



Law and Order: Three Words That Can Help Republicans Win in November—and 2016

By Robert W. Patterson
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When urban riots and campus unrest erupted across the nation in the mid-1960s, the GOP made a powerful case for “law and order.” That no-nonsense message catapulted Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, and dozens of other Republicans into high public office.

Riding a wave of public revulsion against disorder, Reagan was elected governor of California in 1966, and in the more tumultuous year of 1968, Nixon won the White House. As Pat Buchanan chronicles in *The Greatest Comeback: How Richard Nixon Rose from Defeat to Create the New Majority*, the GOP picked up 47 seats in the House and 3 in the Senate in the 1966 midterms; in 1968, the party added another 5 seats in the House and 5 in the Senate.

Yes, the law-and-order theme was indispensable to Republican fortunes. In 1964, Republican Barry Goldwater took just 6 states, whereas four years later, Nixon won 32 states. He was the first Republican politician to win the presidency since 1928; the only other Republican victor was Eisenhower, who was not a politician but a general.

Now, a half-century later, has the GOP abandoned its own victory formula? Looking at the reactions of prominent Republicans to the violence and civil unrest that broke out this week in a predominately black suburb of St. Louis, it appears so. Instead of championing law and order, these party figures have adopted the liberal voice of Democrats and their allies in the media who deliver aid and comfort to lawbreakers.

Witness Rand Paul, a leading 2016 presidential hopeful. Writing in *Time*, the junior senator from Kentucky offered the obligatory “there is never an excuse for rioting and looting,” but vented anger at the police and the alleged racial bias of the criminal justice system. Channeling the libertarian Cato Institute, which equates law enforcement with big government, Paul decried not the hoodlums who shouted, “Kill the police,” but “the militarization of local law enforcement.”

Seemingly eager to outdo President Obama — whose pronouncements from Martha’s Vineyard “put the police on the same moral equivalency as the rioters,” per Andrea Tantaros of Fox News — Paul made premature judgments not only about the police but

also about Michael Brown: “If I had been told to get out of the street as a teenager, there would have been a distinct possibility that I might have smarted off. But, I wouldn’t have expected to be shot.”

Would a President Paul’s adolescent understanding of “smarting off” include hurling Molotov cocktails and rocks at police, as did the Ferguson rioters? If so, Republicans should pay close heed to the Kentuckian’s judgment and sense of proportion.

Not surprisingly, Democratic Rep. John Conyers Jr. of Michigan — a longtime nemesis of the police — found Paul’s comments “heartening,” prompting a giddy *Washington Post* blogger to imagine the potential of a “left-right alliance” against the police. Perhaps Paul will be the Senate sponsor of Conyers’s promised legislation to repeal a federal program that provides used riot gear and armor equipment to local law-enforcement departments.

Moreover, does Paul really concur with his left-wing colleagues sitting on the other side of the Senate, like Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill, who echoed his call for police departments to look more like Andy Griffith’s in the fictional Mayberry, or Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, whose tweet implied that the Ferguson police created a war zone? Sounding like these liberal Democrats virtually guarantees Paul all the fawning media attention he covets.

Enough on Paul. Why are RNC chairman Reince Priebus and the other presidential candidates leaving the libertarian solon from Kentucky to speak for the GOP? Wouldn’t it be nice if other Republican voices defended the police or, at a minimum, due process?

Meanwhile, the party is also deserting its winning law-and-order ways on the Southwestern border. With the exception of Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama, many prominent Republicans since the Bush 43 presidency have been soft on illegal immigration and border enforcement, thinking — perhaps like Paul — that it earns them love from liberals and money from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Yet, where’s all the sympathy, for example, from party “strategists” like Karl Rove, former Gov. Haley Barbour, or Al Cardenas, former chair of the American Conservative Union, for the widow and three children of Javier Vega Jr., the U.S. border patrol agent who was slain by two repeated border-violators in front of his family two weeks ago?

This lenience toward certain kinds of lawlessness comports with the GOP’s general failure to oppose the president’s demand for “comprehensive immigration reform,” as Daniel Horowitz noted on Breitbart News:

“Ponder for a moment where we would be politically if Republicans had spent the past five years promoting Obamacare and targeting the GOP’s own members with millions of dollars’ worth of ads beckoning conservatives to support Obama’s signature legislation. Well, that is exactly what Republicans have done with the immigration debate.”

Granted, the party has tightened its border stance, as *Politico* has reported, in response to Obama's concocted border crisis and his threatened amnesty proclamation. But credit goes not to party leadership or to Rove, but to new media insurgents including Breitbart News and radio hosts Laura Ingraham and Mark Levin.

Still, the party must do more — and learn from Nixon's strategy that laid the political foundation for the Reagan landslides in the 1980s. Buchanan's new memoir provides a helpful roadmap, including a reminder of how the 37th president skillfully defended law and order without blaming minorities. As Buchanan writes of those years: "We laid the blame for the nation's descent into lawlessness at the feet of the intellectual, moral, cultural, and political elites."

To be sure, there were plenty of liberal Republicans in the Sixties — John Lindsay, George Romney, and Nelson Rockefeller come to mind — who, seeking media affection, were quick, like Paul today, to blame "the system."

But Nixon and his top aide Buchanan understood — as Republicans must today — that the American experiment is all about ordered liberty, an idea that comes naturally to conservatives, but not so naturally to libertarians. As Russell Kirk, a father of modern American conservatism, observed: "The problem of order has been a principal concern of conservatives ever since conservative became a term of politics."

So the Grand Old Party must decide: Go libertarian, and sympathize with the protesters and rioters? Or does it want to be conservative, and side with the police, the rule of law, and the forces of order? The lessons of the 1960s suggest the latter is the path to victory.