



Donald Brings Show Biz to Politics: Will America Survive a Trump Administration?

Can we survive the complete absorption of politics into the culture of mass entertainment?

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At his last and final White House Correspondents' Dinner, President Obama quipped that "the end of the republic never looked better." With Trump as the presumptive Republican nominee, and Hillary Clinton beginning to steadily lose ground to him in national polls, it is time for millions of Americans to emerge from their nearly year-long state of denial and face the reality that Trump may very well be the 45th President of the United States.

To be sure, a lot can and will happen between now and November; however, to still think that a Trump defeat is a forgone conclusion is not only overly optimistic, but plays into the hands of Trump's presidential bid, which has from the beginning never failed to capitalize on successfully defying expectations.

The truth is that Trump's campaign has been, sorry to say, historic. Regardless of what happens in November, his run for the White House laid bare the limitations (or even irrelevance) of Washington's once highly esteemed class of campaign advisors; the culpability of the media in its gluttonous coverage of Trump, which gave his campaign more exposure than all the other Republican nominees put together; the disaffection of the Republican base with its leadership; and the extent to which misogyny, xenophobia, and full blown racism still remain deeply entrenched within American culture. Trump's campaign has forced us to admit that political correctness has worked not to actually reduce, but only repress, hatred and racism.

I would like to hazard, however, a perhaps controversial claim. If Trump wins the general election, it will not be because of those factors just mentioned (though they all played a role): it will be because there is something Americans love more than competent leadership, more than safety and security, more than even making a buck - and that's entertainment.

Trump brings a level of show biz to politics that hasn't been seen in modern times. This is emphatically not a mere extension of ordinary political theater, which has traditionally been about presenting heads of government as dignified, self-composed, legitimate and statesmanlike. In fact, Trump's brand of crass political showmanship represents, among other things, the destruction of political theater - the rejection even of minimal standards of decency, courtesy, and respect.

The thing about reducing politics to mass entertainment is that it turns all the rules upside down: to be presidential is to be boring; to be concerned with evidence, rational arguments, and objective reality is to be stuffy, over-intellectual, and boring; to be respectful of

difference and caring towards the less fortunate is to be self-hating, soft-hearted... and did I mention boring?

This poses a distinct problem for Clinton, because the very things which are generally regarded as her strengths – knowledge, experience, a cool temperament – could, in this topsy-turvy world, be turned against her to her opponent’s advantage.

One might like to suppose that Trump must invariably get trounced in a debate against Clinton, at least if he doesn’t start seriously cracking open the books, so to speak. His recent meeting with Kissinger may suggest that he is not unaware of this and is taking due precaution. But, sad to say, this gives the American public too much credit. The more knowledgeable and versed Clinton sounds, the more it will push away countless Americans who have rallied against such educated elites, thanks to Trump. Trump has tapped into a very American strain of anti-intellectualism.

Trump discovered something – he discovered what so many Americans really want, and it isn’t rational sounding policies, well-thought-out proposals that reflect the best that America stands for; and it sure isn’t a commitment to the endless struggle for truth and justice. What they want is best summed up by H. L. Mencken when he observed that

“As democracy is perfected, the office of the President represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. On some great and glorious day, the plain folks of the land will reach their heart’s desire at last and the White House will be occupied by a downright fool and complete narcissistic moron.”

So let us turn finally to the question we posed above: will America survive a Trump administration? Yes. This country had had awful presidents in the past, but the United States is bigger than any one chief executive, regardless of how bloated, egomaniacal and hate-mongering. ***The question is, can we survive the complete absorption of politics into the culture of mass entertainment? That I’m not so sure about.***

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