

# Advantage: Trump

The New Hampshire primary illustrated the determination of the American public to chastise the political class responsible for the successive national disasters of the last 20 years, both parties, all branches and levels of government. The country that rose from a couple of million colonists (and their slaves) in two long lifetimes to be the greatest power in the world, with a monopoly on atomic energy and half the world's economic product, and contained international Communism so successfully that it collapsed like a soufflé without the U.S. and Soviet Union exchanging a shot, has been floundering for decades. It is little wonder that the country is seeking leadership outside the party hierarchies.

It is hard not to like Bernie Sanders, as he clearly does care about the little people and is sincere in thinking that all the woes of a hundred million relatively disadvantaged Americans, half of them severely so, can be solved by surtaxes on the incomes of "the billionaire class . . . the top one percent." One percent of Americans is over three million people; there are 536 billionaires in the United States and even if their income taxes were raised to 95 percent it would have no material impact on the country's deficit or the quality of life of the poor. Sanders probably is thinking of a wealth tax, but his often passably eloquent rages against the corruption of the creaking system and the rule of the special interests should disabuse him of any notion that any such measure could be adopted. (And if it were, the billionaires and most of their assets would shove off.) These are a populist version of the ravings of King Lear. He might as well have screamed "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!" It was apparently uplifting for his vanguard of what he considers a "political revolution" to trounce the Clintons by over 20 points, to attack the Supreme Court for the *Citizens United* decision (facilitating corporate political donations), and to

promise a trillion-dollar loan forgiveness for the nation's indebted current and former university students (in a bigger bribe than all of the candidates whom Sanders excoriates have ever offered their supporters). But it is bunk and it is going nowhere; Bernie Sanders will depart New England and fall off the edge of the political world. If he has any traction at all, voters will want to know more about what he was doing in a pro-Stalinist kibbutz in Israel even after the Soviet 20th Communist Party Congress renounced Stalin in 1956.

Sanders had the satisfaction of pushing Hillary into the rich incantation, "No bank too big to fail; no executive too big to go to jail." This is a bold thrust for the one candidate in either party, so far as is publicly known, teetering on the edge of indictment (over her handling of e-mails when secretary of state). And since American prosecutors win 99 percent of their cases, 97 percent without a trial, Mrs. Clinton would have done better to join Senator Sanders in denouncing the criminal-justice system as the vicious conveyor belt to the corrupt and often barbarous prison system that it is. Her primary-night speech, like Bernie Sanders's, was a relatively peppy effort. But it was implausibly moralistic for someone who in the minds of most is obscenely overpaid for delivering the same speech over and over and for questionable activities in the Clinton Foundation, and whom 92 percent of Democrats and 99 percent of Republicans in New Hampshire consider chronically untruthful.

It has appeared, through much of the preliminaries leading up to the campaign in earnest for delegates, that the country had tired of the Clintons and the Bushes, one or another of whom held great public office for eight straight terms prior to 2013. It seems a media conjuration that the camp Vermont septuagenarian socialist Bernie Sanders can run closely with Clinton any further. But it is equally hard to believe that the Democrats really have any enthusiasm for giving their party back to the Clintons, as everyone who is interested

waits to see whether Obama concludes his presidential tour by indicting Hillary, eight years after pulling the rug out from under her and Bill, when he convinced America to expiate its guilt over slavery and segregation by putting him in the White House. It is hard to believe that the Democratic party has really come to this, a party of aggrieved and crumbling voting blocs fought over by a loopy old socialist and a shopworn woman in neon pantsuits who has been plying the rounds in Washington for a whole generation.

On the Republican side, Jeb Bush has almost come through the wall. After a disastrous beginning of a campaign that he should have had prepared for the last seven years, after bumping along in single digits for months, he put on a spirited campaign for third place and has been liberated from the suspicion of thinking he was entitled to be president because the position has been handed down from his father and brother. He doesn't excite anyone, but he is pleasant and solid and, like his rival John Kasich (and, while they lasted, Chris Christie, Scott Walker, and Mike Huckabee), has been a good governor (and is the least malapropistic of the Bush politicians). As I suggested after Iowa, Marco Rubio conformed too exactly to Chris Christie's dismissal of the candidates from the Senate as mere talkers while the governors have a proper administrative background. We have heard too much of his father's struggles as a bartender and the repetitive claptrap about "the greatest nation in human history." After Iowa and in the Saturday Republican debate, his glibness paled beside Christie's gritty combativeness, Bush's dutiful modesty, and ?Kasich's indisputable experience and accomplishments, in Congress and in Ohio, homey though his manner is. (We could have done without his urging everyone to hug strangers in shopping malls to heal the nation; and Donald Trump's thanking his long-deceased parents too.)

Above all, it was Donald Trump's night. He ran about 18 points ahead of Kasich in second place, and another 4 or 5 points

ahead of Cruz, Bush, and Rubio. Cruz is conducting a rearguard action and is now a factional candidate. Rubio has half-disintegrated. Christie is out of the race, but, having dealt Rubio a lethal blow in the last debate, may be the king-maker of the stop-Trump forces. If matters don't change drastically in South Carolina, Christie will be able to help Kasich or Bush into clear second place, and Donald will be tempted to dangle the vice-presidential nomination before whoever is third behind the leading anti-Trump candidate. Denying Trump the nomination will be very difficult, but he should have started on Tuesday night the process of conciliating kindred spirits in his party and independent voters who like his Archie Bunker attacks on Obama, Clinton, and the mealy-mouthed Republicans who weaseled on immigration and other hot subjects. He was brief and graciously praised the other Republican candidates as a group, but there were too many "huges" and "greats" and no specifics about how he was going to make America "great" again except building the wall on the Mexican border, tearing up trade pacts, and "knocking the hell" out of ISIS.

If his opponents in the Republican party want any chance of stopping him, they will have to coalesce around one of the alternatives right after South Carolina, and that candidate will be an underdog. Trump should win the nomination, and Clinton should limp to a listless and clichéd victory at the head of her fatigued party. Trump still faces a high but porous wall of anyone-but-Trump sentiment, slightly more numerous than the anyone-but-Clinton bloc. He should move soon to dissolve this antagonism by speaking more seriously and precisely, and in finished sentences, and showing that he is, in all but his presentational flamboyance, a moderate. Shame on the *New York Daily News* for referring to his followers as "the brain dead" and on the *Huffington Post* for its scurrilous attack on him as "a racist, sexist demagogue." He is none of that and his followers are too numerous and righteously angry at those who have failed the nation to be so disparaged,

especially by such lowbrow outlets. Now is Donald Trump's chance to defeat and humiliate that sentiment by behaving with exemplary dignity, modesty, and precision, as he has waxed the floor with the elders of the Republican party and stolen much of the old Roosevelt-Truman-Kennedy coalition among working and middle-class Democrats.

With only a light clean-up of his forensic techniques, Donald can ease the concerns of the reluctant without forfeiting any of the exaltation of soul of those who are grateful for his assault on politicians and institutions who have failed and disserved the United States. It looks like Trump and Clinton, and Trump should win. Whatever else may be said of him, he has had no hand in the savage violence the political class has done to America with debt, wars, the Great Recession, corruption, and the pell-mell appeasement of America's enemies of the last 20 years. Hillary is not blameless and has fish-tailed through the last two decades facing in all four directions on many issues. Trump has a mighty and unsuspected tidal wave of opinion behind him; he has only to make the turn from bombast and braggadocio to a simple program of reform of immigration, entitlements, taxes, health care, and campaign financing, all of which he has promised. The people will support it and he will get it adopted before the summer recess of 2017. As with FDR's promise of a New Deal in 1932, the great Reagan campaign of 1980 proclaimed: "The time is now for strong leadership." It was and it is, in more suave and purposeful vocabulary and cadences than we have heard so far. The revolution is Trump's, not Sanders's, the more welcome because of the hostility to him of both the mainstream national media and the Murdoch organization, with its absurd promotion of an independent campaign by Michael Bloomberg. Donald Trump is very close to one of the most astonishing political victories in American history. Never has that office sought such a man, and in a democracy, the people are always right.

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