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Lines Drawn in the Constitutional Sand By Amy V. Simmons BC Editorial Board



Photo Credit: Denise Clay

The 2012 Democratic National Convention held in Charlotte, NC earlier this month is now behind us. Armed with calls to “move forward” delegates and politician alike left that place with the usual buzz that immediately follows these events. The sound bites have been thoroughly digested, action items discussed ad nauseum and all traces of a huge national convocation, and the international press in town to cover it, have vanished.

But this image caught during the event had a deep effect on me, and I am sure many others, although not a uniform one.

I was actually next to my colleague when she took this picture the night of President Obama's acceptance speech as it was pulled behind a white pickup truck with two terrorists proudly at the wheel. Some reacted with a silent gasp, hand to their mouth, speechless. Others, many press photographers, snapped the picture that they knew would catch the attention of their editors, whether or not it was eventually used. It was as an anachronistic sight as many had seen in many years, if ever, Tea Party and post 2008 backlash notwithstanding. Many simply did not notice, or if they did, just kept walking or shrugged as if to say "what are ya gonna do?". The perpetual reference to "a few bad apples" was murmured as well.

Others were enraged, and as I moved through all of the emotions described above, before I knew it, I was enraged as well, and felt compelled to join the fray in decrying this cowardly and unimaginative attempt at voter intimidation. In what they felt was a very clever way, displaying hanged effigies of some of the white officials along with that of President Obama, they could claim some sort of twisted equal opportunity hatred as protected free speech under the First Amendment of the Constitution. Protest, even hatred, disgraceful as it is, is indeed classified as free speech regarding US citizens. Sedition and an indirect threat to a sitting President and other elected officials is not. Still, the float was allowed.

The specter of voter intimidation, of the spectacle of lynching with dozens of people reacting in different ways to it left me stunned. I thought about how it was perceived in its heyday, and realized something that I should have known but was crystal clear now; that there has always been a mixed reaction, even many years ago - for some, an ambivalence and reluctance to get involved, for some, fear and immobilization, for others, the way it should be.

It was the few who led that made the difference-but the stark reality is that the opposition went underground and regrouped, adapted and resurfaced, but largely hold the same views they always have, and despite the Pollyanna statements of many who wish it was not so, they are training new generations to take their place. Those weren't two elderly antebellum holdouts driving the pickup truck which pulled the effigies of government officials with their campaign signs underneath; it was two strapping young men.

And it is not only race or political ideology that is their target of protest; it is progress itself- for women, for education, for equality, for anything that challenges their anachronistic philosophy. They have found succor in the neo-con movement, just as they did the Dixiecrat agenda years ago.

The tactics are back- physically, strategically and psychologically. They will be more effective the more people fail to accept this- even when it stares them in the face. It is even more insidious than the boldness of driving an seditious effigy of a murdered sitting president ,directly past his hotel a couple of hours before accepting a nomination for reelection, with total police protection, in front of thousands supporters. That this was just one of many such displays since 2008, not just in the South but throughout the US proves it is not going back underground any time soon. It is silence, denial, and wishful thinking, to ignore these signs any longer. A Pandora's box has been opened, and progress is under full frontal attack.

These forces are more encompassing, financed and organized than they ever were, and as well as meeting this with our own resolve, we must find that courage of the few who not so long ago led to those freedoms we now enjoy, and protect those hard fought gains, in whatever way we can.

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