

The Alabama Elections: Roy Moore and the “Rage of Decency”

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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It all seemed to be the rage of decency. Everywhere, moral indignation was on the rise. Since the election of Donald Trump to the White House, advocates, activists and arm chair commentators have been subjecting the Trump administration to every analysis except the one that counts: how did actually win.

The Alabama Senate election, featuring the reddest of red states, was another chance to discombobulate and baffle. Pundits dug into the electoral dug and found what bright trinkets they wanted to see.

There was much to wade in, and the result was a Democratic victory, with former lawyer Doug Jones winning with 49.9 percent of the vote to former judge Roy Moore’s 48.4 percent. As with so many features of this campaign, Moore preferred to keep the show going and refuse to concede. Votes for write-ins and military ballots might push him across the line.

The Moore slate is certainly a heavily weighted one. His comments and actions over the years have suggested a carnival of flesh, an enthusiastic sexual predator busy while in office. A new term in US political discourse has been etched as a result: a case of credible allegation rather than provable conduct. His views about US greatness are rooted in a vision of hot plantations, plentiful cotton and slavery.

In an economic sense this unpopular, and to some, monstrous view, has some merit not in terms of ethical or humanitarian value but in terms of economic reality. The institution of slavery remains a source of confusion in the US political landscape, unsettling to those familiar with why it lasted for so long. But Moore’s point is not historical and economic, but lodged in the deep recesses of family relations and communities.

His sense of caricatured history assumed proportions that seemed to emulate Trump. He took to riding a horse to the vote as a matter of electoral appeal, a point less of charming equine antiquity than his own variant of muscular values.

If there was one discernible current in this closest of contests, values, for all their vagueness, was strongest. Beth Clayton was one of many who spoke of “Alabama values” that had supposedly won through. It has been an election, in the words of Victor Jones, about “dignity and respect”. It was a campaign “about the rule of law”, “common courtesy and decency.”

A range of public figures and personalities rushed to the decency band wagon. “Common sense and decency have prevailed in Alabama,” came the observation from [Robert Reich](#),

who also claimed that it showed a loathing for sexual abuse, racism and for those “who would ride roughshod over our democratic institutions.” [Mark Ruffalo](#) stepped out of his thespian role to politicise: “Love and decency prevails.” To vote for Moore would have been a repudiation of those values. To have voted for the GOP candidate would have been a suggestion of deficiency and intellectual vacuity. And yet, he got close.

Any chat of such values invariably draws dangers and contradictions. A society of values, for instance, that tolerated slavery, then grim segregation, and pernicious inequality. Moore, in that sense, was hardly spectacular in holding views that seem, only on the surface, to be extracted from cold storage. The world of God and settled hierarchies has also been the world of iniquitous conduct.

The GOP, having put Moore in the ring, seemed to be making an announcement of Trump-like inspiration. It was a channelling of rage, grist to the mill of the deplorables, a blast suggesting more to come. Moore was also the candidate preferred by Steve Bannon, who has made it his project to turn the GOP inside out. This is something he has, to a certain extent, achieved.

As the votes started tallying, a narrow victory for the Democrats seemed evident. But another view started forming: GOP members disturbed by the influence of Bannon and even Trump [chortled and condemned](#). The loss of Moore was less a loss for their man, but someone else’s. The party could abandon Moore while retaining its form and credibility. The GOP would thereby be spared, its officials washing their hands in anticipation for the 2020 contest.

The better view of this is that neither party can really celebrate the Alabama result. The Democrats continue to walk around in a daze of denial, refusing to acknowledge that Trump is a symptom so profound it will require earth shaking, even shattering reforms. Democratic strategists on the ever remote distant CNN were attempting with blinding conviction to suggest that Trump was not even relevant, that the cold grip Hillary Clinton still exerts on her party is worthy and credible.

The GOP, for their part, are waging a [war within](#). For Bannon, its members are dispensable, a vessel to be altered to shape history. What matters is generating a base of candidates patterned on a populism that will sell, against a media stands in as the opposition. The corporatists and marketeers are positively terrified at the ongoing influence the man of Breitbart news still exerts.

What both parties need is an outflanking altogether, something that Trump has done, to a degree, albeit in a manner so roguish and contrarian it beggars political wisdom. A third party, one genuinely progressive, is not on the cards. What lies in place of such a machinery are platitudes, and the notion that decency is somehow on the march. What is forgotten, as was the case in the presidential election of 2016, is the obvious point that the candidate who lost deserved to do so.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

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