

Historic Opportunity for Trump

by Conrad Black

The year ends amid the most astonishing display of sour grapes, mass embarrassment, and unspontaneous amnesia in living memory of U.S. presidential elections. The national media, sleepwalking toward the inauguration they did everything possible to prevent, having denied at every stage, including very late on election night, could occur, have clangorously announced each new desperate plan to overturn the election result. The recount, begun in Wisconsin by the Green candidate, Jill Stein, but financed by the Clinton Democrats, spent \$5 million to increase Trump's plurality in the state by 131 votes. In Pennsylvania, a federal judge declined to act on the opposition claim that the state's election, in which 6 million votes were cast, had been influenced by computer hacking. And in Michigan, the only irregularities that were turned up were in African-American districts of Detroit, where the vote exceeded the number of registered voters – more likely a manifestation of the vaunted Hillary Clinton “ground game” than of any skulduggery by the Trump Republicans.

As that illusion faded, the cry arose that the chosen members of the Electoral College, though morally pledged to cast their votes for the candidates whom they were elected to support, could be induced to shift their votes because of the alleged unsuitability of Mr. Trump. The Democrats put out some television advertisements urging conscientious citizenship on the 306 Trump-pledged electors who were chosen on Election Day. It was another exercise of large amounts of money chasing very few potential votes, and the result on Monday flaked four Clinton electors off and only two Trump electors (who cast their votes for Republican governor John Kasich of Ohio). A few op-ed writers were pushed forward by the scruff of the

neck and the small of the back to write that the founders of the country had intended the Electoral College to be eminent and independent-minded personalities for whom the popular vote was merely indicative, if not a simply impartial exercise. Never in history has there been such a foolish commotion about so improbable an effort to change an election result. It was all nonsense, and of a piece with the other symptoms of common or garden denial that have afflicted the country and its media these last six weeks.

The winners of the election are not only ignoring the antics of their late opponents, but preparing ever more vigorously to jettison practically everything that the outgoing administration has been noisily proclaiming to be its legacy – all the official deferences to global warming (despite the lack any evidence that it is actually occurring), affirmative action, unionized schools, disadvantageous trade agreements, unregulated immigration, the shambles of Obamacare, the appeasement of Iran, centralized government, and executive fiat unsupported by congressional approval. There was a wistful but noisy agitation for direct election of the president by the plurality of voters, an anti-federalist idea that has no chance of adoption on any timetable, as most of the three-quarters of the states that would have to approve it would never be visited by a presidential campaign again, and their congressional representatives would have no chance of getting a fair share of funding from a federal government entirely dominated by the 15 largest states.

The next four weeks will produce a concertina of time and perspective unique in American history as the Trump-incredulity movement is ungraciously driven from its high seats in the temple of American public life, media, entertainment, and even finance. The unchallenged lords and dominatrixes of the American political, celebrity, and socio-economic elites, will be bundled out onto the proverbial sidewalks of New York, to trip the light fantastic, indeed, by

comparison with the unchallenged tranquility that has reigned in their lives since time immemorial, like delinquent tenants in Trump middle-class housing projects in Queens. And they will make way for the unrepentant barbaric hordes of those who were conditioned throughout their conscient lives to believe that their time would never come. Since Donald Trump ran against everyone in high political office since Ronald Reagan, long in the saddle, rode into the golden sunset of Santa Barbara 28 years ago, everyone who has held the limelight – Bush and Kennedy, Clinton and Gore, Kerry and Obama, Romney and McCain, the Sanderses and Cruzes, Jacksons and Sharptons, Cuomos, all the endless walk-on auditions (Bachmann, Santorum, Herman Cain, Fiorina, Kasich, the Pauls), the cavalcade of the false leaders and the also-rans – all will complete their trip on the treadmill to oblivion on Inauguration Day.

Franklin D. Roosevelt called it “a day of national consecration” 84 years ago, when there was only fear to be afraid of; now America can forget the personalities of the recent past but not its lessons. The country will increase energy production and assault the obscene balance-of-payments deficit. It will cut taxes on small income-earners and businesses and raise taxes on elective transactions and stop treating the velocity-of-money spinners and asset-strippers as if they were titans of greater employment and a broader industrial base, and shrink the budget deficit. The environment will be protected but the American public will not be hounded into putting whirring fans on their hats and solar panels on their foreheads to mitigate by 1 percent China’s use of carbon, or pass its threadbare national cap to produce money for the gangsters of the underdeveloped world as a consolation prize for their economic failures, as Obama proposed at the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in 2009. The hour of the deunionized teacher and federal civil servant has struck, secure in their jobs, meritocratically promoted, but no longer holding the nation to ransom while degrading the whole concept of education and turning the nation’s children

into a nightmarish army of illiterate, innumerate, juvenile turbots.

It may seem far-fetched to present Donald Trump's induction into the presidency in the terms of a great historic assumption like those of Washington, Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, and he is not cut from the same cloth as those men. It need hardly be said that Donald Trump is not the father of the country, the founder of modern guerrilla warfare, the man who kept a rag-tag army going for seven years, crossed the Delaware on Christmas night, shared the rations of his men through a cold winter and declined absolute power when asked to assume it, and sponsored a Constitution of an indissoluble union that would defend itself and maintain a strong currency. Nor need it be said that he did not co-found a party, lead the greatest national debate in American history to electoral victory, wage a successful war to save the Union and then emancipate the slaves and leave America unbound before a limitless horizon. No more will he take over, next month, the headship of a financially and psychologically depressed country where the financial system has collapsed, one-third of a nation is without means or help, and then lead it back to prosperity and security and through history's greatest war to the threshold of the triumph of democracy and the free market in most of the world.

But American history, like that of other great nations, is not a songbook where verses are sung over again, by players who keep returning. Donald Trump would be more at home in Roosevelt's Springwood in Hyde Park than Mr. Lincoln would be in the Trump Tower and Mar-a-Lago, or than General Washington would have been in Mr. Lincoln's modest house in Springfield, Illinois. But Washington, co-convener of the Constitutional Convention with Benjamin Franklin, and Lincoln, the co-founder of the Republicans who cracked the Democratic hypocrisy of pandering to the slaveholders while telling the North they would keep the South in the Union, and the patrician Roosevelt

who salvaged 95 percent of the capitalist America he knew by creating a happy and hopeful working and agrarian class, would all understand a leader who set aside a life of great wealth to seek the leadership of a party and then of the country in a crusade of those who were tired of corrupt and incompetent elites who drove the nation toward bankruptcy, throttled and despised the common man, and turned America into a laughingstock whose international face was slapped in turn, and to rhythm, by the Russians, the Turks, the Iranians, and the Chinese.

Washington and Franklin worked over constitutional delegates in small groups, and Washington was elevated without opposition to lead the country. Lincoln won just 39 percent of the vote in a four-party race at the head of a party he was narrowly chosen to lead (but if all the votes of his opponents had been combined, he would have won the election, as Trump has, with a minority of voters). Roosevelt gave no real hint of what he proposed to do to defeat the Depression and moved tentatively toward a foreign policy of peace through strength, rather shabbily confecting a draft to a third term promising to stay out of a war he knew America must join to ensure the triumph of democracy in the world. There is much debate about whether Donald Trump expected to win when he began his campaign for president, and only gradually did the entire political class overcome its unsuppressed hilarity at his tactics and recognize that he intended to dispose of all of them. It would be an absurd statement of the obvious to dwell on the incoming president's absence of the austere dignity of Washington or the soaring eloquence of Lincoln and Roosevelt, but he is older and wealthier than they, a plantation-owning colonial soldier, a prairie lawyer, and an Ivy League and Wall Street aristocrat.

He has made his own way in a much-changed America. More important, he has earned the opportunity to remake the official fabric and radically change the official composition

of the leadership of the American state. It is a time that, if he succeeds, as his predecessors succeeded, by methods bearing almost no resemblance to those of their forebears either, will give him a great place in the American pantheon. I believe his chances of success are excellent, as I have thought his chances of getting this far, these 18 months, were excellent. All who wish America well, when they recover from their personal embarrassment and often dislocation, will wish him well. Merry Christmas and Happy 2017 to all readers.

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