

Choosing Sides

The Sunday morning television shows love to pronounce winners at the end of each week's news cycle. But they ignore the important question of who will win over the next ten or 20 years. Are American politics moving rightward? Or leftward?

There are several possible ways to predict the political future. One can extrapolate from the most recent election. But elections give only a snapshot. After the 1992 elections, hopeful liberals predicted a generation of Democratic control at the federal level; 1994 turned out pretty different.

In between elections, one can look at polling data to see how party affiliations or attitudinal positions on various issues are shifting. Following that course after the 1991 Gulf War, nearly all pollsters expected a second term for President George H. W. Bush. Obviously, answers to pollsters' questions don't fully reflect future voting commitments.

A better measure of what is likely to happen in the political future is to look at decisions people are making in their own lives. For the last seven years, new Republican voter registrants have outnumbered new Democratic registrants for the first time since the 1920s. That is a bedrock shift.

Significant transitions are also taking place among political professionals. When an elected Democrat switches to the GOP, he is wagering that he will be happier and more likely to win elections on the Republican side for the duration of his professional life. He is making a momentous decision that will determine his employability, his ability to earn a liv-

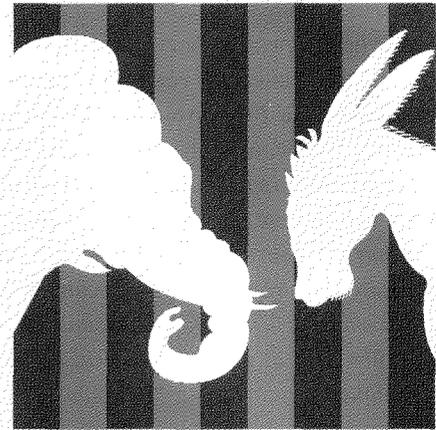
ing, and the shape of his social calendar.

Since Bill Clinton won in 1992, over 400 elected Democrats have become Republicans. This includes two senators, Richard Shelby of Alabama and Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado, and five members of the House of Representatives: 433 Democrats in all. The number of party switchers spiked at 82 in 1995, but 39 switched in 2001, 31 in 2002, and 15 in the first third of 2003.

It is harder to count elected Republicans who switch to the Democratic Party, because Democrats say they don't keep track (the team that tells you it isn't keeping score is generally losing). In my own personal count, however, I find fewer than 20 switchers in recent years. Among them: former congressman Michael Forbes, former New York lieutenant governor Betsy McCaughey, and four state representatives. Vermont senator Jim Jeffords only made a quarter-turn from liberal Republican to independent back in June 2001.

Writers and intellectuals also switch teams. David Brock, a former investigative journalist for conservative periodicals, moved from right to left in the mid 1990s. Kevin Phillips wrote *The Emerging Republican Majority* in 1969, but by 1980 was denouncing Reaganism and the modern conservative movement and leading the charge for class warfare.

The ranks of intellectuals making a left to right shift are much larger, however. Irving Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, David Horowitz, and Peter Collier arrived officially on the right during the 1980s.



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Michael Barone, who worked on Edward Kennedy's 1980 campaign, is now a strong conservative voice in his news columns. *TAE's* James Glassman, once a leftish president of the *Harvard Crimson* and publisher of the *New Republic*, is now the voice of the emerging investor class and a foe of leftwing environmental extremism. Authors like Ron Radosh, Stephen Schwartz, and P. J. O'Rourke have moved right.

It is possible that millions of voter registrants, hundreds of politicians, and scores of intellectuals are wrong, and that our country will move left over the next generation. But few people seem to be betting their careers on that.

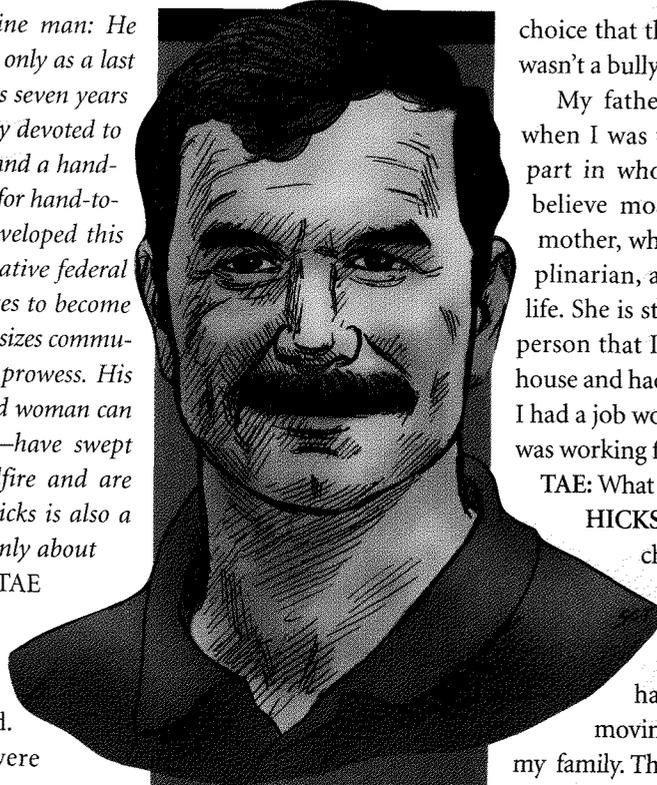


“Live” with TAE

He’s a Navy SEAL-turned-successful-businessman who could beat just about anyone in a fight but prefers communication to combat.

Lew Hicks

Lew Hicks epitomizes the masculine man: He knows how to fight but uses violence only as a last resort. Since leaving the Navy SEALs seven years ago, he’s built a 200-person company devoted to teaching law enforcement agencies (and a handful of private citizens) his techniques for hand-to-hand self-defense. He originally developed this method for Police Corps, an innovative federal program that trains college graduates to become police officers. Hicks’ program emphasizes communication skills as much as physical prowess. His techniques—with which a 110-pound woman can pin and hold a 300-pound man—have swept America’s police agencies like wildfire and are already taught in over 30 states. Hicks is also a devoted family man who speaks openly about his religious beliefs. He talked with TAE senior editor Eli Lehrer at the Police Corps offices near Baltimore.



**Every man
needs to know
he can defend
himself.**

TAE: Tell me about your childhood. Where were you born? What were your parents like?

HICKS: I had a wonderful childhood. It was filled with adventure. I grew up near the Missouri River in South Omaha, on the wrong side of the tracks. It was a rough-and-tumble neighborhood. I started fishing with friends in the Missouri River at age six. There was a lot of independent activity in my youth. I just romped through forests and down by the rivers and adventured through molasses factories and stockyards at a very young age. I was one of 13 brothers and sisters. I’m still close to most of them. One of them was murdered in his sleep when I was in fifth grade. Through my entire childhood, I had really great guidance and, for whatever reason, I never got involved in a gang or drugs and drinking. Not so much because of adult pressure but just because I made the

choice that that’s not what I was going to do. I wasn’t a bully, but I knew how to defend myself.

My father was an alcoholic and he died when I was very young. He played very little part in who I am and what I’ve become. I believe most of who I am came from my mother, who was the guiding light, the disciplinarian, and the emotional support of my life. She is still alive today and is the strongest person that I know. At 13, I moved out of the house and had my own apartment with a friend. I had a job working at Armour Packing House. I was working full-time and going to school.

TAE: What led you to move out of the house?

HICKS: My father had died, and with nine children still living at home it obviously made for a very impoverished house, and my mother, never having had a job before, had gotten one. I just decided that moving out would make things easier on my family. There were child labor laws of course. But the labor law I followed was that I needed to work. So I went to the meat-packing house.

TAE: Was being able to defend yourself a part of growing up?

HICKS: It was. I had a great many aggressive brothers and neighbors. My brothers grew up in the ’50s, I was born in 1959, and the sort of violence you see in *West Side Story* was real-life activity on the streets where I grew up. There was a process of fighting and establishing yourself either as a block leader or, at least, as somebody who needs to be reckoned with. There was a lot of fighting. For a lot of men I meet, the ability to protect themselves is a major theme in life. The things I do are sexy and attractive to most men because they are the things that are in the front of every man’s subconscious: Can I protect myself?