



THE VIEW

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WAITING FOR THE MAIN EVENT

BY

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Mississippi's moment in the political sun is almost gone and it's anybody's guess when it will come again. The preliminary phase of the 2008 presidential campaign is beginning to wear thin.

For twelve months now we have been watching two separate family quarrels. Regardless of which of the two sides one observes, there is basic agreement on the issues. For example, both democratic candidates agree on the fact that they will get the United States out of the protracted conflict in Iraq. Thus, the point of debate is who will accomplish this exit the fastest. On the Republican side the presumptive nominee John McCain has stated that we may be engaged at some level in Iraq for 100 years. On this one point alone the debate should be lively.

Now everyone appears to be growing impatient for the main event. What does the preview look like? To once again borrow a football metaphor, Republicans and Democrats are itching to do battle with someone wearing another colored jersey. The GOP has apparently decided on John McCain as the party's standard bearer. The Democrats have yet to come to a conclusion, and therefore continue to command the lion's share of media coverage in their ongoing primary fight. On the positive side the Democrats continue to build momentum, and the campaign fundraising machines are humming at maximum capacity. On the negative side the longer the Democrats spar with one another the greater their risk of self destruction. This may perhaps be why the Republicans are willing to sacrifice some air time in order for the Democrats to continue to bloody one another's nose.

What awaits is a major debate between two competing philosophies of governance. In some elections little separates the positions of the two parties. That will decidedly not be the case during this election year. The Democrats idea of change is ironically rooted in the Roosevelt New Deal and the LBJ "Great Society" programs all of which served to under gird the philosophy that government in the richest country the world has known can accomplish things for people that they would not be able to do for themselves. Can the Democrats convince the voting public that they can dress these dowdy old ideas in clothes that truly appear to be new? Will universal health care of the twenty-first century be the social security of the mid-twentieth century?

The Republicans find themselves in a unique dilemma. The Republican "pure in heart" believe their finest hour occurred when Ronald Reagan won the Presidency in 1980 thus harvesting the fruits of the seeds planted by their ideological pioneer Barry Goldwater in his brave but futile Presidential race in 1964. It was in that race that Goldwater set out to prove that you could run a campaign with a set of bedrock ideological principles at the center. In this case the establishment of a modern conservative philosophy was Goldwater's reason to run. Since then anyone who has departed from the core of this brand of conservatism has found rough sledding with the majority of rank and file Republicans. Enter John McCain and his list of documented actions that left many at the heart of the now aging Republican conservative movement aghast at his success. Amnesty for illegal aliens, opposition to the President's position on torture and water boarding, and perhaps most egregious of all opposition to the Bush tax cuts are used as proof to the Republicans that McCain isn't "one of us". It appears that the GOP has McCain whether the majority of party insiders like it or not. Conservative Republican commentator Patrick Buchanan has labeled the current situation between McCain and the Republicans a "loveless marriage". There perhaps could not be a better metaphor for the current state of affairs.

The differences of opinion between the Democrats and Republicans are clear, deep, and glaring. The old issues of abortion, tax cuts for the wealthy, and Iraq are still around. Add to them dramatic differences on the issues of universal health care, immigration, and two or more appointees to the Supreme Court in the immediate future and the stage is set for a debate of the philosophies at the cores of the respective parties. Those debates will sound new but they are rooted in the political philosophies established by the giants of the Republican and Democratic parties over the last century. If you are handicapping the possibilities you will need to ask yourself if the GOP will be able to rally behind a John McCain who appears insistent upon doing things the moderate way.

There are many in that camp who express the notion that it is better to maintain there rewarding and hard won ideological purity than simply to win another election. Could it be potential Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton instead of McCain who galvanizes Republican support? Will Barack Obama get the nomination and restore liberalism to legitimacy as a governing philosophy?

This is the debate that many of us await and, frankly, I can't wait to get the family feud out of the way and get going with the main event.

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