

Politics as Usual?

The presidential campaign is heating up with the usual mud being slung. The Democrats will be talking about Bain capital while Republicans will pretend that Jeremiah Wright is running for president and that Barack Obama is merely a stand-in for the racist preacher.

Most of us think that the 50's was a bucolic time of peace, while the United States made the transition from the horrors of World War II to the suburbs of Hicksville. Men, and some women, returned from war and all they wanted to do was marry their sweethearts, have babies, buy a car, and live in their dream house. We tend to think of that era as politically boring. The truth is otherwise.

None other than Eugene McCarthy intended to release information suggesting that Adelaide Stevenson, the Democratic nominee president in 1952, was a homosexual. Stevenson was recently divorced and rumors about his sexual preference percolated throughout the political establishment. Eugene McCarthy, the junior senator from Wisconsin, was the right attack dog to spew the message. McCarthy had terrorized the nation into believing that communists were hiding under everyone's bed. "Commie pinko fags" were everywhere, preparing to take over America and turn it into a Soviet state.

What the Republicans were not counting on is that the Democrats had their own nuclear option, before there were that many nuclear bombs around. General George Marshall had written Eisenhower that if Eisenhower divorced Mamie, the great hero of Normandy and the European "Crusade" would be busted out of the military. Marshall was emphatic in his anger. The military establishment knew that Eisenhower had a mistress for the entirety of the war, Kay Somersby. Kay was even airbrushed out of photographs of important ceremonial events in order to hide *le affaire* from public view. Eisenhower, always politically ambitious, heeded the advice from his friend and mentor, and stayed with Mamie.

Eisenhower was so furious at the threat that he never again had good relations with President Harry Truman. Truman and Eisenhower had previously been very close. In fact, Truman made very clear to Eisenhower that if the General was to run for election, Truman would step back; but that if Eisenhower was not willing to run for election, Truman would seek another term.

The Republicans were not the only ones to play the homosexual card. During the censure hearing of Republican Senator Eugene McCarthy, nationally televised, the Senator was closely questioned concerning the allegedly improper activities of his investigations, Roy Cohn and G. David Schine. McCarthy was queried as to whether he believed that the misdeeds were accomplished by "pixies" since McCarthy denied that his staff had done anything wrong. When McCarthy asked what a "pixie" was, his

interrogator likened them to “fairies”. Everyone knew what was meant and the whispering campaign that Schine and Cohn were homosexuals was part of McCarthy’s undoing.

The dirt was not tossed, although a low-key whispering campaign took place. Today, there is no question that all of this information would have been spread to every newspaper and internet site in the country.

Eisenhower is rarely mentioned today by Republicans as one of their heroes. There is a certain oddity to the exclusion of Dwight Eisenhower, given that as President he balanced the budget, kept the country out of war for eight (8) years, fully implemented integration of the military which had been initiated by Harry Truman, aggressively enforced the civil rights laws by sending federal troops to Arkansas and refused to bail the French out of Vietnam. Perhaps most importantly, it was the former General who put both Earl Warren and William Brennan on the Supreme Court of the United States. While some Republicans claimed that Eisenhower regretted those appointments, there is absolutely no evidence to support that point of view. Warren was a former Governor of California and both a friend and confidant of the Presidents. All of the President’s personal correspondents and diary entries indicate that he fully supported both Warren and Brennan and in fact appointed many Circuit and District Court judges in keeping with his philosophy that the judiciary should be an active participant in the development of America’s future.

At one point, Eisenhower, fretting over the right wing of the Republican Party, stated that if he had to be a Taft Republican he would just as soon be a Democrat. Men and women of Eisenhower’s distinction, integrity and independence are essentially excluded from office today. It was Eisenhower who, behind the scenes, degraded Eugene McCarthy’s effectiveness in the Senate by working behind the scenes to assure a Senatorial censure of McCarthy. Eisenhower opposed political extremism in every form, particularly from the right. When legislation was introduced in Congress to eliminate the separation between church and state and to advance the cause of state’s rights, Eisenhower, in the most blunt military curse words, privately denounced the effort.

It was none other than the fiery African-American Congressman from New York, Adam Clayton Powell, who claimed that Dwight D. Eisenhower did more for the “negroes” of the United States than any President since Abraham Lincoln. It is easy to make the case that Eisenhower was what today is described as a “liberal.” Eisenhower was not liberal in his personal philosophy but rather had been made wise by his life’s experiences as America’s military leader during World War II. Eisenhower rubbed elbows with the likes of Stalin, Churchill, De Gaulle and Roosevelt. Eisenhower regarded none of these men as totally unreasonable, but rather as advancing their own national interests. Eisenhower became friends with some of the Soviet military generals, who were his opposite number, and did much to prevent a nuclear World War III over Berlin, Formosa, Indochina, and a number of other places where the United

States military advocated the use of the Atomic Bomb. It is not an overstatement to say that Eisenhower probably kept the world from a major nuclear exchange in the 1950's.

The lesson for today is an American's need to step back from the war of words and from the ideological labels pinned on the candidates. We should support the candidate who is most middle of the road, reasonable, and willing to denounce the excesses of his own party. We should demand that politicians stop talking about one issue agendas and return to a basic discussion of America's fundamental problems. The election may be more boring, but it will be a lot more meaningful.

While Dwight D. Eisenhower may have not been the most charismatic President, he may have been one of the most level headed. It is important that we reach back into our history to study those who have served our nation successfully in order to select future leaders who will advance the interests of America without advancing exclusively their own personal agenda.

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