

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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WHO'S TO BLAME? WE ALL ARE

The irrepressible Dorothy Parker once quipped that no matter how long she lived, there were two things she knew would always confuse her: the theory of zippers and the exact function of Bernard Baruch. So far as I know, Mrs. Parker (1893-1967) never did figure out how zippers worked. No matter; even without grasping the theory behind them, they still worked every time she gave one a tug. And the fact that she never could plumb Baruch's precise function within political society, meant that she was in some pretty good company. From an early 21st century point of view, Bernard Baruch's "exact function" still remains a deep mystery.



**KEEP
CALM
AND
BLAME
SOMEONE ELSE**

Along these lines, I for one have been flummoxed in trying to ascertain precisely who's to blame for the rise and relative political success of Donald Trump and - to a slightly lesser extent - Senator Ted Cruz. After much pondering, perpending and ruminating, I've concluded that *we're all to blame*. Of course precisely what role various individuals, factors and factions play in bringing about this harrowing scenario depends on who you talk to . . . and who's doing the talking. And before one loses sleep over the fear that The Donald may actually win the presidential race, keep in mind the following:

- In order to win the presidency, a candidate needs to receive at least 40% of the Hispanic vote. [Donald Trump's unfavorable rating](#) within that community is about as high as ever recorded. Recent polling has him losing the Hispanic vote to Hillary Clinton by a margin of 57 points (73-16). Senator Sanders leads Trump by 56 points.

- According to the most recent [Reuters/Ipsos poll](#), fully half of U.S. women say they have a "very unfavorable" view of the real estate mogul, up from 40% who felt that way less than 6 months ago.
- According to the latest [Bloomberg Politics poll](#), only 29 percent of likely general election voters nationally have a favorable view of him, compared to 68 percent who view him negatively. (In the pursuit of full disclosure, Secretary Clinton is similarly underwater on favorability, with 44 percent saying they have a positive view of her and 53 percent saying they view her negatively.) And yet, the Bloomberg poll has Clinton rolling over Trump by more than 18 points.

And, for what it's worth, [many influential world leaders](#) are recoiling in horror (and on the record) about the possibility of a Trump presidency:

- **Alwaleed bin Talal Al Saud**, a member of the Saudi royal family: *"You are a disgrace not only to the GOP but to all America."*
- **Former Mexican president Felipe Calderón** called Trump a *"not terribly well informed man If this guy pretends that closing the borders to anywhere either for trade [or] for people is going to provide prosperity to the United State, he is completely crazy."* (When asked to respond to Calderon's statement, Trump said *"Now the wall just got taller."*
- **British P.M. David Cameron**: *"I think his remarks are divisive, stupid and wrong. I think if he came to visit our country he'd unite us all against him."*
- **French Prime Minister Manuel Valls**: *"Mr. Trump, like others, stokes hatred: our ONLY enemy is radical Islamism."*

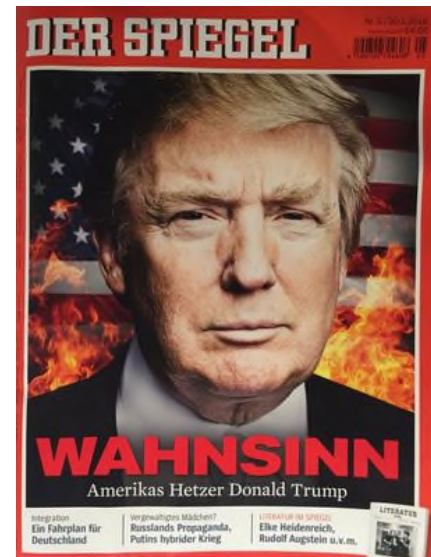
But let's return to the question "Who's to blame for the rise of Donald Trump?" In reality, we all are:

Tea Party Conservatives, of course, blame President Obama for the rise of Donald Trump; that in so badly dividing the nation, he's given Trump an ineluctable appeal to the angry masses. Of course, one must keep in mind that during his 7+ years in office, the president has also been blamed for everything from the rise of ISIS and the massacres in Paris, Brussels and San Bernardino, to the toxic water in Flint, Michigan and World Series collapse of the New York Mets. In other words, Obama's culpability in the rise and relative success of Donald Trump can be taken with an enormous grain of salt.

Mass Media has essentially made an enormous contribution to the Trump for President campaign by providing more than \$2 billion in news coverage. Whenever and wherever Trump speaks, mugs, bad-mouths, lifts a middle finger, or passes gas, media ranging from the major television networks and *The New York Times* to social media cover him like he was the second coming of Abraham Lincoln, Charles Lindbergh and

Sir Charles Chaplin all rolled into one. Even MSNBC, a supposedly left-of-center outlet, breaks into their regularly scheduled news programming to run Trump press events in their entirety. By shining all that megawattage on one uncouth, ill-informed sideshow freak, they have morphed an amoeba into a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Then too, mass media has become expert at entertaining through screaming headlines where once they informed, enlightened and uplifted through professional reportage.

The Republican National Committee (that which passes for the GOP's "Establishment Wing") earns its share of the blame in having spent more than a generation placating a mob of misfits by pushing social and "values" issues in an attempt to bring more and more voters to the polls. In moving the political fulcrum far to the right of anything Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon or even Ronald Reagan would believe, they have replaced consensus and compromise with bigotry and boorishness, and strategy with sanctimony. The monster they have mindlessly nurtured has grown up to devour them. (By the way, the cover of *Der Spiegel* translates "Madness: America's Rabble-rouser, Donald Trump.")



Congress certainly must shoulder a lot of blame for having become a hyper-partisan, rudderless body in which next to nothing gets done. On the Republican side of the aisle, their majority has used most of their clout to ensure that Obama and the Democrats get nothing done - and then blame the minority for being the culprits responsible for the political logjam. This is akin to blaming the victim of a shark attack for not being in a submarine. Of course, one major result of all this political *danse macabre* is an all but universal mistrust on the part of the American electorate, which seeks to "throw the bums out" and replace them with people who are totally outside the system -- like Donald Trump. Although in part an understandable response, it seeks a cure that is far more lethal than the disease. Perhaps an analogy will help: I am a dyed-in-the-wool L.A. Dodger fan. During baseball season I live, breath and bleed "Dodger Blue." I am also really angry and frustrated over their inability to make it to the World Series. So what do I suggest? That we get rid of every last player and replace them all with . . . professional golfers. Hey, they're athletes too, and certainly have the drive to win . . . so why not? Except playing baseball requires a very special set of skills. Being president also requires a very special set of skills - skills neither fully developed nor mastered in the world of real estate or marketing. Get the point? Perhaps that is why we've never elected a person from the world of business to occupy 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Democrats certainly come in for a share of the blame for not having put their collective bully pulpit to good use. And by "good use," I am not referring to the pointing of fingers. Democrats have, for more than a generation, done a particularly poor job of reaching people, of explaining the vast chasm which exists between "progressive" and "socialist," or "liberal" and "Marxist." They have permitted others to define who they are (or are not), and what they stand for, instead of standing up for themselves. They have far too often confused the "high road" with a garden path, while the not-so-loyal opposition have turned civility into an unforgivable sin. Where once we responded to fear with hope, today we cower in the face of bellicosity.

The "great unwashed majority," as it used to be called, is also to blame for the rise of Donald Trump, Ted Cruz and the rest of the Republican field - most of whom have now been sent to the showers. This group has permitted itself to believe that the intricacies of international relations can best be handled by a schoolyard bully, and that promises - no matter how irrational, ridiculous or unrealistic - are credible when coming from the mouth of a billionaire who laces them with four letter words and mono-syllabic threats. When Trump says he'll "bomb the sh*t out of ISIS," what does that mean? Where is he going to do the bombing? What about the tens of thousands of civilian casualties? The man - like Senator Cruz - is a chicken hawk. OK, Donald Trump may be entertaining, but he is no leader. Next to him, Ronald Reagan was Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Indeed, when all is said and done, we are *all* responsible for the likes of a Donald Trump or Ted Cruz; candidates who will say anything, promote anything, pretend to believe anything, in order to capture a vote.

We began with Dorothy Parker, quipster *par excellence* . . . and end with Robert Musil, one of the deepest, most trenchant writers of the 20th century - author of a vast, unfinished novel [*The Man Without Qualities*](#) - who famously noted that "Life is to blame for everything . . ."

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