

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Winner of 20 Pulitzer Prizes

TODAY'S TOP
STORIES

MONDAY SEPTEMBER 7, 2015 | PHILLYINQUIRER | CITY & SUBURBS | C | \$1

philly.com

Trump exposes gulf between voters, elites

By Robert W. Patterson

In their 1970 bestseller *The Real Majority*, Ben Wattenberg and Richard Scammon warned fellow Democrats to learn from President Richard Nixon's 1968 election strategy, which tracked closely the economically moderate but socially conservative "silent majority" of American voters.

Likewise, after George McGovern lost a 49-state landslide to Nixon in 1972, the outgoing executive director of the Democratic National Committee, Alan Baron, painfully admitted that his party had discarded a cardinal rule of politics: "The voters are always right."

Were they alive today, these analysts would be warning the Republican Party of the perils of ignoring the voters. While GOP donors, consultants, and policy theorists have been distancing themselves from the people since the Bush 41 presidency, a Grand Canyon now separates the two: Witness the howling over the meteoric, out-of-nowhere rise of the anti-politician Donald Trump.

Stunned that their designated favorites, Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, and Scott Walker, have stumbled, the same GOP experts who unanimously assured a nervous party the weekend before the 2012 election that Mitt Romney had the presidency in his pocket have fallen into a collective seizure over The Donald.



Donald Trump waves to supporters during a campaign rally in Mobile, Ala., on Aug. 21. BRYNN ANDERSON / Associated Press

The sources of the scorn heaped on the front-runner range from the onetime high priest of conservatism, George Will — who declared the New York billionaire a "counterfeit Republican" who needs to be "excommunicated" from the party — to Michael Gerson, master wordsmith of the Bush 43 White House, who claims Trump's "spontaneous combination of ignorance and malice" feeds only "cultural resentment with racial overtones." Further down the food chain, ubiquitous analysts complain that Trump is bringing out "low-information voters," "reactionary xenophobes," and "know-nothing nativists."

Establishment Republican strategist Alex Castellanos has even suggested a Shakespearian strategy for taking down Trump: "The best way to do it is how Brutus killed Caesar. Get real close, snuggle up, and shiv him in the ribs."

Supposedly keepers of the conservative flame, these anxious critics sound indistinguishable from Trump's left-wing antagonists, channeling the same-old disdain for the voting public that elite cranks have vented since Sinclair Lewis and H.L. Mencken ridiculed Middle America in the 1920s.

In particular, the talking-head set is joining some low-ranking GOP presidential hopefuls in

brandishing pitchforks at Trump's immigration-control plan. Developed in concert with Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama — and channeling the 1997 recommendations of Bill Clinton's bipartisan commission headed by Barbara Jordan, the late black congresswoman from Texas — the proposal aims to stop the flooding of the U.S. labor market by foreigners.

The visceral reaction to Trump's proposal mostly echoes the editors of the Wall Street Journal, whose demand for a "There shall be no borders" constitutional amendment two months before 9/11 reveals the political class' captivity to corporatist and globalist demands.

Aghast that the real estate magnate believes illegal immigrants and visa overstayers should return to their homelands, the grand Republican poobahs fear "he is hurting the image of the GOP and damaging its eventual nominee," as the Atlantic reports.

Yes, Trump's bombast doesn't help his party with that magazine's tony readers, most of whom peer down their noses at the churchgoing party of Ronald Reagan. But Trump's steady rise in the polls — both state and

national, among all factions of the GOP, and among independents — suggest the inverse among those who count: the voters, who consistently express support for scaling back immigration as well as ending, per a late-2011 Rasmussen poll, "anchor baby" citizenship.

The latter position, one that George Will embraced in his Washington Post column in 2010, comes right out of the 1996 GOP platform. Contrary to all the media misinformation, numerous mainstream legal scholars believe the 14th Amendment does not automatically confer citizenship to the newborns of foreigners here without legal status.

The *Apprentice* host is also breaking from the out-of-touch GOP establishment and right-wing think tanks that have wanted Social Security and Medicare privatization for years, and slamming hedge-fund managers for enjoying lower tax rates than plumbers and welders. Last but not least: his Reaganesque standing up to rivals like China and Japan, insisting on balanced trade, and shaming Ford for building multibillion-dollar plants in Mexico, not Michigan. All wins for the voters.

Unseasoned and undisciplined as a candidate, Trump could yet crash and burn, especially if he doesn't reconcile with Megyn Kelly of the Fox News Channel; he needs Roger Ailes in his corner. But the more he calls out the tone-deaf political-media complex while expounding American nationalism and pushing Hamiltonian nation-building, the more he helps his party connect with the voters, especially neglected Reagan Democrats in states like Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

By taking on the "Washington-Wall Street axis of power," as former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee calls it, the brash, quintessential New Yorker is forcing GOP muckety-mucks to do what they haven't done since the Reagan era: recognize that the voters are indeed always right. For that reason alone, Trump deserves a full hearing — and his popular agenda should be championed by the ultimate survivor of the long nominating process ahead.

Robert W. Patterson is a policy consultant who served in the administrations of President George W. Bush and Gov. Tom Corbett.
✉ rwpatterson79@verizon.net
📧 @RWPatterson