

Opinion: Booker Bows to Reality that ‘Peace and Love’ Didn’t Work

CARL GOLDEN | JANUARY 14, 2020 | **OPINION**

Senator’s campaign to become Democratic presidential nominee rested on a message that was ‘jarringly at odds’ with dark mood in the country



Carl Golden

Sen. Cory Booker yesterday conceded the inevitability that was clear to many for several months — his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination was dead in the water and all that remained was painful acceptance of that reality.

His funds were exhausted, he said, and there was no hope of an 11th hour multimillion-dollar cash infusion. [Any potential path forward had vanished](#), erased by a depleted bank account and unreasonably long odds of success.

His campaign was an uphill struggle from [the day he announced in February](#), joining an unwieldy, chaotic field of more than two dozen candidates with varying degrees of credibility and potential staying power.

Despite receiving generally warm and often enthusiastic responses from his campaign audiences, he never rose above 3% in preferential polling and struggled unsuccessfully to separate himself from the rest of the field.

He was unable to compete with the three leading candidates who were a quarter century his senior or with the mayor of a small midwestern town 13 years his junior.

He shared a political resumé equal or greater than his own with five other sitting U. S. senators, a former vice president and an assortment of current or former members of Congress, governors, business executives, and government officials.

He was just another commuter on the crowded train platform hoping to score a seat.

Great reviews of debate performances

While his debate performances drew highly complimentary reviews, sharing the platform with 10 other candidates who spent 90 minutes interrupting and talking over one another shamelessly seeking a soundbite to impress cable news networks worked to Booker's disadvantage.

He was consistently lumped in with the second tier of candidates, polling in single digits and increasingly referred to in media coverage as "among others in the race," a journalistic euphemism for "not a chance."

The Booker campaign message — something of a biblical admonition to love thy neighbor — was jarringly at odds with the dark and decidedly contentious mood which had enveloped the nation's political environment.

To Booker's credit, he never fully abandoned his "come let us reason together" philosophy. He gave in on a few occasions to the darker impulses of his competition, but he never strayed very far from his conviction that "peace and love" was the only true path to summon the better angels of the national nature to confront and solve the ills which afflict the country.

In the current poisonous atmosphere, it just didn't sell. A belief has gripped the electorate that "peace and love" aren't going to drive President Trump from office; only engaging in blood sport at its highest and most brutish level can accomplish that.

His critics are convinced it's a philosophy Trump has raised to an art form and only by responding in kind can he be defeated.

Booker, despite his distaste for all things Trump, just never bought into it.

It didn't pay to be positive

It's not that his message was the wrong one (most people would agree that it is preferable to settle differences without spilling blood), but the national mood at the moment is such that shedding blood now is a necessary catharsis and apologies can be offered and wounds healed later.

He ran to the left on issues dear to the party's progressives but stopped short of joining those who supported trillion-dollar spending programs which stood no chance of congressional approval.

Abandoning a political candidacy because of a lack of sufficient funds is, of course, nothing new. Money follows polling and any candidate who remains static — as Booker consistently did — can only stand by as fundraising becomes more difficult while resources on hand are burned through.

Major donors are willing at the outset to respond favorably to appeals for money, but they are a hard-headed and clear-eyed lot whose patience is finite. While hearts and minds might be sympathetic, writing checks is a practical exercise ruled by a “I like you, but...” decision.

It is likely Booker would have preferred to test his competitive mettle in the Feb. 3 caucuses in Iowa, but despite spending significant time and money in the state, he saw clearly the writing on the wall of the silo — he would have finished well back in the field, destroying any hope of viability in New Hampshire or beyond.

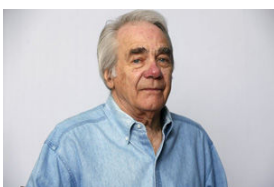
Vice presidential odds

There will be speculation that Booker will receive serious consideration as a vice presidential candidate and perhaps that may come to pass. Odds are, though, that the eventual nominee will have already made a commitment.

Booker will seek reelection to the Senate, thanks to legislation approved last year to permit him to seek both offices.

Given the history of Senate elections in New Jersey (a Republican hasn't won in nearly half a century), he'll return to Washington, D.C., and mull his future.

At 50, he's in his prime political years and, hey who knows, “peace and love” may be back in vogue in a few years.



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