

CHANGING THE FACE OF POLITICS

What do politics look like to you? Can you see beneath its makeup and appreciate it as a major force driving our human interactions – for better or worse? Does it determine how you value individuals? Does the face of politics arouse your passion to either embrace it or reject it?

A few days ago, I saw an old friend whom I had not seen for several years. We were quite happy to see each other and smiled as we reminisced. My friend rejoiced when I told her I had entered the North Carolina Senate race. She immediately said I would make a great Senator. As we continued the conversation, she learned that I am a registered Republican. She literally stepped back and her countenance fell. She said, “Bobbie, I would really like to support you – but that “R” is a problem.” That was the end of the conversation.

Fortunately, some of my other acquaintances did not completely recoil but confided that I am the only “Republican” they would ever support. I know some people I would not support for political office regardless of their political affiliation. I also know politicians who have different political affiliation than mine - whom I would support. The difference for me is my understanding of their humanity and stance on critical issues impacting our shared liberties.

From 1971 until 1994, I was a registered Democrat. The Democrat Party generally supported bigger government intervention and the liberal use of taxes to promote social agendas. I and my family were victims of Jim Crow laws and yearned for liberation. I was admitted to N.C. State University to study Engineering because someone saw potential in me although the academic rigor in the rural parts of eastern North Carolina was dismal. From 1971 until 1994, I observed the “invisible hand” of free enterprise at work. I experienced the seemingly arbitrary regulations imposed upon my profession – Engineering. I witnessed how corporations were just as likely to yield to governmental intercession as an unemployed single mom. I left my job in the private sector and joined the public sector to get an inside look at the workings of government and to hopefully fix the broken aspects.

My “ah-ha” moment came in 1994 - the year I earned an MBA. We live in a great country built upon ideals that encourage respect of the inherent equality of humans, a free market system, a democratic government and individual responsibility. For me, those ideals aligned better with the Republican Party. At the beginning of the Reagan presidency, I rode a local bus with a friend named Phil. He constantly talked about Republican values and I wondered how he could – a Black man – be aligned with the Republican Party. I could not see beyond the Party’s make-up.

I have learned that the heaviest make-up is worn by those on the extreme right and on the extreme left. The make-up has so altered the face of politics that it is more difficult to see the real purpose of our political systems and appreciate the ideals upon which this nation was founded. I refuse to yield to suggestions by others to change my party affiliation because of the make-up that is being used. Both major parties spend too much time looking in the mirror – at the opposing party. My preference is to stay true to the ideas I believe in and do my best to help wash away or see beneath the make-up. That’s how we can “change the face of politics.”

- Bobbie Shields, Candidate for NC Senate – District 40