCain, the past four years have led me to question whether my vote for Obama really helped the Liberal cause.



Of course, then, one might get the idea from what I’ve written that my 2012 choice was easy. How could anyone as disenchanted with Obama as I am cast a vote for the man? Well, I watched the Republican primary campaign like everyone else, and was completely horrified. “Surely,” we were all thinking, “these aren’t the only options.” Maybe Chris Christie, or Jeb Bush, or the resurrection of

Jon Huntsman would jump into the ring and pull the party back from its insane fringes. Maybe Ron Paul would stage a coup for the nomination. But no such luck. And, as the Republican primary drew to its close, all I could think is, “Oh, I do not want that guy to be President.”

And, while the bleak hilarity of the primary dragged on, Obama was just so cool. No juxtaposition could more fully explain this past election than the comparison of Obama’s utterly charming Al Green impersonation with Romney’s painfully stilted rendition of “America the Beautiful.” Obama was in on the joke. Romney wasn’t. And, despite the general lack of action on any domestic issues over the past four years, Obama was on the

right side of all of them. Immigration reform, access to women's health care, gay marriage. Romney was decidedly not.

Both men would continue the long international nightmare of drone attacks, warrantless surveillance, suspension of habeas corpus, and state secrets. With Obama in power, the Left would be toothless and silent. With Romney in power, the Left could feasibly come roaring back. Liberals would return to their position of protest. Public support for the civil liberties excesses would decline. But the policies would likely continue. And, at the same time, under a Romney presidency, the Tea Party would be allowed to dictate horrible domestic policies. Planned Parenthood could lose funding. Immigration reform would languish another four years. God knows what anti-women, authoritarian hawks would be appointed to the Supreme Court.

And so, of course, I could have summed up this article in a simple phrase: "lesser of two evils." I never wanted to vote for a lesser of two evils. Voting for Obama would be an act of cynicism. Fully aware of the betrayals of the last four years, and conscious of what new betrayals would likely arise in the next four years, a vote for Obama would be an admission that the continued erosion of civil liberties was inevitable. I knew this, walking into the polls. I knew the right thing to do. A write-in vote would, essentially, amount to a throw-away. But at least I wouldn't be complicit in the actions of the next four years. When Obama continued his unconstitutional excesses, it wouldn't be my fault.

And yet.

I can't explain my vote. It's been a month, and I still can't decide whether I did the right thing in voting for Obama. Most days, I lean toward regret. For all the reasons I've laid out, I probably should have lodged a protest vote. But I didn't. Due, partially, to some desire for civic participation—the desire to see my vote among those displayed across the TV screen on election night, and not discarded among the loony-votes for Yoda and Margaret Thatcher. Due to a need to be a part of a group—to have a "side" I could cheer on. Due to the knowledge that my father would have voted for Obama. All of my reasons are irrational. But, ultimately, they swayed me more powerfully than my own political convictions. And that is why I keep deliberating. That's why, a month after the election, I remain conflicted. The election is over, but I'm still an undecided voter. With four more years to deliberate.

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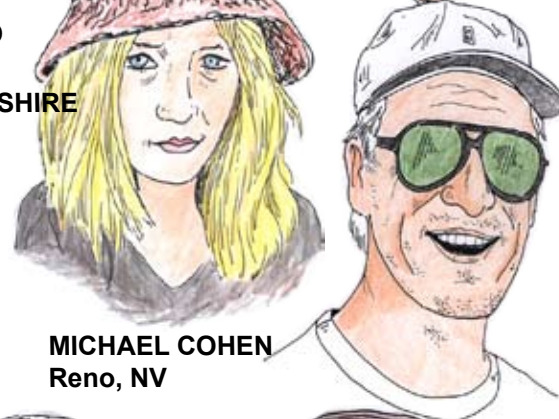
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