

A Call to Arms

The history of violence in the United States political history is long and sordid. Whether it was the Whiskey Rebellion, whose perpetrators were ultimately tried in Washington DC, or the Bonus March during the Great Depression, the District of Columbia has known its share of violence. In 1968, large swaths of the city were burned down as a result of racial violence. The British torched the White House, with Dolly Madison fleeing while carrying her valuables, during the War of 1812.

The uniqueness of the riots which took place in Washington DC on Wednesday, January 6, 2021, is they may be the first which were directly encouraged by a sitting President of the United States. Unfortunately, this will be remembered as the legacy of Donald Trump. An intemperate egotist, the President placed his own personal anger and frustration above what is good for the country. That is a kind of treason, regardless of the moniker applied to his behavior. It was a Call to Arms not to be confused with Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. It is true that the President offered tweets urging non-violence and a return home. But it was too little too late; the cat was out of the sack. They lacked all indicia of integrity.

The first political book I can remember reading is when my sister gave me John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*. Susan was a Kennedy-ophile, having shaken his hand as a student at New York University. She would not wash her hand for a week; really!

What caught my attention about the book, and all my subsequent political interests, is the politician who runs against the tide regardless of how it might affect his or her future political aspirations. While some may say that Lindsay Graham and other Republicans were out to save their own skin, when they endorsed the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, they nevertheless took a risk on their political future with their most diehard, bedrock supporters. In my experience as a licensed mariner, I have run against the tide, literally. It is certainly not an easy thing to do, especially if under sail. Sometimes, however, it just has to be done.

There is no doubt in my mind that some of the Republicans who spoke out in a profound and sincere manner on January 6th, were sealing themselves as much in the book of history as trying to protect their future political options. What ambitions Mike Pence or Mitt Romney aspire to are unknown, but they did the right thing when it was called for. They are Profiles in Courage.

Where do we go from here? It is customary that when a new order comes in, the old guard is driven out. Whether it was the Soviets seeking revenge against the Czarist or the Trumpists four years ago tossing out the hated liberals, revenge is part of the *lingua franca* in politics.

The number of people in political life who will be radioactive because they either supported Donald Trump, voted his way on one or more occasions, or did not oppose him vociferously enough, is a long and growing list. Not all of those people will be washed up in politics. Some of them will have a great comeback. During a difficult time politically in my life, my wife purchased for me a book by one of her heroes, Jim Carville, entitled *Buck Up, Suck Up and Come Back When You F**k Up*. I bought that book for someone who

lost a political race, but he seemed quite annoyed with me. Let us not forget that Richard Nixon lost what could have easily been a contested election in 1960, only to come back and win the Presidency, followed by a humiliating resignation. Nixon is probably one of the great comeback politicians of all time, but there have been many others.

Do not look for Donald Trump to play the comeback kid. It is highly unlikely to happen under any scenario. However, some of the other Trump associates might have a new lease on life. It is not a stretch of the imagination to see Vice President Pence or Senators Graham, Romney and many others back in the ring, given a few years licking their wounds. They will, of course, have to reinvent themselves as the “new Republicans” who can appeal to the base but reject its most extremist elements.

Each political party has remade itself as the times have changed. The greatest example, of course, is the Democrats who went from supporting the disenfranchisement of Black voters after the Civil War to being the great supporters of the African American community in the early 1960’s. The Republicans morphed from being radical reshapers of southern politics to being by the side of big business and the blueblood wealthy elite class in America. Individual politicians have also remade themselves in the image of new times, aside from the infamous Richard Nixon.

One of the hidden beauties of America is how the heterogeneity of our population make for quickly shifting alliances and pop cultural issues. What is important today, may be meaningless tomorrow. What we have not even thought about at the moment, may be the most divisive or uniting issue in a month. Aside from the unpredictability of the future, the greater the diversity in our population, the more likely it is that both familiar and unfamiliar names and faces will change the political landscape in the coming years.

Every once in a while, there will be a new profile encouraged. It will not happen a lot, but it will happen often enough to make for interesting conversation over a couple of beers. We will not go forward in unity as a result of the January 6, 2021 riots in Washington, DC, but we may have a newly chastened view of the necessity to banish violence, whether it is in support of Donald Trump or George Floyd.

Good day and good luck America!

*Clifford A. Rieders, Esquire
Rieders, Travis, Humphrey,
Waters & Dohrmann
161 West Third Street
Williamsport, PA 17701
(570) 323-8711 (telephone)
(570) 323-4192 (facsimile)*

Cliff Rieders is a Board-Certified Trial Advocate in Williamsport, is Past President of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association and a past member of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. None of the opinions expressed necessarily represent the views of these organizations.

CAR/srb