



Advertisement

NEWS

# Historian Wayne Flynt on Senate race, Confederate monuments, Alabama's 'political prostitution'

Published: Aug. 20, 2017, 11:00 a.m.

By [Jeremy Gray | jgray@al.com](#)

As the results came trickling in from the U.S. Senate primary Tuesday night, Birmingham officials were moving to cover a 102-year-old Confederate monument days after violence in Charlottesville, Virginia shocked the nation.

AL.com asked Wayne Flynt, a professor emeritus of history at Auburn University and author of "Mockingbird Songs: My Friendship with Harper Lee," to weigh in on the week's events.

Advertisement

Flynt saw brilliance in Mayor William Bell's covering the monument and predictable "prostitution" when Attorney General Steve Marshall quickly sued Birmingham in response. And at the heart of these and most all issues facing Alabama and America, Flynt says, is race.

Advertisement

**On Senate primary:**

Flynt said he was not surprised Chief Justice Roy Moore did as well as he did.

"The question is is (Moore) going to be able to pick up anybody's support, like Mo Brooks and others. Of course, the big unknown in that election is going to be turnout, because (Alabama Secretary of State John) Merrill is predicting that turnout will probably fall by half from 18 percent to closer to 10 percent and one would assume that the ones that would stay home would be the ones who voted for defeated candidates who couldn't stomach either Luther Strange or Roy Moore."

"If that is a very low turnout election, I think Roy Moore has much more enthusiastic support than Luther does, so even though I think the total number of Roy Moore's votes will not grow much, they may not have to."

Advertisement

Strange should not count on Brooks' supporters switching to his camp, he said. "What they may do is just stay home."

**Will support from President Trump help Strange in the runoff?**

Yes, but Trump has "to be really careful because there is so much anti-establishment feeling in Alabama politics. That is basically Alabamians start off by hating all politicians and for good reason. I mean if you've had Hubbard and Bentley and Roy Moore, you could assume all politicians are crooked and corrupt."

"I predict Luther will win the Senate seat because what he's done is sound just like Donald Trump. Alabamians love Trump because he's against every establishment. Of course, that makes him unable to perform as president. That doesn't bother Alabamians as long as they keep getting their welfare payments and Social Security benefits and their Medicare."

Advertisement

"Probably, if you interviewed every Alabamian individually, with no one else in the room, they'd probably say a plague on all your houses, that there's no such thing as an honest politician, in Alabama that's an oxymoron. They don't think anyone really shares their problems, nobody really cares about them, all they're doing is feathering their nests and obtaining power, acquiring power, and I don't think that's just true of their attitudes toward national politics, I think that's their attitude toward local politics, too."

Advertisement

"They're conservative, and so they vote Republican, just as once upon a time they voted Democratic, and the Democrats were both racist and conservative. I think Alabama is still defined primarily by race, that's the most important issue."

"The most obvious example of that is blacks vote almost all together one way, whites vote almost all together another way. Blacks worship altogether in one setting, whites altogether in another setting. When blacks hit a tipping point of 40 or 50 percent in schools, all the whites tend to go to another school. When the neighborhood gets to be more than 50 percent black, all the whites move."

"Race defines Alabama completely and we're just now learning what I've been arguing for a long time, which is race defines America to a much higher degree than most people who don't live in the South understand....We live with it all the time. Right now, if you live in Washington state, you are in a state of shock because you can't believe what's happening in America, to which I would just say historians oughta come live in Alabama a while. They'd understand perfectly what's happening."

Advertisement

"Alabamians are anti-black, they're anti-establishment, they don't like Washington, they don't like the federal government despite the fact that Alabama couldn't exist without the federal government. We're the fourth largest recipient of federal transfer payments .. and yet Alabama detests the hand that feeds them."

**If Moore wins the runoff, can a Democrat win the general election?**

"It is possible though not likely. Judge Vance nearly beat Moore for Supreme Court Chief Justice with less than a month to campaign. If lots of "establishment" Republicans -- think urban, well-educated business types -- who voted for someone other than Moore decide to switch to Doug Jones to avoid another national marketing disaster about Alabama and even more decide to stay home, Moore could well win because his followers really believe in him, while Luther's voters know he will tack his sail to any wind blowing. If Moore beats Luther, all bets are off for the December general election."

Advertisement

**On Birmingham Confederate monument covering:**

"I thought it was a piece of genius myself," Flynt said of Mayor William Bell's decision to cover the monument rather than remove it.

"Until the law is amended, which it almost certainly will be in the next legislative session, but until the law is amended, I think the state is going to have trouble winning a legal case against him. Of course, Steve Marshall has to say what Steve Marshall said because Steve Marshall could get beat by Troy King if he doesn't go to the right. He's sort of like Big Luther: Big Luther is whatever the situation demands."

"I like Steve Marshall, he's a friend but I think he knows in Alabama politics he's going to have to do what Big Luther did which is whatever his personal convictions or whatever his personal ideologies are if he wants to win in Alabama politics, he's got to sink to the lowest common denominator. He's got to prostitute himself just like Luther does and what that means is you can come out of this pretty sullied. I don't think you can keep your principles as a human being and I don't think you can keep your morality as a Christian and participate very much in Alabama politics. When you walk in the door, you know what the compromises have to be in a state that is primarily dominated by race."

Advertisement

**On Gov. Kay Ivey's political future:**

"She called me some years ago and asked me to come to the lieutenant governor's office and talk with her about the Black Belt and about strategies for Black Belt development."

"She understands that with the black population in Alabama trending up and the white population going down, and the Black Belt dying, unless we want to bury 14 or 15 counties in central Alabama things have to change. Education has to get better, white people, black people have to start talking together to make the Black Belt more attractive so every 18-year-old doesn't dream of the day he or she can graduate high school and go someplace else."

Advertisement

"It's almost impossible to stabilize those counties where she's from essentially dying; some are smaller than they were in 1860, which is hard for people to comprehend when I say that but it's true."



**Alabama District 2 race: House Democrats link Dobson, GOP candidates nationwide to Project 2025** Oct. 8, 2024, 8:25 a.m.

**An upset's consolation, Butterbean update, quiz answers: Down in Alabama** Oct. 7, 2024, 5:43 a.m.

"Kay understands all of that. She can make hard decisions and she is tough."

"There's an assumption, and it's a sexist assumption, that women are just more honest and more compassionate, that was an assumption about Lurleen Wallace that she was a novice and didn't know much about politics but she came out of Bryce, the mental institution, with tears in her eyes because of what she saw there. I can't imagine that happening to George Wallace. There is an assumption, and I think correct, that on things like children's issues and poverty and the way in which the welfare system operate that women are more concerned about issues like that."

"She understands without a global competitive education system, there will never be a global competitive economy in Alabama. We'll have islands of technological capacity and economy (like the bi cities. Everything other than that will slowly be dying on the vine. Surely Alabamians understand that. If they are not willing to acknowledge it, they must know that it's true just by the circumstances of their lives."

---