

Title:

American Presidential Campaigns: The Need For A New Vision

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Summary:

The current article is the first part of a series on America's spiritual history and soul-identity. A subject like "America's Presidential Campaigns" that is so 'of the world' might be construed as relating only to political life, but that would be incorrect. What relates to consciousness is part of our spiritual life, as is what relates to the operation of light and darkness, and what relates to the vision we hold for the future.

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Article Body:

The current article is the first part of a series on America's spiritual history and soul-identity. A subject like "America's Presidential Campaigns" that is so 'of the world' might be construed as relating only to political life, but that would be incorrect. What relates to consciousness is part of our spiritual life, as is what relates to the operation of light and darkness, and what relates to the vision we hold for the future.

In every area in which consciousness exists, the possibility is also present to make choices that are more or less moral concerning thought and behavior, and to bring every aspect of one's thinking into the highest light. In relation to the national political scene, there is much unconsciousness that operates on all levels, and much manipulation that takes place by those who have a vested interest in shaping a particular outcome or in presenting things in a particular way. This is the domain in which darkness has a chance to influence outcomes. It is the area of vulnerability produced by the fact that people are asleep or unaware in relation to what is going on so that the shaping of opinion is done silently, covertly, and is not perceived by most or not until much later on. One of the arenas in which this shaping of consciousness takes place is within

American presidential campaigns.

More than a year before a presidential election, candidates begin to step into place to position themselves for the available political and financial support that is necessary in order to run a national campaign. Generally, they have begun this process long before this. It used to be that presidential campaigns were much shorter. However, over time, the influence of media has created a watchfulness and anticipation in relation to potential candidates that extends longer and longer into pre-campaign planning. This watchfulness has contributed greatly to the success or failure of candidates, especially in states where they are not well-known and where extensive media coverage is needed, as well as personal appearance, so that former 'unknowns' can become someone familiar.

Within presidential campaigns, the role of media has become as important as the content of a candidate's message - a message which may come to affect the lives of an entire nation. In any campaign, there is the content of a candidate's message, and there is the shape of that message. More and more in recent years, the shaping of a message has been handled by media experts who offer a package that includes forming, shaping, promoting, and assessing the impact of any message. This is a process that is costly, but perceived as necessary in order to create a sense within the public of being able to selectively choose between rivals in an electoral race.

There was a time in which content was given more weight than appearance, when debates actually took place, with those listening paying close attention to the positions being advocated and the principles behind them. This is in contrast to the focus, today, which is often on the way in which things are said, or the personal quality of charm or likeability that a candidate possesses. Aspects of personality and character have always been part of an electoral process, but they did not form the center. Today, they are at the center. And because they are at the center, a candidate in a presidential election must be presented to the public in as appealing a way as a movie star. The effect of every image-variable needs to be considered so that the public can receive the desired impression. This shift in focus is due to several factors - the first, and perhaps most important, being the complexity and multi-layered nature of most national issues today which do not allow for a clear-cut presentation of positions or approaches to problem solving; the second, the technological advances that have made media instantly accessible across the country so that literally nothing that a candidate does goes unnoticed.

All of the involvement of media with national campaigns involves a high cost to candidates. But the burgeoning cost is not only related to this. It is also related to the need that candidates have to travel across the country and back

many, many times, hosting events and attending others in order to interact with the public, especially in key electoral states. This grueling process of meeting all who are essential to meet at local and state levels requires a great deal of stamina on a candidate's part. It also requires a great deal of money. And, in the competitive arena in which politics and personality have merged, if a rival candidate has become visible in states 1, 2, 3, and 4, then it is incumbent upon his competitors to also create a similar kind of visibility. In this way, more and more is being asked of candidates in terms of making personal appearances, because the standard for what is possible during an election campaign has been raised in order to create greater positive publicity for those who choose to run.

Let us not forget that there is another way that one could conceive of and run a national campaign. It is the way of integrity and of focus. It relies on communicating more about issues and less about personalities, and it also involves reducing media's role in campaigns and therefore the amount of campaign spending. Such a campaign could take place in a much shorter space of time with far less cost to all concerned. Instead of taking years, it could be undertaken within one year, with primaries, whose dates are variable, more closely spaced together (See note). These changes would not allow each candidate to do all that is presently being done with respect to creating a public image. Instead, there would need to be more content-focused debates between candidates, and the public would need to reflect more, employing both reason and intuition, and to rely on appearance less, in order to be responsive to such discussions. Furthermore, if the stature of the presidency remained one of honor, leadership, and accountability - more in line with those who act on behalf of their constituency rather than as a separate entity, then both the glamour and the risk involved in electing a President could be less.

Becoming aware and using one's vote wisely is the responsibility of democracy and part of what it means to be a citizen. Were campaigns shorter and more focused, less reliant on celebrity and more on content, we would see a different kind of democracy in action when it came time to elect a new president. And because the cost of running such a campaign would be less, many more qualified people would be able to enter the public arena with their own ideas and visions for the future, enabling this country to more truly become a representative democracy, in keeping with its historical, constitutional, and spiritual foundation.

Note: In relation to presidential primaries, dates are established by each state and are subject to change. Currently, primaries take place between Jan. and May of the election year.

"Establishing the date for a Presidential primary, and determining the type of Presidential primary held, varies from state to state. This is due to differences in state statutes, party constitutions, party rules and regulations, party by-laws, and delegate selection plans. In some states, a caucus and/or convention may be held instead of a Presidential primary election. Other states may use a combination of both caucuses and primaries for delegate selection."

From: "2000 Presidential Primary Dates" - Federal Election Commission