Kaitlyn Frye

Professor Matthews

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The Future Empire of America

In April 2015, the Daily Show with Jon Stewart opens with talking about the politics of war in the United States. In the first segment of his show, Stewart compares the current American government to the Galactic Republic in Star Wars. The segment of his show is called, “Start Wars.” (The Daily Show) The point that Stewart is making is that the Senate can’t come together to find a way to make peace, but instead gives more and more power to the president when it comes to making war strategies. The Daily Show is one of many to make the connection that the American political system is mirroring that of the Galactic Republic. Episodes I-III was filmed and released before and after the terrorist attack in 2001. Many fans and critics of the *Star Wars* movies alike asked whether the was a connection between what was going on in the galaxy far, far away, and the reality of the political struggles in America.

The main conflict in 2015 that has the whole world on the edge is the War on Terror in the Middle East, against ISIS, and other radical Muslim groups. The November 2015 Paris attack has renewed the focus on the Middle East, and the terrorists found there. This event has brought to the surface the great divide in American politics, between the Republicans and Democrats. The president of the United States is currently a Democrat, and the policies that he is putting in place is upsetting the Republicans in Congress. With Congress unable to decide on the next course of action, the president is free to choose what he believes is best for the country. The politics found in the storyline from Episode II through Episode III, comments on the division found within the legislative branch as it contributes to the growing executive powers. The executive powers increase over time weakening the legislation, which is one of the main problems within the politics of the Galactic Republic in *Star Wars*.

The American Constitution was founded on the balance of power. The legislative branch, executive branch, and judiciary branch all have mechanisms in place to keep one branch from becoming too powerful. However, there has been a shift in power from the 2001 attack, strengthening the power of the executive branch while weakening the legislative branch. This shift started with the terrorist attack on the twin towers. In 2001, Congress passed a resolution that allows the president to “use all necessary and appropriate force,” when it comes to dealing with terrorists. (Zenko 16) This resolution was passed seven days after 9/11, in a way to protect America from future attacks. This resolution was called the Deference Thesis. The Deference Thesis defers the powers of the legislative and judiciary branch to the executive branch during “emergencies” involving the country and threatening the safety of its citizens. (Posner 213) As long as the emergency persists, the Deference Thesis continues to be used by the president.

The Deference Thesis played out after 9/11 where the government engaged in “immigration sweeps, detained people without charges, used coercive interrogation, and engaged in warrantless wiretapping of American citizens.” (Posner 215) These sorts of activities were put into practice by the executive branch, without the consent of Congress. Starting with George W. Bush, the idea of the president having “unlimited powers,” especially when it comes to the “domain of national security,” grew stronger and stronger under the Deference Thesis. (Fallon 354) Choices are decided quicker. Action can be taken sooner. The country can be better protected.

With the current war in Iraq, the Obama administration uses the Deference Thesis as an explanation for using drone strikes. The president could send drones into combatant and noncombatant zones if there were suspects of terrorist groups. One main argument against the presidential control of the drone strikes is that one man has the power to send drones to another country to kill people who may or may not be terrorist. Sure, he isn’t putting American soldiers at risk, but he has the power to kill most of another countries population by claiming they are terrorists. Many of the targets of the drone strikes were “civilian facilities” because that was the location of the headquarters of the terror groups. (Zenko 12) When the Deference Thesis is applied to drone strikes, it gives one man the power to kill civilians in hopes to get some leaders of a terrorist group, or let the leaders live not to kill the civilians. That is a great responsibility for one man, and it is something that shouldn’t be taken lightly.

It is important to understand why the Deference Thesis was put into place. The attack on 9/11 created a huge split in the Congress on what the next course of action should be. The differences between the two parties that makes up most of Congress halts progress on what course of action is needed. When it comes to the two parties, Republicans are the conservatives, and the Democrats are liberal. Conservatives deal with the “traditional.” (Nichols and Sheldon 590) Liberals deal with “social change.” (Nichols and Sheldon 590) An example of this division in the two parties is their view of the military. Republicans tend to be “more inclined towards military action.” (Klein and Stern 80) In the War on Terror that America is fighting, Republicans are wanting to put ground troops in Syria. Democrats, on the other hand, are “less inclined towards military action.” (Klein and Stern 80) An example of this is found in President Obama’s choice to keep troops out of Syria. At one point in the war with Iraq, President Obama boasted about “withdrawing U.S. troops,” because he was saving American lives. (Carafano) Republicans, on the other hand, see this move as a way for the ISIS to “take advantage” of the lack of United States troops. (Carafano) The division between deciding how much military should be involved delays any progress and on actually finding a way to stop the terrorist groups before they can do more damage.

The divide in Congress is affecting the nation, and people’s perception of Congress. Many people see the nation divided in two, “one red and one blue.” (Ramirez 681) This division puts Congress in a gridlock. Citizen’s view on what Congress is doing is affected by the division. Citizens want the government to “provide a stable and healthy economy, enact policies for the benefit of the nation, and provide security from external threats.” (Ramirez 682) Men and women in Congress, are the voice of the people. They are the ones who have the education in how to make a stable economy, benefit the nation, and protect the citizens. With the partisan divide, the basic needs of the people aren’t being met, and it is causing dissatisfaction among the citizens.

Another aspect that is causing the citizens to distrust Congress is the corruption in the government. Many of the citizens are believing that the members of Congress are “misleading” and “self-serving.” (Johnston 128) The perception that is forming around Congress is that the members, once they reach the Congressional building, are working for their agendas, and not representing the people who put them into power. The effects of the corruption are found in the people. When people start losing access to their basic needs, they start questioning what the government in control is doing. With the increasing lack of trust, the American people are having a hard time supporting what Congress is doing.

When comparing the politics of America with that of the Galactic Republic, it is best to start with an overview of the story. The timeline for the Star Wars Universe starts with the Galactic Republic in control of the galaxy in Episode I. Ten years later in Episode II; the Galactic Republic is slowly losing its control of the galaxy, as a result of many systems leaving the Republic for the Confederacy. War was then declared against the Confederacy, best known as the separatists. Clone troopers on the Republic side are produced to fight under the command of the Jedi. In Episode III, after three years of fighting, the Senate of the Galactic Republic declares that Chancellor Palpatine is made emperor to bring an end to the war. The declaration does succeed to end the war. The war did not end because the Republic won, but because the newly declared Emperor Palpatine was working with the separatists the whole time. Once Palpatine was declared the emperor, he was given the complete power of the Republic. Emperor Palpatine destroyed what we left of the Republic bringing all the systems under the oppression of the Empire. The Jedi were all wiped out. The Senate lost their remaining power within the government and were kept around only for show. Episodes IV-VI is set twenty years after the rise of the Empire, focusing on freeing the people from the tyranny of Emperor Palpatine.

The first thing that is necessary for this chain reaction to happen is that there needs to be an event that puts the government in a state of emergency. For the United States, it was the attack on the twin towers in 2001. For *Star Wars*, it is the discovery of the Separatist army that leads to the attack on the Jedi on the planet of Geonosis. This event demonstrated how vulnerable the Republic was. To create an army of the Republic in a timely manner, “the Senate must vote the Chancellor emergency power.” (*Star Wars Episode II*) Once the Chancellor was granted these emergency powers, “he could then approve the creation of an army.” (*Star Wars Episode II*) The clone army was then approved, and place under the order of Jedi Master Yoda. Because the Chancellor was granted this power many Jedi, including Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi, along with Senator Amidala, were able to escape from the Confederate-controlled planet of Geonosis.

In the speech that Chancellor Palpatine recited when granted the emergency powers, he stated how much he loved “democracy” and the “Republic” that he served. (Star Wars Episode II) Chancellor Palpatine in his speech also noted how he would “lay down” the power given to him once the “crisis has ended.” (Star Wars Episode II) Emperor Palpatine dies after 30 years of having the emergency power granted to him. 20 years after the end of the Clone Wars, Emperor Palpatine stilled claimed that there was an emergency against the government. He even went as far as to dissolve the remainder of the Senate completely, claiming that he was the only one who could see clearly to protect the future of the government of the galaxy. The emergency power given to Chancellor Palpatine is like the Deference Thesis in the United States. The power given to the president is to allow “less deliberation and more action” to be taken in a crisis. (*Star Wars Episode III*) Faster action is important because it makes it easier to “win this war”, and the threat to the government can be resolved and life can go back to how it was. (*Star Wars Episode III*) But with no clear end to the Deference Thesis, it can easily be manipulated to any president’s will, like it was manipulated to the will of Emperor Palpatine. The thing is that if the people who comprise the Senate in the Galactic Republic and American’s Congress would be more willing to work together efficiently, then there would be no need to grant the emergency powers to one man.

In a conversation on Naboo between Senator Amidala and Anakin Skywalker, the topic of the division of the Senate comes up. Anakin summed up the role of the Senate as a place where “politicians sit down and discuss the problem, agree on what’s in the best interest of all the people, and then do it.” (*Star Wars Episode II*) Anakin reduces the job of the Senate to being a place where people can agree on what is the best for the interest of the citizens. Senator Amidala that the “trouble is that people don’t always agree” (*Star Wars Episode II*) There are no clear cut parties in the Galactic Senate like there is here in America, but there is a division. On one side, there is the trade federation and their followers, who want the war to continue. The trade federation can prosper during the war, and their followers certainly feel the benefits. The opposition is headed by Senator Amidala and Senator Organa. Both senators want peaceful negotiations to take place, to end the war, and focus on rebuilding the systems that have been destroyed. The conflict is seen in every Senate meeting between the side willing to fight the war, and the side wanting to make peace.

Another cause of the division is that each planet in the Galactic Republic has their needs, and they might not be the same needs as other planets. For example, Tatooine needs money and resources that help with the moisture evaporator farms that are scattered all over the planet. On the other hand, Coruscant is a planet that is one big city, so any bill or money that might be spent on farms on Tatooine has no effect on the lives of citizens on Coruscant. The same goes for the 50 states that make up America. Something that might work for Alaska and other northern states will not necessarily work for the warmer states like Hawaii. The difference in needs adds to the growing in different views of the Congress.

Another key factor that plays into the disagreements is that senators aren’t only focused on doing what is best for the people. Obi-Wan Kenobi was telling Anakin that “Senators focus only on pleasing those who fund their campaign.” (*Star Wars Episode II*) In the world where money is everything, senators need all the help they can get to run for senator. The downside of having people fund their campaign is that the people who donate money are often more important than the average civilian. For if you stop pleasing the people who give you money, you lose your chance to be in office. This idea is also found in American politics. Many citizens say that they don’t believe that the people in Congress are working for them, but that they are meeting their needs to stay in office. The problem with people meeting their needs is that the selfishness of the Senators blinds them to the important matters at hand, causing emergencies to go on without any way to end the crisis, and diverting all power to one man.

An example of this found in Star Wars is when a bill was working to be passed in the Senate to fund an additional 5 million clone troopers for the Galactic Army. To fund the creation of 5 million many clones, the deregulation of the banks needed to take place, for a loan to be withdrawn to help the Republic. After further investigation by Senator Amidala and Senator Organa, the interest rate alone on the loan would bankrupt the republic. The banking clan and the senators from Camino, where the clones are made, didn’t worry about bankrupting the Republic. They were only focused on earning as much money for themselves and their supporters in the Senate. If it wasn’t for the emotional speech gave by Senator Amidala, the Republic would have gone into bankruptcy. Senator Amidala drew the focus of the Senate back to the “basic needs” of the people before they “evaporate.” (Filoni) Senator Amidala told about how her people back on Naboo are without lights to study by at night and that they barely have clean water to drink with, and they rarely bathe. These needs were taken care of by the government, but with the disagreements in the Senate and the selfishness found in some senators, the needs aren’t being met. Many of the citizens of America are starting to believe that Congress is focusing less and less on the basic needs of the people. While it isn’t as bad as found in *Star Wars*, America is heading that way.

With the problems in the government, the question becomes if there is anything that can be done to stop America from ending up in an Empire like in *Star Wars*. At the end of the defeating the bill to make more clones, the audience sees Chancellor Palpatine in his chamber reflecting on what happened when he states, “it is remarkable that one can have all the power in the galaxy, yet the words of one single senator can sway the thoughts of millions.” (Filoni) This statement goes to show how powerful a senator who is there for the people can be against the power hungry leader. There need to be senators that are fighting for the people, not worried about political ties or personal appearance. Many people on Naboo love Senator Amidala because she “listens to the people.” (Filoni) She understands that their needs are not being met, and she is willing to fight for them in the Senate. In Congress, which Senator is going to stand up for the citizens that the government is supposed to protect? *Star Wars* shows how one senator can persuade millions, all that is needed is that one senator to start to speak out.

Even if one senator were to stand up for the citizens in Congress, more would have to come along actually to fight the growing power that is being placed in the president’s hand. A small band of senators can start the change in Congress, but if the disagreements and the divisions in Congress can’t be removed, then America will slowly keep moving towards being an Empire. At the end of Episode III, Senator Amidala has a realization that the democracy that they thought they were serving “no long exists.” (*Star Wars Episode III*) She then goes on to say that the Republic might have become the “evil [they’ve] been fighting to destroy.” (*Star Wars Episode III*) The Republic was fighting to protect their people from the separatist, and allow them to have a place where their voice is heard. However, during the Clone Wars, the citizens of the Republic have lost their voice, and are no longer free, but many have had their lives destroyed and are now in fear of the Republic and not the separatists. America is fighting against terrorism. During the war, could America be turning into terrorists themselves, causing people to fear America not feel protected under its government?

Towards the end of the Clone Wars, Chancellor Palpatine was given more executive powers, after the Jedi attempted to take him out of office for being a Sith Lord. Chancellor Palpatine used this attack by the Jedi to turn the Senate against the Jedi. With the Jedi betrayed by the Republic, Chancellor Palpatine was granted authority to order the death of all Jedi, best known as Order 66. With the only opponent to the Sith Lord eliminated, Chancellor Palpatine declared that the he was the new Empire of the Galaxy. He ended the Clone Wars. He united the Separatist under him. He brought peace to the galaxy. When Palpatine became Emperor, Senator Amidala said to Senator Organa, “this is how liberty dies, with thunderous applause.” (*Star Wars Episode III*) Many people were excited to bring an end of the war, but they couldn’t see far enough ahead to understand what this would mean for the planets now under the rule of the Empire.

As audience members, it is clear to see the oppression that the Empire puts into place. The destruction of families and communities and whole planets deems the Empire as being bad for the galaxy. However, the Senators at the time at the creation of the Empire couldn’t see the pain that would soon follow. In America, the shift in power is making the president stronger and stronger allowing for the president to one day take control of the country. At the time, many might see this as a good thing, but as time drags on, the loss of the democracy will be devastating to the country. Star Wars demonstrates what is not only happening in the politics in the past couple of decades in America, but also the path America is heading if a change is not made in Congress, and power is once again balanced between the three branches of government.

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