

Democrats - 'The lost countrypolitans'

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MADISON - The Democrats have been a party in decline for more than 40 years. That's not to say they haven't won an occasional battle in that time, but they've been losing the war for that long. It's been a downward spiral ever since the [Great Society](#) era drew to a close soon after the dawning of the 1970s.

Forty years of losing argument after argument about which direction the country should head has had a profound cumulative effect. America is more [walled off](#) . More [locked up](#) . [Armed](#) to the teeth. More militaristic, [defended](#) to the point of ridiculous overkill. All largely because we are becoming [more unequal](#) by the day. That's what 40 years of trickle-down economics and crony capitalism and deregulation for deregulation's sake get you.

In its heyday, the Democratic Party was countrypolitans. It isn't anymore.

Countrypolitans is a slang term most often associated with music. But it can apply to anything — or anyone — that's a mix of rural (country) and urban (metropolitan). That's what the Democratic Party used to be decades ago. It is not countrypolitans today and hasn't been for quite some time now. The Democrats started losing ground when they [stopped appealing](#) to people outside the cities.

The Democrats' decline will continue until they get serious about exploring why rural and suburban people currently are sticking together to support right-wing values and policies, how they could be persuaded to part company, and how rural and urban interests could be reunited.

The Democratic Party has much to gain and little to lose from such exploration. It can't sink much lower. But lower- and middle-class Americans in both rural and urban areas stand to gain the most. Policies benefiting them don't stand much of a chance of becoming the law of the land as long as the vast wealth of a few holds policymakers in such an iron grip.

For there to be a chance of commoner-friendly thinking being reflected in government actions, a new coalition of commoners needs to emerge, one that packs enough punch to stagger the reigning political champion — money. Legions of diligent campaign finance reformers are watching helplessly these days as old safeguards against government corruption are stripped away and the floodgates are opened ever wider, allowing more and more money to flood into elections and lobbying. They are powerless to stop political inequality from breeding still more political inequality.

Growing political inequality then produces greater economic inequality and sustained social inequality. And the more government is seen working for just a few at everyone else's expense, the more the masses despise government. The more government is despised, the easier it is for a wealthy and well-connected few to control.

This vicious cycle is the 99%'s quandary. And the Democratic Party's.

Preventing our nation from becoming more stratified, more walled off and more fractured depends on breaking the vicious cycle of political and economic inequality. Today's Democratic Party appears to be at a loss about how to do it or even what to try. Democrats would do well to start by reacquainting themselves with the forgotten countrypolitan formula that worked so well for them from the 1930s through the 1960s.

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