

We the PURPLE



FAITH, POLITICS, AND THE
INDEPENDENT VOTER



MARCIA FORD



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Finally, encouragement to think for ourselves! Marcia Ford has tapped into a major frustration for Christians who don't fit neatly into one political party or a label such as Conservative, Progressive, Moderate, etc. How many Christians would that be? In my estimation, practically all of us! This well-written and well-researched book is not only a breath of fresh air; it portends the winds of change to individualized politics.

—**DR. JOEL C. HUNTER**, senior pastor of Northland—A Church Distributed and author of *Right Wing, Wrong Bird: Why the Tactics of the Religious Right Won't Fly for Most Conservative Christians*

What a refreshing book! Marcia Ford has almost convinced me to give up my partisan political positions and join her. This book is fun, insightful, clear, and helpful. It may or may not change your views, but it will make you think. Then you will rise up and call Marcia Ford and me blessed. Her for writing it, and me for recommending it to you.

—**STEVE BROWN**, author, professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, and president of the media ministry Key Life Network, Inc.

With a journalist's eye for accuracy and a believer's passion for truth, Marcia Ford lays bare the stubborn myth that in a nation divided by party allegiance, independent voters are aimless, apathetic, and irrelevant when it comes to the great issues of the day. *We the Purple* is a perceptive portrait of an awakening giant in a political system too often paralyzed by partisanship run amok. In frank, compelling, and sometimes irreverent prose, she offers a fresh vision of what it means to be people of faith in the public square.

—**JEFFERY L. SHELER**, contributing editor, *U.S. News & World Report*, and author of *Believers: A Journey into Evangelical America*.

In *We the Purple*, seasoned journalist Marcia Ford employs sass, spirituality, and statistics to expose the failings of our current two-party

system that blocks independent voters from having a viable voice in the political arena. Using her piercing wit and keen research skills, she shines a light on both the failings of the Religious Right and the Progressive Left, when they align themselves with a given political party instead of following the teachings of the risen Christ. In particular, I pray that religious leaders will heed her clarion call to be pastors and preachers, not politicians.

—**BECKY GARRISON**, author of *Red and Blue God: Black and Blue Church*

Lovingly and tolerantly dedicated to my
husband, John, a committed nonvoter.

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*We stand in the presence of an awakened nation,
impatient of partisan make-believe.*



WOODROW WILSON
1912 presidential campaign speech

Preface, or The Making of We the Purple

AS RECENTLY AS FIVE YEARS AGO, the thought of writing—or reading—a political book would have made my stomach turn. To me, the word *politics* was synonymous with *partisan*, and I would have none of that.

But things change. I have long been a voter without a party, but for a long time I was also a Christian without a church. Several years ago, the blatant partisanship in some Christian communities left me on the outside, not even bothering to look in, so discouraging was the picture. But out there I discovered similarly dismayed, independent-minded believers (as well as independents of other faiths and no faith) who had grown tired of being labeled politically because of the church they attended. Their stories populate the pages that follow.

In addition to being a now-politically active independent voter, I'm also what some would call a seasoned journalist, which basically means I'm an old reporter. I thrive on research and one-on-one interviews, and *We the Purple* reflects those complementary passions that inform my professional life. I'm of the opinion that there's generally a 10 to 1 ratio between the amount of research material gathered and the amount that ends up in print. It doesn't matter to me whether that's a reasonable ratio or not. I'm a research junkie, and I don't care if 90 percent of my research just takes up space on my computer. All that is to assure you that much of what you'll read here is based on solid research. The rest is based on my generally unorthodox opinions and observations, but I'm confident you'll be able to

make the distinction between legitimate research and personal blather.

Despite my commitment to journalistic objectivity, I started this project with the energy and gusto of a zealous standard-bearer for the independent cause. *I'll show them, by golly—I'll show this country what independent voters are all about! We're not undecided! We're not easily swayed! We're not election spoilers! We're transforming the political process in America!* That attitude lasted until, oh, a week or so after I signed the contract for *We the Purple*. In fact, I can tell you the exact time and date it expired: 10:10 a.m. on Tuesday, March 27, 2007, about ten minutes into a phone interview with John Dashler, who had attempted to run for governor of Georgia as an independent in 2006. That was the moment when Dashler began to describe the partisan machinations that tanked his campaign.

That was also the moment when I waded into the swamp-land that covers so much political territory. Independent voters like me are able to face an election with a fierce sense of optimism, but the manner in which independent and third-party candidates must face elections is another matter altogether. As you'll discover, some of these candidates are among the most courageous people you're likely to meet. It's no exaggeration to describe some of them as people who have pledged their "lives, [their] fortunes, and [their] sacred honor" in a relentless effort to bring about political reform.

Over the course of the next six months, I conducted dozens of interviews with independent voters and candidates, politicians, political observers, and activists of many stripes. By "stripes," I'm referring to both ideology and party affiliation. With regard to ideology, despite the perception that independents are mostly liberals, I've met and interviewed independents from one end of the ideological spectrum to the other. With regard to party

affiliation, independents generally welcome into our big tent members and candidates of minor parties (so-called third parties), because the obstacles and issues that apply to us also pose challenges to them. Unfortunately, the reverse is not always the case; some minor parties have opposed independents' efforts to attain equal rights both as voters and as candidates. In any event, most often when I use the word *independent* I'm including minor parties in the discussion. The exceptions to that wider definition should be clear by the context.

A WORD ABOUT LABELS

Impossible. That's a word about labels.

Political labels, I've decided, are impossible to define. Just as soon as I come up with the perfect definition of a term like *centrist*, I can guarantee that someone will come along with some nitpicky argument designed to discredit me and thereby call into question the credibility of everything else I write, including the stories from my own life that I'm about to regale you with. If you don't believe it, pick a random political blog.¹ You'll find someone whose sole purpose in life is to dispute the incredibly trivial details of someone else's perspective. So take terms like *conservative*, *liberal*, *radical*, *moderate*, *centrist*, and the like with a healthy dose of salt. Please.

Acknowledgments

I have received more help on this one book than on all my previous books combined, so I can only hope that my memory and my notes have served me well in compiling this collection of names. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to each person below, as well as to countless others who maintain organizations, Web sites, and blogs that provide excellent information on and insight into political activity of every kind—independent, third-party, and even (gasp!) partisan.

I am most grateful to:

- Jackie Salit and the staff of the Committee for a Unified Independent Party (CUIP) and its Neo-Independent magazine: Nancy Ross, Fran Miller, Gwen Mandell, John Opdycke, Sarah Lyons, and CUIP co-founder Lenora Fulani, the first African-American and female presidential candidate to get on the ballot in all fifty states—as an independent, of course.
- Those who agreed to be interviewed and gave so generously of their time: Omar Ali; Jose Barrera; Lisa Braun; Mitch Campbell; David Cherry; Mike Clawson; Mike Crane; Linda Curtis; John Dashler; Craig Detweiler; Russ Diamond; Bob Friedman; Lenora Fulani; Nancy Hanks; Jerome Holden; John Koza; Richard Land; Emily Lewy; Joseph McCormick; Jonathan Merritt; Audrey Mowdy; Michael Ostrolenk;

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- The entire Beers group at Tyndale House Publishers, particularly Carol Traver, Sue Taylor, and Maria Eriksen. They made this a better book than it otherwise would have been, and they made the entire process a delightful experience as well.
- My agent at Alive Communications, Beth Jusino, who picked up on my passion for nonpartisan politics and encouraged me to share that passion with you, the reading public. You can thank her for taking my idea for an essay and transforming it into a whole entire book that's thirty times longer than my original idea would have been.



Independents' Day, 11/7/2006



Together, the two parties function like giant down comforters, allowing the candidates to disappear into the enveloping softness, protecting them from exposure to the harsh weather of independent thought.

—Jon Stewart, Ben Karlin, or David Javerbaum¹

Few days in the history of humankind have been as satisfying to independent thinkers as was November 7, 2006. Yes, I'm overstating things, but only to point out the political puffery that permeates the U.S. political system. Even *independents* are susceptible to this. Imagine that! Still, we know we affected the outcome of the election on November 7, 2006, and we have the stats to prove it. By the Election Day '06 midterms—a heady day for indie voters—we had found our voice and settled in to witness our contribution to history. The mid-term results presaged what the nation can expect from the purple electorate in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election—which could spell trouble for any gloating Dems, because we're turning up the heat and holding their feet to the subsequent blazing flames.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

TWO YEARS EARLIER

A warm and homey kitchen on a chilly fall evening, the savory aroma of a home-cooked meal, a half-dozen kindred spirits

alternately laughing and discussing the deeper issues of life—how could it get any better than this? Relaxed and mellow and grateful, I truly became immersed in the moment, in the *now*, a highly unusual and blissful place for me to be. My other life, a life I also love, was a mere 343.53 miles away from the contemplative Christian prayer center to which I had retreated three days earlier. But it seemed much farther away, that other life with all its stresses and annoyances and everydayness. This—this quiet, secluded haven, this pocket of serenity—was a place where I could slow down and pray and meditate and maybe even entertain a profound thought or two.

But then, just as my facial muscles were about to form that contented, amused smile that only Buddhists seem capable of achieving, someone at the table—a traitor to the contemplative cause, I later decided—*someone* said the dreaded “K” word. *Kerry*. It was late October in 2004, and John Kerry had just committed another of his preelection gaffes. As if on cue, everyone sighed a despairing sigh. *That Kerry. There he goes again. What are we going to do with him?* “Well, I know it’s not enough to keep us from voting for him,” said the thief who had just made off with my peace, “but still . . .”

As her voice trailed off, I bristled, no doubt perceptibly. What did she mean, “us”? How could this stranger possibly know whether I was a Kerry supporter—or if I was, how much it would take for me to change my mind about him? That led to a scarier question: Did my presence at this particular prayer center peg me as a . . . a *Democrat*? And an equally scary question: If I objected to her assumption, however graciously, would everyone mentally label me a . . . a *Republican*?

I kept silent. This was not the time or the place for political dispute. The director of the center, bless her peacemaking heart, gently got us back on track. We had intentionally broken

silence during supper, and now we would return to silence. As relieved as I was that our conversation had ended, I couldn't shake the feeling—the reality—that once again, I didn't fit in with my brothers and sisters in Christ. And all because of partisan politics.

The truth is, I am every partisan politician's worst nightmare—a registered independent. Wildly unpredictable in my voting habits over the last three decades and more, I have cast ballots for Democrats, Republicans, independents, and assorted loose cannons. I have also cast ballots *against* Democrats, Republicans, independents, and assorted loose cannons. And I have cast no ballot at all in those years when political ennui overtook me, when voting for the lesser of two evils appeared to be more evil than not voting at all. In those years, I intentionally avoided the evil of two lessers.

People like me have come to be known as purple voters—neither Republican red nor Democratic blue—thanks to Massachusetts congressman Barney Frank. At a 2002 bipartisan press conference promoting a bill to legalize the medical use of marijuana, Frank, a Democrat, said this: “I even noted, by the way, we do believe this ought to appeal both to Democrats, Republicans, liberals and conservatives. You notice we have a new color scheme here. We have green states and white states. But I would point out that the green states are composed of both red states and blue states.” (At this point, Frank is interrupted by laughter.) “Now, that may be a color combination that you don't get from the spectrum. I guess—what?—red and blue will give you purple states.”² Since then, Frank's reference to “purple states” has led to the use of the term *purple voters*, which gradually made its way into the political lexicon. But in 2004, it had yet to make its way into my consciousness.

As I walked back to the sanctuary of my private room at the

retreat center, I wondered if I would ever meet another nonpartisan Christian. The leadership of my own church was clearly Republican, though they took care not to declare that from the pulpit. Still, their affiliation was so evident and the sermons were so politically tainted that I had quit attending the misnamed “worship” services several months earlier when the election season began to heat up. The situation was even worse at another church where I was part of a small group; there, the congregation was split down the middle along partisan lines, and the rancor between the two groups was tangible.

I was not only a voter without a party; I was also a Christian without a church.

MUSINGS: NOVEMBER 7, 2006

What a difference two years can make. Today I felt as if I was part of a vast, invisible army of nonpartisan voters trooping off to make history. By all accounts, we’re the ones who will tip the scales in this election. But right now I’m content to sit and knit, satisfied that earlier today I voted according to my conscience—and for the first time, I didn’t feel alone in that activity. Over the years I’ve known lots of Democrats, lots of Republicans, lots of nonvoters, and a Libertarian or two, but finally—*finally!*—I know more than a few independents. We call ourselves by different names, some preferring *nonpartisans*, others opting for *centrists* or *moderates* or *radicals*, still others—like me—enchanted with *purple voters*, and almost all disdaining the term *swing voters*, but we share this in common: We swear allegiance to no political party.

That, of course, makes us the enemies of the partisan segment of the electorate. A very good and very Democratic friend of mine once got right in my face and blamed me for George W. Bush’s re-election in 2004. I never felt so powerful in all my life.

Me! Single-handedly deciding a presidential election simply by filling in a not-Kerry, not-Bush circle! (We hadn't gone Diebold yet in my voting district. In fact, we still haven't.)

By now, I've heard all the criticism that's leveled at independents: Our votes are wasted, we're wishy-washy, we have no convictions, we can't make up our minds. None of which is true, but there you go. On this day, that criticism rolls right off my back; I know how important our vote—my vote—is to this year's midterm candidates, especially GOP incumbents. If nothing else, the political chatter for months has underscored this one point: Neither major party can afford to dismiss purple voters as irrelevant.

Tonight I'll forgo network television, with its “up-to-the-minute, you-heard-it-first-here!” breaking election news. I'll get all the political news I need at 11 p.m. Eastern, when Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert have promised a full hour of election coverage on Comedy Central. Of course, if this election follows the pattern of elections in recent years, we won't know the results of some of the major contests until tomorrow or later anyway. Tomorrow's soon enough. Right now, I'm basking in the delicious feeling that today, I made a difference. I do believe I have not felt this politically content since I cast my first vote in 1972. So McGovern got walloped that year, but I *voted*. Casting my ballot never felt quite that good in subsequent elections. Until this year, that is, when my ballot sealed my identity as a purple voter.

THE MORNING AFTER

You might think that independents across the land woke up on November 8, 2006 in a universal state of near-euphoria. Some did, of course. This was the year when we would make our voices heard by bringing about *change*, and there's certainly something

intoxicating about knowing that our votes made a difference in the outcome of the election and in the very balance of power on a congressional level.

But here's where the nuances of purple thinking enter the picture. And here's where I have to switch from writing about "we" to writing about me—because independents, being so, well, independent, don't think alike. My reaction to the midterm results went like this: I was glad that the balance of power shifted; the party in power on November 7 had for years displayed an unconscionable measure of arrogance, and they needed to be ousted. But was I euphoric that it was the Democrats who clearly won the day? Not really. Bear in mind that to me, the fact that the lawmakers who needed to be voted out were all Republicans and that those who would take their seats were Democrats was purely a technicality. As a nonpartisan voter, I would just as passionately vote out members of the Democratic or Reform or Libertarian or Green parties—or even an independent—if they ever betrayed my trust to the extent that the Bush administration has—but there I'm getting ahead of myself again.

What I'm saying is that independents like me intend to keep the Democrats' feet to the fire. We have no allegiance to the party, no partisan ideology to uphold, no reason to ever vote for them again if they don't do something to fix what needs fixing. I have a list of what needs fixing, by the way, starting with the war in Iraq. My list is a pretty long one, but first things first.

HOPE, FAITH, AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

One Christian political activist that I respect—though I don't always agree with him—is Jim Wallis, founder and editor of *Sojourners* magazine and author of *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*. Following the '06 midterms, Wallis, who has long been critical of the religious right,

told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that he believed the Christian vote should always be “up for grabs”; if Christians voted according to their beliefs, then no party could own them. “The religious vote should always be a swing vote,” Wallis said. “We should be morally centered but not centrists; religion should play a prophetic role.”³

If religion is to play a prophetic role in the culture and in the political process, then people of faith need the freedom to speak prophetic words openly, without fear of repercussion or losing face. As a religion journalist, I personally know many Christian leaders who are so closely aligned with either of the two major parties that they will dig their heels in and defend the actions of their party’s politicians even when those actions are contrary to what they themselves believe and know to be morally and ethically right. I understand why they do this, though I wish I didn’t. I wish I could remain oblivious, scratch my head, and go through life wondering what on earth they were thinking. But their reasons are clear: They don’t want their ministries to lose the support of the party faithful, and they don’t want to suffer the embarrassment of publicly admitting they were wrong. Wallis is right; as paradoxical as the image may seem, if Christians remained morally centered, their votes could swing all along the political spectrum. And that includes the votes of prominent Christian leaders.

Mind you, I have no quarrel with those conservative or liberal or radical or reactionary Christians who consistently vote according to their consciences. It would be really nice if they would return the favor and not quarrel with me when I vote according to my unaffiliated conscience, but so be it. I just won’t bicker in return. I know we’re far closer in our beliefs than we may appear to be to the untrained eye. I just happened to have trained my eye to focus on our points of agreement.

And that has led me to the conviction that we're nowhere near as polarized as the political talking heads would have us believe we are. Let's face it; it's to the partisan politicians' advantage to convince us that we're so far apart on the major political issues that we simply *have* to pledge our allegiance to the party whose platform lines up with our perspectives. Maybe it's just me—maybe I'm unusually blessed—but most of the people I know are pretty reasonable, whether they realize it or not. Whenever I'm able to talk them down off their partisan ledges and engage them in a sensible discussion about the very real problems in our society, more often than not I find that at some point a light clicks on, and even they have to admit that they're not as committed to the party line as they thought they were.

Yes, there are some black-and-white issues in life, but there's a whole lot of gray out there as well. And yes, there are red and blue voters in America, but there are a whole lot of purple voters as well. In the following pages, you'll find out just who these voters are and how they're quietly shaking up the political landscape. I say "quietly" because although we can be a raucous bunch, we're not prone to public displays of political fervor. As Jon Stewart, host of *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central, once said, punching the air with his fist: "It's not like we're going to take to the streets and shout, 'Be reasonable!'" But keep that image in your head as you continue to read—the image of a powerful group of independent voters with their metaphorical fists in the air, mentally shouting, "Be reasonable!"

Marcia Ford



Purple Reign



*Purples like me have their work cut out for them,
if we are to serve as any kind of meaningful bridge
across the cultural divide.*

—Marlowe C. Embree, Ph.D.
Social psychologist

I am a Christian, and what's more, a Christian with one foot planted in the evangelical world and the other in a more inclusive faith community. Politically, I am neither red nor blue. I don't vote solely on a candidate's stand on one particular issue. I'm far more complex than that, and that makes me what has come to be known as a purple voter. And you know what? There are a lot of people, even people of faith—even *evangelicals!*—who are just like me.

I've met independent voters who take their faith seriously. Most of them are Christians and Jews, though I'm sure there's a contingent of Islamic independent voters that I've yet to discover. And I've met many Buddhists, as well as people who express faith in the universe, or in an overriding moral law, or in the human spirit, who are also independent voters or members of minor parties, also known as third parties.

I've met independent voters whose political views span the entire ideological spectrum, from ultraconservative to ultraliberal. Some are antiabortion, others proabortion. Some support the war in Iraq; others oppose it. Some oppose gay marriage;

some support it, and still others don't care one way or another about what they consider to be a nonissue. The independent voters I engage with on a regular basis are impossible to pigeon-hole.

As diverse as we are, we do share one nearly universal concern: the need for political reform. *Major* political reform. *Radical* political reform. The kind of reform that takes the axe to the root of the problem—the problem being partisanship run amok.

We're a frustrated lot, we purple voters. Disenchanted by candidates and incumbents on both sides of the political aisle, we're looking for leaders who are committed to working together to solve problems instead of digging in their heels on the party line. Our discontent has led to the phenomenal growth in the number of independent voters among the U.S. electorate, a segment estimated to make up as much as 42 percent of actual voters nationwide following the 2006 midterm elections. Despite that percentage, politicians have until recently paid little attention to our concerns. They wanted our vote but not our input. They saw us as swing voters who could be enticed to their side of the political divide. Because we're generally not strident activists who make our presence known all over the map, they considered us important only in the so-called swing states. They were wrong, and the '06 midterms proved it.

Six years earlier—from my then-home in Florida, of all places—I witnessed firsthand the debacle that was the 2000 presidential election, reported on it for *Charisma Online* e-newsletter, yawned my way through the '02 midterms, fumed over the absence of a write-in option for president on my precinct's '04 ballot, and tried ever so hard to contain my temptation to gloat after the 2006 rout—especially over the number of candidates and voters who pledged to turn independent the following day. (I should note that I did not watch any election coverage

on Election Day '06 until Comedy Central's live coverage late that night, for the same reason that I faithfully avoid watching the Sunday morning political shouting matches: I value my sanity.) My adamantly nonpolitical husband, John, tolerates the fact that I actually vote more often than not. Our two young-adult daughters wish I'd vote a straight Democratic ticket, but I figure they're still young. They'll come around eventually.

Those six years found me in something of a political incubator. I had spent a half-century in the safe and secure womb of the politically uninvolved. In the aftermath of the 2000 presidential election, I emerged from that sheltered environment not so much because of who was elected but because of how he was elected. I could see—anyone could see—that there was something fundamentally wrong with our electoral system, but I saw no hope of it changing in my lifetime. For the next six years I continued to go quietly about my long-standing independent ways. Something was growing inside me. I can now call what it was—a sense of utter outrage—but like a preemie in an incubator, I didn't have the capacity to raise a loud cry.

I still don't. I am not and never have been a strident, take-to-the-streets-in-protest kind of person—not in the antiwar '60s, the feminist '70s, the—um—what exactly was it that we were protesting in the '80s and '90s? But in 2006, I found my voice, my political voice. I won't raise that voice in the streets, but I'll wear out this keyboard and my fingertips writing about it in that voice.

THE COLOR PURPLE

I have always loved the color purple. I'm guessing that has something to do with two distinct factors from my distant past: flannelgraphs and hippies.¹ Anyone who has missed out on the richness of a genuine faith experience has indeed suffered a great

misfortune, but those who have missed out on the joys of the Sunday school flannelgraph are to be pitied the most. In the mainline Protestant world of my childhood, a flannelgraph represented the best the church had to offer: brightly colored biblical figures that would quietly find their places on an equally colorful background depicting the Temple in Jerusalem or the shoreline of Galilee or a humble home in Bethany that nevertheless looked a whole lot better than my own. Then there were the miniature pieces that lent authenticity to the scene: baskets of loaves and fishes, jugs of water that would soon turn to wine, fishing boats that sailed on a turbulent sea.

The scenes depicting royalty were among my favorites. How could you not love the image of Queen Esther, draped in a purple robe that symbolized her royal status, placing her life on the line before her husband, the king? Oh, the drama! The tension! The purple!

It's not surprising that decades later, I invested money—an amount we couldn't afford to invest—in a complete set of flannelgraph figures and scenes and accessories, along with a full-size flannel board. Full-sized video screens had replaced full-sized flannel boards by the time my children came of Sunday school age in the 1980s, but I was not about to have them miss out on this exquisite experience.

Even before that, quite by accident I discovered what purple, and its pastel kin, lavender, could do for my appearance, which needed doing for. In my hippie heyday, I bought a new pair of prescription glasses with lavender frames and lavender-tinted lenses, mainly because I thought they were ultrahip. But a couple of weird things happened: Friends started noticing the color of my eyes and stopped telling me how tired I looked all the time. It seems the tinted lenses brought out the green in my otherwise hazel eyes and diminished the appearance of the genetically

induced dark circles under my eyes. Trust me, I would have worn plaid every day for the rest of my life if I thought it would stop thoughtless people from saying, “Oh, you look so tired!” I’m just grateful that it was the colors of the purple spectrum that did the trick and not a chartreuse plaid-and-stripe ensemble.

The love of purple never left me. For decades thereafter I was purple when purple wasn’t cool.

These days, at least politically, purple is the new cool, in part because of a freshman computer-programming project at Princeton University in 2000 directed by Dr. Robert Vanderbei, chair of Princeton’s Operations Research and Financial Engineering Department.² Vanderbei felt that the traditional maps showing red and blue states did not accurately reflect voting results and that a detailed map of a county-by-county tally, showing regions that were a mix of Republican and Democratic votes, would reveal that the country is nowhere near as polarized as the media and partisan politicians would have us believe.

The resulting “Purple America” map made Vanderbei the equivalent of a rock star among political junkies.³ Since then, Vanderbei has created similar maps for subsequent presidential elections and one very cool interactive map that shows the purple-ization of America from 1960 to 2004.⁴ Independent and third-party voters should find the interactive map particularly interesting, as it clearly shows, in green, the counties that helped give George Wallace 13 percent of the popular vote and an impressive 46 electoral college votes in 1968 and Ross Perot 19 percent of the popular vote (and no electoral college votes) in 1992.

Writing in the April 24, 2006, issue of *New York* magazine, Kurt Andersen offers up an intriguing idea: Why not start a Purple Party?⁵ I’m not what you’d call a party person these days, but if I ever were to join a political party (oh, my; what would it take?), I’d naturally gravitate toward a purple one. Here’s part

of Andersen's premise: "Less than a third of the electorate are happy to call themselves Republicans, and only a bit more say they're Democrats—but between 33 and 39 percent now consider themselves neither Democrat nor Republican. In other words, there are more of us than there are of either of them."⁶

Andersen wants moderates to abandon the baggage of the two major parties and create a "serious, innovative, truth-telling, pragmatic" third party that would field candidates who are capable not only of winning but also of governing—a party of "passionately practical progressives" who represent the middle. The time, he says, is right, given that in 1992 independent candidate Ross Perot—you really have to read the entire article, if only for his description of Perot—received more votes than the incumbent president, George H. W. Bush, in Maine, and Bill Clinton in Utah.

And Andersen suggests launching the Purple Party in New York City, writing:

For a generation now this city's governance has tended to be strikingly moderate, highly flexible rather than ideological or doctrinaire. . . . For 24 of the past 28 years the mayors we have elected—Koch, Giuliani, Bloomberg—have been emphatically independent-minded moderates whose official party labels have been flags of convenience. . . . We're certainly not part of red-state America, but when push comes to shove we are really not blue in the D.C.–Cambridge–Berkeley–Santa Monica sense. We are, instead, like so much of the country, vividly purple.⁷

There you have it. Now that I've made the case for purple voters, though, I need to fess up, issue one of my many disclaimers, and beg your indulgence. Because the truth is, many independents,

myself included, technically aren't purple voters at all. True purple voters are a mix of red and blue. We, however, are often considered to be more like muddy voters. We may vote red or blue, but we are also likely to vote neither. If we vote for the Green Party, that really muddies the red and blue waters. Actually, I prefer to think of us as crystal-clear voters. We're far more clear on *what* we want and *who* we want than politicians seem to realize.

SO WHO ARE WE . . . AND WHAT DO WE WANT?

For starters, independent voters represent at least a third of the electorate and possibly as much as 42 percent, depending on which poll you read. Let's go with the lower number so I'll appear to be objective, even though I'm not. That figure comes to us compliments of the Rasmussen Reports, "The Best Place to Look for Polls That Are Spot On."⁸ Rasmussen's spot-on poll of 15,000 American adults taken in May 2007 showed a decline in the number of people who self-identified as either Republican (30.8 percent, down from a peak of 37.8 percent in 2004) or Democrat (36.3 percent, down from 38 percent just six months earlier, right after the 2006 rout).

Which means, of course, that those who self-identify as independents or "unaffiliated" took up the slack, polling at what Rasmussen calls an "all-time high" of 32.9 percent—more than the percentage of Republicans. To put that in perspective, as recently as 1988 only 10 percent of registered voters considered themselves to be independents.

Ideologically, we run the gamut from right-wing fundies to radical lefties, from proabortion conservatives to anti-gay marriage liberals, from embarrassed ex-Republicans to disillusioned ex-Democrats, from Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical Christians to religious and secular Jews to Buddhists and the ever popular "highly spiritual" types. And speaking of

evangelicals, I can't think of another group that has benefited more from the growing respectability that independents are enjoying. Switching to an independent voting status has given many an evangelical permission to safely jump the *U.S.S. GOP* without having to board the foundering, and floundering, Democratic ship. Unless you've been there, you have no idea how much pressure there is on lay leaders in particular to toe the party line—and how much courage it takes to buck the evangelical and fundamentalist religious systems (they are not identical, by the way).

Theodore Roosevelt was the first person to use the term *bully pulpit* to describe the presidency as a place of extraordinary influence, without the pejorative connotation we attach to the word *bully* today or the literal, religious association of the word *pulpit*. But let me attach and associate both, because the pejorative and literal meanings *do* apply to some of today's conservative churches and religious organizations and, on occasion, to the presidency.

One misused and abused Bible verse has led to the contemporary use of the bully pulpit. That verse is found in Matthew 12:30 in the New International Version: "He who is not with me is against me." That's Jesus speaking, and in the context, he has just healed a demon-possessed man. The religious leaders of the day—which Jesus so eloquently calls a "brood of vipers"—deny his wonder-working powers, so in Matthew 12:30 he's basically telling them off.

Well, I'd say anyone who has just exorcised a demon has that right, Jesus foremost among them, since he did it more than once. But when you take his words out of context and begin broadly applying them to your own domain, you're on shaky ground. Those of us with evangelical ears knew exactly what President Bush meant shortly after 9/11 when he said,

“You’re either with us or against us in the fight against terror.” Bush knows his Bible, and he knew those words would resonate with an evangelical base that knows the Bible just as well. They had likely heard their own pastors use that verse to get the congregation to line up behind their own interpretations of the Bible—or their own political persuasions. I even know of at least one large Christian company that tried to use the verse to weed out any employees who did not toe the corporate-religious line.

But many evangelicals and conservatives have reached what I call a “Hold it!” moment. Hold it—what right do these people have to use the words of Jesus to keep me in lockstep with them? Hold it—what makes them think they have divine, supernatural powers? Hold it—what does it mean to be “with us”?

A growing discomfort with the church’s alignment with the Republican Party, coupled with a refreshing freedom to question the authority of our old-guard leaders, has awakened many evangelicals to the ramifications of that lockstep obedience. And that means they finally feel free of the pressure to conform to conservative religious Republican voting patterns and party allegiance—which is what led us down this five-paragraph sidetrack to begin with.

The original point was that independent voters cannot be neatly categorized. There are some things we all agree on, like the need to change the political system, but we are hardly on the same ideological page. Let me take a stab, though, at clearing up some misconceptions and maybe providing a clearer picture of who independents are. Here are *some* characteristics of *some* of us:

- We’re tired—tired of two parties whose main priority is self-preservation and self-promotion rather than serving the people who voted them into office.

- We have no problem voting for someone who has absolutely no chance of winning.
- We vote for the person and not the party.
- We wouldn't vote a straight, major-party ticket if they paid us to, which I have no doubt they will try to do at some point.⁹
- We are not *undecided*. We have *decided* to be independent.
- We believe that a diversity of opinions stimulates healthy debate.
- We believe that the two major parties suppress a diversity of opinions and stifle healthy debate.
- We want dialogue, not diatribes.
- Sometime before we die, we'd like the warm-and-fuzzy experience of a government that follows the will of the people instead of one that manipulates it.
- We care as much about what happens on the remaining 364 days of the year as we do about what happens on Election Day. And about how it happens.¹⁰
- We *want* Ralph Nader to keep on running and keep on fighting and keep on debating, even if we don't vote for him. We probably need to apologize for that.
- We're inconsistent. We are antiparty, and yet we welcome all third-party voters and candidates to join us under the independent umbrella.
- Maybe we're not that inconsistent. We're outsiders, and we welcome all other outsiders to join us. There, that's better.
- We thank God for creating the Internet just so he could bring independents together, except for the atheists among us, who probably thank Al Gore.¹¹
- We believe the United States is better than this.¹²

FEELING ALL ALONE?

As I talked with independents across the nation, I discovered that I was not alone in what I had thought was an unorthodox way of thinking about politics. What I also discovered is that I was not alone in feeling alone. Time after time I heard some variation on this sentiment: “I didn’t know there was anyone else out there who felt the way I did about the two major parties. I considered myself to be independent, but then I kept hearing independent voters referred to as ‘undecideds.’ But that didn’t describe me, so I wasn’t sure what I was, other than maybe a political anomaly.”

Maybe we are a political anomaly. Even so, there are more independents out there than most of us realize, especially if we hesitate to express our own political views in an environment where doing so is likely to incite conflict or rancor. We don’t know any other independents because we don’t talk about our own independent voting habits in, say, a church that clearly considers it a sin to not vote for a Republican, or in a close-knit, extended family that has voted for Democrats as long as there have been Democrats. Which is one reason why I believe God invented the Internet, but more on that later.

Meanwhile, let’s look at how many independents there are and at how their numbers are growing, in a random sample of U.S. states. Bear in mind that the terminology varies from one state to another (e.g., “no party” or “decline to state”), but for our purposes here I’m designating all those who are neither Democrats nor Republicans as independents:

- **Arizona:** In the past decade, almost 300,000 voters have registered as independent, nearly doubling in number to 712,765, or 27 percent of the state’s 2.6 million voters—a significant percentage in a traditionally Republican state.

- **California:** If recent trends continue, independents may outnumber Republicans and Democrats within the next two decades. More than 1 million of the state's 3 million independents have been added to the voter registration rolls in just eight years.¹³
- **Colorado:** The number of independent voters increased in suburban Denver between 2004 and 2006, while the numbers of Republican voters declined and Democratic voters held steady. The percentage of increase in independents in just four counties ranged from 32.8 percent to 36 percent, according to the *Rocky Mountain News*, which pointed out that the 2 million potential voters in the Denver suburbs generally determine the outcome of elections.¹⁴
- **Florida:** Of the state's 2 million independent voters, 680,000 registered in the last decade. Democratic registration has dropped by nearly a half million voters; Republican registration has also declined.¹⁵
- **Iowa:** Some 39 percent of the state's 2 million voters are registered as independents in a state that can make or break a candidate early on.
- **Maine:** Data from the 2006 election indicates that 38 percent of voters registered as independent or third-party voters; Green Party registrants were tabulated separately, at 3 percent, bringing the actual total to 41 percent. That compares with Democrats at 31 percent and Republicans at 28 percent.
- **New Hampshire:** In the past decade, the number of independents has grown by 62 percent. They now represent 44 percent of registered voters.¹⁶ About 85 percent of first-time registrants have declined to register as members of either major party.
- **Pennsylvania:** The state's nearly 1 million independent

voters represent about 12 percent of all registered voters, but that's a whopping 257 percent increase in just ten years.¹⁷

If your state isn't listed—this really is a random sampling, with other dramatic stats to be found in other states—you should be able to get them from your secretary of state's office or on its Web site under "elections" or a similar designation. Some states make it fairly easy to find the voter registration data you're looking for online, while others make you jump through an untold number of cyberhoops before you realize they just don't want to accommodate you. Simply another reason to vote for someone who *will* accommodate the citizenry.

And independent voters do expect to be accommodated.

WE WON'T BE IGNORED

In an insightful "I told you so" article in the *Weekly Standard*—appropriately titled "You Gotta Be Purple to Win"—John J. DiIulio Jr. shared this bit of wisdom with his fellow Democrats two weeks after the 2006 midterms:

You can't effectively court a purple-voter majority with faux-purple candidates, or wait to show your purple colors till the election is all but over. Real purple Democrats won even in many states and districts where both the president and Republican incumbents were not as wildly unpopular as they were in Philadelphia and its suburbs.

Attentive purple voters will be listening and watching. If the Democrats' leaders in Congress slip into ultraliberal attack mode, then they will be rebuked, and the whole party will suffer.¹⁸

Two years earlier, DiIulio had warned the Democrats that they needed to “start winning and stop whining by wooing America’s purple . . . majority.”¹⁹ After the Democrats took control of Congress, he warned them that if they didn’t start helping President Bush lead the country, especially with regard to Iraq, then their candidates, “purple or not, will lose in 2008, and deservedly so.” This is the same John J. DiIulio, by the way, who served as the first director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. He understands purple thinking, particularly from a faith perspective. At this writing, in the summer of 2007, his second warning is, as our friends at Rasmussen would say, spot-on.

However brilliant DiIulio’s advice may be—independents everywhere would positively swoon if the Democrats would actually help Bush lead the country—no Democrat in his or her right mind will ever heed it. Because that would mean taking the high road, and neither party will abide that. So instead, the citizenry has to suffer through another insufferable round of the blame game. No wonder so many Americans throw their arms up in despair and turn down the opportunity to participate in the political process by casting a vote. Just writing this makes me want to avoid voting, and *I’m* a borderline political activist.

Which brings up another issue: not voting. I don’t expect to get a whole lot of support on this, from independents or anyone else, but I respect a person’s decision not to vote. I’m not even sure I care *why* they choose not to vote. Maybe it’s for a noble reason, like they cannot in good conscience vote for any of the candidates or any of the ballot issues. Or maybe it’s for a somewhat less noble reason, like they have no idea what’s going on and they don’t want to taint the electoral process with their ignorance. Or maybe it’s for a completely ignoble reason, like they are just plain lazy and they care not a whit about their

fellow man or woman. Here's why I defend their right not to vote: because I hate "get out the vote" messages.

You know the ones. Suddenly there's Rory Gilmore—Alexis Bledel—filling up your television screen, awkwardly chiding you: "If you don't vote, you lose your right to complain." Every time I saw one of those public service announcements, I wanted to fire back, "Oh yeah?" And I was a voter! Still, I was highly offended. The way I figure it, no one—*no one*—has the right to take away my right to complain, whether I vote or not. Not Rory, not Alexis, not anyone. So my nose got all out of joint, and I started defending the right of nonvoters to complain. No one listened, but I stand by that defense. Remember, I'm all about the freedom. In this case, the freedom of speech.

This is a book about voters, though, so I'll leave those nonvoters to their beer and potato chips and complaining ways. (It works both ways. I'm also free to be judgmental.)

Let me give you just one example of what happens when politicians take our calls. This happened in New Hampshire, whose citizens live free or die. As we just learned, it's home to a large percentage of independent voters, some 44 percent of the electorate. It's also home to the nation's first presidential primary every four years. And it's home to some of the country's most independent and active independent activists.

I would not want to be on the opposing side of an issue supported by the New Hampshire Committee for an Independent Voice (NH-CIV).

Cofounded by fourth-grade school teacher Betty Ward and lawyer André Gibeau, the group was organized in part to fight a 2005 bill that would have required the state's independents—who are allowed to vote in primaries if they register with a party on the day of the primary—to wait ninety days to regain their status as independents (officially identified, to their consternation, as

“undeclared” in New Hampshire). As independents saw it, they were being forced to remain a member of a party against their will. They argued that if the bill passed, it would have the effect of discouraging voter participation in the primaries—and it would get candidates off the hook from talking to, and listening to, all the state’s voters, not just party members. NH-CIV rallied independents to write, call, and e-mail their representatives and express their opposition to the bill, which was eventually killed in the state senate. They won that round, but then an identical bill resurfaced in 2006.

Well! That infuriated the state’s independents, and you don’t want to do that to 44 percent of the electorate if you hope to have any chance of being reelected someday. This time, they garnered nationwide support by enlisting independent voter organizations across the country to contact friends, family, and colleagues in New Hampshire to let them know about the bill and what they could do to defeat it. Voters in New Hampshire, most of them independents, bombarded their legislators with one clear message: Defeat this bill, or we’ll hold you accountable in the next election.

Trust me, the independent voters in New Hampshire won’t be *ignored*, and now their legislators know it.

ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL . . . SORT OF

As much as anyone, independent voters and candidates understand the truth in former House Speaker Tip O’Neill’s comment that “all politics is local”—a bit of wisdom his father handed down to him. In an article unrelated to independent voting, environmental activist Thomas Kostigen gives us this visual image of the importance of local, grassroots activity: “That’s why it’s so important to enact local policy change. Policies, like hot air, rise. Enough local policy changes and soon national policy-

makers then international policymakers—in this case President Bush—will wake up and see the urgent need and cry for worldwide carbon-emission reductions.”²⁰

Now I’m not suggesting that we independents are blowing hot air, but I do like the image of local policies rising to national and international levels. We saw a bit of that in the New Hampshire battles over the open-primary law in 2005 and 2006. Make no mistake about it—this local issue attracted the attention of legislatures across the country. They were looking to see how the issue played out in one pivotal state, since other states were considering changing their own voting laws—this, thanks to a partisan effort to combat widespread voter fraud. Such fraud is so widespread, it seems, that it has virtually dissipated into the ozone, since no one has yet to produce one shred of evidence that voter integrity is in peril.

One of the best gifts independent voters can give their local communities, in addition to independent candidates, is a grass-roots effort to establish nonpartisan elections on the municipal level. Most large cities, including Chicago and Los Angeles, already have nonpartisan elections, as do 80 percent of cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Smaller towns also need this reform, which would inject some life into a stagnant political climate. Remember this principle: Any time you eliminate partisanship, you improve the political climate. Okay, maybe that’s not always true, but I don’t know of a time that it’s failed. What happens when you subtract partisanship? You get a much more vibrant field of candidates, including the occasional dun-derhead who just might belong to one of those major parties anyway. You also get a livelier debate on whatever issues your community is facing. When a candidate is not beholden to a major political party, that candidate is free not only to speak her mind but also to engage in more creative problem-solving.

One of the rallying cries of the 1960s was “power to the people,” and protestors have used it ever since to voice their opposition to what, back in the day, we called The Establishment. Now that we *are* The Establishment (*Can it really be true?*), respectable people like you and me can pick up that mantra again and make it all respectable-like by applying it to local elections. No, we don’t need to do that “take to the streets and punch our fists in the air” thing that I mentioned earlier. Slogans in that context distort the meaning of genuine power in a democracy (or a republic, for you purists); we’re not talking about a hostile takeover here. We’re talking about the legitimate power granted to us in the Constitution, and we can regain it by strategically and lawfully removing it from the hands of the two major parties. To some people, I’m sure, that sounds like a no-brainer, to others, an impossibility, and to still others, an example of sophomoric idealism.²¹

Call it what you will, it can work on the local level.

SUCCESS IN THE CITY

Waterbury, Connecticut, is a city of just over a hundred thousand people and the place where my parents spent their honeymoon back in the late 1940s. I remember passing through there once and wondering why on earth they chose to honeymoon there. It’s too late to ask them, so I just have to figure that the city held some kind of appeal for them back then. Today, it’s a hotbed of independent political activity, a city that offers proof of the power of grassroots activism.

One thing you should know about Waterbury is that it’s governed by a fifteen-member board of aldermen, who will probably be known someday as alderpersons or just plain alders. According to the city’s at-large election law, each party is allowed to put up a slate of nine candidates. Did you get that? “Each party,”

meaning Democrats and Republicans. And did you get this? Eighteen candidates, fifteen seats. You've got to feel sorry for the three losers in a race like that. "If you don't like what's going on with the board of aldermen, the best you can do is un-elect three of them," Mike Telesca, who founded the city's Independent Party and serves as its chairman, told me in a 2007 interview.

In 2001, Telesca and other independents decided to challenge the system. Three independent candidates won seats on the board of aldermen, but they were denied the opportunity to serve. Why? "They said, 'Well, you're still Democrats. It doesn't matter that you didn't run with the party,'" Telesca continued. "So they gave our seats to the Republicans, even though we got more votes than they did."

Not surprisingly, the independent candidates took the matter to court. The court decided the city's charter did not adequately address the situation and instead based its decision on state law, which says that in at-large elections, no single party may hold more than two-thirds of the seats on the board. In Waterbury, that translates into ten seats. Well, the Democrats had come by the first nine seats honestly, one presumes, through the normal voting procedure, so the court decided the independents—who were Democrats in disguise, of course—should be allowed one seat, which was awarded to the independent candidate who received the most votes. Though the independents wanted to appeal, they knew the \$25,000 or more needed for an appeal would be hard, if not impossible, to come by.

They dropped the court case, but they did not give up. In 2003, they formed the Independent Party, proving that they were not Democrats. That year, the Republicans all but gave up; nine Democratic candidates were elected, as were six independents. In that same election, two independents won four-year terms on the board of education; a third independent member was added

in 2005, when another seat opened up. Telesca and his independent colleagues had broken Waterbury's two-party stranglehold, or actually, the one-party-with-two-names stranglehold.

"The coalition between Democrats and Republicans is so pervasive in this particular town that we have quite a history of corruption," Telesca added, explaining the Republicans' 2003 action—or rather, inaction. "The last two Republican mayors went to jail. In 2001 the mayor that was in office was taken out of his office in handcuffs. The Republicans at that point knew they couldn't win."²²

What's most interesting about this is that the Independent Party had already been planning to put up a full slate of candidates in 2003 before the Republicans essentially dropped out. By creating an independent coalition to prove they were independents and not Democrats, they were able to take advantage of a future situation and fill the void left by the faltering Republicans.

It's seldom easy, but independents can begin to reform the political system by starting in their own municipalities. Waterbury is but one example of a city in which independents are beginning to clean up a corrupt political system.

Maybe that's the most accurate image of independents: We're the cleaner-uppers. Whatever action we take, our basic motivation is to clean things up—to sweep career politicians out of office, wipe out political corruption, clear away the clutter in the electoral system, and overhaul the two-party system. Yes, that image works for me.



PROFILE OF AN INDEPENDENT VOTER

Audrey Mowdy, 49, Conyers, Georgia

IN HER WORK as president and CEO of Rose of Sharon International Resource Center, Audrey Mowdy discovered what she calls “the most independent group there is”—the homeless and poverty-stricken people her organization serves. As it became clearer that this group was greatly impacted by public policy but had no voice in the process of developing that policy, she and others in the Atlanta area founded a political organization called iMove. Mowdy, an African-American and mother of two adult daughters, also serves as chairman of the Atlanta-based iMove, whose name stands for “independent movement.”

“I’ve always been an advocate for what’s right, and I’ve been affiliated with both parties,” Mowdy said. “What prompted me to become an independent were the struggle of both parties to gain more power and the lack of involvement or real concern candidates had for people and communities.”

The mission of iMove is to create a strategy for neighborhood, community, and faith leaders—and independent voters—to fully participate in the public policy process, help

generate new ideas for solving long-standing problems, and overhaul a social service system that has failed to provide empowering opportunities for the poor and the homeless.

Not surprisingly, poverty and homelessness, along with unemployment and the lack of jobs that pay a living wage, top Mowdy’s list of the political issues that are of primary importance to her as an independent.

“I believe that the society that we live in is far too opulent for homelessness to be an issue in the twenty-first century,” she says. “I don’t think we’ll make much of a difference until we gather people [together]; there’s strength in numbers. In the prisons system and the homeless structure there is an unprecedented amount of people who do not vote. [We need to] educate them.”

Neither Mowdy nor iMove is focused on voting independents into office. “The focus is to create an environment that includes people. iMove is a nonpartisan, inclusive movement about including citizens in the decision-making process,” Mowdy says. And that’s a process, she says, that for too long has been denied the very people she serves every day. ■





PROFILE OF AN INDEPENDENT VOTER

Jonathan Merritt, 25, Atlanta, Georgia

JONATHAN MERRITT is a self-described conservative independent who is disgusted with both parties and has an inexplicable affinity for Libertarians. To understand how radical that political perspective is for him, you'd have to know a bit about his background—starting with his heritage. His father is Dr. James Merritt, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention; Jerry Falwell was a family friend. Dr. Merritt's political views were no secret to anyone. "You never had to ask how we voted. Our family voted a straight Republican ticket," says Merritt. "We were invited to political dinners, and some of the most active members of our large church were congressmen."

When he reached voting age, Jonathan Merritt followed suit, voting a straight Republican ticket—and believing that a person couldn't be a Christian *and* a Democrat; the two were mutually exclusive. After his last year of college—he attended Falwell's Liberty University—he was elected GOP precinct chairman for the First Precinct in the state of Georgia. "I resigned shortly after," he says. "I had ventured into the belly of the partisan beast, and I almost didn't return intact. It is an ugly place to exist."

Even though all officeholders face pressure from contributors,

independents, he believes, have the advantage of "pressureless voting" from a partisan standpoint. They're free to vote their consciences, which Merritt believes is more trustworthy than a "party's ever-changing disposition."

A writer and the senior editor of PastorsEdge.com, Merritt remembers attending church during his college years and often asking a friend, "What exactly was the sermon about today anyway?" Much of the service had been devoted to endorsing candidates and other political talk, with little or no room for the Word of God. Democrats were mocked from the pulpit. "When a church publicly draws a political line, it can begin to overshadow the real reason the church exists," he says. "My experience was not uncommon. It was actually normative. Over the years, scores of progressive college grads left Liberty University and found themselves disillusioned with the politico-religious culture found in so many places." He is currently completing a master of divinity program at Southeastern Seminary in North Carolina.

Merritt's major political concerns today are the war in Iraq, particularly achieving victory so the government can focus on other foreign policy issues, and consistent environmental





regulations. Global warming, he says, is stealing the stage right now, but other environmental concerns need to be discussed as well.

Though his conservative Protestant faith greatly influences his political perspective, he is open to voting for a Catholic or Mormon candidate. He considers a candidate's

voting record to be more helpful than a claim of faith that may not be authentic. His '08 presidential pick as of the summer of 2007 was Fred Thompson—though he secretly wished Stephen Colbert would run, months before the Comedy Central personality announced his candidacy. ■





PROFILE OF AN INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE

Lisa Braun, 42, Wenonah, New Jersey

WENONAH, A HISTORIC town of a little over one square mile just south of Philadelphia, is home to 2,300 people—most of them Republicans. One of its residents is Lisa Braun, a former customer-service professional who was appointed to a seat on the borough council in 1996. When the Republicans who appointed her discovered she was a registered independent, they insisted that she register to vote as a Republican.

To Braun, her registration status was secondary to her desire to work for the betterment of the community. Over the next nine years, she continued to serve as a Republican member of the council, but her discontent with the party's mantra—"Keep the Republican control"—coupled with the feeling that she was living a lie, caused her to grow increasingly uncomfortable with her situation.

In choosing a slate of candidates, the Republicans' motivation "had shifted from who would serve our taxpayers well to who would win the election," says Braun. "My suspicions were confirmed during a mayoral election when the committee chose a candidate that was the 'highest vote-getter ever' in our town. I knew this incumbent to be a hands-off mayor who only ran because no one else would. I chose to leave the party."

In January 2006, Braun notified Wenonah residents of her decision to become an independent, citing her belief that:

- Council members have an obligation to vote objectively on issues.
- All people, regardless of party designation, should feel secure that their observations, suggestions, and vision are met with equal weight.
- The historical practice of voting along party lines is an antiquated, inefficient approach to filling government positions. Voting for people and not parties helps ensure that local affairs will be handled with open communication and by people with open minds.
- Ideas from both parties can be fused to create the best of both worlds.
- The borough is better served without drawing lines in the sand that only weaken its human resources.

Braun's political purpose is simple and clear: She focuses on the people and not on the political parties. "I am not naïve; I know that we will never fully eradicate partisan politics," she says. "I do believe, however, that we, the independents, can change the flavor





of politics. My goal is to communicate this to others and hope that one by one, people will join in the cause of ‘independent thinking.’ We can elect good, strong leaders who use their brains, not their political connections or backers, to [restore] what was once a solid system of government, by the people and for the people.”

A return to that solid system requires major political reform, Braun believes, starting with improving ballot access laws so more independents can run and bring a fresh way of thinking to the political process—and maybe even be elected. “Campaign reform is a necessity in

this process,” she adds. “By disabling the special interests, the corporate powerhouses, the almighty dollar will lose its power of influence. Elected officials, generally speaking, have lost sight of their role as public servants and have become puppets of their contributors.”

Today, Braun remains confident in the integrity of her decision to become an independent. A Presbyterian and a stay-at-home mother of three, ages 13, 11, and 7 (“the most fulfilling job of all”), Braun believes God has given her the security to stand for what she believes in—the people he created. ■





Notes

PREFACE, OR THE MAKING OF WE THE PURPLE

1. Don't pick mine.

INTRODUCTION

1. Who knows which one? All three are credited with writing and editing the magnificent *America (The Book): A Citizen's Guide to Democracy Inaction* (New York: Warner Books, 2004), 107.
2. "Bipartisan Group of Representatives Holds News Conference on Medicinal Marijuana," *Federal Document Clearing House Political Transcripts*, July 24, 2002. Quoted on <http://www.wordspy.com/words/purplestate.asp> and <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v02.n1401.a04.html> and accessed November 24 and 28, 2006, respectively.
3. Thomas Fitzgerald, "Narrowing 'God Gap' Raises Eyebrows," *James Logan Courier*, December 3, 2006. Posted on <http://jameslogancourier.org/index.php?itemid=1162> and accessed November 2, 2007.

CHAPTER 1: PURPLE REIGN

1. I hate the word *hippie*. I hated it then. I hate it now. I use it here only for the purpose of parallel construction and alliteration. I am a writer, after all.
2. I have no idea what this is and no inclination to find out.
3. I wish I could insert it here, but that would jack up the price of the book, and we'll have none of that. You can find the map at <http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2000/> and elsewhere on the Web if that link expires at some point.
4. This one is at <http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/elections/Multiyear3.gif>.
5. Not to be confused with Great Britain's Purple Party, launched in 2005 by Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, who hosted such shows as *Changing Rooms*, *Homefront*, *Fantasy Rooms*, and *Taste*. Bowen's raison d'être is to preserve Britain's architectural heritage. Part of his party's "manifesto" provides for up to 100 percent tax relief for nominated citizens who have "performed a heroic, generous, or selfless act." Woe to those who commit acts of "cowardice, unkindness, and selfishness"; they could see a 90 percent increase in their taxes. Oh, and

- to promote good taste and a more sophisticated sense of style among Britons, “houses with visible net curtains will be subject to a 5 percent increase in council tax charges and will not be eligible for any of the usual reductions.” Posted on http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/tv/purple_party_manifesto2.shtml and accessed February 25, 2007. This page has since been removed.
6. Posted on <http://www.nymag.com/news/politics/16713/> and accessed March 17, 2007.
7. Ibid.
8. You can find the results of the poll at http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/mood_of_america/party_affiliation/number_of_republicans_in_us_hits_new_low_number_of_democrats_also_decline. Accessed November 3, 2007.
9. On second thought, maybe we should. It would be fun to watch the ensuing indictments race through the courts.
10. Thanks to Jackie Salit of CUIP for articulating this.
11. Remember? In a 1999 interview with CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, Gore, who was then vice president, said that while in Congress, he “took the initiative in creating the Internet.” And then he took a whole lot of flak for claiming that. Posted on <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/03/09/president.2000/transcript.gore/> and accessed June 17, 2007.
12. “This” meaning the ill will we’ve brought upon ourselves globally and the failure to provide for ourselves domestically (think Katrina, more than *three years* later).
13. David Leshner with Mark Baldassare, “Declining to State: Why Are Fewer California Voters Declaring Support for a Major Political Party?” *Press-Enterprise*, April 8, 2006. Posted on http://www.newamerica.net/publications/articles/2006/declining_to_state and accessed March 20 and June 30, 2007.
14. Stuart Steers, “The Power of Purple: More Unaffiliated Suburbanites Vote ‘for the Person’—Not the Red or Blue,” *Rocky Mountain News*, September 23, 2006. Posted on http://www.insidedenver.com/drmn/elections/article/0,2808,DRMN_24736_5015623,00.html and accessed March 23 and June 29, 2007.
15. Kim Zetter, “Florida E-Vote Fraud? Unlikely,” November 10, 2004. Posted on <http://www.wired.com/politics/security/news/2004/11/65665?currentPage=all> and accessed June 30, 2007.
16. Rick Klein, “Independents Rule New Hampshire: Partyless, Unpredictable Voters Could Sway Primary . . . Again.” June 4, 2007. Posted on <http://www.abcnnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=3242844&page=1> and accessed June 28, 2007.
17. Posted on http://www.paindependents.org/Independent_PA_Info/PA_Facts_and_Figures/54/ and accessed June 15, 2007.

18. John J. DiIulio Jr., “You Gotta Be Purple to Win: How the Democrats Did It,” November 20, 2006. Posted on http://www.weeklystandard.com/Utilities/prINTERVIEW_PREVIEW.asp?idArticle=12956&R=EEC251A5 and accessed March 23, 2007.
19. Ibid.
20. Thomas Kostigen, “All Politics Is Local and Green Politics Are No Exception.” Posted on <http://www.alternet.org/environment/54915/> and accessed July 10, 2007.
21. I need to remind that last group that I am definitely a senior.
22. He’s not kidding. Former mayor Joseph Santopietro served six years for bank fraud, bribery, embezzling federal funds, and tax evasion. Former mayor Phillip Giordano is serving a thirty-seven-year sentence for sexual crimes against minors that allegedly took place in the mayor’s office. He was being investigated for municipal corruption when FBI agents discovered evidence of the sex crimes. While he was in prison, he tried to collect \$61,000 in back pay from the city of Waterbury.

CHAPTER 2: CHANGING AMERICA

1. If you don’t believe me, check out the C-SPAN coverage of the at-times hilarious panel discussion. It’s not available to view online, but if you’re really, really interested in all this, you can order the DVD “Voting for Independents” from www.c-span.org. The direct link is http://www.c-spanarchives.org/library/index.php?main_page-product_video_info&products_id=196456-1&highlight-independents. Should that link change, the best way to find the product is to search by the date the event was held (January 28, 2007) or aired (February 7, 2007). By the time you read this, though, copies may be available through interlibrary loan or possibly on eBay.
2. I later discovered that in 1992 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that voters did not have the right to a write-in option. Blank ballots, in which every candidate was essentially a “write-in,” were at one time the norm in the United States.
3. Ballot-access legislation changes, or is challenged, frequently. A number of significant efforts were being made to change Georgia law at the time of this writing. The petition requirements may have changed since the summer of 2007—but not necessarily for the better.
4. Posted on <http://www.ga.lp.org/bibb/VoterChoice.html> and last accessed June 20, 2007.
5. A Libertarian candidate qualified for the ballot in a special congressional election to fill a vacancy in June 2007, but the petitioning requirement did not apply in that case.
6. Winger believes reforming the electoral college will solve the ballot-access



Glossary of Sorts

527: A tax-exempt organization that attempts to influence elections by advocating for specific issues and by mobilizing people to vote; think the conservative group Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, which called into question John Kerry's military service in the 2004 presidential election, and an arm of the liberal group MoveOn.org that focuses on voter registration and education. Because money from 527s is not used to directly support a particular candidate, these groups are able to circumvent Federal Election Commission regulations.

Approval voting: Largely designed for local elections, this is a method of voting in which voters place a check mark by each candidate they approve. The candidate with the highest number of check marks wins.

Ballot access: The determination of whose names will appear on the ballot for local, state, and federal elections. Ballot access laws vary widely, and often wildly, from one jurisdiction to another. I'm guessing that because the two major parties dominate the legislative bodies that enact ballot-access laws, regulations that apply to independent and third-party candidates are nearly impossible to follow. But maybe that's a coincidence.

Campaign finance reform: An effort to reduce the amount of money spent on political campaigns and change the methods by which candidates receive funding. Current efforts include one that advocates providing a set amount of public funding for candidates who agree not to accept private donations and another that proposes allowing anonymous donations to be filtered through the Federal Election Commission.

Centrist: Can I avoid this one, please? Because no matter how I define this term and all the other political-persuasion terms in this section, *someone* will take me to task for it. Let's just say that you're probably a centrist if your fellow liberals think you're too conservative or your fellow conservatives think you're too liberal.

Web Sites of Interest to Independents

It would be impossible to list all the worthwhile independent-voter blogs and Web sites I've discovered, so I've pared the list down to sites that reflect general interests. Some of the links below refer to sites mentioned in the previous chapters, but some referred to earlier are not on the list below. That is no reflection on their value to independent voters but rather an effort to avoid too much duplication. Be sure to visit the sites mentioned in the chapters as well.

Most of the sites below provide a list of links to sites that narrow the field to, say, independent conservatives, evangelical progressives, or liberal populists.

Ballot Access News (<http://www.ballot-access.org/>): This one's a real eye-opener, even if you're not interested in ballot-access issues. Just read a few random posts, and you'll get an inkling of the challenges faced by independent candidates—and independent voters trying to simply register as independents. Of course, if you're a ballot-access junkie, this is where you'll get your fix.

Central Sanity (<http://www.centrsanity.blogspot.com/>): “Supporting the Rebellion of Reasonable People in an Unreasonable World.” This site is for moderate Republican and independent voters but provides news and smart commentary that transcends political ideology.

Committee for a Unified Independent Party (CUIP) (<http://www.independentvoting.org/index.html>): Pretty much a national clearinghouse for all things politically independent. This group has done more to rally and unite independents than any organization or individual out there. Great source of information and news, plus a link to the CUIP publication *The Neo-Independent*, where you'll find indie-related articles and commentary. This is where you start if you want to find out more or connect with other independents nationwide.

The Hankster (<http://grassrootsindependent.blogspot.com/>): Hands down, the best source for daily political news that independents would be interested in.



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