Brooks -- Romney the Bully -- 5/10/12

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Romney the Bully

By Kenneth Brooks

5/10/12

"And If anybody was hurt by that or offended, obviously I apologize for that." This was Mitt Romney's version of prominent people's typical mealy-mouthed response to charges of misconduct. Romney made his almost apology after saying, "Back in high school, I did some dumb things."

According to a Washington Post story, by Jason Horowitz, Romney, was upset seeing the dyed blond locks of another male student. Reportedly, "John Lauber, a soft-spoken new student one year behind Romney, was perpetually teased for his nonconformity and presumed homosexuality." Romney organized a group of students that attacked Lauber and held him down while Romney cut his hair. Lauber left school long enough to return with brown hair.

I do not place much value on apologies. What someone did was an accident or it was intentional. Someone cannot sincerely apologize for circumstances of an accident she or he did not control. Additionally, someone apologizing for intentional harmful conduct does not change the victim's pain or loss. Nevertheless, the tone of someone's apology does tell us much about the likeness of her or his character then and now. Many people see no relevance between this 1965 incident by high-school senior Romney and his character as presidential candidate 47 years later. I would agree except for his responses to the news article.

"Back in high school, I did some dumb things," Romney said, "And If anybody was hurt by that or offended, obviously I apologize for that." This remark suggests that many of the shallow character traits of a high school senior remain part of Romney's character 47 years later as presidential candidate.

Romney refers to a time-back in high school- and not to specific acts. "Back in high school" could refer to annoying faculty members by streaming their homes with toilet paper. It could refer to bullying weaker or less popular students by jumping ahead of them in line. On the other hand, it could refer to assaulting Lauber and other male students that he decided acted too feminine or that he presumed were gay. An apology does not admit responsibility if it does not specify the bad conduct.

"And if anybody was hurt. . ." Translation, "Forty-six years later, I still do not understand how what I did "back in high school" was offensive or hurtful to anybody. Nevertheless, I apologize if they took offense or felt hurt." This sham of an apology denies responsibility and shifts it to the victim.

I heard Romney in a live radio interview with Brian Kilmeade talk about the article. He said, "I participated in a lot of hijinks and pranks during high school, some might have gone too far, and for that I apologize." Again, he trivializes the pain his assaults caused others by apologizing for "hijinks," noisy and mischievous merrymaking, and for "pranks," tomfoolery. This choice of words effectively denies his bullying did serious harm. He used those terms even as he admitted that he remembered the incident where he and other boys forcibly cut Lauber's hair. Society advanced far since 1965 to understand the continuing stress school bullies cause victims. Nevertheless, Romney obviously missed the message.

Some incidents from youth stick in the mind to influence adult attitudes. I noticed some older students in my new school calling one boy "Sister Brown." I substitute Brown for his actual last name. I knew him from church by his actual name. The nickname seemed disrespectful to me. However, I said nothing. Seemingly, they were friends from kindergarten and he always responded by laughing. However, one day I looked direct into his eyes as he laughed and saw pain and misery so deep and strong it distressed me. They taunted him because they believed he was gay and he understood the scorn. He left town a short time later, but I never forgot that look of pain.

I relate this incident to acknowledge the experiences that influences my conclusion about Romney. He lies when he asserts that homophobia did not motivate his assault on Lauber and others that he perceived exhibited feminine traits. Often, I saw young males target for bullying someone with a small frame and whom they decided displayed female traits. In all cases, they presumed the targeted person was gay. It is not a coincidence that many adults living openly gay were high school targets of taunting assaults by Romney and his gang of vigilantes. Nevertheless, Romney claims he never knew or presumed them gay in high school.

The news about Romney's bullying conduct in high school is not necessarily a relevant indicator of his adult character. Nevertheless, he makes it relevant with responses more characteristic of the bullying teenager than of someone who matured and changed attitude over the past 46 years.

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