

Grow up, America

The year twenty twenty-four is rapidly approaching and with it will come a test for all of us. Will we have the right stuff to take it - and pass it - or not? I'm speaking of perhaps the most basic test to determine a person's actual maturity, fairness and objectivity. The test is called: "Hate what I say; love what I do" and it concerns Americans' favorite punching bag and political personality, Donald J. Trump.

We spend a fair amount of our early lives amassing prejudices for and against certain things and... people. As young adults, we want to be accepted and liked so we gravitate towards those cliques and groups that will have us. But, our membership comes with a price. That price is our acceptance of the group's beliefs and modus operandi. For some of us, that price was too high and we avoided fraternities or sororities and rejected the elitism that fueled them. We left our infatuation at the door and did a 180 towards our own path to 'enlightenment.' It wasn't an easy path for most of us because it was filled with binary choices: turn left or right, take the high-paying job or the satisfying one, get married or stay single, etc.

One of those critical decisions had to do with how we evaluate and assess our fellow human beings. Do we judge them on their outward appearance and then put them in the proper 'box' on our attractiveness scale like we do with movie actors or do we exercise some emotional restraint and dig a bit deeper to find their true 'selves' by giving them an opportunity to reveal their real personalities and their essential humanity? With those who are closest to us, like family and friends and co-workers, do we entrust them with our resources and our secrets to see if they measure up to their assurances and stand by us? Yes, we do... sometimes by inches, sometimes by miles. Faith and intuition play an important part in those decisions, but should these people fail us we will most likely cut them loose and leave them to disappoint someone else.

The point is that we humans are a complex amalgamation of instinct, intuition, memory, emotion and logic and all depending on our experiences and environment we use some or all of them when weighing important decisions. There are those of us, however, that never get past 'go' to collect \$200. We remain frozen in place in a state of perpetual immaturity that prevents us from looking beyond people's externals - their rhetoric, physicality, accents, clothing, you name it. We elevate them to a higher level in our 'compatibility/attractiveness pyramid,' which acts as a storage unit for our accumulated biases.

This is especially true when it comes to politicians. While many of us might deny it, many of us also do make snap judgments of public figures and then we pigeonhole them. Simply put, we are either unable or unwilling to allow new facts - like a person's actions - to change our opinion of them. This is especially true in the bifurcated states of America where we are split down the middle into two warring ideological camps of political thought. Each statement made by elected or appointed officials is analyzed to death, but their actions are often downplayed or left to wither away due to our short memories and/or attention spans.

Here's the real point I want to make. Americans have become tribalist sound-bite addicts and personal bias junkies. As immature 'products' of a heavily commercialized society we tend to form opinions based on what appeals to us instead of what's good for us. Basically, we're a nation of Peter Pans that haven't grown up and that don't particularly want to, either. We like narcissism and group think. It's comfortable and safe to live within our own personal belief system cocoons.

Enter Donald Trump.

There are some people that just infuriate us or confuse us... or inspire us. Donald Trump is not only a man that people love to hate or one we cannot stop loving, he is more. He is a living and breathing symbol and representative of our American society and culture and as such elicits exaggerated fear, loathing, anger and distrust from diehard Leftists along with the polar opposite emotions from his

supporters on the Right. He is a barometer, Geiger counter and yardstick that measures how different we Americans think and react. Some of us only hear what he says and ignore what he has done. Others only look at his actions and ignore his often puerile remarks. Either way, like a car crash on a highway, we cannot avert our eyes from the scene. He keeps our blood boiling and gives us a momentary reprieve from the mundane things that occupy our time and lives.

He is as American as apple pie. He's the wealthy, successful and powerful villain people love to hate and the mouthpiece for all the unspoken words the silent majority won't say out loud. His bombast and braggadocio are quintessentially American and in that regard he is an iconic figure like P.T. Barnum, Buffalo Bill, Lee Iacocca and Muhammad Ali - all larger than life figures that we cannot ignore.

Love him or hate him he's here to stay, but if you want to be fair and objective and understand why he has so many supporters you must not judge him solely on his words or by his style. Look at what he did for four years as President, and if your memory fails you there's always the Internet or my book, "Remaking America: Reflections on the Trump Presidency - Four years that changed the nation." Neither the White House log nor my book, however, will help you if you're stuck in the ditch of your own bias. Only a tow truck from the 'fairness garage' can pull you out.

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