



Establishment v. Establishment

Although the aforementioned figures rarely mention names, it would appear that if Limbaugh's, Hannity's, and Levin's are the faces of "the conservative movement," then those of the establishment belong to the likes of Charles Krauthammer, Bill Kristol, and Karl Rove.



It is during presidential primary contests moreso than at any other time that this rivalry between "conservative" Republicans and establishment Republicans comes into focus, for it is always conflict over the selection of a candidate that seems to shove it most forcefully to the forefront. On the one hand, the voice of the establishment insists upon favoring only the most "moderate" (read: *liberal*) of candidates. On the other hand, the voice of "the base" — as channeled through such colorful radio and television personalities as the Limbaughs and Hannitys of our world — expresses resentment toward the establishment for its continual betrayal of "conservative principles": The objective, according to "conservatives" and Tea Partiers the country over, is to always support the most *conservative* of candidates.

The conflict between these two factions of the Republican Party is continual. It is intense. It is even ugly.

It is also contrived.

It isn't necessarily that the self-styled representatives of "conservatism" don't have real disagreements with those whom they identify as spokespersons of the Republican Party establishment. It is just that these differences, when they exist, are greatly exaggerated. In reality, the conflict between the base and the establishment of the GOP is a conflict *within the establishment*.

There is one, and *only* one, genuinely *anti-establishment* candidate in the GOP's presidential primary race. Of course, that candidate is Congressman Ron Paul.

Whether you like or dislike him — and Lord knows that the Limbaughs and the Krauthammers, as in so many other substantive respects, are *united* by their equal disdain of him — there is no one who can credibly deny that Paul is not only a heterodox Republican, but an anti-establishmentarian *extraordinaire*. At the same time, though, he is the embodiment of just that vision that is the stuff of Republican Party rhetoric: "limited" or constitutional government; individual liberty; a strong national



defense; free markets, etc.

What, we may ask, are the *substantive* differences between Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Mark Levin, on the one hand, and Charles Krauthammer, Bill Kristol, and Karl Rove, on the other? How is it that Limbaugh and company do not belong to the establishment, while Rove and company do?

Presumably, there must be some fundamental differences in opinion regarding the issues of the day between those who belong to the establishment and those who do not. Yet when we consider these issues, we are hard pressed to determine where such differences lie.

When it comes to “national security,” both sets of Republicans are of one mind. Certainly, there *may* be differences in *emphasis*; but there is *no* difference in *kind*. National security, to hear both camps tell it, demands not only that we steadfastly refuse to so much as consider cuts in “defense” spending; it demands as well that we resolve to forever *increase* military expenditures. These expenditures are necessary if America is to maintain its position as a “benevolent” hegemonic power. They are necessary if America is to *win* “the War on Terror” and bring “Democracy” to the Islamic world and beyond.

Both establishment Republicans and “conservatives” such as Limbaugh enthusiastically supported the Iraq War — even long after the predominant pretext for the invasion of Mesopotamia — “weapons of mass destruction” — had crumbled. And both kinds of Republicans insist upon describing President Barack H. Obama as an “appeaser.” This, mind you, is the same Obama who increased our troop presence in Afghanistan by 30,000 bodies; invaded a sovereign nation that never attacked us — Pakistan — in order to *assassinate* Osama bin Laden; and essentially invaded another independent nation — Libya — to assist a revolution and undermine the government.

Domestically, also, there are no substantive differences between establishment Republicans and their alleged detractors among the base of their party.

The “conservatives” of “the alternative media” were as ardent supporters of President George W. Bush’s “compassionate conservatism” as was the very establishmentarians against whom they now set themselves. Whether it was the aggressiveness with which the Bush administration sought to pressure lending institutions to make mortgage loans to unqualified applicants or its consolidation of federal authority over America’s public schools via the disastrous No Child Left Behind; whether it was Bush’s decision to supply federal funding for embryonic stem cell research or his initiation of the ominous PATRIOT Act, Rush, Sean, and Mark threw their weight behind our 43rd President as unreservedly as did Rove and the establishment gang.

And now, during the midst of this primary season, we are treated to the display of “conservative” Republicans battling it out with their foes in the establishment over which candidates are and are not “conservative” — as opposed to members of the dreaded establishment. Rick Santorum, Michele Bachmann, and Rick Perry are *real* “conservatives,” we are told, whereas Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich are busy trying to convince voters that each is more a member of the establishment than the other.

In truth, though, how do any of these candidates differ substantially from the other? How do any of them differ from any other establishment Republican? As Ron Paul has often observed, they are all equally beholden to the same ideology of Big Government.

Anyone who is honestly interested in voting for an anti-establishment Republican has no option but to pull the lever for the only Texas Congressman and former obstetrician on the ballot.



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