



The Trump Love Affair Explained in Terms Even Beltway Pundits Can Understand

Donald Trump's rise this election season has been historic, amounting to something heretofore unseen in the annals of American politics. Given this, it's perhaps not surprising that many are still befuddled by the phenomenon. Pundit Charles Krauthammer is [bewildered](#), saying that "for some reason" Trump "is immune to the laws of contradiction." (In reality, Democrats get away with contradiction continually; the only difference is that the media actually report on Trump's.) Also in the news recently is that some find his appeal among evangelicals "[inexplicable](#)." Of course, it's all quite explainable.



In an earlier piece — which I [strongly urge you to read](#) — I expanded on certain factors evident in the Trump phenomenon. Trump is

- tapping into anger against the Establishment and over immigration and is a plain-spoken breath of fresh air.
- sounding a nationalistic note in an age where treason is the Establishment norm.
- not campaigning as conservative but a populist, which, almost by definition, tends to make one popular in an era of mass discontent.
- a crusader against hated political correctness, which has stifled tongues and killed careers nationwide. And in being the first prominent person to defeat the thought police (at least for now) — and by not cowering and apologizing to them — he has become a hero.

And as I wrote, "[W]hen you have a hero, leading the troops in the heat of battle against a despised oppressor, you don't worry about his marriages, past ideological indiscretions or salty language. You charge right behind him." This is largely why Trump's contradictions don't matter. Yet more can be said.

I often mention the fault of "mirroring," which most everyone exhibits and is when you project your own ideals, values, priorities and mindset onto others. It's particularly amusing when pundits and politicians comment on the electorate and speak as if everyone is a politics wonk who analyzes issues logically within the context of a broad knowledge base (pundits themselves often lack erudition and reason; of course, they're blissfully unaware of it when thus guilty and nonetheless consider those qualities ideals). But man is not Mr. Spock, and logic and reason play less of a role in people's decision-making than most of us care to think.

This brings us to what Trump now has. It's something all successful politicians have to a degree and that every iconic one has in spades: an emotional bond with his supporters.



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 25, 2016

Trump has been criticized for speaking in vague generalities and not providing specifics on the campaign trail. This misses the point. If advertising a product on TV, do you willingly provide mundane details about its ingredients or describe the intricacies of its manufacturing process? That's more the stuff of documentaries, and, insofar as the vendor goes, would only be found on an Internet product-information page (tantamount to a politician's policy-position page) provided for those interested. No, you say "Look 15 years younger!" or "Lose 20 to 30 pounds in 6 weeks!" Or think of the circa 2000 [Mazda commercial](#) with the young boy whispering "Zoom, zoom!" It was advertising an expensive, hi-tech machine but was invoking the unbridled joy of childhood, thus endeavoring to pique people's passions. And that's the secret: capture your audience on an emotional level and they're yours.

Or think about affairs of the heart. If you're truly bonded and in love with your wife, it's not because you first looked at her and, rendering a logical analysis, thought "Well, she's vibrant and seems to have good genes, so we'd likely have healthy kids; and she's a darn good cook, and I relish a fine pot roast." Rather, a true romantic *bond* is somewhat inscrutable, an emotional phenomenon, not an intellectual one. And it's powerful enough to cause a woman to follow a man into a life of faith or a life of crime (Bonnie and Clyde); it explains the enduring good marriages — and the bad ones.

Likewise, playing on emotion is not the sole province of morally bad or good politicians — only of successful ones. Hitler did it and Churchill did it; Huey Long did it and Reagan did it. When a candidate stands on a podium expounding upon policy nerd-like or has little to say beyond touting his "accomplishments" (John Kasich comes to mind), they're proving they don't get it. Create an emotional bond with the people, and they're yours. And they will remain yours in the face of others' intellectual appeals for their affections, for, to paraphrase Jonathan Swift, "You cannot reason a man out of a position he has not reasoned himself into." Note that while this relates the futility of trying to shake a person from passionately embraced error, people can also have an emotional attachment to correct beliefs, for the right or wrong reasons and with or without an intellectual understanding (e.g., Plato spoke of inculcating children, who are too young to grasp abstract moral principles, with an "erotic [emotional] attachment" to virtue).

And this is what Trump does so masterfully. When he repeats his slogan "Make America Great Again," says we're going to "win" under his administration or speaks of building a border wall and getting "Mexico to pay for it," it's silly to wonder why it resonates despite the lack of detail. He's marketing, not doing R&D; he's not trying to appeal mainly to the intellect, but the emotions. And you do this with the slogan, not by reciting the list of ingredients. Again, this isn't a commentary on the validity of his recipe, only on the principles of effective campaigning.

Having said this, if a candidate is the real McCoy, he'll also have a quality product with a list of ingredients (again, a policy-position webpage) for the discriminating shopper. But if he's smart he'll understand that most people are impulse buyers with relatively short memories and recognize the importance of branding himself. Coca-Cola has "Coke is it!" Nike "Just do it!" and Barack Obama had "Yes, we can!" (no, he couldn't — but it worked). Now, can you think of a GOP candidate other than Trump identifiable by way of a catchy and popular slogan? And it's no coincidence that "Make America Great Again" was also Reagan's slogan in 1980.

Of course, stating the obvious, to connect with people emotionally you must capitalize on something appealing to them emotionally. Trump's bold nationalism does this. What do the others offer? Jeb Bush is associated with saying that illegal migration is "an act of love" and John "Can't do" Kasich with "Think about the [illegals'] families, c'mon, folks!" which might appeal to illegal migrants if they could



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speak English. And none of the others will even support suspending Muslim immigration — despite deep and widespread fear of Muslim terrorism — which certainly will appeal to Da'esh (ISIS).

It's as if Trump is courting Lady America with wine, roses and his alpha-male persona, while the Establishment candidates are lead-tongued nerds promising a tent with NSA surveillance, a bowl of soup and squatters on a burnt-out lawn.

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