

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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## FIGHTING BS WITH A MARSHMALLOW

The story has long been told about the great actor John Barrymore's last few moments. According to the tale - perhaps apocryphal, though I pray not - as "The Great Profile" lay dying at his home in Beverly Hills (1500 Seabright Place to be precise), Jack's elder



John Barrymore

brother Lionel was by his bedside, spending what he well knew would be the last few moments in the life of this highly talented but unbelievably tortured soul. "Is dying difficult Jack"? Lionel asked softly. "Comedy's difficult," Jack responded; "Dying's easy!" And with that he winked, closed his eyes, and shuffled off this mortal coil. Again, whether or not these were Barrymore's dying words may or may not be true; no one will ever know. Nonetheless, the sentiment attributed to the man who had more than conquered Hamlet, Lear, and Richard III are unquestionably pithy and right on the money: comedy *is* unimaginably difficult. Just read a bit

about the lives of such classic cinematic clowns as [Max Linder](#), Sir Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Harold

Lloyd (not to mention Danny Kaye, Zero Mostel and [Mabel Normand](#)) to realize just how terribly serious and conscientious these comic geniuses were in real life.

Two weeks ago, I posted [an essay](#) in which I derided Donald Trump for being a clown; not a funny laugh-till-your-nose runs sort like Lucille Ball, Benny Hill or [Jacques Tati](#), but rather one far more like *comedia dell'arte*'s [Punchinello](#), who was mean, vicious and crafty, a jerk who was suspicious and disrespectful of anyone who was not like him.

Sound familiar? With each passing news cycle; with every campaign gathering and resulting press conference, Mr. Trump becomes ever more frightening and clownish - again, in the Punchinello sense. Starting out as the birther-to-end-all birthers, Trump moved on to demeaning Mexicans, making outrageous statements about Muslims, whipping his minions into hysteria and most recently, urging them to "raise your hand" and pledge allegiance to the man who is incredibly long on outrages promises, unbelievably short on nitty-gritty details. What is to be done? One holds out hope that one of these days he will go too far; he'll make the one inexcusable statement or get ensnared in the one unforgivable con that causes his idolaters to abandon ship. Yes, one can hope, but it is not likely to happen. And for those who believe that facts, figures and documented statements can defeat b.s., I've got news: they cannot. Trump has given his supporters an antidote to all facts and figures that tend to show him for the shallow blowhard he is: questioning the very media or researchers that provide the facts and figures. Yes, it is frustrating, maddening and conducive to ulcers. Trying to change the mind of the average Trump supporter through reliance on logic or fact is a fool's errand; I have long counseled my politics students that banging one's head against a wall only leads to concussions, and unless one is truly in love with cerebral trauma, they'd better find another path.

So what is the cure for Trump's BS?

Perhaps derisive humor and comedy. The one thing that truly rubs The Donald the wrong way; the one thing that can likely make him blow up and put his foot even deeper in his mouth, is to treat him with low-decibel humor; to dismiss him as a truculent, ego maniacal child. When he threatens to sue opponents and the press for "defamation of character," we should respond by announcing that what truly bothers him is not "defamation," but rather *definition* of character. He should continually be tasked with explaining what he's going to do about specific problems and challenges. We should urge him to pay for the wall at the Mexican border himself . . . as well as the approximately 100,000 buses it will take to deport 11 million illegals. When he urges his followers to "raise your hand," (which is hauntingly reminiscent of Riefenstahl's [Triumph des Willens](#)) parody him with a once-famous deodorant commercial which commands "Raise your hand, raise your hand . . . if you're Sure."

By using this particular video, we are of course urging people to "raise your hand" in order to eliminate the odor, the stench - not from one's body but from the political system itself. And if we're successful, Mr. Trump and the brand of low-brow xenophobia and intolerance he represents like "Sure" will soon become a memory; a reminder of a product that has lost a tremendous amount of market share.

Over the past nine months, Mr. Trump has pulled off several miracles, not the least of which is making such a spectacle of himself that people no longer pay attention to - or comment on - his ludicrous hairdo, spray-on tan or recycled Benito Mussolini/Alvin Lee (Ten Years After) pout. He has managed to climb to the top of the Republican heap by promising that if elected, *"We're going to win so much you're going to get sick and tire of it. You're going to say, Mr. President, we can't take it any more."* I ask you, what in the name of Punchinello does *that* mean. Win what? What game is he talking about? "The Apprentice?" "Survivor?" "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" "The Price is Right?" How's about "Jeopardy" or "Let's Make a Deal?"



Alvin Lee

Whether or not Jack Barrymore actually made the quip which begins this piece will never be known for sure. Regardless, it is undoubtedly true that comedy *is* serious business; getting laughs takes a lot of planning and rehearsing. But unlike every other clown from Chaplin to Steve Martin, Trump, the modern-day Punchinello can't stand being laughed at; his brand of BS is both derisory and dangerous. It is best fought - and responded to - not with facts or outrage, but with a marshmallow. Laugh *at* him, not *with* him, and perhaps he'll finally blow his cork. Eventually *he* will provide the punch line that brings the curtain down.

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