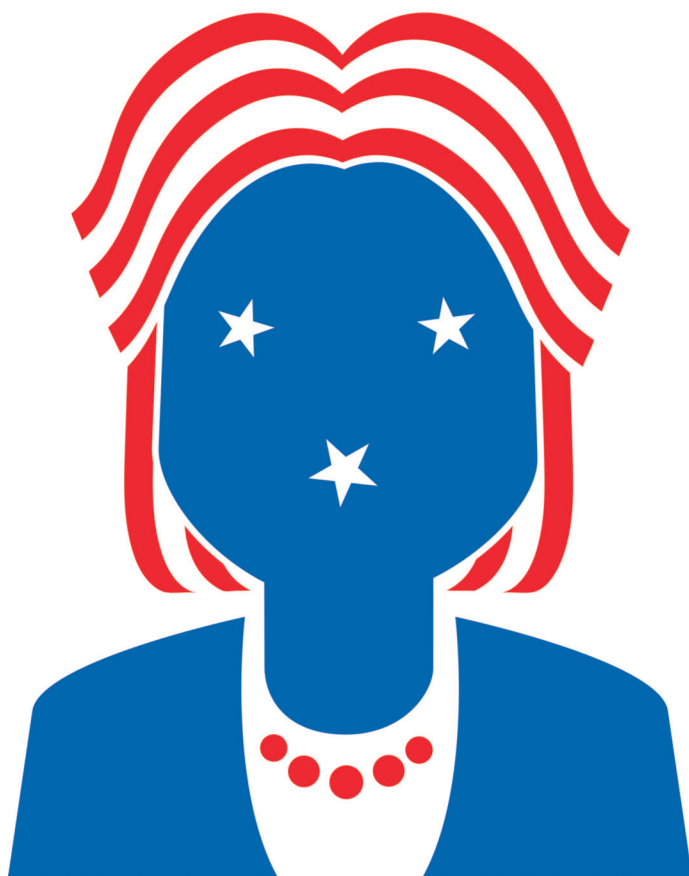


# THE WOMAN CARD

*How feminism and antifeminism created Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.*

BY JILL LEPORE



**I**T MEANS FREEDOM FOR WOMEN TO VOTE AGAINST THE PARTY THIS DONKEY REPRESENTS” read the sign on a donkey named Woodrow who, wearing a bow, was paraded through Denver by the National Woman’s Party during its campaign against the Democratic incumbent, President Wilson, in 1916. This year, the hundredth anniversary of the Woman’s Party arrived, unnoticed, on June 5th. Two days later, Hillary Clinton became the first woman to claim the Presidential nomination of a major party: the Democratic Party.

If elected, Clinton will become the first female President in the nation’s history. She will also join John Quincy Adams, James Monroe, Martin Van

Buren, and James Buchanan as the only Presidents to have served both in the Senate and as Secretary of State. If she loses the election to Donald Trump, he will be the first man elected President who has never served the public either in government or in the military. Trump wants to make America great again; Clinton wants to make history. That history is less about the last glass ceiling than about a party realignment as important as the Nixon-era Southern Strategy, if less well known. Call it the Female Strategy.

For the past century, the edges of the parties have been defined by a debate about the political role and constitutional rights of women. This debate is usually reduced to cant, as if the battle between

the parties were a battle between the sexes. Republicans and Democrats are “just like men and women,” Trent Lott liked to say: Democrats might be from Venus, but the G.O.P. is “the party of Mars.” Democrats have talked about a Republican “war on women”; Trump says, of Clinton, “The only card she has is the woman card.” She polls better among women; he polls better among men. The immediacy and starkness of the contrast between the candidates obscures the historical realignment hinted at in their own biographies: she used to be a Republican and he used to be a Democrat. This election isn’t a battle between the sexes. But it is a battle between the parties, each hoping to win the votes of women without losing the votes of men. It’s also marked by the sweeping changes to American politics caused by women’s entry into public life. Long before women could vote, they carried into the parties a political style they had perfected first as abolitionists and then as prohibitionists: the moral crusade. No election has been the same since.

**F**OR A VERY long time, the parties had no idea what to do with women. At the nation’s founding, women made an argument for female citizenship based on their role as mothers: in a republic, the civic duty of women is to raise sons who will be virtuous citizens. Federalists doffed their top hats, and no more. In the eighteen-twenties and thirties, Jacksonian democracy involved a lot of brawls: women were not allowed. When the social reformer Fanny Wright spoke at a political meeting in 1836, she was called a “female man.” Instead, women entered public affairs by way of an evangelical religious revival that emphasized their moral superiority, becoming temperance reformers and abolitionists: they wrote petitions. “The right of petitioning is the only political right that women have,” Angelina Grimké pointed out in 1837.

The Whig Party was the first to make use of women in public, if ridiculously: in 1840, Tennessee women marched wearing sashes that read “Whig Husbands or None.” Because neither the Whig nor the Democratic Party was able to address the question of slavery, a crop of new parties sprang up. Fuelled by antislavery arguments, and adopting the style of moral suasion favored by female reformers, these parties tended to

*The G.O.P. was built by women, who brought the moral crusade to party politics.*

be welcoming to women, and even to arguments for women's rights.

The Republican Party was born in 1854, in Ripon, Wisconsin, when fifty-four citizens founded a party to oppose the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which threatened to create two new slave states. Three of those citizens were women. Women wrote Republican campaign literature, and made speeches on behalf of the Party. Its first Presidential nominee, in 1856, was John Frémont, but more than one Republican observed that his wife, Jessie Benton Frémont, "would have been the better candidate." One of the Party's most popular and best-paid speakers was Anna Dickinson, who became the first woman to speak in the Hall of the House of Representatives.

The women's-rights movement was founded in 1848. "It started right here in New York, a place called Seneca Falls," Clinton said in her victory speech on June 7th, after effectively clinching the Democratic nomination. Advocates of women's rights were closely aligned with the Republican Party, and typically fought to end slavery and to earn for both black men and all women political equality with white men. In 1859, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote to Susan B. Anthony, "When I pass the gate of the celestials and good Peter asks me where I wish to sit, I will say, 'Anywhere so that I am neither a negro nor a woman. Confer on me, great angel, the glory of White manhood, so that henceforth I may feel unlimited freedom.'"

After Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Stanton and Anthony gathered four hundred thousand signatures on petitions demanding the Thirteenth Amendment. They then began fighting for the Fourteenth Amendment, which they expected to guarantee the rights and privileges of citizenship for all Americans. Instead, they were told that "this is the Negro's hour," and that the amendment would include the word "male," so as to specifically exclude women. "Do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males?" Stanton asked Wendell Phillips. And then she warned, "If that word 'male' be inserted, it will take us a century at least to get it out."

The insertion of the word "male" into the Fourteenth Amendment had consequences that have lasted well into this year's Presidential election. At the time,

not everyone bought the argument that it was necessary to disenfranchise women in order to secure ratification. "Can any one tell us why the great advocates of Human Equality . . . forget that when they were a weak party and needed all the womanly strength of the nation to help them on, they always united the words 'without regard to sex, race, or color'?" one frustrated female supporter of the Republican Party asked. She could have found an answer in an observation made by Charles Sumner: "We know how the Negro will vote, but are not so sure of the women."

This election, many female voters, especially younger ones, resent being told that they should support Hillary Clinton just because she's a woman. It turns out that women don't form a political constituency any more than men do; like men, women tend to vote with their families and their communities. But, in 1865, how women would vote was impossible to know. Would black women vote the way black men voted? Would white women vote like black women? The parties, led by white men, decided they'd just as soon not find out.

Women tried to gain the right to vote by simply seizing it, a plan that was known as the New Departure. Beginning in 1868, black and white women went to the polls all over the country and got arrested. Sojourner Truth tried to vote in Battle Creek, Michigan. Five black women were arrested for voting in South Carolina in 1870, months before Victoria Woodhull became the first woman to run for President. She announced that women already had the right to vote, under the privileges-and-immunities clause of the Constitution, and, in 1871, she made this argument before the House Judiciary Committee. Anthony was arrested for voting in 1872—not for Woodhull but for the straight Republican ticket—and, in the end, the Supreme Court ruled against Woodhull's interpretation of the Constitution. Thus ended the New Departure.

Prevented from entering the electorate, women who wanted to influence public affairs were left to plead with men. For decades, these women had very little choice: whatever fight they fought, they had only the weapons of the nineteenth-century religious revival: the sermon, the appeal, the conversion, the crusade. The full measure of the influence

of the female campaign on the American political style has yet to be taken. But that influence was felt first, and longest, in the Republican Party.

At the Republican nominating convention in 1872, the Party split into two, but neither faction added a suffrage plank to its platform. "We recognize the equality of all men before the law," the Liberal Republicans declared, specifically discounting women. Stanton called the position taken by the regular Republicans—"the honest demand of any class of citizens for additional rights should be treated with respectful consideration"—not a plank but a splinter. Still, a splinter was more than suffragists ever got from the Democratic Party. In 1880, Anthony wrote a speech to deliver at the Democratic National Convention. It began, "To secure to twenty millions of women the rights of citizenship is to base your party on the eternal principles of justice." Instead, her statement was read by a male clerk, while Anthony looked on, furious, after which, as the *Times* reported, "No action whatever was taken in regard to it, and Miss Anthony vexed the Convention no more."

Close elections seemed to be good for the cause because, in a tight race, both parties courted suffragists' support, but women soon discovered that this was fruitless: if they allied with Republicans, Democrats campaigned against Republicans by campaigning against suffrage. This led to a certain fondness for third parties—the Equal Rights Party, the Prohibition Party, the Home Protection Party. J. Ellen Foster, an Iowa lawyer who had helped establish the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, spoke at a Republican rally and cautioned that a third party rewards women's support with nothing more than flattery: "It gives to women seats in conventions and places their names on meaningless committees and tickets impossible of success." In 1892, Foster founded the Women's National Republican Association, telling the delegates at the Party's Convention that year, "We are here to help you. And we have come to stay."

IN THE SECOND DECADE of the twentieth century, anticipating the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, the parties scrambled to secure the loyalty of voters who would double the size of the electorate, no less concerned than

Sumner had been about how women would vote. "With a suddenness and force that have left observers gasping women have injected themselves into the national campaign this year in a manner never before dreamed of in American politics," the New York *Herald* reported in 1912. When Theodore Roosevelt founded the Progressive Party, it adopted a suffrage plank, and he aggressively courted women. He considered appointing Jane Addams to his cabinet. At the Progressive Party's Convention, Addams gave the second nominating speech. Then she grabbed a "Votes for Woman" flag and marched it across the platform and up and down the auditorium. Roosevelt had tried to win the Republican nomination by bribing black delegates, who were then shut out of the Progressive Party's Convention. When Addams got back to Chicago, she found a telegram from a black newspaper editor: "Woman suffrage will be stained with Negro Blood unless women refuse all alliance with Roosevelt."

Alice Paul, a feminist with a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania who'd been arrested for fighting for suffrage in England, decided that American women ought to form their own party. "The name Woman's Party is open to a quite natural misunderstanding," Charlotte Perkins Gilman admitted, introducing the National Woman's Party in 1916. It wasn't a party, per se; it was a group of women whose strategy was to protest the existing parties, on the theory that no party could be trusted to advance the interests of women.

Terrified by the very idea of a party of women, the D.N.C. formed a "Women's Division" in 1917, the R.N.C. in 1918. The G.O.P. pursued a policy of "complete amalgamation," its chairman pledging "to check any tendency toward the formation of a separate women's party." White women worked for both parties; black women worked only for the G.O.P., to fight the Democratic Party, which had become the party of Southern whites. "The race is doomed unless Negro Women take an active part in local, state and national politics," the National League of Republican Colored Women said.

After 1920, Carrie Chapman Catt, the longtime head of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, turned it into the League of Women Voters, providing voter education and other aids to good government. Meanwhile, she told women to join the parties: "The only way to get things in this country is to find them on the inside of the political party." Inside those parties, women fought for equal representation. The Women's Division of the D.N.C. implemented a rule mandating an equal number of male and female delegates, in 1920. In 1923, the Republican National Committee introduced rule changes—billed as "seats for women"—that added bonus delegates for states that had voted Republican in the previous election. But the Democrats' fifty-fifty rule was observed only in the breach, and, as both Catherine E. Rymph and Melanie Gustafson have pointed out in their rich histories of women in the Republican Party,

the real purpose of adding the new G.O.P. seats was to reduce the influence of black Southern delegates.

The League of Women Voters was nonpartisan, but the National Woman's Party remained antipartisan. It focussed on securing passage of an Equal Rights Amendment, drafted by Paul, who had lately earned a law degree, and first introduced into Congress in 1923. Yet, for all the work of the Woman's Party, the G.O.P. was the party of women or, rather, of white women, for most of the twentieth century. In the late nineteen-twenties and thirties, black men and women left the Republican Party, along with smaller numbers of white women, eventually forming a New Deal coalition of liberals, minorities, labor unionists, and, from the South, poor whites. F.D.R. appointed Molly Williams Dewson the director of the D.N.C.'s Women's Division, which grew to eighty thousand members.

In 1937, determined to counter the efforts of the lady known as "More Women" Dewson, the R.N.C. appointed Marion Martin its assistant chairman; during her tenure, she founded a national federation of women's clubs whose membership grew to four hundred thousand. Martin, thirty-seven and unmarried, had a degree in economics and had served a combined four terms in the Maine legislature. She led a moral crusade against the New Deal. In 1940, she also got the R.N.C. to pass its own fifty-fifty rule and to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment, formally, in its platform. This went only so far. In 1946, Martin argued that party women needed more power. "We need it not because we are feminists but because there are a great many non-partisan women's organizations that do wield an influence in this country," she said. Five days later, she was forced to resign.

Hillary Rodham was born in Chicago in 1947. In 1960, when Richard Nixon ran against J.F.K., she checked voter lists for the G.O.P. By then, the majority of Republican Party workers were female. During the Cold War, the G.O.P. boasted about "the women who work on the home front, ringing the doorbells, filling out registration cards, and generally doing the housework of government." As the historian Paula Baker has pointed out, party work is just like other forms of labor; women work



*"Is it starting to feel like mission creep?"*



harder, are paid less, are rarely promoted, and tend to enter a field when men begin to view it as demeaning. The elephant was the right symbol for the Party, one senator said, because it has “a vacuum cleaner in front and a rug beater behind.”

Betty Farrington, one of Martin’s successors, turned the women’s federation into a powerhouse of zealous crusaders. After Truman defeated Dewey, in 1948, Farrington wanted the G.O.P. to find its strongman:

How thankful we would have been if a leader had appeared to show us the path to the promised land of our hope. The world needs such a man today. He is certain to come sooner or later. But we cannot sit idly by in the hope of his coming. Besides his advent depends partly on us. The mere fact that a leader is needed does not guarantee his appearance. People must be ready for him, and we, as Republican women, in our clubs, prepare for him.

That man, many Republican voters today appear to believe, is Donald J. Trump, born in New York in 1946.

**P**OLITICAL PARTIES MARRY interests to constituencies. They are not defined by whether they attract women, particularly. Nor are they defined by their positions on equal rights for women and men. But no plausible history of American politics can ignore, first, the influence of a political style perfected, over a century, by citizens who, denied the franchise, were forced to plead, and, second, the effects of the doubling of the size of the electorate.

The Republican Party that is expected to nominate Trump was built by housewives and transformed by their political style, which men then made their own. The moral crusade can be found among nineteenth-century Democrats—William Jennings Bryan, say—but in the twentieth century it became the hallmark of the conservative wing of the Republican Party; it is the style, for instance, of Ted Cruz. This began in 1950, when the Republican Women’s Club of Ohio County, West Virginia, invited as its principal speaker for Lincoln Day Senator Joseph McCarthy. It was during this speech that McCarthy said he had a list of subversives working at the State Department. “The great difference between our Western Christian world and the atheistic Communist world is not political—it is moral,” McCarthy said. His

rhetoric was that of the nineteenth-century women’s crusade. The great crusader Barry Goldwater said in 1955, “If it were not for the National Federation of Republican Women, there would not be a Republican Party.” That year, Republican women established Kitchen Cabinets, appointing a female equivalent to every member of Eisenhower’s cabinet; their job was to share “political recipes on G.O.P. accomplishments with the housewives of the nation,” by sending monthly bulletins on “What’s Cooking in Washington.” One member of the Kitchen Cabinet was Phyllis Schlafly.

In 1963, Schlafly nominated Goldwater to speak at a celebration marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the National Federation of Republican Women. In a straw poll taken after Goldwater delivered his speech, 262 out of 293 Federation delegates chose him. Meanwhile, Margaret Chase Smith was drafted into the race, a liberal alternative. As the historian Ellen Fitzpatrick recounts in a terrific new book, “The Highest Glass Ceiling,” Smith was the first woman elected on her own to the Senate and the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress. Asked why she agreed to run against Goldwater, she once said, “There was nowhere to go but the Presidency.” She was the first and boldest member of the Senate to oppose McCarthy, in a speech she made from the floor, known as the Declaration of Conscience: “I don’t want to see the Republican Party ride to political victory on the Four Horsemen of Calumny—Fear, Ignorance, Bigotry, and Smear.” At the Convention in 1964, she refused to endorse Goldwater, and denied him her delegates.

Young Trump had little interest in politics. He liked the movies. In 1964, he graduated from military school, where he’d been known as a ladies’ man, and thought about going to the University of Southern California, to study film. Hillary Rodham was a “Goldwater Girl.” But Smith was her hero. She decided to run for president of her high-school class, against a field of boys, and lost, “which did not surprise me,” she wrote in her memoir, “but still hurt, especially

because one of my opponents told me I was ‘really stupid if I thought a girl could be elected president.’”

**I**T’S RIGHT ABOUT here that the G.O.P. began to lose Hillary Rodham. In 1965, as a freshman at Wellesley, she was president of the Young Republicans; she brought with her to college Goldwater’s “The Conscience of a Conservative.”

But Goldwater’s defeat led to a struggle for the future of the Party, and that struggle turned on Schlafly. In 1966, Elly Peterson, a Michigan state party chairman and supporter of George Romney, tried to keep Schlafly from becoming the president of the National Federation. “The nut fringe is beautifully organized,” Peterson complained. At a three-thousand-woman Federation convention in 1967, Schlafly was narrowly defeated. Three months later, she launched her monthly newsletter. Rejecting the nascent women’s-liberation movement, she nevertheless blamed sexism for the G.O.P.’s failure to fully embrace its most strenuous conservatives:

The Republican Party is carried on the shoulders of the women who do the work in the precincts, ringing doorbells, distributing literature, and doing all the tiresome, repetitious campaign tasks. Many men in the Party frankly want to keep the women doing the menial work, while the selection of candidates and the policy decisions are taken care of by the men in the smoke-filled rooms.

In the summer of 1968, Trump graduated from Wharton, where, he later said, he spent most of his time reading the listings of foreclosures on federally financed housing projects. That September, in Atlantic City, feminists staged a protest at the Miss America pageant, the sort of pageant that Trump would one day buy, run, and cherish. They carried signs reading “Welcome to the Cattle Auction.”

Rodham, a twenty-year-old Capitol Hill intern, attended the Republican National Convention in Miami as a supporter of the antiwar candidate, Nelson Rockefeller. For the first time since 1940, the G.O.P. dropped from its platform its endorsement of equal rights. Rodham went home to see her family, and, hiding the fact from her parents, drove downtown to watch the riots outside



the Democratic National Convention. One month too young to vote, she'd supported the antiwar Democrat, Eugene McCarthy, before the Convention, but later said she would probably have voted for the Party's nominee, Hubert Humphrey.

In 1969, Rodham, senior class president at Wellesley, became the first student invited to deliver a commencement address, a speech that was featured in *Life*. In 1970, a leader of her generation, a student at Yale Law School, and wearing a black armband mourning the students killed at Kent State, she spoke about her opposition to the Vietnam War at a convention of the League of Women Voters, on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. She had become a feminist, and a Democrat.

**W**HAT FOLLOWED IS more familiar. Between 1964 and 1980, Schlafly's arm of the Party steadily gained control of the G.O.P., which began courting evangelical Christians, including white male Southern Democrats alienated by their party's civil-rights agenda. In the wake of *Roe v. Wade*, and especially after the end of the Cold War, the Republican Party's new crusaders turned their attention from Communism to abortion. The Democratic Party became the party of women, partly by default. For a long time, it could have gone another way.

In 1971, Hillary Rodham met Bill Clinton, Donald Trump took over the family business, and Gloria Steinem, Tanya Melich, Bella Abzug, and Shirley Chisholm helped found the National Women's Political Caucus, which, like the National Woman's Party, sought to force both parties to better represent women and to gain passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. At the 1972 G.O.P. Convention, in Miami, Republican feminists demanded that the Party restore its E.R.A. plan to the platform. They won, but at a cost. After the Convention, Schlafly founded STOP ERA.

The Democratic Party, meanwhile, was forging a new coalition. "A new hat, or rather a bonnet, was tossed into the Democratic Presidential race today," Walter Cronkite said on CBS News, when Chisholm, the first black woman to be elected to Congress, announced her bid. She went all the way to the Convention. Chisholm said, "You can

go to that Convention and you can yell, 'Woman power! Here I come!' You can yell, 'Black power! Here I come!' The only thing those hard-nosed boys are going to understand at that Convention: 'How many delegates you got?'" She got a hundred and fifty-two.

By 1973, Trump was making donations to the Democratic Party. "The simple fact is that contributing money to politicians is very standard and accepted for a New York City developer," he explains in "The Art of the Deal." He also appeared, for the first time, in a story in the *Times*, with the headline "MAJOR LANDLORD ACCUSED OF ANTIBLACK BIAS IN CITY." The Department of Justice had charged Trump and his father with violating the 1968 Fair Housing Act. "We never have discriminated," Trump told the *Times*, "and we never would."

In 1974, Rodham moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked for the special counsel preparing for the possible impeachment of Richard Nixon. The next year, she married Bill Clinton, though she didn't take his name. The G.O.P., weakened by Watergate, and thinking to stanch the flow of departing women, elected as party chair Mary Louise Smith, an ardent feminist. In 1975, some thirty G.O.P. feminists formed the Republican Women's Task Force to support the E.R.A., reproductive rights, affirmative action, federally funded child care, and the extension of the Equal Pay Act.

The shift came in 1976. Rodham went to the Democratic Convention, at Madison Square Garden. Schlafly went to the Republican Convention, in Miami, where, as the political scientist Jo Freeman has argued, feminists won the battle but lost the war. For the nomination, Ford, a supporter of the E.R.A., defeated Reagan, an opponent, but the platform committee defeated the E.R.A. by a single vote.

In 1980, Republican feminists knew they'd lost when Reagan won the nomination; even so moderate a Republican as George Romney called supporters of the E.R.A. "moral perverts," and the platform committee urged a constitutional ban on abortion. Tanya Melich, a Republican feminist, began talking about a "Republican War against Women," a charge Democrats happily made their own. Mary Crisp, a longtime R.N.C. co-chair, was forced out, and declared of the party of

Lincoln and of Anthony, "We are reversing our position and are about to bury the rights of over a hundred million American women under a heap of platitudes."

Buried they remain. Until 1980, during any Presidential election for which reliable data exist and in which there had been a gender gap, the gap had run one way: more women than men voted for the Republican candidate. That changed when Reagan became the G.O.P. nominee; more women than men supported Carter, by eight percentage points. Since then, the gender gap has never favored a G.O.P. Presidential candidate. The Democratic Party began billing itself as the party of women. By 1987, Trump had become a Republican.

In the Reagan era, Republican strategists believed that, in trading women for men, they'd got the better end of the deal. As the Republican consultant Susan Bryant pointed out, Democrats "do so badly among men that the fact that we don't do quite as well among women becomes irrelevant." And that's more or less where it lies.

With the end of the E.R.A., whose chance at ratification expired in 1982, both parties abandoned a political settlement necessary to the stability of the republic. The entrance of women into politics on terms that are, fundamentally and constitutionally, unequal to men's has produced a politics of interminable division, infused with misplaced and dreadful moralism. Republicans can't win women; when they win, they win without them, by winning with men. Democrats need to win both the black vote and the female vote. Trump and Clinton aren't likely to break that pattern. Trump, with his tent-revival meetings, is crusading not only against Clinton and against Obama but against immigrants, against Muslims, and, in the end, against every group of voters that has fled the Republican Party, as he rides with his Four Horsemen: Fear, Ignorance, Bigotry, and Smear.

"This is a movement of the American people," Trump wrote in an e-mail to supporters. "And the American people NEVER lose." It took a very long time, and required the work of the Republican Party, to change the meaning of "the American people" to include everyone. It hasn't taken very long at all for Trump to change it back. The next move is Clinton's, and her party's. ♦

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