

Gotta Love the Tea Party Crowd

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 8, 2010 NCR Today

One of the few nice things about losing power around noon on Saturday during the blizzard, and not getting it back until 1 a.m. the next morning, was that I did not have to decide whether or not to watch the Tea Party Convention on C-Span. I was especially torn about watching Sarah Palin's address to the assembled Tea Partiers. The reason for this ambivalence is essentially hereditary: My father is a bit of an ambulance chaser. He likes to see what is going on and can't seem to tear his eyes away from a car wreck. If you are stuck in traffic because of rubber-necking as people watch the remains of an accident on the other side of the road, one of those rubber-neckers is my dad. Watching Palin address the Tea Party crowd promised to have all the high drama and the bloody mess of a car crash.

Friday night, as the snow began to fall, I watched the opening night of the convention. Someone named Joseph Farah addressed the crowd ? harangued might be a better word choice ? on the subject of President Barack Obama's birth certificate. If ever there was a clear example of the kind of denial that is so fundamentally, and crazily, flawed that you must conclude its roots are not political but psychological, the birther issue is it. Even other rightwing zealots like Andrew Breitbart were seen gnashing their teeth in the back of the room.

It is easy to ignore the birthers, but we shouldn't, not least because of the prominence of those who associate with such silliness. Including people like Breitbart, whose criticism of the focus on the birth certificate as this: ?It's self-indulgent, it's narcissistic, it's a losing issue.? Not that it is factually wrong. Not that denying Obama's birth is like denying the sun rises in the East. But, the so-called ?issue? is a loser.

I am not a fan of guilt by association, but those conservatives who wish to be taken seriously need to explicitly disassociate themselves from such nonsense. There is a difference between a difference of opinion and being nuts. If you hang out with nuts and do not call them out on their nuttiness, people can be forgiven for thinking you concur. America needs a thoughtful and articulate conservative political voice, but no such voice emerged from the proceedings in Nashville.

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