



The Atlantic: The Second Pillar Of The Obama Style Has Been Technocracy

A pillar of journalism, The Atlantic Magazine is bringing Technocracy into its lexicon, and not a minute too soon! Since Obama was first inaugurated, I have painstakingly detailed Obama's connection to Technocracy and the Trilateral Commission since the day he took office. □ TN Editor

The 2016 presidential race represents a vivid rejection of the Obama style. This is easy to miss: His approval ratings are climbing, and Hillary Clinton won the Democratic primary by running as his successor. But the two most dramatic and portentous campaigns of the year, Donald Trump's vertiginous win and Bernie Sanders's astonishing insurgency, both flew in the face of the Obama era's premises.

The Obama style had two pillars. He brought to apotheosis the American political tradition of redemptive constitutionalism. This is the creed of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural, Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, and Lyndon Baines Johnson's

nationally televised speech on the Voting Rights Acts of 1965, in which he promised, “we shall overcome.” Redemptive constitutionalism holds that democracy and equal freedom really are the nation’s foundations, that slavery and Jim Crow were terrible deviations from these principles, and that, if we manage to take them seriously, to live by them, Americans will finally be free together.

In one respect, Obama’s victory and inauguration unavoidably embodied a version of this idea: a black man speaking the constitutionally prescribed oath, as Lincoln had done, and invoking the Declaration of Independence, not to promise equality but to pronounce it. Short-lived fantasies of a “post-racial” America were one symptom of this moment. A Tom Toles cartoon quoted the iconic “all men are created equal” and added, as if a note of legislative history, “Ratified November 4, 2008.” The fantasy of redemption was instantaneously ironized, of course—on the election-eve episode of the *Daily Show*, Larry Wilmore informed Jon Stewart, “We’re square”—as if the country’s black-white ledger were balanced by one symbolic election. But the audience laughed precisely because so many people wanted to feel it might be true.

Obama’s commitment to a redemptive version of American politics went much deeper than the fact of his race. Both in his campaigns and in the public-facing aspects of governing, he insisted on common principles and the possibility of a shared perspective. His persistent refrain, from the career-making speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention to the elegiac address after the Dallas murders of 2016, has been that unity is deeper than division. Race has always been a central preoccupation of the redemptive style of American politics. That is partially because it has been the basis of national crimes and savage inequality. But the redemptive style also promises that, if Americans come together in the right ways, including but not limited to healing the angry wounds of racial injustice, their shared principles can make them whole.

The second pillar of the Obama style has been technocracy. The Obama administration has been intensely deferential to the expertise of conventional authorities: generals and national-security professionals, political operatives like Rahm Emanuel, and, above all, mainstream economists and bankers such as Larry Summers and Tim Geithner.

Deference to the professional culture of economists led, in particular, to trade policies that pressed aggressively toward liberalization and harmonization, until a political rebellion against the Trans-Pacific Partnership drove even Hillary Clinton to repudiate it while campaigning. The **technocratic approach** to governing rests on the idea that there is a right way to manage major policy questions, and that much of the point of electoral politics is to keep the way clear for expert administration. In practice, outside of questions of war and security, this has meant managing the economy for maximum total growth. Even Democratic wonks have tended to promote market-style competition. (The usual difference is that the Democrats believe government has an important role in creating and policing such competition, while Republicans are more likely to think that rolling back government gives “the market” room to work.)

In very different but curiously similar ways, both redemptive constitutionalism and **technocracy** promise deep reconciliation between different groups of Americans. If they can just take the right principles seriously, they’re square. If they can just plug the holes in the economy, the rising tide will lift all boats.

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