

# Red Nation vs. Blue Nation: Healing Our National Schizophrenia

Don Edward Beck, PhD

Our nation is deeply divided in our cultural core and these fault lines are cracking our country apart. Note the spiraling conspiracies, the hardening boundaries, the escalating hostility. Chadgate will be with us for a long time. Even in my own hometown, “dear hearts and gentle people” are murmuring of the need to form two nations: a Red one and a Blue one.

If you’ve seen the geographic maps that display the counties won by Governor Bush and Vice President Gore you get the picture. Bush Country (The Red Nation) covers the vast midlands and heartland. The Gore votes (The Blue Nation) are concentrated along the narrow coastlines and in minority and unionized enclaves.

Welcome to the Age of National Schizophrenia.

Just as a sudden lightning bolt in a dark, rainy night momentarily illuminates the land contours and structures, the political hurricane that hit Florida in the post-election turbulence provides us with a rare glimpse into the deeper dynamics that are shaping our destiny.

Look at what “the light” has exposed. One writer describes our differences as merely “Martha Stewart” vs. Wal-Mart” preferences. Yet, others speak of a class-warfare that is breaking out with clear and distinctive racial battle-lines. Michael Sande, the Harvard sociologist, claims “The election returns show a country that is evenly divided, but not deeply divided.”

Alas, he speaks only from his Blue Nation perspective. Acrimonious responses to the Florida fiasco convey a more ominous warning from the Red Nation’s emotional cores. Deep currents of anger, fear, and even revenge are bubbling and boiling beneath our prosperity façade. We ignore these messages from the future at our own peril. These cultural fissures go much deeper than Republican vs. Democrat or even “from the Left and from the Right” as in CNN’s “Crossfire.”

What are the real differences? The Red Nation’s cultural code consists of two dominant themes: *The Rule of Law* and *Individual Self-Reliance*. Here one finds modern day manifestations of the Puritan Work Ethic, the belief in the virtues of discipline, responsibility, and the free market’s invisible hand. In the Red Nation one disdains Big Government and social engineering, especially from the judiciary. These codes provide the critical elements that generate law and order, social stability and prosperity.

In the Blue Nation, one detects two contrasting codes: The *Struggle to Overcome* and *Egalitarian Sensitivity*. The first code defines “the victims” who have either been left behind or shut out of the affluent mainstream. The second code is embraced by postmodern thinkers and feelers who need to rescue the deprived while striving after a vision of a higher ideal. Herein lies the classic appeal of the Democratic Party and remnants of the FDR coalition from an earlier time. In the Blue Nation one extols the virtues of human rights, equal opportunity, and a “living” Constitution that must change with the times. The “will of the people” is some mystical consensual force that transcends rules and technicalities. Big Oil is a leading bugaboo as is crass selfishness, greed, and raw power.

Thus, we have a Monolithic, Eurocentric Society vs. a Pluralistic, Egalitarian Commune. We have corporate attorneys vs. trial lawyers. All media voices and megaphones carry either Red or Blue passports. The highly emotional, ego-involved issues, like a centrifugal force, are spinning both camps toward their rigid and radical ends. Both elevate the issues to higher order abstractions such as “democracy” or “fairness.” The middle disappears in the wake of severe polarization.

Our National Schizophrenia may well drive us crazy.

What to do about it? First, it is crucial that we focus more on these diverse codes than surface-level manifestations. Rather than being competitive or mutually exclusive, these core belief systems reflect diverse levels of emergence along a developmental track. They must be integrated, aligned, and synergized. A legitimate synthesis of “Third Way” politics and “Compassionate Conservatism” objectives would cobble from both what is necessary in different situations to produce healthy communities. All resources – public, private, secular and sacred – could be mobilized to focus efforts like laser beams. We could then add power and precision to efforts to deal with education, gang violence, prison overcrowding, and environment threats. As Albert Einstein often warned: “Today’s problems cannot be solved by the same thinking that produced them.”

Second, we desperately need new models and processes of decision-making. Neither naive “coming together” bromides or hardball win:lose tactics can close the gaps. We must be creative in exploring the *Power of the Third Win*, the ability and temperament to focus more on meeting the needs of people at different stages of development than scoring political points, generating clever sound bites, or playing volatile race cards.

Governor Bush spoke for many across the entire political spectrum and on both sides of the aisle when he said in a recent speech in Albuquerque:

“There are good people in both parties willing to rise above the confrontation and stalemate of the last eight years – People who are ready for a fresh, bipartisan approach.”

No doubt Vice President Gore will echo this sentiment, as will responsible Congressional leaders.

We must now paint our entire nation Red, White & Blue again. We lack any common enemy or external “evil empire” to unite us. We must search deep in our hearts and souls for the wisdom and courage to renew, for this century, the essence and genius of America.

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*Dr. Beck heads the National Values Center in Denton, Texas and played a major role in the South African transformation. He is a leading global authority on value systems, societal change, and Stratified Democracy.*