

THE HIGHTOWER REPORT

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

AN EXPLOSIVE NEW POLITICS

Bush political operative Karl Rove is a Machiavellian master at finding divisive, hot-button, election-year issues that delight the GOP's right-wing barnburners, divide the Democrats, and divert voters' attention from such realities as falling wages, poor health care, and war.

For this fall's electoral battle, Karl thought he had the perfect scapegoat: illegal immigrants. But – look out, Karl – this flamethrower of an issue has blown back on you!

By pushing a vengeful, anti-immigrant bill through the house, the Bushites have indeed rallied the xenophobic right – but they also got something they never expected: a massive outpouring of outrage from immigrants of all kinds, as well as from young people, the clergy, union members, moderate Republicans, and just plain folks. Karl awakened, alienated, and activated a huge constituency that he wrongly assumed was too meek and powerless to stand up.

Rove's strategy of divisiveness requires more than an issue being boneheaded simple. He thought he had it with immigration: "See illegal workers. Deport. Build wall. Everything good again." But, as made clear by the millions of people taking to the streets, it's not so simple.

Republicans are not the only ones who could learn something from these mass demonstrations, however. Democrats in Congress (and those planning to run for president) also had no idea that this dormant constituency was there, was so passionate, and was ready to fire up. If Democratic leaders will grow a backbone, break out of the clubby confines of corporate politics, and reassert their party's populist ideals – they'll find that millions of Americans who've been shunted aside by the system are ready to respond to a new politics that appeals directly and honestly to their long-ignored hopes and needs.

This would be an opportune time for Democrats to start reaching out to the workaday majority of people who've been getting kicked by the Republicans for so long.

SPORTS BRANDALISM

Time for another report [sports theme] from the Wide, Wide, Wide, *Wild* world of sports!

Exciting news, sports fans: Marketers have made a trendsetting breakthrough for the corporate branding of sports! For some time, corporations have been plastering our stadiums with such lovable names as Office Depot Center, Bank Of America Stadium, and Enron Field (until that corporation plunged into infamy and bankruptcy.)

Well, if you loved having a cold, corporate ID slapped on your local stadium, get ready to be deliriously happy, for corporations have now begun to put their brands on the teams themselves! One of our listeners has labeled this development as an act of "brandalism."

The first victim is the major league soccer team formerly known as the MetroStars. This New York City team was recently bought by the Austrian corporation that produces Red Bull, the energy drink and cocktail mixer. So – shazam! – the MetroStars are now the New York Red Bulls, and the players trot out for each match wearing jerseys bearing the corporate logo. As the team president gamely says, "We are part of the Red Bull family."

How sweet. But, it's not a family. It's a corporation – and the team is just another commodity being peddled by the executives and beancounters back at headquarters. It's one thing to cheer for a team – but it's hard to connect with a corporate profit center: "Go Red Bulls! Raise your return on investment! Downsize the workforce! Hike your CEO's pay! Scooooooohrrrrr!" One sports marketing executive scoffs at critics who're concerned that other corporations will follow the Red Bull example. "Can you imagine the New York Rangers [hockey team] being called the ABC Rangers?" he asked.

Sadly, yes. I can also imagine the Wal-Mart Warriors, the Yahoo! Yankees, or the Exxon Mobil Cowboys. After all, we're talking about profit-grabbing corporations here – not sports.

Jim Hightower is the bestselling author of Let's Stop Beating Around the Bush, on sale from Viking Press.

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