

Subject: [NLG-Southern] Historic First Meets Racist History: Republicans Campaign on Hatred in Georgia

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Historic First Meets Racist History: Republicans Campaign on Hatred in Georgia

Jul 18, 2018, 4:38pm Sara Patenaude & Azadeh Shahshahani

At a time when Georgia voters have welcomed the first Black woman candidate for governor of any state, the Republican gubernatorial candidates seem to be in a competition to “out-racist” each other.

In a historic first, former Georgia House Minority Leader Stacey Abrams secured the Democratic Party’s nomination for governor this summer, becoming the first Black woman candidate for governor of any state. Meanwhile, the Republican candidates vying for their party’s nomination appear to be more focused on who is the most racist, rather than who can best govern the state. These politicians, campaigning on hate, would do well to heed lessons from the 1906 election and subsequent riots, which demonstrated how rhetoric could quickly turn deadly. History has shown us that inciting hate leads to violence, and these candidates owe it to the American people to be better than their predecessors.

The campaigns of the two candidates in the July 24 runoff for the Republican nomination, Casey Cagle and Brian Kemp, are replete with openly racist attacks and blatantly xenophobic rhetoric, particularly targeted at Latinx immigrants. Their rhetoric is doubling down on the strategies deployed in the run-up to the primary, when candidates seemed to be in a competition to “out-racist” each other. First, Kemp presented a campaign ad promising to round up immigrants in his personal pickup truck. Then another candidate, Michael Williams, used the threat of vigilante

kidnapping by driving a “deportation bus” through immigrant-friendly areas throughout the state presumably to rouse his base. Casey Cagle, the state’s lieutenant governor and leading GOP candidate, has taken it even further.

As lieutenant governor, Cagle has used a state immigration board to challenge the City of Decatur for formalizing a police policy limiting unconstitutional collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). To date, seven localities in Georgia have implemented policies limiting their collaboration with ICE in order to protect the constitutional rights of their residents and serve as welcoming spaces for community members, even as the state legislature has prohibited “sanctuary” cities. Cagle and other GOP candidates have attacked these localities relentlessly, but Cagle’s baseless complaint against Decatur joins in the current national trend of purposely misleading the public to use unsubstantiated safety concerns about undocumented migrants for political gain.

Still, even Casey Cagle seems to acknowledge the outrageous nature of these primaries, saying in a recently released, secret recording: “This primary felt like it was who had the biggest gun, who had the biggest truck, and who could be the craziest.”

Georgia has been here before. In 1906, two men were vying for the governor’s mansion in the Democratic primary. At that time, the conservative Democratic Party had a firm hold over the state; winning effectively assured victory in the general election. Both candidates were publishers of major Atlanta newspapers—Hoke Smith of the *Atlanta Journal* and Clark Howell of the *Atlanta Constitution*—and both knew their audiences well. The city was home to a growing Black population, where Black-owned businesses were thriving and a small number of African American men were exercising their right to vote. White Georgians were becoming increasingly anxious with what they saw as racial intermingling—though segregation was still strict, with separate drinking fountains, waiting rooms, and elevators, Black areas abutted white, especially in the seedy dives of the central business district. White politicians, in particular, knew that increased Black electoral power would eventually lead to calls for rights in other arenas as well, a situation they desperately wished to avoid.

In patterns reminiscent of today, both Smith and Howell “raced to the right” in their bids for the party nomination. Howell questioned Smith’s white supremacist credentials, accusing Smith of secretly cooperating with Black political leaders. For his part, Smith insisted that Howell was an establishment candidate and not fully committed to white supremacy. Both men blamed Black people for the problems facing the state, reacting to racist white sentiment that Black people no longer knew their place in the racial order of the South. In their speeches and their newspapers, Smith and Howell used false, unsubstantiated, and sensationalized accusations of impropriety and sexual assault by Black men against white women to stoke fear in white communities that they—and their women—were at imminent risk of attack.

Racist rhetoric has no place in the Georgia of 2018. Politicians who rely on it to rile up their base should be exposed, ashamed, and held accountable.

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PAST COMMON CAUSE MISSISSIPPI PRESIDENT DIES

Past Common Cause Mississippi President Ken Wooten died Monday, July 16, at his home outside of Oxford. Wooten was 85.

Dr. Wooten was also the former Registrar and Dean of Admissions for the University of Mississippi, and was recognized in 2006 by the UM Black Student Union for his long-time efforts to bring top African American students to the university. In addition to Common Cause Mississippi, Dr. Wooten was president of six other national or local civic organizations, and served on the boards of three more.

Dr. Wooten was active in Common Cause on issues of open government, ethics in government, and government accountability – issues still important to the state chapter. He continued to financially support Common Cause Mississippi long after his term as president.

He will be missed.

As newspapers explicitly endorsed violence and lynching in retaliation for supposed violations, Smith called for a new Ku Klux Klan to rise up and take back control.

Hoke Smith won the primary and sailed easily through the general election, but the racist rhetoric and white supremacist theories promoted by these men remained embedded in the state's collective psyche. Local newspapers (including the *Atlanta Journal* and *Atlanta Constitution*) continued to run stories of alleged sexual attacks against white women alongside stories celebrating the lynchings of Black men by vigilante mobs, using fetishized and lurid details meant to scare and inflame the white population of the city.

On September 22, 1906, headlines shouted about an “epidemic of rape,” with unsubstantiated claims of sexual assault by Black men against four white women. In response, a mob of 10,000 white men and women formed in downtown Atlanta. The mob terrorized the streets of the central business district, running down Black men and women, pulling Black people off streetcars, attacking Black-owned businesses along Decatur and Pryor streets and dragging their occupants into the road. The mob attacked Black people indiscriminately, bludgeoning them with iron bars and wagon wheel spokes, hacking them with knives and hatchets, and shooting them with pistols and rifles. Dozens of Black people were killed and hundreds more injured. The crowd then mauled and mutilated the bodies in the quest for “souvenirs.”

Just as the rhetoric used by Smith and Howell in their campaigns set the stage for the violence of the Atlanta Race Riot, the racism espoused today by politicians in the highest seats of government has made possible the open prejudice and xenophobia being spewed by Cagle and Kemp. The Republican Party has not only refused to disavow such racism, but has repeatedly embraced candidates seemingly because of such views, and downplayed any allegations of hate-based actions. On Wednesday, President Trump announced his “full and total endorsement” of Kemp.

We must remember that words have consequences. Although the public response to such rhetoric hasn't yet reached the same levels of violence as it did in the early 20th century, recent investigations into hate-based attacks and crimes show a torrent of incidents in the past two years. In the wake of a horrific policy separating migrant children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border, racists have been emboldened by the Trump administration to put their previously hidden feelings into action, as we've seen with the increasingly public attacks against immigrants (and which we've seen time and again against people of color and Muslim Americans).

We need to remember and recall that ugly history often, especially as it informs the shameful and racist rhetoric of current GOP candidates. The rhetoric meant to scapegoat and “other” a group of people for political aims inevitably leads to violence and tragic consequences, as we also saw in Charlottesville. It needs to stop.