

Are We the Change We're Looking For?

Contributed by Byron Williams
Friday, 06 June 2008

"As it is doubtful that Republicans can do much beyond getting out of their own way"

With the Democratic primary season finally coming to an official close, I suspect myriad emotions are at work. Disappointment, elation, anger, joy, resentment and ecstasy are among the feelings experienced by Clinton and Obama supporters.

Things said in June, fueled by the open wounds of a tough, contested, historic primary season, in all likelihood will be healed by the time of the convention. Along with it will come the stark reality that stay-the-course is not a viable direction for the republic.

The problem with change is that we seldom see it coming until it is thrust upon us unannounced, rendering us inadequately prepared. If Florida and Michigan could have seen change on the horizon, they would have been bigger players in the process without the controversy and penalties imposed by the Democratic National Committee because they would have kept their original primary dates.

Likewise, California would have had one primary in June, with huge turnout, instead of two. Yesterday's primary garnered the traditional lackluster turnout that we've grown accustomed to, while wasting taxpayers' money.

As much as many within the Democratic hierarchy wanted a smooth primary process, free from acrimony, that is not how change works. Change, if it has any chance of rising like a phoenix from the ashes of the status quo, must endure the predictable challenge of resistance. But that can be a double-edged sword.

It is unfortunate that some of America's most insidious characteristics have made themselves available for public consumption during the primary season. Racism, sexism and classism have been on display during the Democratic primaries, as they are in other aspects of our society.

Change has also taken its toll on the church. The impact of the YouTube culture has called into question our vaunted notion of separation of church and state.

We've witnessed pastors blur that line for their own self-aggrandizement. Could the Revs. Jeremiah Wright and Michael Pfleger been any more damaging to Obama's campaign if they had been operatives of Karl Rove?

Moreover, have we entered a realm where the sacred space reserved for worshippers on the Sabbath must require that those who attend be searched for video and audio equipment while the church disbands its practice of selling recordings of the pastor's sermons?

Never before has a presidential candidate felt compelled to leave his church of 20 years as the chattering class seeks to understand it through the stagnant lens of news cycles and political calculations.

If Obama's insurgent campaign did not create some backlash, I doubt it could be considered change. That is not to equate Obama with change per se -- only time can reveal the final verdict. But I do not believe a competitive primary season is tantamount to snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, as some have claimed.

If this were simply based on the issues, 2008 definitely should be the Democrats' year. Republicans seem not only vacuous when it comes to new ideas, but the past eight years also leave little doubt of their ineptitude when it comes to governing.

I see 2008 as something more. The country does not simply need to change political parties in the White House; it needs a change of direction. As it is doubtful that Republicans can do much beyond getting out of their own way, it leaves the Democrats as the de facto party of change.

Change requires that its artisans must also purge themselves of certain status-quo impulses -- something Democrats seem unwilling to do. But what if many Clinton supporters' pain has not healed by November?

If a number of Clinton supporters see Obama as George McGovern redux and either stay home or vote for John McCain, who am I or anyone else to question their logic? Can we live with four more years of two wars staying the present course, or the appointment of more conservative federal judges -- at least two to the Supreme Court -- which would undoubtedly put *Roe v. Wade* in jeopardy?

This is why change rarely happens and why the status quo is always a viable option, no matter how vulnerable it may appear. That's why we may end up with more of the same.