Two Good Men, One Good Campaign

Aaron J Shuler

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/aaron_shuler/14/
John McCain lost the election for president of the United States on November 4th by a significant margin. However, before the returns came in sealing his electoral fate, he had already lost something more important than an election.

Mr. McCain was never entirely comfortable in the Republican Party. He often contradicted his own leadership, particularly in the last eight years during the Bush Administration.

He spoke out against torture, he wanted to close Guantánamo Bay, he was in favor of stem cell research and he believed that man caused global warming, all positions that set him apart from the Bush White House.

Americans have had enough of George W. Bush. His approval rating vacillates around 25%. This was the year, it seemed, that the Americans would finally choose Mr. McCain’s moderate, pragmatic conservatism over Mr. Bush’s hard line, uncompromising political ideology.

Instead of maintaining the image of the man that his supporters revered and his opponents respected, however, John McCain began to compromise himself. The theory was that Mr. McCain was not conservative enough and needed to appeal to the religious and fiscal base of the Republican Party.

As a result, Mr. McCain reversed many of his long-held positions, including his pro-choice stance on abortion that he had taken in 1999, as well as removing the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy.

Perhaps even more disheartening, Mr. McCain’s campaign began to engage in the very same underhanded and disreputable attacks based in false innuendo and scurrilous rumor against Mr. Obama that Mr. McCain had condemned Mr. Bush for using against him in the Republican primary race of 2000.

The GOP was still not satisfied, and Mr. Obama was polling well with his message of change. Mr. McCain then made his most drastic, cynical move to satiate the Republican base. He chose Sarah Palin, a first-term forty-four-year-old governor of Alaska.

With his selection of a vice presidential running mate that had been in office for less than two years, had only first traveled abroad a year earlier and cited her proximity to Russia as her foreign policy credentials, John McCain had undercut his campaign’s chief argument against a young and relatively untested Mr. Obama: that experience mattered.

Mr. McCain’s gamble initially appeared to pay off after a tsunami of publicity and energy within the GOP erupted. However, soon after Ms. Palin’s teleprompter was taken away from her, the woman that a seventy-two year-old cancer-surviving Mr. McCain had
known for one hour before choosing her as his running mate and potential president should anything unfortunate befall him, began to reveal her true nature.

Ms. Palin’s speeches appealed to the most partisan and intolerant strain of the Republican Party: the anti-intellectual, anti-elite education, anti-cosmopolitan crowd that divided the United States into the “real America” of small, rural towns and the “other America” of the big cities.

Ms. Palin had burst onto the scene ingratiating herself with “the simple folk” that she claimed to be a part of with a joke at the Republican National Convention about how the only difference between a pit bull and a hockey mom was lipstick. The truth of the matter, however, is that Sarah Palin is George W. Bush in lipstick.

Along with the general public eventually souring on Ms. Palin and her ignorance, the economy took a precipitous drop, favoring Barack Obama. This was in part due to public confidence being higher in Democrats to fix the economy after eight years of a Republican-controlled White House.

The 2004 election was almost exclusively determined on national security grounds. Americans reelected George W. Bush because they believed that he would protect them better than John Kerry.

The 2008 election was also primarily about one issue. Since Americans appear to believe that Barack Obama will do a better job than John McCain in rehabilitating the economy, Mr. Obama gained a noticeable advantage.

Things might have been different if the economy had not taken a nosedive and Mr. McCain had not succumb to a political expediency that backfired. If this election had been about national security, Mr. McCain, the real one, would have undoubtedly fared better.

However, it is no certainty that Mr. McCain would have prevailed. Mr. Obama displayed his foreign policy acumen by opposing the Iraq War from the beginning when it was highly unpopular to do so.

He is also—notwithstanding the ubiquitous cliché—a monumental change. Mr. Obama is a stark rebuttal to all of the country’s lies, hypocrisy and false promises from its dark, racist past, and personifies the idea that the United States is the melting pot of the world. His election finally brings The Dream, Martin Luther King’s, and the American Dream in general, to fruition: No matter your race, your class, or your connections, if you are intelligent, capable and you work hard, you can reach the top in the United States.

We do not know for sure if this version of John McCain lost the election or if Barack Obama won it.
What we do know is that the economy was foremost in the minds of Americans and they finally rejected Bush/Palin anti-intellectualism, likely sounding the death knell for the Republican Party as it stood before this election.

It is also hopefully the end of the GOP-hijacked John McCain who can now make way for the real one to finish his career as the honorable man that he is. His gracious concession speech appeared to signal as much.

This election had two great men that both would have made good presidents. Unfortunately, Americans only saw one of them, but that one that they chose changed the political, cultural and historical landscape of the United States, as well as the world.