

Donald Trump Was Bound to Happen

Donald Trump didn't start the fire that is consuming the Republican Party, but he's been pouring gasoline on it from the day he entered the race.

Long before there was a Donald Trump there was turmoil inside the party. Unlike the Democrats whose politics run the gamut from A to B – they're either liberal or very liberal – there are widely disparate factions inside the Republican Party.

Yes, the GOP is the conservative party, but conservatism alone isn't enough to bring the factions together. A lot of Republicans who share mainstream conservative principles on the size and scope of government are liberal on the social issues. When it comes to those issues, what does the moderate wing have in common with the Religious Right? Not much.

I know Republicans who favor small government and low taxes and don't think waterboarding is torture, but who have no problem with same-sex marriage. Some of them just can't vote for Ted Cruz, who went to Kentucky to support that county clerk who wouldn't issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples – even though the Supreme Court had ruled that banning such marriages was unconstitutional.

Trump, who has no detectable ideology, didn't create the disparate wings. He didn't create the chaos inside the party. But things did get more chaotic after he decided to run.

And as much as they viscerally detest the very idea of Hillary Clinton as president, a lot of Republicans will not be able to bring themselves to vote for Donald Trump – a man who lies too much; who brags too much; who is mean-spirited too much; who says Bush lied to get us into a war in Iraq; who denigrated a fellow Republican that spent five years as a POW; who made fun

of a female opponent's face; who said he would ban all Muslims from entering the country; who mocked a disabled journalist; who imagined a story about thousands of Muslims cheering as the World Trade Towers came crashing down; who claims he'd like to make his tax returns public while many of us believe he never will; who says he's worth \$10 billion but may be worth considerably less; who thinks eminent domain is "wonderful" even when it gives the government the right to take your house to build a casino parking lot; and who has embraced just about as many liberal causes as Bernie Sanders has.

That's enough gasoline to keep the fire going for a while.

And while Donald Trump has turned presidential politics more boorish than it's been in modern times – unless you count Bill Clinton turning the White House into a place for casual sex – the culture was getting crummy long before Trump opened his mouth to tell the world about the size of his penis, another claim he may be lying about.

It's not just rap with its bitches and hos, or movies you can't watch with your kids. Even mainstream network TV sitcoms have gotten downright dirty. There's a show on CBS called *2 Broke Girls*. Every 15 seconds or so there's a sex joke – and not exactly a PG rated sex joke.

This is how one episode began: One of the girls (they're both waitresses at a coffee shop) takes the bill up to the cashier and tells him that the diners want to split a measly \$11 tab three ways – even though only one of them did most of the eating. The cashier smiles and says, I was in a three-way once – and it was the same thing.

You can't blame Donald Trump for that.

In fact, the only reason Trump could get away with a classless remark about his penis – *at a presidential debate broadcast on national television* – was because of the waste that has been

coarsening our culture for quite a while now.

In a piece about Trump and “culture rot” for National Review, Andrew McCarthy writes that, “In 1966, which is not exactly millennia ago, Trump’s vulgarity would have had him banned from appearing on anyone’s black-and-white TV – even after midnight. Today, he is the front-runner. Today, in fact, he is coveted not by the blue channels but by the news channels. He is ratings. He sells. He is Viagra without commercials.”

We can blame Donald Trump for a lot of things. I’ve done just that here in this space and on television. But he’s not the cause of the breakdown of our politics or our culture, as convenient as it may be to lay it all on him.

The GOP is a party of unnatural alliances and sooner or later the Republican establishment is going to have to deal with that. How? Who knows? Ronald Reagan was able to unite the disparate wings of the party, but the Gipper is gone and he’s not coming back.

Donald Trump has told us that he is a “unifier,” that he will bring people with different ideas together. He may be on to something. He’s already managed to bring Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and whole bunch of principled conservatives together ... in condemning Donald Trump.

As for the culture, Donald Trump didn’t make it nasty. But he did make it nastier. For years, as our pop culture descended into the sewer, many Americans barely noticed. The fall came in small doses, a little at a time. Like the frog in the boiling pot, we didn’t understand how bad things were really going to get.

And now we’re supposed to be shocked that a man running for President of the United States – boasting that he will make America great again – tells the world about his penis?

It was bound to happen.

An Open Letter to the Ayatollahs

✘ No, not the ayatollahs in Tehran. This is a letter to *you*, the conservative American ayatollahs who demand purity, just like the ones over there. I'm not talking about all of you, of course. But this open letter is for many of you; maybe even most of you – the ones who say you agree with what I write on this Web site and what I say on the O'Reilly Factor almost all of the time, but as soon as I fall out of lock step with you ... you vow to never listen or read another word I say or write. You are the ayatollahs this letter is aimed at.

The last two columns I wrote – one about whether Christian small business owners can refuse to do business with gays, the other about the civil war raging in the Republican Party – have drawn a ton of negative reaction. In both cases I wasn't pure enough for many of you. Let me be clear: dissent is welcome. Unlike many of you, I don't believe I have a monopoly on Truth. Do I like comments that say, "Bernie, right on, we love you"? Sure. But those of you who disagree are free to state your opinions just as I'm free to state mine.

But what I've learned is that while many of you *claim* to respect people in the public eye who stand up for their views, no matter how unpopular, what you really mean is you respect people in the public eye who stand up for *your* views. What I've learned reading your comments over several years now is that many of you only want your views validated. Nothing else is good enough. You don't simply disagree with the other guy. You don't want to even hear the other guy. You want the other guy dead (in some cases, I suspect, literally dead!). So this feel-good nonsense that you spout – that you admire people who

stand on principle – is just something you say to make yourself feel good – about yourself. But you don't mean it. Like the other ayatollahs, reasoned dissent scares you. You talk tough. But you're weak.

In my particular case, I have never written or uttered a word on TV that I didn't honestly believe. Those views often offend liberals who read or listen to me. Understood. And every now and then those views rub my hard right friends the wrong way. But despite what you say, you don't really respect independence. You only want to hear from people who agree with you. You rightly deride liberal colleges for not welcoming diverse opinions. You rightly wonder what they're afraid of. You, my conservative ayatollahs ... are them.

You know how many of you (again, rightly) condemn liberals who attack black conservatives for straying from the liberal plantation? You ayatollahs are no better. You condemn me for straying from the conservative plantation. And even if you agree with me most of the time, one false move and I'm dead to you. Think I'm exaggerating? Try this sampling (with bad spelling and bad grammar left intact) from those of you angry conservatives who are no better than angry closed-minded liberals:

From Leisa: "I can no longer listen to you. How disrespectful and foolish can you be. I will stop watching O'Riley in fear I might possibly see or hear from you again."

From Wade: "Followed you for years and bought [your] book. Never again Go to Hell."

From Vicki: "Bernie. you have now lost me. wow. you missed the point entirely. You and O'Reilly are done."

From Conservative Citizen: I will never watch them [Goldberg and O'Reilly] again. Just like MSNBC.

From Mal: "last time I'll bother reading Bernie!"

From LaMont: "Been a long time follower of yours Bernie, but after seeing youR comments on Ted Cruz and Eric Bolling, it seems that you are just anther Karl Rove ASS KISSER. YOU establishment GOP guys suck – our only chance is if the likes of Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, and Eric Bolling can get rid of you, Rove, McConnell, and Boehner. Go screw Pelosi you traitor – I AM DONE LISTENING TO PHONIES LIKE YOU!"

There are many more just like that.

When I wrote about liberal bias while I was still a CBS News correspondent, conservatives applauded me. But some of my liberal CBS News colleagues called me a "traitor" because I didn't toe the party line. They were afraid of dissent. Dissent would force them to consider another point of view, and that's the last thing they wanted to do. Now I'm called a traitor again – this time by you conservative ayatollahs, for expressing a few opinions you don't want to hear. Once again, you are what you condemn in liberals.

There is little difference between the authoritarians on the hard left and those of you ayatollahs on the hard right. You're both closed-minded. You both demand ideological purity.

The ayatollahs in Tehran survive because they will not tolerate dissent. This is all the proof you need regarding their insecurity. You, my American ayatollah friends, are no different. You don't simply dislike opinions that don't mesh with yours. You don't ever want to be exposed to them. At some level you see opinions you don't share as viruses that may do you in. That's why, like the ayatollahs over there, you too want to shut down dissent. You too are insecure.

I know, as I said at the outset, that some of you reading this – whether you agree with my views on various subjects or not – are open-minded enough to hear me out. That's all I ask. It would be nice if more of you took on the ayatollahs with

strong comments on my Web site, but that's up to you. As for the right wing authoritarians who have threatened to never read another word I write, or listen to another word I say, do what you have to do.

The good people in Tehran will not miss their ayatollahs when they finally go. And we won't miss you, either.