

To Shill for Trump Is to Lose His Respect

Back in 2012, shortly after President Obama secured a second term in the White House, I wrote a column in which I posed the below question to Americans:



If our president can do so many things wrong in his first term, fail miserably to achieve every predicted outcome he put forth at the beginning of his presidency, show no interest in addressing the biggest threats to our nation, and still be rewarded with re-election, how can he possibly respect us?

It was a not-so-veiled reference to a famous quote often attributed to legendary comedian Groucho Marx: “I wouldn’t want to belong to any club that would have me as a member.”

The point, of course, is that if a group can bring itself to hold such a grossly unworthy individual in high regard, that group is not worthy of the individual’s respect. I suspected (and still believe) that President Obama felt this way about the country after he won re-election, and I think that both of the major parties’ 2016 presidential candidates probably feel the same way about their devout supporters.

For example, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton have established themselves as perhaps the two most unmistakably dishonest presidential candidates ever to win their parties’ nominations. Yet, each has a band of loyal followers that are always ready and willing to excoriate the other side’s candidate for – you guessed it – *lying*.

How anyone with any sense of shame can participate in such a glaringly hypocritical effort is beyond me, but there is no shortage of such people. And while each of the candidates undoubtedly appreciates the benefits of those willing to disgrace themselves in the name of their campaign, neither could possibly find a way to respect them.

The only real difference I see between the presumptive nominees, in this sense, is that Trump routinely goes out of his way to publicly *express* that disrespect.

I'm not only talking about what little regard he has for his common faithful, who he claims (probably accurately) would vote for him even if he *shot someone* in the middle of a street. I'm also referring to the public figures out there who've spent an enormous amount of their political and professional capital to substantiate Trump as a serious, credible candidate.

One of those people is former Texas Governor, Rick Perry. As many will remember, Perry was the first GOP presidential candidate to leave the primary race last year. Not long before his exit, he delivered to his party a dire warning of the dangers of a Trump nomination. He called Trump a "barking carnival act" and a "cancer on conservatism." In his departure speech, Perry said that "the conservative movement has always been about principles, not personalities," and that the Republican nominee "should embody those principles" and "must make the case for the cause of conservatism more than the cause of their own celebrity."

Those words were why so many conservatives were shocked eight months later, when Perry declared his enthusiastic support for Trump, and even began floating his own name as a possible VP pick. Perry then even went as far as to knock the #NeverTrump crowd, telling a cable news host, "Can you believe those renegades who refuse to support Trump?"

Perry *had* to know that his principled stance against Trump helped inspire many of the conservatives who later vowed not to support Trump in the primary and in the general election. So for him to hop aboard the *Trump Train* was a big political gain for Trump.

How did Trump reward Perry for his unlikely support? By publicly mocking him.

“This politics is a dirty business,” Trump told campaign rally attendees, after reminding them of the negative things Perry had said about him months earlier. “I have to tell you, I have never seen people able to pivot like politicians.”

Plainly put, to shill for Trump is to lose his respect.

One of the most incredible stories of the 2016 election cycle (which I’ve written about in several columns) has been rise of the “Alternative Right” (more commonly known as the “alt right”) in the conservative media. A number of right-wing commentators on cable news, talk radio, and Internet blogs, who had long demanded ideological purity within the Republican Party, suddenly decided in the summer of 2015 to shelve their exhaustively preached beliefs. Rather than backing the type of primary candidate they had been insisting upon for years, in order to save the party and the country, they decided instead to throw their support behind a fiscally liberal, pro-entitlement, socially and constitutionally disinterested candidate named Donald Trump.

In some cases, their motivation was increased ratings and other forms of revenue-related exposure; Trump, after all, has always been a big-ticket item. In other cases, cronyism was the culprit; the New York billionaire has a number of longtime friends and even business partners in the media.

The result was an exodus of ideology from a number of influential conservative-media mainstays. They willingly lent conservative credentials to Trump, when the candidate hadn’t

earned them. They downplayed his abhorrent conduct (everything from the mocking of American POWs and disabled people to the advancing conspiracy theories on the Iraq War and the JFK assassination). They even served as attack dogs against Trump's primary opponents, on occasion, and were among the first to call for the rest of the field to actually leave the race. Most notably, they sidelined (but only for Trump) their conservative principles – their professional and supposedly ideological lifeblood.

These people did Trump an *enormous* favor in his successful primary campaign. Needless to say, he owes them – big time.

That's why I wasn't particularly surprised when a Fox News host from the "alt right" – one who is arguably Trump's most enthusiastic cheerleader in the conservative media – recently announced that Trump had written a blurb for the back of his new book.

Putting aside for a moment that there's an obvious conflict of interest in a politician endorsing the product of a news-media figure who is actively covering his campaign, the move made sense. After all, when someone scraps their dignity to routinely shill for your presidential run, the *least* you can do is write a short blurb for their book, right?

Of comical note, however, was the blurb itself: the first sentence simply calling the book "huge" and the second (and last) saying it will help "Make America Great Again."

As an author myself (one admittedly far less successful than those who benefit from regular national-television exposure), I would be grossly disappointed if someone I admired used the back of my book for a phoned-in advertisement for them self. I would have enough self-respect to not even let such a thing go to print.

As *any* author can tell you, it isn't easy to write a book. It is a lengthy, often grueling process to pour your heart and

soul into tens of thousands of words, and it's one heck of an achievement for *any* writer to get their work published. If someone agrees to provide a blurb for the finished product, the *very least* you would expect of them is to leave the impression that they cared enough to have actually read some of what you've written. It's just common respect.

Then again, to shill for Trump is to lose his respect.

Last week, when news reports began to surface announcing that Trump had narrowed his running-mate picks down to Chris Christie, Newt Gingrich and Mike Pence, I knew who he'd end up choosing.

I knew it wouldn't be the governor from New Jersey who used the last, dying breath of his own presidential campaign to cut Marco Rubio off at the knees (at a time when Rubio was emerging as a potential threat to a Trump primary victory). I knew it wouldn't be that man who later stood on stage behind Trump, allowing himself to be used as an expressionless wall-trophy for an individual who had, just weeks earlier, accused him of lying under oath about Bridgegate.

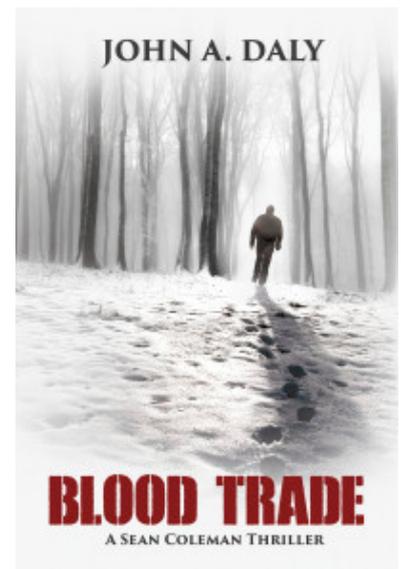
I also knew Trump wouldn't choose the former Speaker of the House, who had spent months actively campaigning for the position by performing verbal acrobatics on national television to normalize Trump, and label the candidate's principled opposition as "elites" and "establishment types." I knew it wouldn't be that guy who tossed out the panicked, last-minute idea of testing Muslims on their sharia law thoughts, in hopes of winning over Trump's affection.

I knew that *none* of the politicians who've been buttering up Trump would get the nod, because to shill for Trump is to lose his respect. And respect is required in the pick of a Vice Presidential candidate.

No, Trump's choice ended up being who I figured it would be – the guy who had yet to diminish himself for the presumptive

nominee: Mike Pence.

Prior to being picked, Pence hadn't really gone to bat much for Trump. He actually opposed Trump on a number of issues, and even endorsed Ted Cruz in the Indiana primary. In other words, Pence wasn't a pro-Trump shill. The Indiana governor has largely preserved his dignity throughout this election cycle,



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I believe that, despite Trump's well-established distaste for those who disagree with him, he has a hidden respect for such people (and those who stand on their principles). Being that he's been surrounded for much of his life by suck-ups and schmoozers, this probably shouldn't be all that much of a surprise. In fact, I would venture to guess that those Trump has specifically said he *doesn't* respect, are among those he actually respects the most.

After watching Sunday's cringe-worthy *60 Minutes* interview with Trump and Pence (that reminded me of the awkward dynamic

between Gob and Michael Bluth on *Arrested Development*), however, maybe Trump would have been better off choosing someone he truly *doesn't* respect.

Fortunately for Trump, the position Pence has put himself in by agreeing to be the VP nominee is likely to soon change him into the very type of person Trump is used to dealing with...and also disrespecting.