

Trump vs. Clinton: A Fight about Character

by Conrad Black

As I am about to depart on an overseas trip and will miss at least one week in this space, I offer a brief forward look on the home stretch of the election campaign. The Democrats have absolutely no plausible argument for their own reelection or for the continuation of the Bush-Clinton-Obama co-regency as they all campaign together to pass the government of the United States around and amongst themselves for decades on end. Incumbency, or at least continuity, of what two-thirds of Americans have thought for years was the wrong direction, can only be achieved by a relentless, maximally nasty attack on Donald Trump, who makes it easier for his enemies by his short and often adolescent temper and the blowhard approach he often takes to challenges and public issues.

His opponents have chronically misgoverned the country and Trump has built and greatly strengthened his electoral insurgency by saying so. The Clinton Foundation has received tens of millions of dollars from people who did business with the State Department while Mrs. Clinton was secretary, and the FBI director all but called her a serial perjurer in his appearance before a House committee last month. Mrs. Clinton would have a more responsible foreign policy than George W. Bush or Barack Obama, but she can't say "Islamist terror," and often can't be believed at all or trusted to show any financial probity, as is agreed by the majority of Americans.

Continuation of the administrative standards that gave us the housing bubble, the Great Recession, the second Iraq War, the "red line" in Syria, a doubling of the national debt for 1 percent economic growth, a shrinking labor force, the Iranian nuclear cave-in, and the immense refugee disaster will strain

the fabric of America and atomize the West. The only change available is Trump and the only alternative to Trump is Hillary. The issue is whether the dangers of continuity are exceeded by the roulette game, as it is widely perceived to be, of having such a volatile and voluminous personality as Donald Trump as president.

It is essentially a choice between the negative foibles of the two candidates, and in Mrs. Clinton's case the vast entourage, now including the last four presidents, that she has accumulated over more than 30 years of public life. This is essentially a character issue, for both candidates. I think the best thing that could happen would be a fourth debate, on the character issue. Both candidates would have an enforced time to make charges and defend against charges. These biased moderators we have seen in the last two debates would be confined to enforcing time limits, if need be by cutting off microphones. The candidates would formulate their own charges or questions. This debate would attract an immense audience and would decide the election by direct discussion of what was always going to become the main issue. Everyone knows the last two presidencies have failed and that the Clinton administration inflated the housing bubble and underreacted to the first terrorist outrages. Most Americans want change and most doubt that Trump has a presidential aptitude and character. This is the best way of getting to the correct decision, given the alternatives.

There has been less serious discussion of public policy in this election than in any of my memory, going back to the second contest between Dwight D. Eisenhower and Adlai E. Stevenson in 1956. Since the Republicans were always going to be running against the Obama-Clinton administration and away from the George W. Bush administration, and the Democrats could not defend their record and have to defame their opponent, there was no chance of this being anything but a monumental, wall-to-wall slanging match. The media are

essentially part of the Democratic team, and they are among those that the Trump insurgents want to throw out of Washington, bag and baggage.

Majorities think that both candidates are unfit for the office they seek, but they are the candidates tossed up by the democratic process and in a democracy, the people are always right, and they get the government they deserve. In these circumstances, these debates, and the whole campaign, have been the Clintons, Obamas, Bushes, traditional Republicans, most of the Cruz extreme right, the Sanders far left, and 95 percent of the media against Trump, and he is still snapping closely at Mrs. Clinton's heels.

Let's have a fourth debate right on character, face to face, no holds barred, equal time, and none of the media frame-ups (such as Lester Holt saying stop and frisk had been determined to be unconstitutional, in what appeared to be his own campaign to be Clinton's White House press secretary). Whichever wins, America and the world will have to live with it, and since the deciding issue is how much mud can be slung at and by each candidate and not who can orchestrate complainants against the other to come out of the undergrowth after decades of silence, or who said what off-mike many years ago, what is called for is single-combat war – mano a mano, toe-to-toe smearing. Trump should demand it, and Clinton should pay a heavy price if she declines and chooses to continue to leave it to the army of her media snipers and assassins to fight her battles for her. Instead of this charade of two- or three-on-one debates, the people must be enabled to make an informed decision.

Probably 90 percent of Americans would agree that this is not the ideal choice, but it's the choice they have made and they must finish the job with the clearest possible test of both candidates, attacking and defending all through the great catalogue of their opponent's alleged larceny, chicanery, skulduggery, and incompetence. Let's make it a fair, dirty

fight to the finish.

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