Twitter Thread by Osita Nwanevu

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So I've been wanting to do this thread for a while and as usual, I'm hoping people who know more than me, academics especially, chime in. The question: when did "bipartisanship" become an important value in American politics?

Obviously members of opposing parties have always worked and passed things together when interests align. But when did collaboration become not only an actual policy goal in itself but a virtue worthy of extolling?

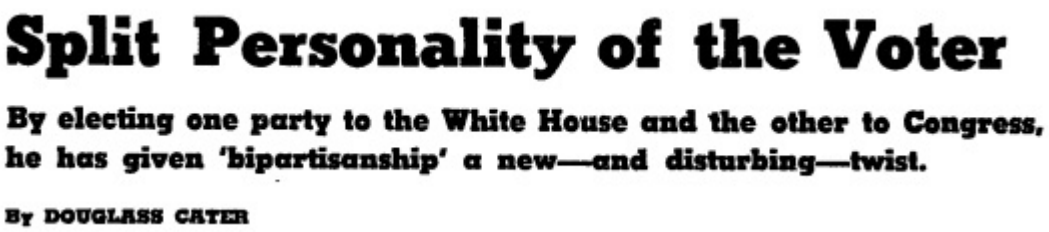
Consider this 1960 article from historian Henry Graff in the NYT on the incoming Kennedy admin. "In domestic matters, bipartisanship is, naturally, impossible and undesirable. Although some legislation will...enjoy bipartisan support, our politics remain by nature partisan."



Bipartisanship:
Only a Fond Dream

By HENRY F. GRAFF

"Naturally!" And Graff evidently wasn't alone. An earlier article that year from one Douglass Cater suggested ominously that divided government after the 1960 election would be not only undesirable for domestic policymaking, but a national security risk.

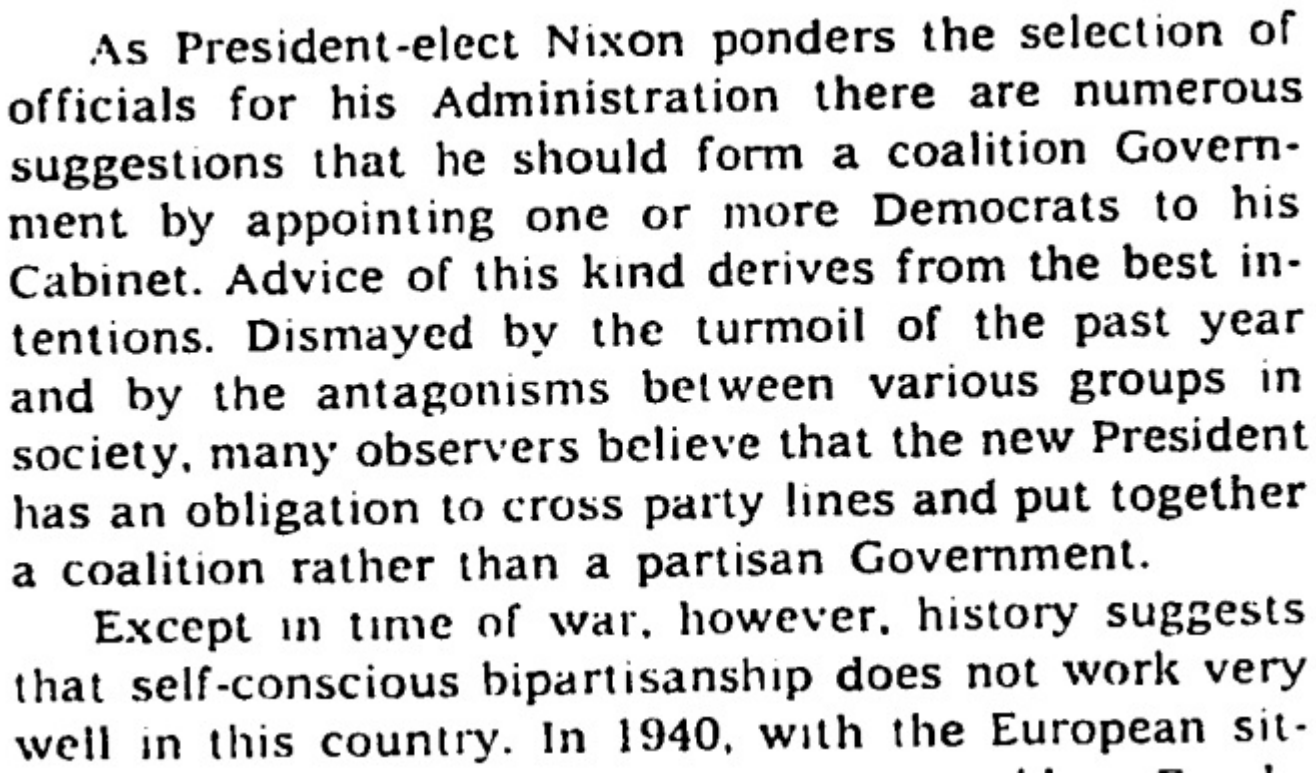


Split Personality of the Voter

By electing one party to the White House and the other to Congress, he has given 'bipartisanship' a new—and disturbing—twist.

By DOUGLASS CATER

If you think these were fringe ideas, here's a '68 NYT editorial on Nixon's election. "Except in time of war...history suggests that self conscious bipartisanship does not work very well in this country…a peacetime coalition could only serve to blur the lines of responsibility"



As President-elect Nixon ponders the selection of officials for his Administration there are numerous suggestions that he should form a coalition Government by appointing one or more Democrats to his Cabinet. Advice of this kind derives from the best intentions. Dismayed by the turmoil of the past year and by the antagonisms between various groups in society, many observers believe that the new President has an obligation to cross party lines and put together a coalition rather than a partisan Government.

Except in time of war, however, history suggests that self-conscious bipartisanship does not work very well in this country. In 1940, with the European sit-

This, clearly, is not where most folks are today. So what happened? How did we get from that to a place where, for instance, a package to address an epochal crisis that might pass by simple majority is being held up explicitly for bipartisanship's sake?

https://t.co/ahymU0Q9Lq

> On COVID, Dem leaders were wanting to move quickly to use reconciliation & started to execute that strategy, but BIDEN stopped them.
>
> He wants to try to work with Rs first and is "bipartisan curious" as one person put it. (Some Ds not happy abt this/see it as a time-suck) https://t.co/cu0h4OMYjY
>
> — Rachael Bade (@rachaelmbade) January 21, 2021

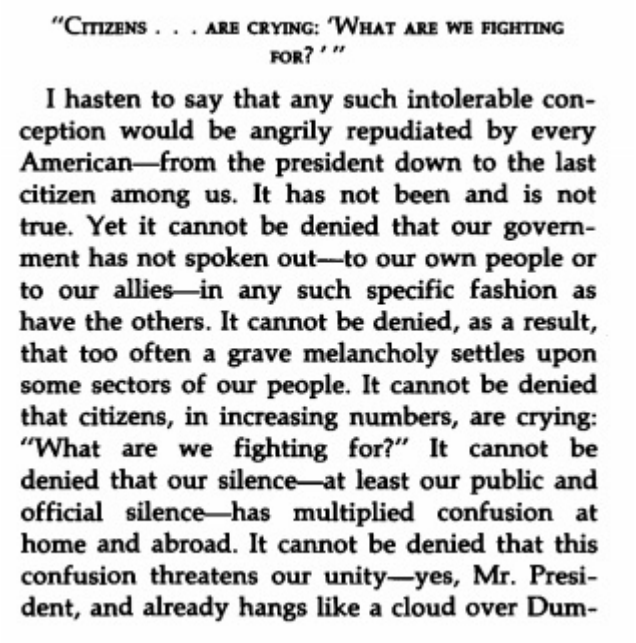
Again, there are people who can speak to the complexities here much better than I can. But a story about how Bipartisanship™ came to be that I've found compelling ■— one Graff actually sketches out in his article ■— begins with the end of WWI and the Treaty of Versailles.

As you might know, the United States never ratified the Treaty of Versailles or joined the League of Nations due to an impasse between Wilson and Republicans in the Senate, led by Henry Cabot Lodge, who'd just won a slim majority in the 1918 midterm elections.



The actual ins and outs of what happened are a little more complicated than that and there were ideological and ethnic splits within the two parties on the matter, but that, anyway, was the story American foreign policy minds took with them into the aftermath of WWII.

One of them was Michigan Sen. Arthur Vandenberg. In 1945, he delivered a famous Senate speech repudiating his former isolationism and urging America to take an assertive role in shaping the post-war order ■— a goal that would require speaking with one voice on foreign policy.



"CITIZENS . . . ARE CRYING: 'WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?'"

I hasten to say that any such intolerable conception would be angrily repudiated by every American—from the president down to the last citizen among us. It has not been and is not true. Yet it cannot be denied that our government has not spoken out—to our own people or to our allies—in any such specific fashion as have the others. It cannot be denied, as a result, that too often a grave melancholy settles upon some sectors of our people. It cannot be denied that citizens, in increasing numbers, are crying: "What are we fighting for?" It cannot be denied that our silence—at least our public and official silence—has multiplied confusion at home and abroad. It cannot be denied that this confusion threatens our unity—yes, Mr. President, and already hangs like a cloud over Dum-

As chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Vandenberg would go on to play a key role in garnering support from both sides of the aisle for the Marshall Plan and NATO. He's generally recognized as one of the giants in the chamber's history.



Later in 1945, FDR would appeal to the same principle Vandenburg had in a speech to Congress on Yalta and the forthcoming San Francisco conference. “The American Delegation is—in every sense of the word—bipartisan...I think that Republicans want peace just as much as Democrats.”

The Senate and the House of Representatives will both be represented at the San Francisco Conference. The Congressional delegates to the San Francisco Conference will consist of an equal number of Republican and Democratic members. The American Delegation is—in every sense of the word—bipartisan.

World peace is not a party question. I think that Republicans want peace just as much as Democrats. It is not a party question—any more than is military victory—the winning of the war.

When the Republic was threatened, first by the Nazi clutch for world conquest back in 1940 and then by the Japanese treachery in 1941, partisanship and politics were laid aside by nearly every American; and every resource was dedicated to our common safety. The same consecration to the cause of peace will be expected, I think, by every patriotic American, and by every human soul overseas.

That was the first use of the word in the familiar sense I could find in the archives of UCSB's American Presidency Project. Positive uses before then connote impartiality ■— to argue a board or commission with members from both parties was going to act on a technocratic basis.

Here's FDR in 1932 on the U.S. Tariff Commission for instance.

I need not say to you that one of the most deplorable features of tariff legislation is the log-rolling process by which it has been effected in Republican and Democratic Congresses. Indefensible rates are introduced through an understanding, usually implied rather than expressed among members, each of whom is interested in one or more individual items. Yes, it is a case of you scratch my back and I will scratch yours. Now, to avoid that as well as other evils in tariff making, a Democratic Congress in 1916 passed, and a Democratic President approved, a bill creating the bipartisan' Tariff Commission, charged with the duty of supplying the Congress with accurate and full information upon which to base tariff rates. That Commission functioned as a scientific body until 1922, when by the incorporation of the so-called flexible provisions of the Act it was transformed into a political body. Under those

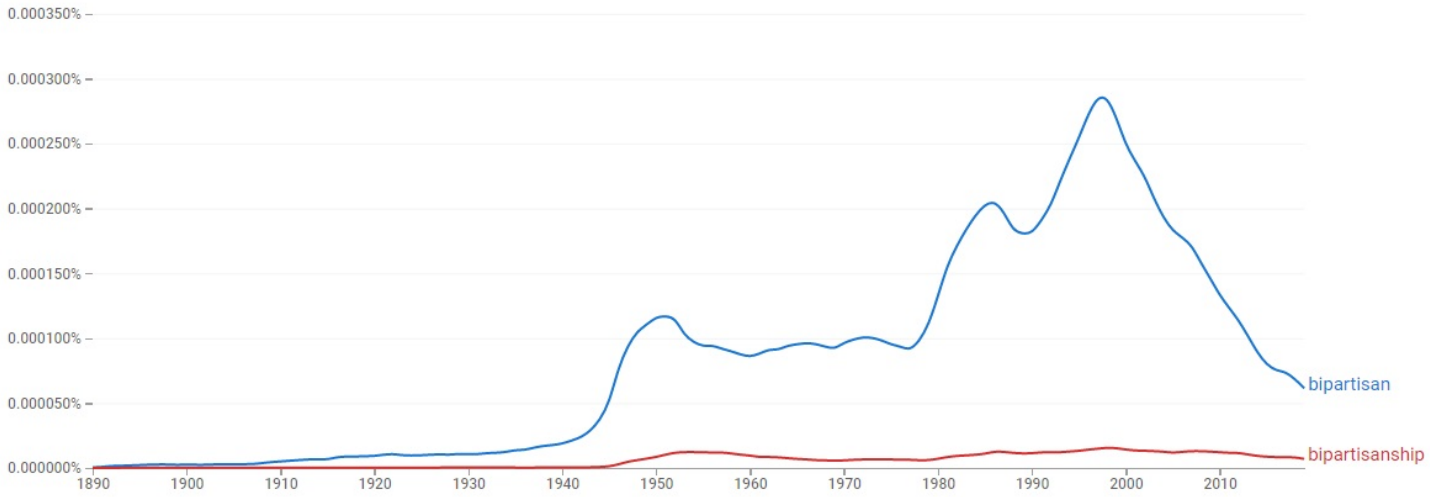
But it was also used critically ■— here's Hoover, for instance, arguing in 1932 that the bipartisan composition of the U.S. Shipping Board had contributed to its "lack of cohesion."

The Shipping Board, in its present form at least, should be abolished. Its administrative functions should all be transferred to the other agencies of the Government. This is not a criticism of the Board, but it is a criticism of an altogether impossible and expensive form of organization and divided responsibility. The Board was designed originally for regulatory purposes. It was made entirely independent of the Executive. It has been subsequently given enormous administrative and financial functions. The President has no authority and had no authority over its activities. The regional basis of selection of membership, and its bipartisan basis, together with the extreme difficulty of any control function in purely administrative and executive matters, has built up a lack of cohesion in the Board that seems irremediable.

FDR's use in '45, in a call to set politics aside for a high purpose, is different. It also shows up in an exchange b/w Vandenberg & Eleanor Roosevelt. "Whatever our representation is in these international contacts, I...emphatically agree with you that it should be bi-partisan."

Your letter deals with two phases of our representation in the General Assembly and in the Council of Foreign Ministers. One is that the representation should be "bi-partisan". The other is that it should be "Congressional". We can dismiss the former in complete agreement. *Whatever* our representation is in these international contacts, I cordially and emphatically agree with you that it should be "bi-partisan". I think this theory has paid infinite dividends in the last two years. I think it is one of the major reasons why your distinguished husband succeeded in his peace prospectus where the late President Wilson failed. So long as we can keep *partisan* politics out of foreign affairs, it is entirely obvious that we shall speak with infinitely greater authority abroad. I am emphasizing this fact in the speech which I am making with Secretary Byrnes at Cleveland next Saturday night.[4] (You may be interested in the enclosed press copy of the speech). Of course "bi-partisanism" is not automatically accomplished by the appointment of bi-partisan spokesmanship. It involves an equal degree of rank and file dedication here at home. Some of our more volatile and violent oracles here at home can jeopardize this result regardless of what our bi-partisan representatives abroad may do. (We have had one or two typical and sinister examples). But I repeat that there is no need to labor this particular point. We are in total agreement.

The word bipartisan had been in use since 1891 according to Merriam-Webster, but a look at Google Ngram suggests it didn't really take off until roughly around this time ■— the mid to late 1940s.



Even by 1951, the word was still rare enough in political discourse that John Foster Dulles, soon to be Secretary of State, called it “new-fangled” in an address about the Treaty of San Francisco re-establishing peacetime relations with Japan.

Japanese Peace Treaty Viewed as Positive Step In Free World’s March Toward Peace

Address by John Foster Dulles
Consultant to the Secretary of State [1]

And in a 1960 piece for the Washington Post, Truman used the word to draw a contrast between post-war diplomacy and the failure of the Treaty of Versailles■—“an historic example of what could happen when a President...fails to avail himself of bipartisan Congressional support”

President Should Take Democrats to Summit

By Harry S. Truman

This is the context Bipartisanship™ as a value emerges in. It's a reference to a doctrine of cooperation specifically on foreign policy ■— the idea, in Vandenburg’s famous words, that politics should stop “at the water’s edge.” So how did it make the jump to domestic policy?

One early document of the broadening of the idea is this 1947 article in the Washington Post: “Bipartisanship Spreads on Hill.”

Mark Sullivan

Bipartisanship Spreads on Hill

It begins with an strange suggestion made by former presidential candidate Al Landon: “An earnest recommendation to the Republican Party was made…that the Republican controlled Congress cooperate with the Democratic president in bipartisan action to deal with high prices"

AN EARNEST recommendation to the Republican Party was made at the recent meeting of its national committee by the party's 1936 nominee for the presidency, Alfred M. Landon of Kansas. The recommendation was that the Republican-controlled Congress cooperate with the Democratic President in bipartisan action to deal with high prices and the factors entering into high prices.

The Post’s Mark Sullivan then writes that the idea, discussed "informally...outside politics" had been taken from foreign policy. “The idea is that bipartisanship has been achieved in foreign relations...and that in the domestic field, the same bipartisanship should be aimed at”

The same suggestion has been made informally in areas of national thought outside politics, and the idea is entertained tacitly in many minds. The idea is that bipartisanship has been achieved in foreign relations, that our domestic problems are as serious as the foreign ones and that in the domestic field the same bipartisanship should be aimed at.

Again, cooperation between partisans on domestic policy issues wasn’t new at all. What’s being noted as novel here is the concept of bipartisanship as a value that should guide domestic policymaking rather than the unremarkable product of interests just happening to align.

And in fact, one of the things that made the idea odd in 1947 is that, as Sullivan notes, cooperation between members of both parties on domestic policy was actually quite common “So far as there is opposition between the two parties...it is a kind of token opposition”

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Without being formally aimed at, bipartisanship informally exists as respects the two parties in Congress. Without having made agreement about it, without indeed being much conscious of it, the two parties practice it.

No one has seen any flailing at each other by Democratic Senate Leader Barkley and Republican Steering Committee Chairman Taft. The same condition of easy going amity exists between leaders of the two parties in the House.

No one has seen any hectic marshaling of party forces such as goes on when the parties are in head-on opposition nor heard cheers over a party victory; no one thinks of the outcome of a roll call as being a partisan victory.

Token Opposition

SO FAR as there is opposition between the two parties on important issues, it is a kind of token opposition, a going through the forms which are imbedded in the mechanism of the two-party system. And it has the useful effect of preventing the line between the two parties from being obliterated, of preserving the two-party system.

The most important domestic issue in Congress is labor legislation. Nominally that is a Republican measure, but only because in the parliamentary mechanism of the two-party system the majority party writes the drafts of measures as they are laid before Congress as a whole. In the final roll call on the labor measure in the House, a majority of the Democrats stood with the Republicans to make up the overwhelming total vote of 308 to 107.

The same significance is in what occurred in the writing of a draft labor measure in the Senate Labor Committee. In that committee are

As others have written about in recent years, a number of political scientists and others at the time actually saw the lack of partisanship within our political system as a problem.

In 1950, a report written for the American Political Science Association called “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System” argued that the parties should become more nationalized and ideologically divided in order to produce “consistent action based on meaningful programs.”

12. *The Dangers of Inaction*

Four dangers warrant special emphasis. The first danger is that the inadequacy of the party system in sustaining well-considered programs

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and providing broad public support for them may lead to grave consequences in an explosive era. The second danger is that the American people may go too far for the safety of constitutional government in compensating for this inadequacy by shifting excessive responsibility to the President. The third danger is that with growing public cynicism and continuing proof of the ineffectiveness of the party system the nation may eventually witness the disintegration of the two major parties. The fourth danger is that the incapacity of the two parties for consistent action based on meaningful programs may rally support for extremist parties poles apart, each fanatically bent on imposing on the country its particular panacea.

And part of the argument here, if you can believe it, is that too much moderation and agreement between the two parties would *increase* political extremism by frustrating voters looking for more meaningful change.

1. *The Danger of an Explosive Era.* The political foundation of appropriate governmental programs is very unstable when it is not supplied by responsible party action.

2. *The Danger of Overextending the Presidency.* Dependable political support has to be built up for the governmental program. When there is no other place to get that done, when the political parties fail to do it, it is tempting to turn to the President. When the President's program actually is the sole program, either his party becomes a flock of sheep or the party falls apart. This concept of the presidency disposes of the party system by making the President reach directly for the support of a majority of the voters.

3. *The Danger of Disintegration of the Two Parties.* A chance that the electorate will turn its back upon the two parties is by no means academic. As a matter of fact, this development has already occurred in considerable part, and it is still going on. American political institutions are too firmly grounded upon the two-party system to make its collapse a small matter.

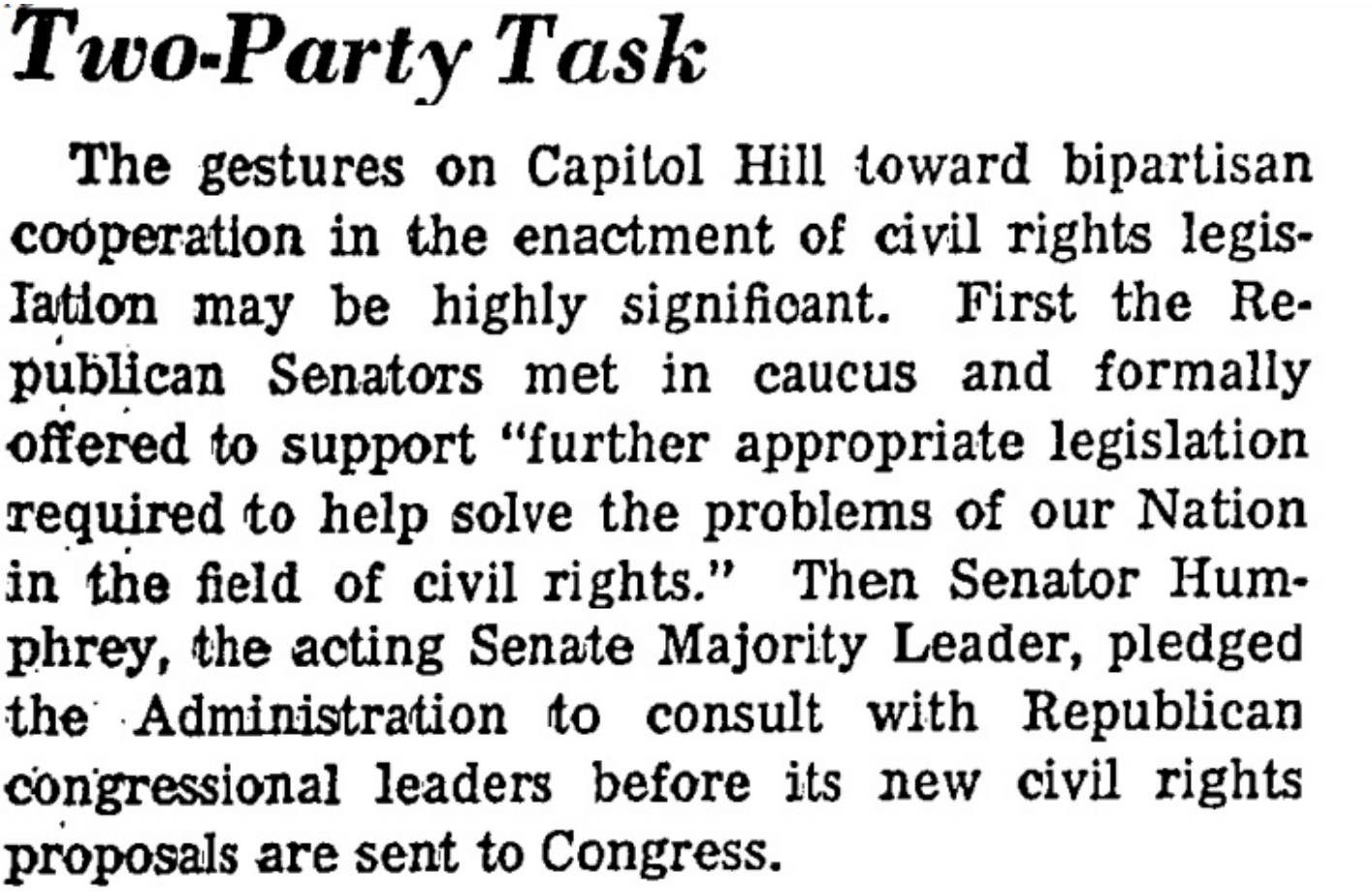
4. *The Danger of an Unbridgeable Political Cleavage.* If the two parties do not develop alternative programs that can be executed, the voter's frustration and the mounting ambiguities of national policy might set in motion more extreme tendencies to the political left and the political right. Once a deep political cleavage develops between opposing groups, each group naturally works to keep it deep. Orientation of the American two-party system along the lines of meaningful national programs is a significant step toward avoiding the development of such a cleavage.

The report never caught on and the parties would stay heterogenous and cooperative for some time. But bipartisanship as a virtue in domestic policy was still an anomalous concept.

It would remain so until the 1960s. And one major domestic issue where the concept began to get deliberately invoked was civil rights.



By the early 60s, a consensus had formed that the fight over civil rights had become a national crisis. This was reflected in editorials like this 1963 one from the Washington Post lauding “gestures on Capitol Hill towards bipartisan cooperation” in advancing civil rights bills.



Two-Party Task

The gestures on Capitol Hill toward bipartisan cooperation in the enactment of civil rights legislation may be highly significant. First the Republican Senators met in caucus and formally offered to support “further appropriate legislation required to help solve the problems of our Nation in the field of civil rights.” Then Senator Humphrey, the acting Senate Majority Leader, pledged the Administration to consult with Republican congressional leaders before its new civil rights proposals are sent to Congress.

And this particular editorial offers an illuminating quote from then Senator Hubert Humphrey. Race relations, Humphrey said, had risen to such importance, that the situation had come to demand “the same kind of bipartisanship we have on foreign affairs.”

This responsible action on both sides reflects wide recognition of the grave proportions that the racial conflict has assumed. Senator Humphrey said that the situation calls for "the same kind of bipartisanship we have on foreign affairs." It would be foolish, of course, to suppose that civil rights problems can be wholly divorced from politics or that either party will cease to seek political advantage out of its actions in this sphere. Nevertheless, substantial support will have to be forthcoming from both parties if meaningful legislation is to be enacted at this session or in the foreseeable future.

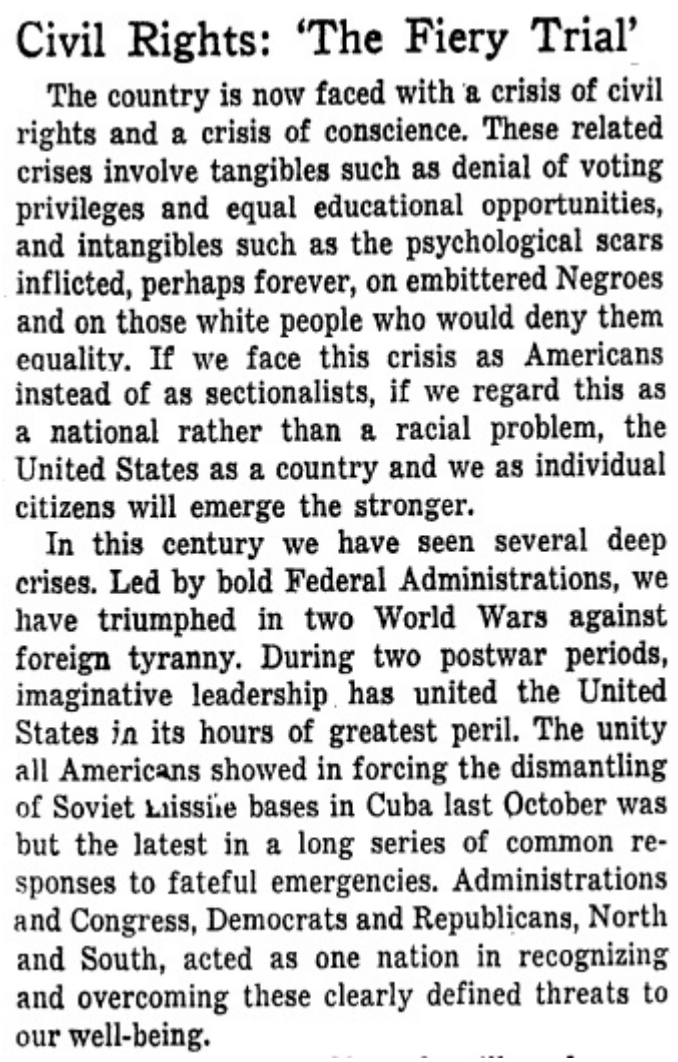
Of course, the clear divides on civil rights in 1963 were really within the parties ■— and within the Democratic Party in particular ■— rather than between them, as the editorial notes. And, again, coalitions between members of both parties were common on other issues.

Both parties are split by civil rights issues. The Republican schism has once more been emphasized by Senator Goldwater's partial dissent from the statement of his Republican colleagues. But the Democratic cleavage is both deeper and more extensive than the GOP's. Despite its heavy preponderance of Democrats, the Senate cannot pass any effective legislation to relieve the racial tension without Republican help. The bills now being worked out will doubtless have to surmount a Southern filibuster, which can be broken only by a two-thirds vote in the Senate.

But civil rights, obviously, had not been like other issues. Civil rights were an “explosive issue.” And here, coalition building had to be induced by a call for a higher sort of politics rather than “politics-as-usual.”

If no common ground can be found between the two parties, therefore, this move to head off a grave national emergency is not likely to get beyond the oratorical stage. But if there can be a genuine meeting of minds between the Administration and leading Republicans as to what the new legislation should consist of, and if the temptation to play politics with this explosive issue can be held in check, the accomplishment may be substantial.

Here’s the New York Times editorial board echoing Humphrey a week later. “Just as bipartisanship has characterized the Congressional response to international crises, so it must bring unity in this great domestic crisis.”



Civil Rights: 'The Fiery Trial'

The country is now faced with a crisis of civil rights and a crisis of conscience. These related crises involve tangibles such as denial of voting privileges and equal educational opportunities, and intangibles such as the psychological scars inflicted, perhaps forever, on embittered Negroes and on those white people who would deny them equality. If we face this crisis as Americans instead of as sectionalists, if we regard this as a national rather than a racial problem, the United States as a country and we as individual citizens will emerge the stronger.

In this century we have seen several deep crises. Led by bold Federal Administrations, we have triumphed in two World Wars against foreign tyranny. During two postwar periods, imaginative leadership has united the United States in its hours of greatest peril. The unity all Americans showed in forcing the dismantling of Soviet missile bases in Cuba last October was but the latest in a long series of common responses to fateful emergencies. Administrations and Congress, Democrats and Republicans, North and South, acted as one nation in recognizing and overcoming these clearly defined threats to our well-being.

But you also begin to see around this time the word coming to refer generically to proposals that members of both parties had come to agree on.

Johnson in particular really went to town with it. Transportation? A bipartisan problem. This bill on controlling nuclear material? Bipartisan. The Higher Education Act? Bipartisan. This park? Bipartisan.

> Our Urban Mass Transportation Act sponsored by this administration has already passed the Senate of the United States and it will soon come to a vote in the House. We are going to do our dead level best to see that it passes the House and becomes the law of the land.
>
> Both Republicans and Democrats are supporting that measure because transportation is a bipartisan problem. It is also national in scope. Seventy percent of our people live in metropolitan areas. Fifty-three of our country's biggest metropolitan areas either border or cross State lines. Their transit problems ignore local boundaries, but their taxing powers are limited and their resources are already strained.

But as much as Johnson talked up bipartisanship, Democrats had huge majorities in the House and Senate during his term and the programs and initiatives of the Great Society were built largely upon them. And this perhaps accounts for the cynicism you hear in that '68 editorial.

88th	1963–1965	100	**67**	33	—	—	435	**258**	176	—	1	Lyndon B. Johnson
89th	1965–1967	100	**68**	32	—	—	435	**295**	140	—	—	
90th	1967–1969	100	**64**	36	—	—	435	**247**	187	—	1	

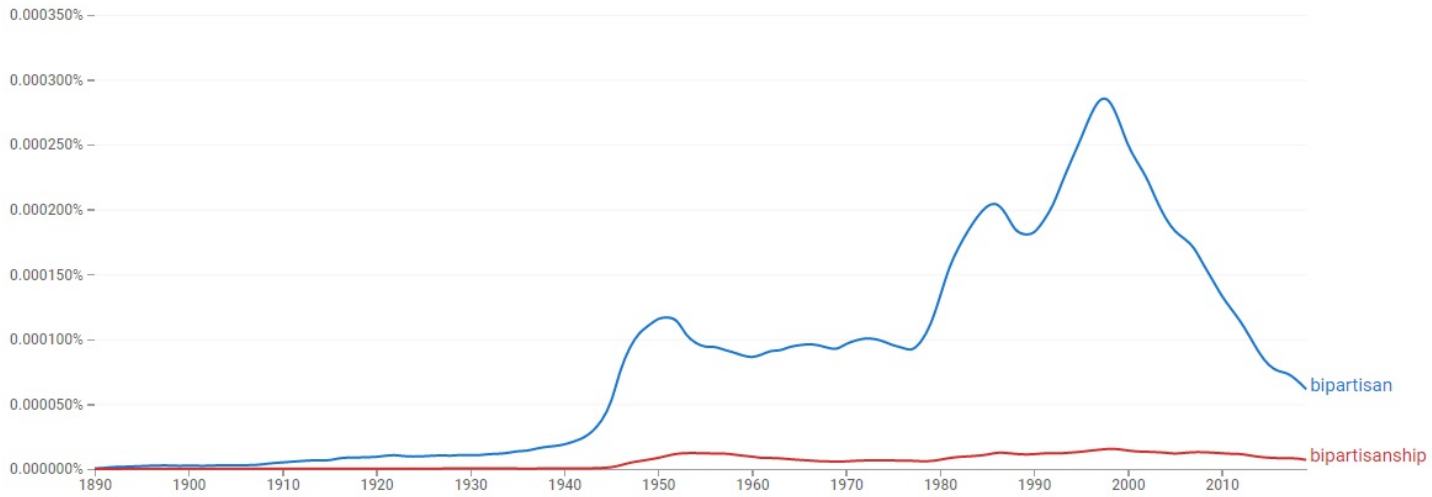
And this is critical: from the turn of the century through the end of the 1960s, one party government was the norm. As you see in that Cater piece from 1960, divided government under Ike had been unusual enough that the idea of it continuing was cause for concern in some circles.

1897–1899	R	R	R	McKinley
1899–1901	R	R	R	
1901–1903	R	R	R	T. Roosevelt
1903–1905	R	R	R	
1905–1907	R	R	R	
1907–1909	R	R	R	
1909–1911	R	R	R	Taft
1911–1913	R	R	D	
1913–1915	D	D	D	Wilson
1915–1917	D	D	D	
1917–1919	D	D	D	
1919–1921	D	R	R	
1921–1923	R	R	R	Harding
1923–1925	R	R	R	Coolidge
1925–1927	R	R	R	
1927–1929	R	R	R	
1929–1931	R	R	R	Hoover
1931–1933	R	R	D	
1933–1935	D	D	D	F. Roosevelt
1935–1937	D	D	D	
1937–1939	D	D	D	
1939–1941	D	D	D	
1941–1943	D	D	D	
1943–1945	D	D	D	
1945–1947	D	D	D	Truman
1947–1949	D	R	R	
1949–1951	D	D	D	
1951–1953	D	D	D	

But divided government was the future. Civil rights and cultural issues broke up the New Deal coalition and scrambled American politics. Nixon and Ford preside over Democratic congresses. There's a return to unified control under Carter. It's rare afterwards.

1969–1971	R	D	D	Nixon
1971–1973	R	D	D	
1973–1975	R	D	D	Ford
1975–1977	R	D	D	
1977–1979	D	D	D	Carter
1979–1981	D	D	D	
1981–1983	R	R	D	Reagan
1983–1985	R	R	D	
1985–1987	R	R	D	
1987–1989	R	D	D	
1989–1991	R	D	D	G.H.W. Bush
1991–1993	R	D	D	
1993–1995	D	D	D	Clinton
1995–1997	D	R	R	
1997–1999	D	R	R	
1999–2001	D	R	R	
2001–2003	R	D*	R	G.W. Bush
2003–2005	R	R	R	
2005–2007	R	R	R	
2007–2009	R	D	D	
2009–2011	D	D	D	Obama
2011–2013	D	D	R	
2013–2015	D	D	R	
2015–2017	D	R	R	
2017–2019	R	R	R	Trump
2019–2021	R	R	D	
2021–2023	D	D**	D	Biden

Look at that Ngram again. The use of bipartisan shoots up from the late 1970s and peaks in the late 1990s. The parties are becoming more ideologically sorted in this period, but these are also the years of what we now call the neoliberal consensus.



In short, the Republican Party moves right and the Democratic Party moves with it to recapture voters they had begun losing to the conservative movement.

For Dems, that meant trying to outflank Reagan on issues like the deficit. Here's a laudatory 1986 piece from the Philadelphia Inquirer on the the Democratic Leadership Council and their call for Reagan " to join them in a bipartisan anti-deficit drive."

All Democrats should weigh this warning from former Virginia Gov. Charles S. Robb: "The biggest mistake we could make is to view the Iran affair as a free pass to the White House. It does nothing to prepare the Democrats to govern. We've got to earn the right to lead America."

Defining how Democrats can best do that in the post-Reagan era was the object of an extraordinary conference Robb hosted last week in Williamsburg, Va. - extraordinary because though it was a gathering of Democratic pols, the focus was on creative new ideas intended to move Democrats beyond the outmoded orthodoxy of New Deal liberalism.

The group calls itself the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC). Elected Democrats at national, state and local levels organized it in reaction to the 1984 Mondale debacle. It is often derided as a caucus of conservative white males from the Sun Belt dedicated to making Democrats into Me-Too Republicans, but such criticism is superficial and short-sighted. What unites DLC Democrats is neither conservativism nor liberalism, but realism.

We know most of the story from here, really. The Democrats take the center. They return to power under Clinton in '92. Republicans sweep Congress in '94. The period produces bipartisan policies we're still trying to dig ourselves out of today. David Broder on Biden's crime bill:

BIPARTISANSHIP WAS THE KEY IN GETTING CRIME BILL PASSED

By **David Broder, (copyright) 1994, Washington Post Writers Group**

Here's a cameo from John Kasich, then a congressman from Ohio, who tells Broder that Clinton would have to learn from the example to work with Republicans once they made gains in the midterms.

Few outside Washington realize the extent of the frustration that House Republicans, 40 years in the minority, feel at their exclusion from substantive policy-making. Occasionally, on some issues in some committees, their ideas get serious consideration, but rarely are they in a position to influence the shape of a bill on the House floor. Here, they found themselves dealing directly with the leaders of the opposition party and the White House on major legislation. It was tough going-but it was heady stuff.

"In the states," Castle told me afterward, "you get past partisanship and into governing pretty quickly. Here in Washington, if you're part of the minority (party), you are rarely allowed to contribute to governing."

In the same interview, Kasich said, "This is the first real gut-wrenching effort both sides have made to govern from the middle. There will be no going back."

After November, when Republicans are expected to make gains in both the House and Senate, Clinton will have no choice but to approach more issues on a bipartisan basis, Kasich said.

It's too soon to say that Clinton will reach out regularly to Republicans as he struggles to salvage his presidency. But the House crime bill vote certainly signals that the possibility is open to him.

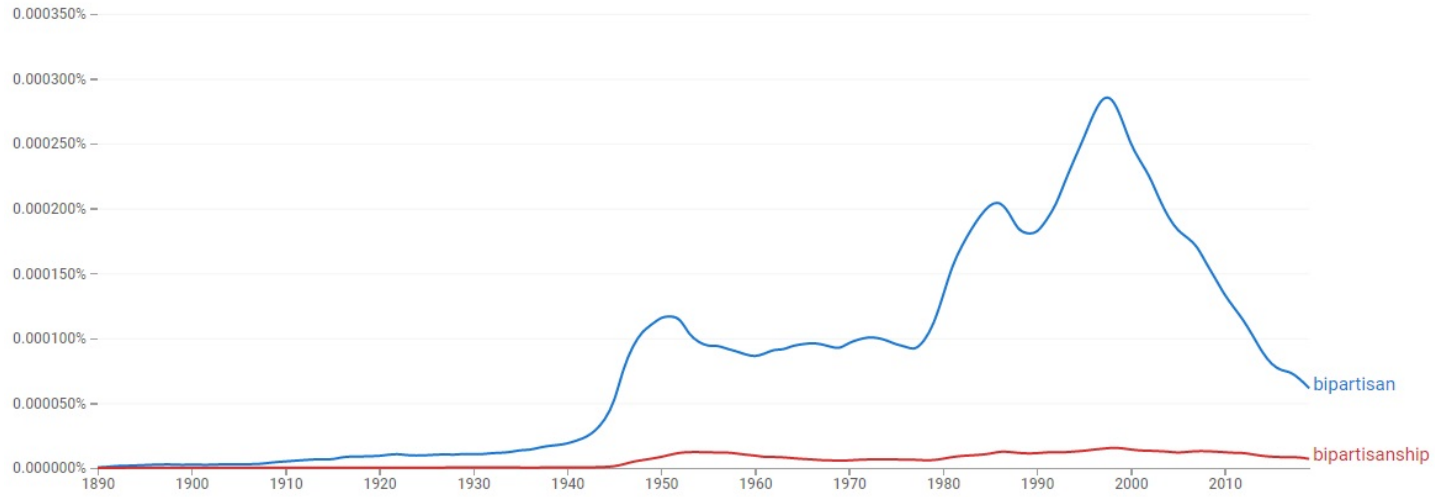
This is ultimately what happened. Here's Clinton outlining his priorities in 1996's State of the Union. Deficits and welfare reform had been on the Democratic agenda, but Republicans played a larger role in shaping policy after gaining majorities.

To improve the state of our Union, we must ask more of ourselves, we must expect more of each other, and we must face our challenges together.

Here, in this place, our responsibility begins with balancing the budget in a way that is fair to all Americans. There is now broad bipartisan agreement that permanent deficit spending must come to an end. I compliment the Republican leadership and the membership for the energy and determination you have brought to this task of balancing the budget. And I thank the Democrats for passing the largest deficit reduction plan in history in 1993, which has already cut the deficit nearly in half in 3 years.

Since 1993, we have all begun to see the benefits of deficit reduction. Lower interest rates have made it easier for businesses to borrow and to invest and to create new jobs. Lower interest rates have brought down the cost of home mortgages, car payments, and credit card rates to ordinary citizens. Now it is time to finish the job and balance the budget.

A last look at that NGram. Usage of "bipartisanship" seems to fall off a cliff in the late 90s, but obviously not because politicians stop using it.

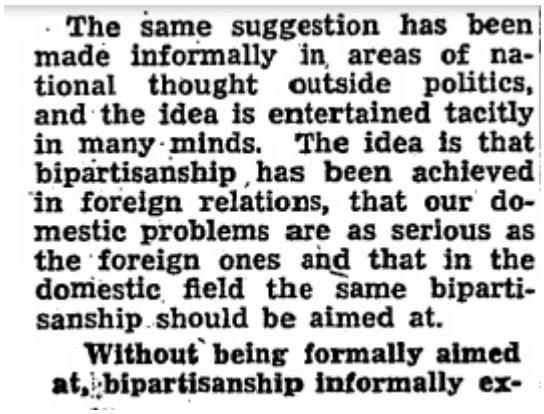


I'd guess this is probably polarization at work. It appears less frequently in increasingly partisan books and media even as (or maybe even because) it's common in the rhetoric of actual elected officials.

A final thought: the salience of bipartisanship as a value is *the product* of political division. The concept only makes sense as a normative principle if there's a deep gulf between two sides, each with its own coherent identity.

Bipartisanship™ doesn't really exist in a world where there's substantial overlap between the two parties and agreement is common. Because then, that's just politics. You don't need a special name for that state of affairs. And for a long time they didn't have one.

That 1947 article again: "Without being formally aimed at, bipartisanship informally exists as respects the two parties in Congress. Without having made agreement about it, without indeed being much conscious of it, the two parties practice it."


The same suggestion has been made informally in areas of national thought outside politics, and the idea is entertained tacitly in many minds. The idea is that bipartisanship has been achieved in foreign relations, that our domestic problems are as serious as the foreign ones and that in the domestic field the same bipartisanship should be aimed at.

Without being formally aimed at, bipartisanship informally ex-

In short, the trajectory of bipartisanship as an idea particularly after the late 1970s seems to track roughly with the deepening of political polarization. Put another way: bipartisanship takes off as a value as *and in fact because* agreement becomes less and less possible.

And to the extent that you do see significant bipartisan policies enacted, the policies are largely center-right to conservative. It's obvious whose interests they serve.

Business groups increasingly worried about death of filibuster

BY ALEX GANGITANO - 09/02/20 06:00 AM EDT

183 COMMENTS

So here’s where we are. 4,000 coronavirus deaths a day. A full package of policies to address the crisis might pass with a simple partisan majority via reconciliation. Evidently this won't happen. Why? Because the president is “bipartisan-curious.” https://t.co/ahymU0Q9Lq

> On COVID, Dem leaders were wanting to move quickly to use reconciliation & started to execute that strategy, but BIDEN stopped them.
>
> He wants to try to work with Rs first and is "bipartisan curious" as one person put it. (Some Ds not happy abt this/see it as a time-suck) https://t.co/cu0h4OMYjY
>
> — Rachael Bade (@rachaelmbade) January 21, 2021

This is how deeply the concept has burrowed into our politics. It is taken entirely for granted by many Americans that this is how things have to work. It is not. The premise is rarely challenged explicitly, even by elected progressives. It should be.