

Trump Can Fix It

by Conrad Black

It is hard to believe that this clangorous campaign of defamations is in its last week. Of course, in the first year of Donald Trump's largely self-financed campaign, which broke all records for the sale of silly T-shirts, hats, and badges, his pandering was sometimes outrageous, but it was brilliant. As Senator Marco Rubio said as he bowed out of the race, having been bombed in his home state of Florida by Trump by nearly a million votes, "There was a tsunami approaching and only Mr. Trump saw it."

The political class that had admitted 12 million illegal immigrants, while waffling about "comprehensive immigration reform" and doing nothing, complacently assumed that the country had acquiesced in this cynical outrage. After all, someone had to do the menial work in the U.S. It was a pandemic of almost terminal hypocrisy and when Donald Trump focused national attention on it, he had to be defamed as a racist. Donald Trump has a big mouth and a loose tongue, but he has, unlike many of his accusers, a perfect record as an equal-opportunity employer, and there is not a scintilla of evidence that he is a racist.

He was probably correct that the judge of whom he complained was biased, but was unrigorous and very ungracious in imputing this to his ancestry. Mr. Trump is a great talent, but rigor and grace, like modesty, are not at the forefront of his fine qualities. Not as easily dismissed are Mr. Trump's attacks on several of the free-trade agreements in place or contemplation. He has no problem with Canada as a fair-trading partner of comparable per capita wealth to the United States, and offered the United Kingdom a free-trade deal with minimal negotiations if it does depart the European Union as it has voted to do.

What he objects to are free-trade agreements that amount to the importation of unemployment into the United States. There is nothing intellectually wrong with this; the desire of all Americans for cheaper goods and natural resources and agricultural products should be balanced against the interests of the U.S. work force. This is not a euphemism for protectionism that allows uncompetitive American enterprises to milk a tariff-insulated market. This was the greatest and most continuous political issue in the United States from the Civil War to the end of World War II, and Trump does not deserve to be branded as a Luddite guardian of feather-bedding and monopolistic practices.

Just as outrageous was the portrayal of Trump as a misogynist. His personal conversation is less coarse than Mrs. Clinton's, and the tape of his exchange eleven years ago with Billy Bush (of the ubiquitous Bushes), while repulsive, was not how he speaks. He shut Hillary down for months by pointing out that she was an enabler of the most egregious "objectifier" of women in American presidential history, and her campaign waited until they must have thought it unanswerable to drop this fragmentation grenade. Trump apologized for his comments, and entered the second presidential debate under greater pressure than anyone in the history of these exchanges, going back to Kennedy and Nixon in 1960. His campaign was disintegrating. An inconvenient fact, which the Washington media chose not to recognize, is that he overcame the Bush-tape disaster and won the last two debates; qualities of leadership do lurk beneath his efflorescent egotism.

This election has not been so dismal in policy terms. Mrs. Clinton, thanks to the unelected party grandees who are ex officio delegates – the same people who sandbagged her eight years ago in favor of Obama – narrowly beat off a cuckoo challenge from a democratic Marxist. Senator Sanders was magnificently correct in excoriating the essentially totalitarian American prosecutorial system, and even in his

objections to excessive concessions to Wall Street engineers of the velocity of money, but his general tax policy, neutral-isolationist foreign policy, and trenchant clamping of his lips around the (unnatural) gas-pipe of global warming, made him an implausible candidate. And Donald Trump, while recruiting the blue-collar reactionaries and bringing them back into the political system after decades of sullen abstention, favors universal health care and a generous hand to disadvantaged African Americans. Both candidates have a sane foreign policy, which would steer between the mindless interventionism of George W. Bush and Obama's Panglossian appeasement of America's enemies.

In England, in the last two weeks, I engaged in three widely publicized debates about the U.S. election. The British public largely clings to the view that the United States is a useful oaf of a country of philistines which occasionally tosses up "one of us" like FDR or JFK, and my audiences had drunk the anti-Trump Kool Aid. I opened each time by predicting that there would not be, because there could not be, any argument for the reelection of the Democrats. Their only campaign has been to smear Trump, whose antics have made him an easy target. Because George H.W. Bush was the only president since Theodore Roosevelt who had sons with an aptitude for politics, and Bill Clinton was the only president since Franklin Roosevelt who had a wife with an aptitude for politics, those two families held one of the three greatest public offices in the country for 32 years from 1981 to 2013, and have handed these positions back and forth between each other. Coincidentally, the last 20 years have been the worst period of presidential misgovernment in the country's history, surpassing even the twelve years before the Civil War, and between Wilson and FDR.

Practically all commentators predicted a race of polemical vehemence unlike any since 1800, when Thomas Jefferson exchanged slanders and libels with John Adams and Alexander

Hamilton, and the shadowy maneuverer Aaron Burr almost emerged as president. It was always going to be portrayed as a race between the grotesque caricatures of the Ugly American braggart and materialist and the sleazeball superannuated feminist. When it became clear that Trump had tapped into an electoral geyser (which to me was when he took 49 percent of the minority Republican vote in the arch-liberal state of Massachusetts in a 14-candidate race), and that he would be nominated, it was clear that he would, in the words of George Wallace nearly 50 years ago, shake the political class "by the eyeteeth." It is often hard not to adapt to Trump FDR's comment on his mentor and rival, Alfred E. Smith, that he "loved him for his enemies."

In the end, the majority of Americans could be persuaded not to vote for Trump, as the candidate not complicit in the decline of America these past 20 years, only if they were so horrified by his vulgarity that they overlooked the poor performance of the Bush-Clinton-Obama regency and the ethical frailties of the Democrats. Trump's offenses are matters of taste, not indictable transgressions, and the revolt of the FBI against the sleazy straddle of Director James Comey's verbal condemnation of Mrs. Clinton as a perjurer while declining to indict her has blown the race open. Mrs. Clinton has tried to ignore the revelations that her chief aide, Huma Abedin, may have perjured herself, as she has ignored the FBI director's assertion that she herself lied under oath. She merely "short-circuited" her FBI interrogators. Rabid partisans like James Carville and Tim Ryan have claimed a conspiracy between the Kremlin, the FBI, Trump, and nameless hobgoblins. It was like Alexander Haig's conjuration of an "unknown spirit" that erased Rosemary Woods's Watergate tape in 1973. Trump's manager, Kellyanne Conway, accurately explained why what has occurred is more odious than Watergate. Richard Nixon, an outstanding president, was crucified, though he never lied under oath and there is no convincing evidence that he personally broke any laws. It is time to write

history, including current history, straight.

The sadness of Peggy Noonan that the country has been let down by inferior candidates is understandable, but fails to credit Trump for unerringly following a trail no one else saw: First he was Archie Bunker, then a lightning rod for excessive abuse, then impresario of the revelation of intolerable ethical strains in the Clinton campaign. Less creditable are the intelligent commentators like Daniel Henninger, who denounced the Hillary Clinton administration as if recounting history, Franklin Pierce or Warren Harding – implicitly expressing anger that Trump wasn't a respectable enough Republican candidate to deny the move into the White House of the Clinton pay-to-play casino. And most distasteful of all are the sanctimonious conservative intellectuals who departed Trump to legitimize the Clinton sleaze factory, with the feigned majesty of those who felt entitled to name the Republican candidate, and whose public twitches and reflections were bound to shape the intellectual conscience of America. The friendship of decades with many of them prevents my mentioning names. The worst of them are those who accused Trump of fascistic tendencies and even of anti-Semitism. Everyone upon whom the country had the right to rely has failed: the traditional party elders, the national media, the conservative intellectuals, the engineers and conductors of the great liberal gravy train.

In the last week of this tumultuous campaign, Donald Trump, however raucous his delivery, has emerged as the candidate of comparative integrity, and the only person who might clean out the Augean stable of the American political system. Unless Hillary Clinton, whose considerable gifts have never included an excess of spontaneous originality, can pull from the tattered Democratic hat a miraculous Brobdingnagian bunny, the doors of the White House will be opened to the greatest, if far from the most elegant, personal political crusade in American history.