



March 28, 2010

The Washington Post

Who loves intellectuals -- Democrats or Republicans?

By: Carlos Lozada

As far as perceptions go, a big difference between President Obama and his predecessor comes down to smarts: Obama is brainy, Bush is folksy. The stereotypes extend to the parties, with Ivy League egghead Democrats and tea partying small-town Republicans seeming to inhabit different planets.

But [an intriguing National Affairs essay](#) by the Hudson Institute's Tevi Troy shifts the focus, arguing that "Republican pres idents actually use intellectuals and allow them to help define presidential agendas, while the Democrats often treat intellectuals as cultural ornaments." Troy is a veteran of the George W. Bush White House but offers insights for all sides.

Democratic presidents, he writes, have a tortured relationship with big thinkers. John F. Kennedy relished his ivory-tower persona and brought in Arthur Schlesinger as an in-house intellectual. But Lyndon Johnson was "uneasy" with liberal intellectuals, Troy writes, while Jimmy Carter's effort to channel historian Christopher Lasch produced the disastrous "malaise" speech of 1979. Bill Clinton, by contrast, courted liberal thinkers, even installing political economist Robert Reich as labor secretary.

On the GOP side, Richard Nixon's top intellectual was disenchanted Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who put conservative thinkers and neocons on the White House radar -- a process that culminated under Reagan, when dozens of conservative intellectuals populated the White House. After George H.W. Bush's disinterest in intellectuals backfired when key conservatives backed Clinton in 1992, his son learned the lesson, establishing a White House office to connect to the world of ideas. But in the end, George W. Bush's religious conservatism undermined his standing with old-school conservatives.

And Obama? He can't assume liberal thinkers will love him forever. Some of his moves -- on Guantanamo and the public option -- have already stoked discontent. "Precisely because Obama's presidency rests, in part, on his status as a cultural phenomenon, he would pay a heavy price for losing their support," Troy warns.