

No Winner Yet

by Lorna Salzman

I watched the presidential debate on Sept. 26th even though I have managed to avoid reading the daily pap fed us about this quite boring campaign.

Who “won”? That’s the wrong question to ask. There were no winners. Each side scored some points and got stymied on others. It goes without saying that Trump was his usual uncivil blustering overbearing self, and that Clinton was her usual poised, informed and qualified self.

If viewers and voters use the criteria of who was the more QUALIFIED person to lead our country, in terms of experience, knowledge and policy, clearly Clinton was the winner. But unfortunately there is a lot of evidence that, despite the pundits’ and the public’s efforts to promote Clinton as the most qualified, that is not how voters vote. They vote from their gut, not their brain. They don’t pull out a checklist of issues and problems facing this country and then measure each candidate on how they would resolve them and then add up the numbers and vote accordingly. The public doesn’t vote that way...nor do any of you most likely. What voters want is a “real person”, someone who acts and reacts to events and pressures just like anyone would. In this kind of competition, it isn’t the smartest person who wins. It is the person who convinces you that he/she is not honest but AUTHENTIC.

In this debate and using this measure, Trump came out on top. Yes, of course he interrupted, was rude, dismissive, contemptuous, overbearing, obstructive, mendacious and made no attempt to convince you otherwise. And Clinton was the model of a very modern politician, one who could handle her responsibilities with confidence. In terms of expectations, both fulfilled them. But here’s the political reality. Clinton

will obviously maintain her grip on enrolled Democrats, typical liberals (not the left), probably many independents, and some rational Republicans. But out there in middle America, and putting aside people who already dislike her and don't necessarily like Trump, there are millions of ordinary folk who, if they are not ideologically suspicious of government to begin with, are innately more likely to support someone WHO IS LIKE THEM.

This is not to say that they have bought into the phony Republican populist, anti-elitist argument. These are people who rarely read the fine print in their newspapers, get their news from TV or friends or the internet, and who have zero interest in policy issues. For them Clinton's decided superiority on issues and her knowledge of how Washington functions and her experience don't count because they haven't even followed enough of the news to make a judgement.

What these people saw last night was a very cool, skilled woman in complete command of herself and the issues....and a man who was a big snarling sarcastic loudmouth, showing a range of emotions. Clinton exhibited a strange continual small smile, no anger, the perfect civil, unfazed debater in control of everything....and no emotions whatsoever, not a sign of anger, puzzlement, disturbance. One cool cookie vs. one big angry rude ignoramus. Of course you and the liberals and Democrats award her the prize for, presumably, looking good in the face of an irresponsible mendacious blowhard. But Trump got the prize from ordinary folks who weren't looking for the perfect Washingtonian.

You've watched and read the moral outrage against Trump, his lies, his insolence, his defiance of all rules of engagement. There are now stacks of Outrage on the internet and in all the newspapers. all of them based on reality. Is moral outrage going to win the election? Hardly. Because there is a reason for all this outrage: the history of the Democratic Party. Note this, please: all of this tongue-lashing against Trump is

monopolizing the media and the public space. But why? Not only because Trump is a bad joke but because attacking Trump is ALMOST ALL THE DEMOCRATS CAN DO. If you don't have a record of accomplishment that you can be proud of, and if you have some really disastrous policies and actions you'd prefer to forget (Iraq, Syria, NAFTA, TPP, Wall St. worship, Benghazi, Obama's bedding down with the Muslim Brotherhood), then focus on your opponent's mistakes, temperament, lack of experience and mendacity.

And that is why Clinton is having a hard time: not only because she is not well liked but because she represents a party that has, by any measure, fallen short, to put it mildly, in all the areas of concern to citizens such as universal health care, income inequality, foreign trade, globalization, loss of jobs and the flight of corporations to foreign countries, etc. And try as they may to blame the Republicans for it, the Democrats are as much to blame as the Republicans for the sorry state of our economy, infrastructure, health care and energy systems.

This is why cursing Trump is not a winning strategy, and why an honest look at the Democratic Party's failures and refusals will end up hurting Clinton. Voters may not be that bright but they are not going to be swayed by moral outrage at Trump. What might have swayed them is water over the dam, the failure of the Democrats to adopt and fulfill a progressive agenda like the one we might have had if Nader or Sanders had been elected. Having Wall St. and the liberal pundits and elites on your side (all of whose jobs and reputations are tied to the Democrats of course) isn't enough.