

Why the GOP 'Establishment' Keeps Growing



I've never worked in politics or government. I've never run for public office, and I don't have any friends who are politicians. I've been to Washington DC before, but just once; it was on a family vacation.

I'd say I'm about as far removed from the world of lobbyists, power brokers, and super PACs that a person could possibly be, but despite all of that, I am part of "The Establishment."

How do I know this? It's because whenever I voice criticisms of Donald Trump or those promoting him, that's what I'm told.

It's not just anonymous Internet trolls that are telling me (and many like me) this. It's also national media figures – specifically those who've been using their television and radio platforms throughout the presidential campaign to promote, normalize, and apologize for their clear candidate of choice: Mr. Trump.

For example, just yesterday on Twitter, I criticized *Fox News* host Eric Bolling for his ongoing, impassioned, on-air defenses of Trump. His compulsory response was to call yours truly part of – you guessed it – "The Establishment."

Bolling even went to the trouble of creating a nifty little

hashtag for me (and Bernie, who's apparently also part of "The Establishment"): *#BernieGoldbergEstablishmentApologistGroup*. Rolls right off the tongue, doesn't it? I suppose I should be flattered.

But really, it's Bolling who's a member of very distinguishable group of individuals within the news media. I won't bother trying to come up with a name for them, but what sets them aside is that they are self-described conservative commentators who just happen to have longtime, personal friendships with Donald Trump. And up until their billionaire buddy threw his big red hat into the presidential ring last summer, they were also united in their very vocal belief that the biggest problem with the Republican Party has been that its leaders aren't sufficiently conservative.

Now, somehow, that's no longer much of a concern to them. After all, Trump isn't a conservative (or even close to being a conservative), but they've devoted themselves to the success of his candidacy nonetheless. They've become cheerleaders for the very type of individual they would have been calling a "RINO" nine months ago.

What's their explanation? Well, they really haven't offered one. And many longtime fans and observers of their commentary have not only noticed, but have also brought the discrepancy to their attention (both on the Internet and on the air). This has left these commentators in somewhat of a bind, as more and more people are wondering how ideological purists could have suddenly let themselves be drawn away from their stated principles, and into a cult of personality – one not all that different than what we saw back in 2008 with presidential candidate, Barack Obama.

While bias derived from cronyism is the logical culprit, don't expect any of them to admit that. I'm not even convinced some of them could admit it to themselves. What they've done instead is find a convenient scapegoat for their stark change

in behavior: *The Establishment*.

I've always had some trouble determining exactly who makes up "The Establishment" – this imperialistic-sounding entity we hear about so often on cable news. My understanding, at the beginning of this election season, was that the term applied to the *Washington DC* establishment, as in the president, congress, the national committees, lobbyists, big donors, etc – you know, powerful decision-makers at the federal government level. That usage of the phrase at least made some sense to me.

A few months back, however, when Donald Trump, Ben Carson, and Carly Fiorina began to rise in the polls, the term was somehow modified in the media and in campaign rhetoric to extend to pretty much anyone who had ever served in public office. That was the case in the Republican Party, anyway. Strangely, "The Establishment" suddenly included state governors and even U.S. Senate "outsiders" like Ted Cruz and Rand Paul, who have famously butted heads with leaders among the *previous* incarnation of "The Establishment."

And that wasn't the end of it. In an attempt by the aforementioned conservative commentators to run interference for their pro-Trump conversion, several have recently co-opted the term in order to expand it once again. As best I can gather, "The Establishment" *now* encompasses every Republican (leader or mere voter) who doesn't want Donald Trump to become their party's nominee.

Over and over again in recent weeks (on television and in print) I've seen this label applied to anti-Trump sentiment: *It's "The Establishment" that doesn't want Donald as the nominee. It's "The Establishment" that's behind the #NeverTrump movement. It's "The Establishment" that's scared of President Trump.*

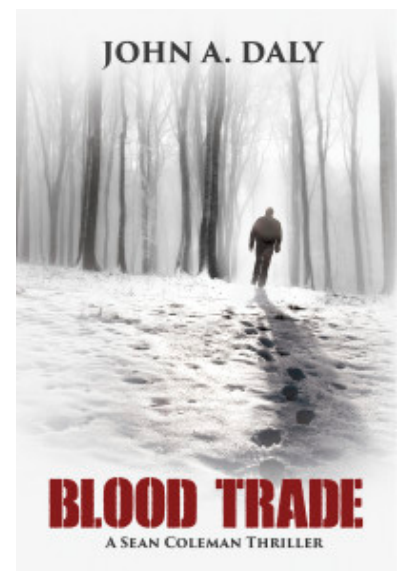
The bottom line? If you're an anti-Trump Republican, you're

part of “The Establishment.” End of story.

The reality, however, is that nearly **two-thirds** of the Republican base don't want Trump as the nominee. A lot of conservatives don't want Trump because they think he's unprincipled and instinctively liberal. A lot of voters don't want Trump because they don't like his conduct, judgement and temperament. A lot of people don't want Trump because they're concerned about his lack of knowledge on big issues.

Do these people really make up “The Establishment?” Of course not. These are valid, organic concerns – concerns that by no means make the people who have them part of some power-mad institution.

I think Trump's advocates in the media understand this, but because they can't rationalize the abandonment of their own conservative principles (or even their prior sense of decency in some cases), all they can do is try and conceal the transition. To do so, they've chosen an alternate, righteous leg to stand on: “The Establishment” narrative.



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In going to war with this continually redefined boogeyman, these commentators are the heroes – rebel forces fighting an empire for the small guy. What brought these warriors to the battlefield in the first place suddenly becomes unimportant – or so they hope.

It's all very confusing, but the real confusion has to lie with those who were sold on the *old* rhetoric: that full-blooded, lockstep conservatism was the answer to saving the country. The same commentators who literally spent years convincing people of that are now berating those same people for having been convinced. That sure seems messed up to me. No wonder the party is in chaos.

Maybe all of this zaniness will sort itself out at some point. In the meantime, I need to get this Establishment column posted and put my Establishment kids to bed, pay off some Establishment bills, and catch up on some Establishment television shows. Good night, everyone.