



Commentary

South Dakota Spurs a Toast to Purple Power

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WeNews commentator

People in South Dakota are taking the state's abortion ban into their own hands in November. Kimberly Gadette says this exercise of grassroots democracy is part of a resurgence of "purple" people power that can be assisted by the Internet.

Editor's Note: The following is a commentary. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily the views of Women's eNews.

(WOMENSENEWS)--Maybe I'm punch drunk.

At the very least, I'm seeing double over what happened in South Dakota last week.

Instead of the requisite 16,000 signatures, 38,416 people put their names on a petition that called for the repeal of Abortion Bill HB1215 that was to go into effect on July 1.

The state legislature took it upon itself to pass the bill without so much as a "Gee, people of Sout Dakota, what do you think?" Now voices that had previously been muted will be heard.



Kimberly Gadette

The roaring "no" filed on May 30 puts the abortion ban in limbo until citizens of the state go to the polls in November.

This protest of the people, by the people, is grassroots democracy at its finest.

One by one, over nine weeks 38,416 South Dakotans from 138 cities in 66 counties raised one voice against one intemperate measure that would outlaw all abortions, even in cases of rape or incest, unless the mother's life was at stake. The bill would punish doctors with a \$5,000 fine and a minimum of five years of prison.

A giddy congratulations to all the Joan and John Hancocks, as well as the 1,200 volunteers who made this referendum happen in one of the most conservative, blood-red states in the country.

Getting That 1973 Feeling

With all this individual empowerment stirring, I'm getting that old 1973 Roe v. Wade feeling all over again.

1973: when the National Organization for Women (NOW) Task Force adopted a resolution that "a woman's right to her own person includes the right to define and express her own sexuality and to choose her own lifestyle."

1973: when the U.S. Government Printing Office agreed to accept "Ms." as an optional title for women in government publications.

1973: when NOW organized protest campaigns against 39 CBS stations that refused to run an episode of "Maude" in which the 47-year-old lead character was pregnant and decided to terminate. Ultimately the show aired.

Like last year's bumper crop of wine grapes, the parallels between 1973 and 2006 continue to multiply.

The Watergate hotel is once again the site for governmental misdeeds. "Hookergate" leaves allegations swirling around ex-congressman Randy "Duke" Cunningham and others for partaking in all-night poker games, prostitutes, limousines and free hotel suites.

John Dean is once again testifying against an acting president of the United States, called before the Senate Judiciary Committee reviewing Senator Russ Feingold's resolution to censure President Bush on his warrantless wiretapping program.

Neil Young is once again writing songs of protest.

1970: "Soldiers are gunning us down . . . What if you knew her and found her dead on the ground?"

2006: "And when the dawn breaks I see my fellow man; and on the flat-screen we kill and we're killed again."

Breaking Out the Polyester

Maybe it's time to break out a 1970s thigh-high, polyester print dress and go cruising around Washington in a neon yellow AMC Gremlin, its AM radio's single speaker blasting out Don McLean's anti-war anthem, "American Pie."

More important, maybe it's time to commit to uniting America once again. Hey, red states and blue states, what do you say we get together for a fine, wine shade of purple?

Before the November elections of 2000, there was none of this "red state, blue state" color coding.

With the advent of color television in the 1960s, various broadcast outlets began displaying colored maps of the country on election night to show the contrasting voting blocs of the two parties. But the colors represented no political pigment in particular.

After election night of 2000, red became the color for Republicans, blue for Democrats.

After a national brawl over balloting procedures and how to count hanging chads, the country officially broke up, forming two clusters of rampant generalities, shouting each other down with a newfound hate.

Red is supposedly agrarian, rural, Christian and Southern; blue is liberal, elitist, godless and wealthy. Yet maybe those stereotypes are not only insulting, but dead wrong. The proof? The deep red of South Dakota has just spouted a brand new vein of blue.

The anti-war lyric from "Get Together" is looping in my head. "C'mon people now, Smile on your brother, Ev'rybody get together, try to love one another right now." The band's name? The Youngbloods . . . how appropriate.

If reproductive rights can cause such a literal stir, what else might get churned up? A co-mixture of mutual objectives such as clean air, affordable fuel alternatives, national health care? With those 38,416 signatures, South Dakota has mixed up the conceptual palette, fermenting your red and my blue into a revolutionary vat of purple.

Purple is Color of Possibility

We've been purple with rage at America's current state of woe; turn on talk radio any time of day and hear one side excoriating the other.

Let's instead become purple with passion, defying the red-blue political Novocain that's reduced us down to an impotent simmer of mummified indignation. While we're still considered a democracy--before that label erodes--let's rethink the definition: "a common people, considered as the primary source of political power." For heaven's sake, for our country's sake, let's move!

Let us once again be inspired by strong women who have been in the political forefront, actively working for change. There are plenty to inspire us, from Gloria Steinem to Cindy Sheehan to Arianna Huffington to Christine Todd Whitman to Madeleine Albright.

In 1973, we only had the television and the media. But now we have the Internet, an electronic wizard at our fingertips that gives us more individual power than ever imagined.

Without the Internet, Howard Dean would never have become a viable candidate in 2004. Looking outside of America, campaigns on the Web helped oust Silvio Berlusconi's anti-reproductive rights government in Italy and halted the approach of a female-subjugating version of Islamic law in family courts in Ontario, Canada.

More than just mumbling our complaints to our friends or yelling back at the television screen, through the Internet, as well as more conventional means, we can express opinions, circulate ideas, sign petitions, ultimately challenging a seemingly stubborn status quo.

Yes . . . I am definitely punch drunk. In the flush of hope that democracy can once again be made to work.

I'm raising this overflowing glass of a new, hearty purple to the American public. Bottom's up. Here's to us.

Kimberly Gadette is a writer based in Portland, Ore. While working on her second novel she's currently juggling seven columns in publications from the West Coast to the East, as well as internationally.

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