

The Rise of the Absurd: Donald Trump and the GOP Legacy

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The politics of the absurd, and the politics of absurdity. Both dance immaculately in the electoral rounds in the US. The point is that the current US political process, with its venality, has created a rather rich soil. The US is far from the only one – Britain, for instance, has its own wop haired eccentric packed with a decent showing of prejudice in the form of Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London. His monopoly of absurdity continues, proving every threatening to his Tory backers.

Usually, such figures tend to fulminate and disappear. Weeded out, we tend to see a filtered, rather dull variant at the end of electoral road show. Populism is eventually snuffed out by the nature of the American Electoral System, that great guarantor of elite privilege and pseudo dynasts. “Democracy,” warned John Adams in his letter to John Taylor in 1814, “never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There was never a democracy that did not commit suicide.”

The founding fathers were clear on this: the system had to be gamed, regulated with forensic efficiency to kill the absurd before it became real. The Electoral College might be regarded as a classic outcome of this patrician, pessimistic sentiment: the absurd, be it viscerally directed or overly steeped in demagoguery, is dangerous, destabilising and the worst form of excess. Underlying this was the notion that the gentleman does not get himself dirty with the muck of politics. The nobility of any office lies in it calling the man.

The presidential office, it is fair to say, has been emptied of a good deal of its nobility. Its dynastic stench is evident by the growing pull Hillary Clinton is exerting in the primaries. Her latest victory in the South Carolina Primary, drawing from such communities as the African-American voters, shows that the steam in the Bernie train may be running out. While there is much fight left in the campaign, Hillary’s campaign is starting to get away.

The rise of the absurd then comes into play. While the Democrats do battle, the party of absurdity now fears an exponent of its own polemics, its own fears. Each time Trump receives an opponent’s ire, the strategist’s scorn, the tactician’s warning about the fate of the GOP, he breaks away with more confidence and storms to through the next primary. It hardly helps that those critics tend to be the dark messengers of previous, failed presidencies.

Karl Rove, one of those more vigorous merchants of the satanic mill, was certainly one concerned about a Trump GOP nomination. On Feb. 19, he warned to a collective of Republican donors and governors that such an outcome would doom the party.

This in itself is a fascinating grievance, given that the tree of Trump grows richly in the soil

of the Bush legacy. It was Rove who claimed in an infamous interview with Ron Suskind that, “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out.”[1]

Similarly, former Vice President Dick Cheney, another creature well suited to the conscious manipulation of various realities, finds himself against the spawn of such theorising. There were no Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq (that was certainly one absurd reality he wished to sell), but that did not matter to the GOP’s foremost Dark Lord. Instead, he prefers to target Trump’s xenophobia while ignoring his own racial realities, not least of all the notion that his Puritan ancestors arrived in empty country with virginal promise. “There wasn’t anybody here, then, when they came.”[2]

The frightening consequences of such views are becoming all too clear, with Trump being one of those “historical actors” who has waded into an electoral race as a televisual reality indifferent to packaged electoral strategy. What matters here is that Trump has not proven controllable in any genuine sense, with the old Bush family strategists incapable of boxing him as unelectable. More to the point, Trump has even seen one of them off, snorting at the WMD hoax and dismissing Bush junior as a serial incompetent.

Consistently, Trump resorts to the old maxims outlined in *The Art of the Deal* (1987). The text is childishly elementary, reducing the world to an 11-step business plan. He rarely deviates. “The point is that if you are a little different, or a little outrageous, or if you do things that are bold or controversial, the press is going to write about you.” Controversy is currency.

While Bernie Sanders has been packaged with Trump with seamless ease by commentators, any similarities fail on closer inspection. Sanders, at the very least, espouses some variant of socialist decency and anti-dynastic politics, something which can hardly be deemed absurd except by the most sceptical of conservatives; Trump’s politics is the anger of rapacious, vengeful indecency shaped by the coda of the stomping businessman.

This is pure GOP absurdity, or what Trump calls “truthful hyperbole,” hoovering up numerous extremist positions and promoting them as a symbol of hope. The politics of anger, even dressed up in this extraordinarily spectacle of the absurd, continues to sow savage seeds of woe.

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Notes:

1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/faith-certainty-and-the-presidency-of-george-w-bush.html>
2. http://www.salon.com/2015/12/10/the_truth_about_dick_cheney_vs_donald_trump_why_he_former_dark_lord_of_the_gop_still_cant_be_trusted/

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