

Extreme Dean

This week a bunch of newspapers in places like Cincinnati and Pittsburgh tried to rally support for the beleaguered Howard Dean, and I am with them... well, somewhat.

The thing you've got to love about Howard Dean is that he is sincere in his hate. No phony is he, Dean despises Republicans and everything for which they stand. If it were up to Dean, those white, Christian layabouts would be shunned, scorned and mocked. Come to think of it, it is up to Dean. As the DNC chief, he is launching personal attacks against Republicans all over the place.

Honestly, where would Howard Dean be without hate? Last year it made him the darling of the far-left internet crowd, which poured millions into his presidential campaign. Dean's loathing of the GOP sent the self-described "Deaniacs" into ecstasy. The more Dean poured on the vitriol, the more money came rolling in. Dean embraced abhorrence with a vengeance Joseph McCarthy would have admired.

But that was then, and this is now. Some democrats like John Edwards and Senator Joseph Biden have recently criticized Dean's personal attacks, but that's akin to ordering salmon for dinner and then, when it arrives, complaining that you don't like fish. Democrats knew Dean was a character assassin when they elected him chairman of the National Committee. This is like the scene in "Casablanca" when Claude Rains announces he's "shocked" there is gambling going on in Rick's place.

The truth is that hate has been very good to Howard Dean. Without his animus, he'd probably be running a bed and breakfast in Bennington. Dean broke away from the bland political crowd by being a mean guy. He relished calling people names and surrounded himself with media smear merchants. Can you imagine a responsible politician saying

publicly that he “hates” Republicans? That’s alienating about half the country with one sentence. So much for Dean’s insistence that the Democrats are the party of “inclusion.”

To be fair, at the height of the Clinton bashing hysteria, there were Republican politicians throwing defamation bombs all over the place. But they were very specific. Clinton was the devil. The GOP did not expand its hatred to include Sally and Joe who voted for the man. They kept their fire concentrated on Bill Clinton and pretty much left the civilians alone.

Fair-minded Americans know trafficking in hate is foolish and destructive. Howard Dean’s anger may be amusing, but the unintended consequence is it has made him a joke. Dean can command a forum of true believers now, but America has always dismissed haters over time. And that’s what will happen with Dean and anyone else who deals in character assassination.

I know some readers will disagree with that assessment, because the hate industry can be very profitable. But there’s a price to pay for blood money. Let’s look at two examples, one from each side. Ultra-right wing radio talk show host Michael Savage was recently ignored by most media when he attempted to hawk his new book, a kindly tome that says liberalism is a “mental disorder.” Savage couldn’t get booked anywhere in the national media. His use of personal attacks has made him radioactive.

Far-left guttersnipe Al Franken, whose defamation skills dwarf those of Savage, still has access to some media (which says something about industry bias), but in the last presidential campaign, John Kerry’s handlers kept their candidate far away from Franken. Jimmy Carter took major heat for sitting close to Michael Moore at the Democratic Convention, and Kerry’s advisors took note. Extremist associations are not good for any candidate.

Which is why Howard Dean's conduct is so strange. Do you think Hillary Clinton or any other democratic candidate for president in 2008 will want Howard campaigning for them? I can just hear it now: "I hate Republicans and so does Hillary! Hoorah!"

Despite the absurdity of Dean's demeanor and the chorus of fellow Democrats who want him to button it, the Governor remains unrepentant and seemingly untroubled with his tactics. Many in the left-wing press are solidly behind him, and the guy continues to talk the trash talk.

He does this because ol' Howard Dean knows something that many of us do not know: Hate means never having to say you're sorry.