

<http://jaygaskill.com/ATrumpQuintet.htm>

A TRUMP QUINTET

{ - The PDF Version of this collection is posted <http://jaygaskill.com/ATrumpQuintet.pdf> - }

Five pieces by Jay Gaskill that ran in the Post Register in 2016



A note: In my political universe, Governor Romney could have been a great president. When the Trump disruption ran through the GOP nomination circus like flu at a rest home for immune compromised elders, I remained confident that somehow, the center-right party establishment would be able to stop the circus at the city gates. But I knew that Hillary would not be an effective alternative. In an earlier piece, *The Rooster vs. the Queen Bee*, I asked:

Who will they trust? Trump's Achilles heel is overconfidence - expecting that his shrewdness, bluster, and open-ended adaptability will pave the way to a great presidency. Where Hillary is calculating, careful, Trump charges on, believing that no matter what he does and says to get the job done, his ultimate success will validate all his posturings. Trump may be the GOP's PT Barnum. And Hillary may be the Democrat's RM Nixon. She tends to paranoid suspicions. This mindset may explain why she set up a private email server outside State Department control - an amateurish system, wide-open to international hackers.

INTRODUCTION

By now, with president-elect Trump's inauguration pending, these five articles have an eerie feel to them, as if I had been writing an alternative history novel, instead of chronicling the most disruptive U. S. political upset in modern times.

Neither political party will be the same after this. The soul-searching among the democrats has just begun, while the republicans are walking the policy tightrope of the century.

One of the most revelatory moments in the campaign was little noted. Trump was commenting about British PM Cameron's plight in light of the Brexit vote. He said that Mr. Cameron was a good man, but that he had misjudged "the mood of the people."

The key to Trump's astonishing success is that, whatever else one can say, he alone among all the political contenders in 2016 accurately judged "the mood of the people."

There was another insightful comment by Michael Gerson in the Washington Post, also little noted.

"If this is a normal election — in which the composition of the electorate and the turnout of various groups roughly match recent presidential contests — Clinton's argument should be enough. If this is an anti-establishment wave election, she has the worst possible political profile — boasting of her royal résumé during the French Revolution."

The piece (published on July 29th, 2016) ended with - *"This is an extraordinary political moment. Any reasonable Republican presidential contender other than Trump probably would be beating Clinton handily. Any reasonable Democratic contender other than Clinton probably would be beating Trump handily. The parties, in their wisdom, have chosen the untrusted against the unstable, the uninspiring against the unfit. Take your pick, and take your chances."*

Of course, this was not a "normal election," it was a cataclysmic anti-establishment eruption.

For the record, I ended up voting for the Utah national security expert candidate, former CIA anti-terrorist specialist and investment banker, David Evan McMullin, knowing full well that he had no prayer of getting a single electoral college vote.

As the Trump cabinet and advisor cadre fleshes out, I am only marginally reassured. My problem is not with the predictable conservative bent of the incoming administration. My concern from the beginning was that Trump, the showman, was making it up as he went, in effect that he was to be presiding over a stochastic presidency where policy is made up on the fly by a celebrity who, though shrewd, is not going to be up to the real demands of governance.

That ship has sailed. Note: Very, very few incoming presidents on the day of their inauguration have known a fraction of what the presidency demands of them. As always, the quality of the ensuing presidency has been a product of the quality of the presidential staff, and the willingness of the Chief Executive to listen and modify his or her positions accordingly. Trump's elusive flexibility may be a virtue. Whether it can overcome his penchant for impulsiveness and risk-taking is the question of the day.

JBG – January 5, 2017

ONE - "A Settle-for" Election?

Indiana was the Waterloo for Trump's opponents. Cruz and Kasich have capitulated. As it looks today, California will be Mr. Trump's coronation as the "best" the GOP can do. Trump still needs 190 delegates, and California republicans (a tiny minority in the state) will deliver 174 of them.

So this is to be our "settle for" election.

Polls are mere shadows compared to actual votes. Donald Trump is still not the preferred choice of most GOP voters. By my count, Trump still lags significantly among GOP primary voters - by a million. You can check my estimate by adding up the popular vote totals on the site <www.realclearpolitics.com>.

That said, it does look like game over.

How can this be? ...Because the GOP geniuses were sleeping at the gate. Because the winner-take-all delegates selection rules allowed a minority candidate to walk away with a majority of delegates.

And why all those drop outs? It was never true that the exit of a Trump opponent made it easier for the remaining candidates to collectively out-poll Trump. It only made it harder for any one of them to lead the pack. Collectively they were strong enough to deny Trump a first-ballot win.

But each candidate capitulated for one compelling reason that never was a consideration for Mr. Trump: He or she ran out of money. Political money is rarely about the good of the order; it's typically about buying access to a winner.

Consider the irony if the current GOP system produces a November loser.

TWO - Two Dreaded Choices

The first debate was Hillary Clinton's best chance to take out Trump. She rattled Donald, but there was no knockout blow. Most observers think Hillary won on points, but just winning on points doesn't ace the game. Hillary was rested, prepared and disciplined. She kept Trump on the defensive because of his loose rhetoric, bankruptcies, tax returns, and old comments about women. Trump held his own ground, but was less disciplined, less concise and more interruptive. He scored on Hillary's FBI email scandal, but failed to press the advantage. Trump was respectful in contrast with his mean spirited performance in the GOP primaries. He demonstrated more competence and depth on the economic issues. On trade and the Iran deal, Trump made the better case.

"National security challenges will be no picnic for the next president.

Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump will face Iran's breakout from the nuclear agreement and aggression from Iran. Worse, the U.S. could be staring down a fiscal abyss. The possible fiscal and international financial crises could eclipse the 2008 meltdown. Both will be life and death first term challenges for Clinton or Trump. Neither candidate has telegraphed what strategy she or he has prepared to deal with this impending train wreck.

On foreign policy, Trump is still weak on details. Hillary Clinton's penchant for manipulative misdirection makes it hard to reliably predict how she will break on the key national security issues. Leaving policy differences aside, neither candidate is in the same league with FDR, Truman, Reagan or Eisenhower. From a constitutional checks and balances perspective, Trump might be better in the short term because of the Supreme Court appointments he has promised to make. Beyond that, his election still seems risky.

Any single debate assessment is like one day on the stock market. Long-term investors track the fundamentals. Here they are: Hillary's campaign is a referendum on Obama's seven plus years, combined with - "Now it's a woman's turn to run things." Trump's campaign is the revolt of marginalized US workers against both party establishments, combined with - "What do you have to lose?"

This is a contest between visions:

In Trump's vision, nation states are like giant corporations led for the most part by cunning operators who have taken the American corporation to the cleaners. Fundamentals like law and order, zero tolerance for would be-terrorist immigrants, suppressing criminal predators in poor neighborhoods, restoring lost manufacturing jobs and rebuilding neglected infrastructure trump concerns like social justice and global warming.

In Hillary's vision, it's more about all the fairness issues, the never ending struggle against racism, sexism, income inequality; and more community access to government help. Details matter more for her. The big picture matters more for Trump.

We have a discontent versus risk election. The fewer risks Trump appears to pose, the greater his chances. It still looks like a close election to me.

In times like these, we tend to veer between dreaded disaster and wishful thinking. Drop the wishful thinking, and batten the hatches.

Yes, rough times for the USA are ahead, but Idaho is among the best places to be when things get ugly.

THREE: On Not Losing Our Friends Over a Political Dispute

This political season is hurting friendships right and left – even for those who don't post harsh rhetoric on social media.

Life is too short to lose friends over politics. If you live long enough, you will find that you once held some of the opinions you now strongly oppose.

There is a takeaway lesson: We are not our opinions. And that lesson applies to the friend, loved one, neighbor or acquaintance that you are angry with at the moment because he or she fails to see the political light well as you think you do. They are not their opinions either.

Peel back the surface, and every liberal is a bit conservative; and every conservative is a bit liberal. Both will probably change opinions and alignments over time more than once. And that's okay, because both liberal and conservative ideas are necessary for human survival.

Conservatism is about the defense of essential human boundaries, while liberalism is about dissolving the arbitrary boundaries. Each side of the argument has been wrong part of the time – conservatives going to the ramparts to defend indefensible distinctions, and liberals climbing over the ramparts to attack valued boundaries.

But conservatives and liberals are the most important voices in any political system, especially when they are in constructive dialogue, each working as to balance the ideological excesses of the other. Their best advocates are confident, morally grounded, and humble as well. ...Because they are mindful of the larger purposes in play, and know that neither side can claim exclusive ownership of the best future for humanity.

Political parties can be the carriers of sets of enduring, time-tested principles...or they can be opportunistic coalitions held together by the promise of sharing the spoils of victory. Rarely are they both.

All political parties eventually misbehave. Think of miscreant teens when Mom and Dad leave them unsupervised with full access to the house, car and beer supply. Misbehaving teens will prompt a police visit, but misbehaving political parties just devolve. When left too long without 'supervision' (i.e., competition), the dominant party will try to rig the system to cripple any organized opposition. As parties degrade, they tend to become opportunistic coalitions bound together by the prospect of shared power, but lacking any coherent purpose other than self-perpetuation. Parties can get so trapped in the feedback loop between political favors and votes that they lose sight of the duty to govern honestly, fairly and well.

Unsurprisingly, populist and other resistance movements periodically boil up. That's when people lose their sense of humor.

So here we are, abandoning Facebook friends and flesh and blood friendships over a political contest. Think about it: Who would risk a single friendship over a choice between two campaigns, neither of which is willing or able to reliably tell us what their candidate will actually do on key issues facing the nation? Neither campaign cares about whether we lose our friends. But we should.

Here's how we can get through it: We vote our consciences, but we don't ask, don't tell. And if our candidate wins, we do not gloat.

Trust me: Whatever the outcome this November, we will have plenty to regret without also lamenting lost friendships.

FOUR - SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS

Why has Trump's victory disrupted families and burned Facebook friendships? I voted against both leading candidates, but when I tried to reassure some Facebook friends about the fate of some social issues, you'd think I'd suggested that "Saint Donald" had killed the "Wicked Witch". It was as if, in the wake of the death of a friend's beloved, I said, "Sorry for your loss," and my friend erupted in anger. "*What was that about?*" I had underestimated the tsunami of anger, but what else had I missed?

For many Americans, the Trump victory is a threat to their entire world view. Note that ordinary humanitarian liberalism was not overturned in this election. Something more fundamental is happening. When traditional religion lost traction in the blue states, a secular religion arose to replace it. This is a very different animal than old fashioned humanitarian liberalism. Political liberalism is the new secular religion – with a catechism and ostracism for heresy. [For my full article on this development, Google the terms '*gaskill political religion*'.]

Trump's bombast and rhetorical vagueness have allowed exaggerated fears of repression to propagate. The worst of these fears will fade, but not all of them. Humanitarian liberals and constitutional conservatives will need to step up and forge a unity of purpose. The looming threats to our country, domestic and foreign, will not wait for completion of post-election therapy for the faint hearted.

FIV E: THE UNTRAINED PILOT IN THE COCKPIT

By Jay Gaskill

Recent attempts to de-legitimize Trump's electoral victory are like a life-death struggle in the cockpit, writes Jay Gaskill.

As one who voted against both Donald and Hillary, I was among those of us who were ready for a change of direction. Yes, Donald Trump was clear about “changing direction,” but he acted like an overconfident TV personality playing a captain at the helm of a jet airliner, believing that somehow he will figure out how to safely land the thing before running out of fuel - How hard could this be?

The recent attempts to delegitimize Trump’s victory resemble a life-death struggle in the cockpit while the aircraft falters. Instead we should canvass all passengers for people with navigation and flight skills to come to the aid of the pilot. Election recounts will not change the outcome. And in the end, we will still have the same inexperienced pilot in the cockpit.

However we might feel about this election, the outcome is an endorsement by most voters of a reversal of policy direction in immigration, regulation, taxation and the rapid development of U.S. energy reserves. Can we add the Libertarian popular vote, plus the Utah and Idaho votes for the independent conservative, Evan McMullin, another 5 million votes to Trump’s? Collectively, these votes were against the policy direction of the Clinton campaign.

But was there massive vote counting fraud? Probably not. Was there significant voter registration fraud? We do not know. It’s a concern, especially in California where Hispanics are almost half the population, and the number of non-citizens living there, documented or otherwise, is in the millions.

The status of non-citizens in California changed in 2015. Non-citizens living there now routinely and legitimately obtain driver’s licenses. Many conservatives are concerned because a California driver’s license is sufficient identification to get registered as a voter - although a date of birth, a street address and the last four digits of a valid social security number are required to register on-line under the state’s motor-voter law.

And social security numbers can be issued to non-citizens. California’s population includes 25 million licensed drivers, a substantial number of whom are not legally entitled to vote because they are not U.S. citizens.

As a practical matter, California’s enforcement regime prohibiting undocumented aliens from voting in a national election borders on an honor system. But even if extra California non-citizen votes were counted in that winner-take-all state, there is no change in the Electoral College outcome.

Of course, voter fraud should be taken seriously. John F. Kennedy’s razor-thin victory over Richard Nixon in 1960 could have been the result of voter fraud. Should Nixon have won? We will never know.

Bottom line: unlike the epic Kennedy-Nixon election, the 2016 Trump-Clinton contest was not close enough in any state or combination of states for local fraud to change the outcome.

In my opinion, there are two important takeaways. First, claims that this election represented a popular mandate for former Secretary Clinton and her politics are refuted by the numbers when you take into account third party votes. Second, whether Donald Trump is the pilot who can successfully guide the plane in a different direction without a crash landing depends on the quality of help he gets from the passengers.

Keep your seat belts fastened.

Gaskill is an attorney and Idaho native who spent 25 years working in the California political environment before returning to his former hometown, Lake Woebegone West, the island of sanity also known as Idaho Falls.

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

There is nothing to gloat about, and there is no reason to run amok in the streets. Yes, this was a very hard election to endure. And no matter how you or I voted, we all have good reasons to be very concerned for the country. That said, here are some passing thoughts....

On many of pending policy issues, such as the next Supreme Court nominee, any GOP president elect would face the same intense opposition that Trump will face. There is a yin and yang to all this. The federal judiciary has moved to the left over eight years and it will now almost certainly move to the right.

On some international issues, Trump is at least marginally acceptable to some Democrats I know – although they would be loath to admit it. For example, Democrats who were hoping that Hillary would resume our traditional support for Israel are quietly relieved that, at least on this one issue, Trump will probably come through for the Jewish state. I find an irony here: The very existence of Israel owes a huge debt to Democrat President Harry Truman.

On the other international issues, especially our role in the chaotic Middle East civil war, Trump has signaled a less interventionist stance than was the case with Hillary. There are reasonable arguments for and against particular adventures and responses in that region, but these problems are going to be the tip of a very large iceberg of international challenges our country will soon face.

Wall Street seems to be betting on a resumption of strong economic growth. But the more cautious among them are worried that a Trump boom will

presage another bubble and another crash. This is what I had in mind when I mentioned that the GOP is facing a policy tightrope: One misstep and our economy will end in the soup.

Would Hillary have done any better on the economy? Unfortunately, candidate Hillary did not run on the economy – other than to say she intended to raise taxes on the wealthy. A real debate on economic proposals would have been useful.

That ship seems to have sailed.

And here we are...

JBG

About the Author



Jay B. Gaskill graduated from the University of California Law School at Berkeley (Boalt Hall), having also studied at Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco, the University of Idaho, in Moscow, Idaho and the University of Washington, in Seattle.



He served many years as a trial and appellate lawyer for the Alameda County, California Public Defender's office, headquartered in Oakland. He finished his public service career as the head of that county department (then employing more than 100 attorneys), serving in the capacity for ten years.

Following his long career in litigation and law office administration, Gaskill then embarked on a number of long deferred writing projects, criminal case commentary, including a television appearance of CBS 48 Hours. Having left his "life of crime" he has written wide ranging non-fiction articles and essays on

criminal justice, law and morality, terrorism and security, religion and philosophy, among other things of interest.

}}}

Learn more about the prospects and possible direction of political reform in the Trump Era, by going to

<http://jaygaskill.com/Renaissance21USA.pdf> .

Other articles are archived on The Policy Think Site at

www.jaygaskill.com .