

Opinion: Roots of Republican Party crack-up

By Robert Reich

With the Iowa caucuses just days away, the Republican crack-up threatens the future of the Grand Old Party more profoundly than at any other time since the GOP's eclipse in 1932. That's bad for America.

The crack-up isn't just Romney-the-smooth versus Gingrich-the-bomb-thrower. Not just House Speaker John Boehner, who keeps making agreements he can't keep, versus House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, who keeps making trouble he can't control. And not just the GOP establishment versus the Tea Partiers.

The underlying conflict lies deep in the nature and structure of the Republican Party. And its roots are very old.

As political analyst Michael Lind has noted, today's Tea Party is less an ideological movement than the latest incarnation of an angry white minority – predominantly Southern, mainly rural, largely male – that has repeatedly attacked American democracy in order to get its way.

It's no coincidence that the states responsible for putting the most Tea Party representatives in the House are all former members of the Confederacy. Others are from border states with significant Southern populations and Southern ties.

This “no-compromise” right wing of today's GOP isn't much different from the evangelical social conservatives who began asserting themselves in the party during the 1990s, and, before them, the “Willie Horton” conservatives of the 1980s, and, before them, Richard Nixon's “silent majority.”

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