

The Republicans' flickering flame

Georgia has been on every pollster and pundit's lips since November, and now that the great runoff is over, the ashes left from the great Republican bonfire of the vanities have inspired a great rethink. For those who only know 'the bonfire' from Tom Wolfe's novel, take a long step back to 1497 for a definition refresher.

A Dominican friar by the name of Girolama Savonarola came to Florence (at the invitation of Lorenzo de' Medici) and began to wage a war against decadence and luxuries like art work, jewelry, books and manuscripts as well as railing against vice and corruption. His followers were loyal and obedient and agreed with him that the rich were too rich and society too corrupted by their stranglehold on power. Savonarola was a forceful and convincing preacher and his followers (called the Piagnoni) routinely gathered up these so-called luxury items and burned them, giving rise to the name 'bonfires of the vanities.'

But it didn't end there. His sermons inspired gangs of thugs to roam the city in search of those who dressed immodestly and who had consumed fancy foods and become obese. These were not pleasant times for the well-heeled, but they did illustrate one important fact which is...when people see one group lording over all the others and hoarding all of society's 'goodies' there will be Hell to pay.

But what does that have to do with Herschel Walker, Raphael Warnock and Georgia you say?

Not much, on the surface, but the runoff was an event that ended one thing and began another not unlike the *big bonfire of the vanities* that occurred 525 years earlier in Florence when a thousand people searched out luxury items which were summarily burned as women danced around wearing olive branches. Stay with me, here. This is actually a great historical metaphor for our mid-term election.

At their core, both illustrated what happens when those on one rung of society's ladder have simply had enough of what they perceive to be an inequitable division of wealth or power. The Piagnoni were constantly reminded of their poverty as the rich Florentines paraded among them every day, bedecked and bejeweled to the nines. The Georgian voters rebelled against the Republicans who made a huge tactical error by reminding them of how wrong they were to have chosen a 'Savonarolian' preacher as their Senator a few years earlier. Herschel hadn't a chance because people don't like to be told they're stupid or that they have made the wrong choice...even though they are and they did. Georgia was also another clear indication of an ideological schism that had become geographical.

Most of Warnock's support came from the cities like Atlanta where the Democrats have dug in like a tick on a hound. Walker's was rural. Warnock's style was preacheresque like Barack Hussein Obama's. He waxed loftily of the Democrat vision for America while Walker delivered his message like a lateral handoff from a down-home Will Rodgers. The contrast was unmistakable. Urban Georgia would not be convinced to surrender its Democrat beliefs nor give up its 'kingmaker' status. THEY were going to insert THEIR spanner into the workings of the Senate and guarantee that the Republicans wouldn't gain a foot of ground on the legislative gridiron.

This begs an important and perhaps critical question for the Republicans if they ever want to win another election of any magnitude. Which tactic will serve them best?

Should they choose what's behind door number one - a new path which will lead them to locate and groom better candidates than Mr. Walker or the dozen or so Trump*lite* folks that lost in November AND who could better sell the Republican/conservative message or...

Should they imitate the Democrats' and opt for the down and dirty way of 'naming them, blaming them and shaming them'?

It seems to me that the Republicans must do both - and forcefully - otherwise they will continue to lose future elections. This goes for local and statewide elections as well as national ones. Can they do it? Are these old dogs capable of learning new political tricks or do they suffer from a terminal case of Marquess of Queensberry syndrome - a set of rules that may work acceptably well in the boxing ring but are totally useless in the political arena?

In order for the Rs to make the transition from salon fighters to street fighters they must become skilled in the art of hand-to-hand combat. Their older warriors must be retired, and that goes for Senators like Mitch McConnell as well as their newer ones who've exhibited Quisling traits like Mitt Romney. Next, it's time to replace Mitt Romney's niece, Ronna McDaniel, as head of the Republican National Committee. While she may have done her best, her best was not good enough. It's time to have a bare-knuckled Republican chair that does more than dance around the ring to confuse the opponent.

Then the Rs must do a no-holds barred state-by-state assessment of each party chair to determine his or her ability (and willingness) to play by the new set of Republican rules of engagement. Those who can't should resign. Granted, this may be a bridge too far for some Republicans who are more wedded to occupying positions of power and the status quo than they are to winning, but they must go. We can no longer afford to pay their salaries, especially as the donor pool starts to evaporate due to repeated election losses. It's time to light the match on the bonfire of failed campaigns and move on.

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