

Don't Run

- Ralph Nader, New York City, May 31, 2008

I was at my Princeton reunion the other day, and a young alumnus came up to me - he was very kind - and he said "You know, I really like what you're doing - I like what you did - but please don't run."

I said "Do you realize what you are saying?"

And he said "Yes, I said please don't run."

I said "You're telling me not to use my First Amendment rights of speech, assembly, and petition inside the electoral arena. You're telling me to shut up. Are you aware of what you're saying?"

He said "I understand, I understand, I like what you're doing, but please don't run."

So I went through and I said "Well, would you tell those voters instead of trying to determine which one was worse between the Democrats and the Whigs, the two major parties in the 19th century, and instead cut out and voted for the Liberty Party, which was the anti-slavery party - would you say to those candidates, 'Don't run'?"

And he sort of paused.

And I said "How about the people who refused to go least-worst between the Republicans and Democrats on women's suffrage? Would you tell those candidates 'don't run'? What do you say to that?"

And he paused.

And I took it up to date and I said "Would you tell Buchanan not to run?"

And he said "I understand what you are saying, but please don't run."

And I said "You know, unwittingly, you are engaging in a politically bigoted statement. Because you can oppose, and you can support, any candidates you want. But when you are saying to someone 'don't run' you are saying to someone 'do not speak, do not petition, do not assemble inside the electoral arena.'"

Now I'm saying this because I'm sure you've had these conversations with people. Look at the word spoiler. Spoiler is a contemptuous word of political bigotry. They do not accuse George W. Bush of being the spoiler in 2000, and last I heard he got more votes than I did, vis-a-vis Al Gore. It's only the independent and third parties that are called spoilers.

And think of the hubris here - these two parties have spoiled our elections, they've spoiled our government, they've spoiled our politics - and to have the temerity to say to someone who wants to reform the process that they are spoilers - they have no sense of humor - I mean, how do you satire satire?

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