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The Culture War's Decisive Battle has Begun

By [Herbert E. Meyer](#)

In every war there is one decisive battle. This battle doesn't end the war; a great deal of hard fighting lies ahead. But in retrospect it's the moment when one side's ultimate victory -- and the other side's ultimate defeat -- were sealed. In our Civil War this decisive battle was Gettysburg. In World War II, it was Midway.

Unexpectedly -- perhaps even astonishingly -- this year's presidential campaign is shaping up as the decisive battle in the Culture War that's been tearing apart our country for decades.

On one side are the Traditionalists. We believe that church and State should be separate, but that religion should remain at the center of life. We are a Judeo-Christian culture, which means we consider those ten things on a tablet to be commandments, not suggestions. We believe that individuals are more important than groups, that families are more important than governments, that children should be raised by their parents rather than by a village, and that marriage is a sacred relationship between a man and a woman. We believe that rights must be balanced by responsibilities, that personal freedom is a privilege we must be careful not to abuse, and that the rule of law cannot be set aside when it becomes inconvenient.

We believe in economic liberty, property rights, and in giving purposeful and industrious entrepreneurs the elbowroom they need to start and run their businesses -- and thus create jobs for all the rest of us -- with a minimum of government interference. We recognize that people in other countries see things differently, and we are tolerant of their views. But we believe that despite its imperfections the United States is history's most blessed country, and when attacked we will defend this country with our lives.

Tuning Out, then Tuning In

On the other side of this culture war are the Left-Wing Liberals. They are uncomfortable with our traditions, with the inevitable inequalities of our free-market economy, and with our military power. They dislike our values, our morality, and our unabashed displays of patriotism. At first -- back in the 1960s -- they were content merely to develop and pursue their own radical culture within ours. They tuned out, turned to drugs, and pushed the level of sexual license to a point our country had never known. They were so distressed by our imperfections that they refused to recognize or celebrate our achievements.

Then they tuned in, and developed a political agenda whose logical outcome would be the overthrow of the American Revolution itself. While we believe that power flows from God to the people, they believe the supreme power is the State, which decides what rights, if any, should be allowed to the people. And because there is no God above the State, there also is no truth; no such thing as right or wrong, good or evil. Since *they* are working to do good -- by *their* definition of the word -- whatever crimes they commit along the way don't matter. But if we are bent on doing what *they* define as harm, they will use any legal trick in the book to stop us. In short, the rule of law means whatever they want it to mean at any given moment.

They believe that rights are more important than responsibilities, that groups are more important than individuals, and that one's stand on public issues is more important than one's private actions or morality. And while they are careful never to condone the tactics of our country's foreign enemies, they always see some justification in our enemies' cause. They don't actually want us to be defeated by our foreign enemies; they wish merely to see us humbled and humiliated

by them.

So great is this gulf between the Traditionalists and the Left-Wing Liberals -- and so irreconcilable are the differences -- that our decades-long political struggle has amounted to a kind of second Civil War. And for several years now, it's been a stalemate. This is why so many elections are so close, why so many Supreme Court decisions are split 5-4, and why we've been unable to act decisively on any of the issues that confront us - the war, the economy, energy, healthcare, border control, immigration, and all the rest.

One way or the other, the Culture War's stalemate is about to be broken.

Study history, and you will learn that there are two kinds of wars: There are short military ones, such as World Wars I and II, in which armies and navies collide until one side wins and the other loses. And there are long ideological wars, such as the Cold War, in which short bursts of fighting are separated by long periods of political maneuvering. In these long ideological wars, the outcome isn't determined by firepower but by will. That's because the aggressor's objective isn't to kill the defenders, but to wear them down until they no longer have the courage and stamina to keep resisting.

The defenders win only when they stop merely resisting -- in other words, trying just to not lose -- and start playing offense. For example, by the late 1970s the Free World's will to resist the Soviet Union's endless challenges had nearly evaporated. Détente was just a palatable word for surrender. And then -- unexpectedly and virtually at the same moment -- three individuals most people had never before heard of exploded onto the scene and into power. They were Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Pope John-Paul II - none of whom, by the way, had any foreign policy experience before taking office. Their objective wasn't to "not lose" the Cold War, but rather to end it with victory for the Free World. Together they threw the switch from playing defense to playing offense, stunning the Kremlin's over-confident leaders who believed that history was on their side. Within a decade, the Cold War was over and the Soviet Union had ceased to exist.

McCain Throws the Switch

By choosing Governor Sarah Palin as his running mate -- and by staking his own claim to the presidency on "Country First" more than on any specific policy initiative -- John McCain has thrown the switch and put us Traditionalists onto the offense. By doing so he has unleashed the energy and the will to victory among Traditionalists that have been dormant for so long the Left-Wing Liberals mistakenly assumed we'd lost. And by taking the over-confident Left-Wing Liberals so completely by surprise, McCain has stunned them into revealing themselves for the vicious phonies that they are.

As a result, what started out as a typical campaign between Republicans and Democrats -- each party trying to hold its base while attracting enough independent voters to win -- has exploded into the Culture War's decisive battle.

Commanding the Traditionalist armies is a war hero whose personal courage and patriotism have overwhelmed any disagreements within the coalition about specific policies and issues. His second-in-command is a pro-life hockey mom with genuine executive talent, star quality, and the most valuable asset of all in politics: a common touch. Commanding the Left-Wing Liberal armies is an elegant, eloquent cosmopolitan whose most striking talent is his ability to push past everyone else to the front of the line. His second-in-command is the U.S. Senate's leading plagiarist, whose only undeniable talent is his ability to use Senate confirmation hearings as a platform from which to trash honorable Republican appointees such as Bill Clark, Robert Bork, and Clarence Thomas.

In the coming weeks we're going to hear a lot from these four candidates and their surrogates about the war, the economy, energy, healthcare, border control, immigration, and all the other issues that confront us. And we'll be talking and arguing about these issues among ourselves - at the dinner table, with our colleagues at work, with our friends and neighbors at barbeques and at the kids' ball games.

But this election isn't really about these issues. This election is about who we are.

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