
Shame On Those Who Recycle Race Fears

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The Very Reverend Sam Candler:
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip
Atlanta, Georgia

This past week during a campaign ad, the distinguished Congressman John Lewis is reported to have said, "On November 7, we face the most dangerous situation we ever have. If you think fighting off dogs and water hoses was bad, imagine if we sit idly by and let the right wing republicans take control of the Fulton County Commission." Our distinguished mayor Shirley Franklin echoed, "The efforts of Martin and Coretta King, Hosea Williams, Maynard Jackson and many others will be lost." Our distinguished Ambassador Andrew Young continued, "Unless you want them to turn back the clock on equal rights and human rights and economic opportunity for all of us, vote for John Eaves as Fulton County Chairman"

I am deeply ashamed of some fine Atlanta leaders today. Growing up in and around Atlanta, I have long admired the work of Mayor Shirley Franklin, Ambassador Andrew Young, and Congressman John Lewis; each of them knows that I have supported them. Moreover, I have given my life and ministry to the hard work of eliminating racism and to developing healthy race relations in the city of Atlanta. As a Christian minister, I serve God first, and I am beholden to neither democrats nor republicans. I have prayed and spoken to both republican and democrat gatherings. I truly believe in a beloved community which contains both liberals and conservatives, and which contains folks of every color imaginable.

But I am deeply ashamed of that particular advertisement. I know that the tumble of political campaigning can be rough; but for some reason, Franklin, Young, and Lewis lent their voices to an advertisement that clearly crossed the line of both factual and moral health. Essentially, they claimed that if their candidate did not win, then we would return to the days of water hoses and dogs.

It is beside the point that the ad conveniently ignored the fact that democrats were in charge during the water hosing sixties. Most political ads make such choices. The horror of this ad is that race baiting works. Our sad society continues to recycle old race fears during the last days of desperate politics. A race baiting ad appears to have "worked" in Tennessee, and now it appears to have "worked" in Atlanta. Actually, given the large measure of Eaves' victory, I wonder if the ad was even necessary. John Eaves is certainly a good man, and he was a strong candidate already.

Shirley Franklin, Andrew Young, and John Lewis have weathered many storms, and they have established fine records of true public service. I do not deny their histories and identities; nor do I deny the history of racism in Atlanta. I am just ashamed of their voices in this ad. They will certainly recover from any offense, and I will probably support them again. As for John Eaves, he has yet to establish a public record. Instead, he has begun his elected career in a moral ditch along alongside the road to civil progress in Atlanta and Fulton County. I am ashamed today; I hope for a more graceful tomorrow.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Atlanta, Georgia

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