

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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AMATEURISM'S ALLURE

[He who shall not be mentioned by name](#) made a campaign stop here in South Florida last night, lamenting that "our country doesn't win anymore," and decrying the "incompetent people running our government." Moreover, he solemnly promised the adoring throng that *when - not if* - he's elected POTA, he will "bring back the American



"The Amateurs" - Honoré Daumier (1866)

dream" to the point where ". . . we're going to win on everything." In a rambling hour-plus speech, Mr. Nameless said he'd be able to fix the U.S. trade deficit with China "by installing the toughest possible negotiators," and would vastly increase military spending: "We're going to build up our military so big, so strong, so powerful. We've gotta do it. So powerful that nobody is going to mess with us. Nobody." No one asked - nor did he explain - precisely how "tough negotiators" could balance a trade deficit (as if the Chinese negotiators are all a bunch of powder puffs) or how in

the world we're going to pay for huge increases in military spending. Such concession or conversation was irrelevant to the evening's agenda; the audience was just as amateurish as their political idol.

And yet, according to the latest University of North Florida (UNF) [poll](#), old nameless is leading the Republican field in the Sunshine States; he's 3 points ahead of fellow political amateur Ben Carson, 7 ahead of Florida's junior Senator Marco Rubio and a whopping 13 ahead of Florida's former Governor Jeb Bush. Moreover, the self-financing

former reality television star and Platonic absolute of narcissism is currently leading the Republican pack by 15 points in New Hampshire, 34 in Massachusetts and nationally, leads the rest of the field by 10 points according to the latest ABC/Washington Post poll. In Iowa, it's a different story: Dr. Carson is currently leading Mr. "We Shall Overcome" by 8 points and beginning to spend money like a drunken sailor. Like his closest rival for the nomination, the good doctor has become known for making provocative, shoot-from-the-hip, off-the-wall statements:

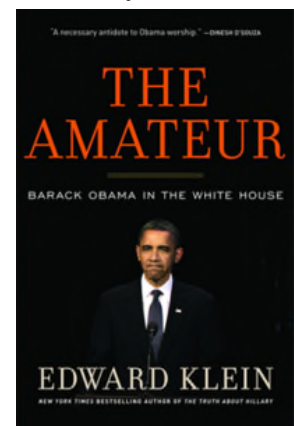
"I would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation. I absolutely would not agree with that,"

"Obamacare is really I think the worst thing that has happened in this nation since slavery."

"We are living in a new Gestapo age"

"I think the likelihood of Hitler being able to accomplish his goals would have been greatly diminished if the people had been armed."

The fact that both Dr. Carson and old nameless - who between them haven't a second's-worth of experience in foreign policy, working with Congress or earning a passing grade on the *Washington Post's* ["Quiz: 20 questions about the world a future U.S. president should get right"](#) - are one-two in the polls, is both enormously troubling and a triumph for the allure of amateurism. To some extent, this latter reality - amateurism's allure - is understandable. Across the country, tons of people are fed up with the gross partisanship of career politicians; of the inability to get anything done; of the schoolyard bickering and downright nastiness. At the same time, destiny's dice-box is rigged; it shakes out cubes far more often favoring consumerism than citizenship. We confuse the responsibilities of thoughtful citizenship with entertainment, and have little facility or patience for anything that has substance or depth. And in the rare instance when the amateurs are asked trenchant questions by the professional press, they accuse that estate of purposely setting traps to make them look bad. Erudition has, in many quarters, become an embarrassment; anti-intellectualism a badge of honor. And so many fall prey to simplicity's siren song. Is it any wonder that many believe that the solution to all our problems is simply to "kick the bums out" and start all over again with a new team of the untried, untested and untutored? We've already blazed that tortuous trail; to a great extent it wound up electing a majority of those sitting on the so-called "Benghazi Committee." I for one am fascinated that many of the same citizens who swear fealty to first-timers, castigated President Obama for being an abject amateur who came into office possessing not even a shred of "real world" experience. Then too these are many of the same people who find nothing incongruous



about accusing the current president of being an effete elitist snob and while firmly believing that his predecessor is "just one of the guys."

There is no questioning the fact that Ben Carson was a brilliant surgeon or that He Who Shall Remain Unnamed is a master showman and richer than Croesus. But these accomplishments - as rare and awe-inspiring as they may be - offer faint preparation for becoming the most powerful person on the planet. Their life accomplishments tell us nothing about how well they work with others; about how adaptable they are to changing circumstances; of their ability to listen to a multiplicity of hard truths and conflicting options; of how thick their skin is when the arrows start flying. Many recall the old declaration that "Any country that can land a man on the moon can . . ." The intent of that statement was to aver that if we could do the former, whatever latter might be - ending poverty, making peace with our enemies, conquering climate change - would be a walk in the park. The problem however, is that the former deals with a scientific, technological challenge, while the latter is far more in the realm of theory, human relations and politics. So too, just because one has risen to rarefied heights in medicine or commerce is no guarantee that they have the skill to succeed on a totally different stage of endeavor. For many, that dichotomy has been beclouded by amateurism's narcotic allure.

The world is an increasingly dangerous place, filled with challenges that demand leaders who understand the players, who appreciate and understand the complexities, and who are masters of the serious arts of listening and responding. Despite all this, I have faith that enough of us - like Odysseus of old - will find a way to lash ourselves to the mast and safely sail past the allure of amateurism.

The times are simply far too complex, serious and demanding for amateurs; for those who, like the Platte River, are "a mile wide at the mouth but only six inches deep."

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