

Where is The Ace in the Presidential Desk of Cards?

by Michael Curtis



Considering the nature of the muster of political figures now on the scene aspiring to be president of the United States, one may conclude they're either too gray or too grassy green. The pickings are poor and the crop is lean. How many have appropriate qualifications for the position? This is not self-evident since the necessary and desirable qualifications are debatable, partly relevant to changing times, the issues confronting the nation, and to the suitable relevant character of the aspirant.

All can agree that honesty and appearance of genuine verisilitude, are essential for potential candidates who should be rejected if they "make their faces vizards to their hearts disguising what they are." The latter individuals may have dangerous ambition that "lurks under the specious masks of zeal for the rights of the people." At the same time, care should be taken that those who advocate the truth are in fact influenced by purer principles than their antagonists.

A particular problem in the game of U.S. presidential politics, as in poker, is that, as the song says, you've gotta have that slippery hazardous commodity, you've gotta have the cards. For candidates the right card must be found to be successful. For the electorate, the task is to shuffle up the cards, eliminate the joker, and find the ace. The decision on the right card depends on priority given to experience, talent, character, style, desirable principles and ability to implement them.

The Founding Fathers tried to help to some extent. The Declaration of Independence calls for prudence in the act of making change. With that, in the present political climate, should go civility, recognition that unanimity in the nation does not exist, that competing "factions" are inevitable, and that compromise of principle and policy is often essential.

One Founder, Alexander Hamilton, is much admired on Broadway in the hip hop-rap musical bearing his name. He should be equally admired for his paper, No. 68 of the *Federalist Papers*, written on March 14, 1788, on the mode of electing the president of the U.S. The particular electoral process he suggested is inappropriate and would not be acceptable today, but it was important for him because it afforded a moral certainty that the office of president would go to a person "endowed in an eminent degree" with the requisite qualifications. This would not be a person with talents for low intrigue and the "little arts of popularity," but one preeminent for ability and virtue, and with the aptitude and tendency to produce a good administration.

James Madison, Hamilton's colleague in writing the *Federalist Papers* in support of the proposed Constitution, though not listing the talents needed for president, warned in *Federalist* 55 that in politics "passion never fails to wrest the sceptre from reason." A contemporary presidential candidate must ensure that passion and emotions do not overpower and distort political and moral judgments. Passion and prejudice rarely if

ever favor the discovery of truth.

The U.S. Constitution itself does not provide any list of qualities for the president position, but Article II contains the key statement that "The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America." Executive ability is therefore crucial. So are qualities of character and ability: integrity, honesty, leadership skill, ability to understand problems, national and international, ability to decide, communicate, negotiate, persuade Congress, and capacity to take care that laws are faithfully executed.

Presently the number of those who are considering or have proposed themselves to be president are likely to fill Madison Square Gardens in New York to capacity. Before surveying some of them it should be pointed out that none of them is a felon, or charged as such. None appears to have had a ten minute talk with a Russian lawyer in a public space, or entered into any form of collusion. All of them know the way to Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina., and speak English when they arrive.

First, there is the covey of present Senators, members of Congress, past and present Governors of states, Mayors, and former public office holders, all different in age, sex, background, and experience. All appear to believe that their present or past public position is insufficient for full display of their political talents, and believe that elevation to the presidency would be appropriate recognition of their ability and wisdom. Among Democrats who are conspicuous or back into the limelight are: Joe Biden at 75, Andrew Cuomo at 59, Elizabeth Warren at 67, Bernie Sanders at 75, Corey Booker at 49, Kamala Harris at 52, Eric Garcetti at 47, Martin O'Malley at 54, Lincoln Chafee at 65, and Julian Castro at 43.

Success in business, a positive achievement, is seen as a logical stepping stone and preparation for the highest public

office. Prominent are Michael Bloomberg, who was also Mayor of New York, now 76, and is spending heavily, at least \$80 million, on 2018 mid term elections, Howard Schultz at 65, formerly head of Starbucks and owner of the Seattle SuperSonics, Mark Cuban at 60, formerly owner of Dallas Mavericks, and TV networks, Mark Zuckerberg at 32 belatedly learning what Facebook does, and Tom Steyer at 61, hedge fund manager.

There's no business like politics show business. Superstars are on the horizon: Oprah Winfrey at 64 mediastar and probably richest African-American, Kanye West at 41, successful rapper, Beyonce at 36, pop star who said she's not sure she's ready yet for the presidency, Dwayne, "the Rock" Johnson, at 46, actor and former wrestler, and a novelist, Marianne Williamson, at 66 New Age author, spiritual teacher who informs us of the spiritual journey from suffering to enlightenment, and a person who would get the "yoga" vote.

And now the enticing Michael Avenatti, the 47 year old brash, aggressive lawyer class action litigator with high profile cases against large companies and individuals. In an curious unfitting image he boasts he has had 18 years of fighting on behalf of Davids and Goliaths. He did take part in cases involving important organizations, NFL, Fortune 100 companies, Dallas Cowboys, and celebrities like film star Jim Carrey and Paris Hilton. Nevertheless, his 15 minutes of national fame results from his function as lawyer of "adult" actress Stormy Daniels in her dispute with Donald Trump regarding a non-disclosure agreement about an alleged sex encounter in the 2006.

A gift for titillation is not of the expected characteristics of presidential candidates. Nevertheless, Avenatti found the right road to Iowa to "listen to the people, (apparently clothed) and learn about the issues," other than sex, that are facing the citizens of Iowa. Other than listen he did speak to the Democratic Wing Ding fundraiser in Des Moines. Avenatti is

also a professional race car driver, a participant in over 30 races. He has engaged with similar drive, speed, and aggression against Donald Trump, even verbally assaulting him with the Italian exclamation "basta."

That exclamation, "enough " in English, might properly apply to the large, somewhat bizarre, list of applicants for the presidency. Alexander Hamilton wrote of the need for a president of ability and virtue who had the esteem and confidence of the whole country, a vigorous executive capable of protecting the country, able to control a steady administration of the laws, and securer of liberty against assaults of ambition, faction, and anarchy. We know there are jokers in the present pack of cards for the presidency. Is there an ace? And as that ace is played will the political opponent always trump?