

The Enemy is Us

Much amused by the current battle of words over who will be the next President of the United States, I glibly compared Donald Trump to an old-fashioned Catskills Borscht Belt comedian. President Obama and the Democrats who want to succeed him, have done well for the country by getting little or nothing accomplished. Heaven forbid that either the Republicans or Democrats would actually govern like they tell us they want to!

It is charming to read about the panic that political “experts” exhibit about the current crop of candidates. I remember looking into what country I could move to when the presidential election was between Richard Nixon and George McGovern in 1972. I could not imagine less desirable candidates. But that was then and this is now, and my imagination has been stretched to its limits.

The politics of my youth left me a registered Independent for a long stretch of time, until I believed that I could actually effectuate a change by registering with one of our two stumbling and somewhat incoherent parties. Independents are effectively frozen out of the process of governing as a result of the monopoly which our antiquated political system supports. Thanks to money, patronage and incumbency, the possibility of a third party candidate is dim at best. Even the popular Theodore Roosevelt found himself out in the cold when he tried to take on Republican Taft and Democrat Wilson. The Bull Moose simply did not have the muscle that he thought he had.

A favorite target of modern whiners is the press, the candidates, the party or the weather. The attention given to Donald Trump, for example, is nothing more than a reflection of the popularity which incivility holds in our national character these days. If there is anyone out there who does not understand why Donald Trump is popular, just spend a few hours a night watching television. The political spectrum and the press are feeding us exactly what we gorge ourselves on. We claim to teach our kids kindness, thoughtfulness, and open-mindedness. In reality, we behave badly much too often. We curse at the driver next to us, lie to our boss when we need a day off, and pat ourselves on the back when we have escaped a civil responsibility such as jury duty. Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, Bernie Sanders, and all the rest are us. Every one of those candidates demonstrates behavior which we all practice every day. The candidates who get the least attention, such as John Kasich, are of no interest and ultimately are ignored by the voters. Those who have dropped out of the race were doubtless those who any citizen would be most likely to hire if we were truly thinking about who we wanted to run our country. The candidates who remain are the “survivors” of the reality show.

It is a sad commentary on our current predicament that Senator Rubio’s advisors counseled him that the best way to stop Donald Trump and overtake the juggernaut was to

be more insulting and offensive than Trump is. It has not worked. Trump owns the real estate on dimwitted sarcasm and disparagement.

Not too many of us are going to read this article, fall on our faces and have an immediate epiphany. No one will change their behavior. We will continue to complain about the candidates, the press, and the “system” which we have created. We will continue to turn out for elections in record low numbers, and those most in need of political change will shun the system as useless to their interests.

Lest cynicism rule the day, let us remember that our nation has gone through troubled times in the past. Some of the Founders of this nation who worked together as a band of brothers, became bitter enemies once the new Constitution was enacted in 1789. Jefferson’s partisans accused Washington and Adams of being agents of the British, and suggested that Washington had become senile, manipulated by the evil Alexander Hamilton. We fought a civil war after decades of acrimonious partisan politics. In the post-Civil War era, we suffered presidential assassinations and the inability to elect a President for more than one term. Corruption in Washington may have been more rampant than it is today. Reckless capitalism and poor government monetary policies created The Great Depression and drove us into an economic malaise that was only solved by the shedding of blood in World War II. Somehow we have managed to survive all of that, and we will survive the current crop of unesteemed presidential candidates. Perhaps some good people will even become angry and irritated enough to engage in politics in a positive way. After all, while many Republicans are wringing their hands over the leader in their political field, both Senator John McCain and former Governor Mitt Romney were formidable and qualified candidates. It was Lyndon Johnson, one of the most experienced political candidates in history, who brought us the tragedy of the Vietnam War. Experience is not necessarily the best or only indicator of presidential success. Apparently the American people were well aware of that when they rejected Romney and McCain for an inexperienced newcomer who has had his share of bumbles.

The future is always full of potential. We can take stock of our national dilemma and seek qualified leadership, or we can grovel in the gutter with the candidates we have chosen. Perhaps we should simply abolish the primary system and let the politicians and party members who show up at conventions select professional politicians as candidates? Would anybody want to go back to that system? We can have the Electoral College decide who should be president and eliminate the direct voting system. The United States Supreme Court did that in the famous *Bush v. Gore* case, when Gore had the popular votes but not the electoral votes on his side. Interestingly, nobody ever seriously attempted to amend the political system to eliminate the Electoral College.

In *The Tempest*, by William Shakespeare, Act 2, Scene I, the character of Antonio speaks, “What is past is prologue.” Not necessarily so. The future is not ordained by the past, but the past can be a powerful abject lesson for us as to how to avoid mistakes in the future.

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