Morning in America

Like so many of my friends and allies these days, I wake up every morning with one thought at the front of my mind:

> *What fresh hell will Trump bring today?*

Maybe it will be careless antagonism of one of our long-standing international allies.

We have always been at war with Australia! Bad hombres!

Maybe it will be careless antagonism of one of our long-standing international rivals. What could possibly go wrong with putting Iran “on notice”? Or warning China to steer clear of the South China Sea? Especially when the Pentagon itself had no advance warning that such red lines would appear.

Maybe we will wake up to the news that the new Supreme Court nominee was in fact the founder of the “Fascism Forever Club” at his “elite Georgetown prep school”.<fn>Remember how the Trump voters were all up in arms about those dalgurned elites from Washington ruining the country? Yeah, me either.</fn> Here’s a fellow who can be counted on to give the god botherers dominion over those pesky lady parts and the ladies who think they belong to them. Strict construction!

<fn>To give you an idea of how OCD Your Narrator can be about these things, when the new nominee was announced I immediately wondered if he might be related to Reagan-era EPA director and noted Bircher nutjob Anne Gorsuch. He is, in fact, her son, a

man nurtured from birth to become an avenging scourge of ladyparts, clean water, and consumer protection. Here's to draining the swamp!</fn>

What other fresh hell? The Muslim ban has generated an astonishing amount of spontaneous street protest. The in-fighting at the White House, and all the leaking that goes along with that – plus the preposterous quibble that it isn't really a ban – is almost comic in scope and content; the knives are out and being sharpened, and if we can avoid getting into WWIII, we will soon be treated to some truly Shakespearean defenestration and ritual disembowelment in the Trump inner circle. Knowing Trump, it will likely be a prime time special event, brought to you by Geico with special guests Amarosa and Scott Baio.

Maybe we will wake up to Trump making a mockery of a sham of the National Prayer Breakfast<fn>Which, truth be told, should be ridiculed into extinction.</fn> with a Trump v Terminator dick measuring, followed by this nearly perfect remark about the Senate Chaplain<fn>Another idea that should be mocked into extinction ffs, but I digress.</fn>:

> *"I don't know, chaplain, whether or not that's an appointed position. Is that an appointed position? I don't even know if you're Democrat or if you're Republican, but I'm appointing you for another year. The hell with it."*

The normally delicate fee fees of the Christianist cult failed to ruffle over this. Of course they did not; Trump promised to get rid of those pesky church-state restrictions that prohibits politicking from the pulpit. He could have said "fuck it" to the chaplain and gotten a pass.

Watching the press secretary slowly lose his mind on a daily basis is another source of pretty swell entertainment. It's more fun than watching a penis-compensator shoot himself in the foot.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypi9D921yvs

I love this way more than I should.

There are some truly comic elements at play in all this, but it is hard to muster much more than a mordant giggle. Take the tone-deafness of Trump ~~wank fantasy~~ daughter Ivanka posing while the airport protests were at their peak. It would be funny…

$5000 to Look Like a Baked Potato?

..but frankly, I thought this girl wore it better.

I wish this were funny.

I wish this were actually funny. It is not. Darkly comic, yes, and mordant chuckling at (some of) it is damn near necessary to deal with the darkness. But it’s hollow fucking laughter at best.

The pace and severity of the coming fuckery are going to have serious negative consequences for years to come. Consider: if Gorsuch is confirmed, he will still be fucking the world up for my kids for years after I’m dead and buried. Consider: a crack in the Keystone pipeline will foul the Ogallala Aquifer for generations. Consider: people will die needlessly because of cruel decisions on immigration and health care. There’s no reversing that kind of thing.

So what to do? Well, face it: the left has zero power right now beyond the ability to obstruct and raise hell. Senate rules have already been tossed overboard for the sake of expediting the fuckery.<fn>Like Trump, the rest of the ruling GOP sees any agreement or contract (or treaty!) as something to be torn up when it becomes an inconvenience. Why any party would trust this Nation under the current government is a

mystery.</fn> They have the power and they are going to do what they want. Because fuck you.

There are still actions we can – and really must – take if we want to turn this around. I visited the office of our local congresscritter on Monday with a group of fierce women. We have a face-to-face scheduled with the congressman later this month only because we refused to leave until we got a commitment for a meeting. I suspect he will be unmoved by anything we have to say. But we're going to make him listen. Unless he chickens out in the end and cancels the meeting. Any bets?

Tomorrow, I will be visiting the office of The Emptiest Suit in Florida Politics, the diminutive and cowardly Marco Rubio. I doubt we will ever manage a face to face with this little chicken shit, but we can at least make him run and hide.

We marched. We will march again. We have been calling Reps and

Senators daily. We do what we can. But it ain't much.

I suspect that we aren't going to see much more than a few dreaded "moral" victories at least until the mid-term elections. Maybe those tiny steps will add up to something resembling counter-momentum by then. But I feel confident that these tiny gestures can accumulate, that the nearly unprecedented taking-to-the-streets we have seen in these first two weeks<fn>Seriously…only two fucking weeks. It's like time is standing still.</fn> is harbinger of real, sustained resistance.

We are entering a dark a gloomy time. There is no shortcut through the forest. We keep going, one step at a time.

There has to be a clearing out there somewhere.

It Did Happen Here

We took down our Clinton sign yesterday.

I accept what is. I'm beyond denial and bargaining. No Fairy Unicorn is going to swoop in and alter the Electoral College. No White Knight from the FBI is going to clap irons on the Trump cabal for back channel dealing with Russia. There is no miracle in the wings.

President Trump. Get used to it.

But even with acceptance, the anger and depression remain.

I’m angry at those who voted for an obvious fraud, a man of low morals and boundless greed, a man who plays footsie with racists and bigots.

I’m angry with a press corps that enabled this two-bit grifter in their quest for ratings, that spent more time and ink on Clinton’s email server than on every other policy issue combined. And today I am infuriated by exhortations that I should reach out to Trump supporters, to try to understand and respect their reasons for voting the way they did.

Well, I’m trying to understand. The respect part will have to wait for someone to articulate a reason that is not bound up in abject falsehood, logical fallacies, or outright racial animus. So far, not a single Trump voter I’ve listened to has even come close.

I am angry that such a simple choice was shrouded in overthinking and fantasy. It really should not have mattered who the Democratic nominee was. Decent people vote against a racist, misogynist, lying fear monger. Period. How goddam hard is that?

Back in 1991, when David Duke first took off his pointy white cap and ran for governor of Louisiana, convicted felon Edwin Edwards ran against him. The bumper stickers read: “Vote for the Crook. It’s Important.” The voters understood. Anything was better than a Klansman. Edwards won.

This year, David Duke crawled out from his rock and ran for Senate. And endorsed Trump. And crowed that “Trump’s agenda is our agenda”. Trump winked and nodded and claimed to not know who David Duke was. The Klan endorsed Trump. The neo-Nazis, the alt-right, they endorsed Trump. Trump was Taking America Back, just like they have been trying to do all these years.

And the KKK is holding a Trump victory parade this weekend in North Carolina. In 2016. Welcome to Trumpland.

All this country needed to do was vote against the racist and his enthusiastic followers. That was apparently too much to ask. No matter the rationale, this is who the Trump voter endorsed:

And these folks:

I am angry because people I know, and people in my family, voted for these people. The rationale may be gussied up in talk about values, or economic insecurity, or because Obama was coming for their guns. Maybe people just don't "trust" Hillary Clinton because emails something Benghazi. But that's all noise masking the real signal: these voters, including many of my friends and family, have given the hate crowd a resounding thumbs up.

Worse: these knuckle draggers know it, and they are ready to act on their long-held and cherished beliefs about their "heritage". The mask is off. The meanest among us need no longer fear the jackbooted thugs of political correctness, a term that seems to really just mean "don't be such a dick to people", but which the throwback crowd finds an intolerable intrusion on their God-given right to "say what they really mean".

Already, the first glimmers of life in Trumpland are coming into focus. It ain't pretty. A rough beast has been set loose. School children are chanting "build that wall" in class. Children of color are being told to "start packing [their] bags" to "go back where you came from". It's happening right here, in my little island of liberal sanity. It's happening all over the country.

My anger is impotent. Nothing about it feels empowering or productive. "We" are outnumbered and the balance of power is exaggeratedly against the values we hold dear. It just feels depressing. Their anger has been given license. A savage darkness is upon the land.

"Time" executed its annual "fall back" maneuver over the weekend. Not yet 5 p.m. and dusk is creeping in. The days are shorter. Trees are going bare, plants browning and withdrawing. The weather here in the Panhandle has turned decidedly brisk, dry and dusty with predominant cloudiness.

We are deep into the autumn, the season aka Fall, and there is a heartless winter close on its heels. It is the twilight of a

year that has been filled with capricious cruelty from the start, laying low a parade of heroes and legends, a reaper's roll call that framed this election with an appropriately morbid echo. This week, hope died for millions of people. It is the greatest loss yet.

Today is Veteran's Day, a day where we thank those who have served for all they have sacrificed for this Nation. It's a day to remind us that we have, collectively and historically, faced many dark hours and survived – some of us – to tell the tale.

It is also a day to recall that many did not survive, that some events are so benighted that we can be sure people will suffer and die. The calendar will cycle round, but I fear that the political climate is going to get much worse before it gets better. Coming off of eight years of actual progress, this is a bitter damn pill.

I hope I'm just being a drama king here. I hope that some spark of inclusiveness, tolerance, and kindness emerges in the nation's Trumpian soul, but we know none of that is coming.

Wednesday evening we went out for a bite and found ourselves among friends (and not the Trump-voting kind). It reminded us that we are a part a very fine community, that we are not alone where we are. This is a comfort, not at all small. But it's not enough to cocoon in our safe zones. Too many people out there do not have this luxury.

It falls upon us to expand our notion of community, to ensure that people who need a safe harbor know where to find one. To do what we can at the local level to work for social justice, to help protect our neighbors from cruelty. To call the powerful to account, and to put ourselves on the line in solidarity with people whose lives are on the line because 49 million people put them there.

This is our call.

I’m pissed.

I’m depressed.

But I am not beaten, motherfuckers. Who’s with me?

Yes or No, But….

How do you solve a problem like The Donald?

From my perspective, the answer is simple: turn out the vote and beat that sociopathic charlatan like a tin drum. Send him scurrying back into the fever swamp that spawned him. Be gone, beast.

But for my Republican friends (stop laughing) and relatives, it is a little trickier. Talking to these folks – in a respectful and civil way (why are you laughing? Stop!) – presents an opportunity for us to find a little common ground

Some of them – call them the #EverTrump crowd – see Big Orange as the answer to their prayers, a knight in Cheetos-colored armor. For them, it’s simple. And I got nothing except to say, “Nice weather we’re having.” Common ground enough.

Then there are the folks Josh Marshall tagged as the “Yes, but…” brigade, people who realize Mister Spray Tan is a disaster on legs, but are going to vote for him anyway. Folks like Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell, who daily have to spin

like tops to distance themselves from Trump's latest nonsense, but still, their support remains unwavering. Rubio. Priebus. McCain. The list goes on. Profiles in triangulating cowardice, they want it both ways: principled opposition to the scourge of Gold Star moms everywhere, but a clean heart about withholding their vote for the only living, non-orange person who might actually become President, the Hildebeast. These are the folks who calculate that party over country is a winning bet. For them, I got nothing beyond a suggestion to check out the latest escapades of Mallard Fillmore. And this: history will not be kind to you. Nice weather, by the way.

Then there are those who know el Trumpo is a know-nothing martinet and a fool, but a lifetime of GOP voting leaves them constitutionally incapable of pulling the lever for the pant-suited she-demon. The "No, but…" brigade. JEB!? I'm looking at you. If you're in this gaggle, stay with me, because I want you to find your way to the fourth possible path, the one less traveled by.

Here is where I praise Republicans who realize that a Trump presidency would inflict incalculable damage on our Nation, who cannot imagine having to explain to their descendants how they could have supported – even indirectly – the election of a vulgar grifter. People who know that they are going to take fire from other Republicans, know they'll hear cries of "Traitor!" People who know they are sacrificing future opportunities in the party they have called home for a lifetime. The #NoButs brigade.

We can also call them Patriots.

I recently struck up a friendship with a long-time member of the conservative GOP establishment. (STOP laughing!) Last time we spoke, X was firmly in the "No, but…' camp, unable to see how she could overcome a lifetime of Clinton-aversion. But today I discover that she has very publicly and definitively joined the #NoButs brigade, proclaiming that if the race is

close, she will vote for Hillary Clinton.

I cannot tell you how much I admire her courage. She could have kept quiet and nobody would have known. Except her. And this was a big splash, a very public conversion driven by conscience and rational analysis.
This is what decency looks like. I hope this opens the floodgates.

And I hope those trying to have it both ways realize that, as my Uncle Herschel used to say, “Roll in pig mud, boy, and you get stink on ya.”

I’m not asking that every Republican become a Democrat or vote a straight Dem ticket. I am asking – no, pleading, really – that the people who identify as reasonable Republicans cut the charade of “Yes/No, but…” and take a simple stand. Proclaim your support for Hillary Clinton as the next President of the United States. #NoButs

You can vote straight GOP down the ticket from there. You can pledge to do everything you can to ensure that she is a one-term President. As a member of the loyal opposition, you can commit to struggling against any of her policies that strike you as wrong.

What you cannot do – if you want to honestly see yourself as a principled conservative and Patriot – is to sit this out, to let your silence serve as tacit approval of a tiny-fingered, Cheetos-tinted lunatic assuming the power of the Presidency.

Just join the ranks of the sane and repeat after my new pal, who proclaimed, “This is a time when country has to take priority over political parties. Donald Trump cannot be elected president.”
Now that’s some common ground we should be able to agree on.

(Out of respect for her reputation, I won’t quote my pal by name.

She’s getting grief enough without being pegged as a friend of mine.)

It’s Getting There

Shadows are falling and I’ve been here all day
It’s too hot to sleep, time is running away
Feel like my soul has turned into steel
I’ve still got the scars that the sun didn’t heal
There’s not even room enough to be anywhere
It’s not dark yet, but it’s getting there
— Bob

I’d love to take a cavalier tone here, deliver a wry slice of the buffoonery that is He, Trump<fn>™ Charlie Pierce</fn>. The man is comedy gold, a walking punch line, from his barely concealed groping of Ivanka, to his hair and skin color, to his inability to let go a grudge, to his Mussolini-esque lip pursing. <fn>Someone wearing my eyeglasses emphasized this last tic during last Mardi Gras. It was yooge. Way ahead of the curve.</fn>

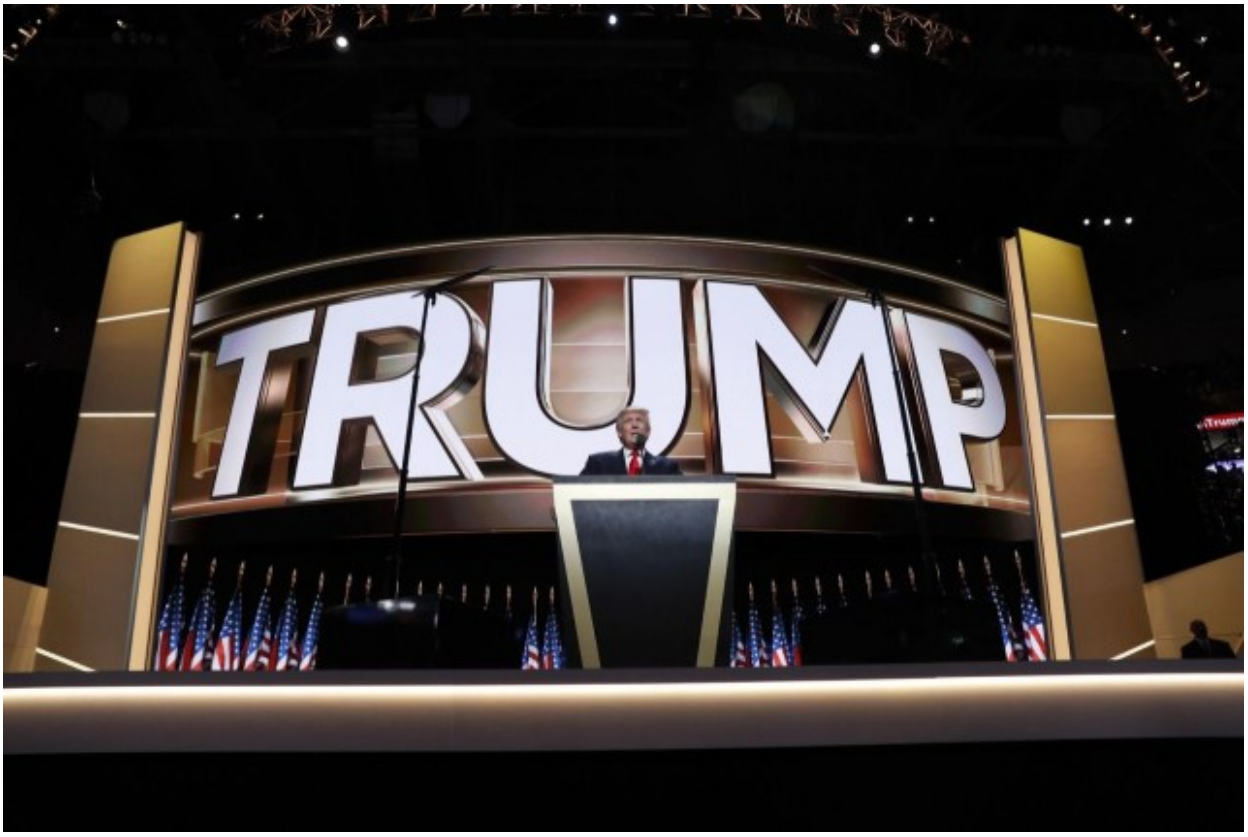
The Writer as Trump, Friend of da Jieuxs – Photo by Ryan Hodgson-Rigsbee

But mocking Trump is just not enough. Things are just a tad too dire. Face it: one of two people has a non-zero chance of becoming the nation's 45th president. Neither is named Jill or Gary.<fn>Get over it.</fn> Given the peculiarities of American electoral politics, one of them is named Trump.

I feel like I'm watching some unholy mashup of *Seven Days in May*, *Manchurian Candidate,* and *The Man in the High Castle.* It can't happen here? This time, I wonder.

His acceptance speech in Cleveland was … was … well, what the hell was that, anyway? He began by saying this:

> *Friends, delegates and fellow Americans: I humbly and gratefully accept your nomination for the presidency of the United States.*



Humble

It was touted ahead of time as hewing to the model of Nixon's 1968 acceptance. (My favorite Nixon scholar, Rick Perlstein, explains here how badly Trump missed the mark.) Trump knows that his only hope for winning is to amplify and exaggerate our fears, to scare enough people into welcoming authoritarian rule to save us from threats at home and abroad, threats to our "way of life" and "our values". Like Nixon in '68, the litany of horror Trump describes is impressively dire. But unlike Nixon's list, it is largely fictional. A few examples: crime is down, cop killings are down, employment is up, ACA is working well, and so on. Our scorched Thunderdome? He pretty much just made it up.

Fact checkers at work on Trump's ravings

Even more telling, Nixon understood and acknowledged that these were problems that we would have to solve "together". Trump had a slightly different perspective:

> *I ALONE CAN FIX IT.*

This theme came around several times, and it is perhaps the most telling component of the whole crazed diatribe. Trump sees himself as a messianic figure, an authoritarian genius who will cure everything that ails us simply by being his awesome self.

> *On January 20th of 2017, the day after I take the oath of office, Americans will finally wake up in a country where the laws of the United States are enforced.*

Because right now, and as far as memory can serve, America is a charred hellscape where chaos reigns supreme. And only one man can save us.

More humility, with a hearty dash of spittle-flecked anger

He yelled. He balled his fists. His face contorted and reddened. He started loud and got louder, more angry.

And then he lowered his tone and said this:

I AM YOUR VOICE.

I truly lost my bearings at this point. Is he a con artist, delivering his practiced patter to sting an easy mark? Is it all an act, or does this guy truly believe our world is in the depths of hell and he is the only man who can save us.

It doesn't really matter. We now have a know-nothing narcissist within hailing distance of the Oval Office. He is clearly unqualified, and unhinged. Whether he's running a long con or is "just" a demented egomaniac (not that these are mutually exclusive), this is dangerous territory

It's unlikely, but this tiny fingered schmuck could win. He starts with a reliable ~40% of the vote, people who love them some authoritarianism, along with folks whose tribal affiliation to Republicanism means they just have to vote for him. On the other side, Clinton has a reliable ~40% base who love them some Democratic tribalism. And as always, that leaves the mushy middle of 20 million or so people who are unsure, undecided. These are, for the most part, what the political profession calls low information voters.<fn>Actually, that label applies to a huge portion of the dedicated party folks, too. On both sides.</fn> People who will make up their minds based on their feelings. Who would you rather have a beer with?

A few hours ago, a candidate for state representative knocked on my door.<fn>Really! This is not some Thomas Friedman cab driver gimmick.</fn> Nice guy, friendly. Republican, and in a town this size, basically a neighbor. We got to talking Trump. He's not a happy guy on this, says there's no way he can vote for a "looney", and is pretty sad about the state of his party.<fn>He also had unkind things to say about Little Marco Rubio. I liked him even more then.</fn> I asked him if he would vote for Hillary. He kind of shook his head and said, no, he didn't think he could do it.

I asked him if, knowing that Trump is a dangerous nut, and that one of two people was going to be President, and that Florida is a tight state electorally, he didn't think it was his responsibility to do what he could to keep the nut out of office. He was remarkably open to the idea when phrased that way.

I had the same conversation with my fab daughter this morning, a disappointed Bernster who "just isn't feeling Hillary". I get it. It's her first election, and she wants it to be a righteous experience. And I get that many Bernie supporters are disappointed and feeling left out. Been there.

Much has been said about prominent GOPers refusing to attend the convention. Several big name Republicans have announced that they will absolutely not vote for Trump, but like my new pal and state house candidate, they can't bring themselves to vote for Clinton. And much is made of their integrity, their principled opposition.

I say bullshit. How bad does it have to get to renounce your party's presidential nominee? Pretty fucking terrible, that's how. Yet that's not terrible enough to actually do something to keep him out of the office you already admit that he is unqualified for? What more do you need?

Republicans have a shitty choice, but it has a silver lining. I'm looking for prominent Republicans – come on JEB! – to take a stand and say, "This guy is dangerous, he does not represent the values of our party or our country, and I am voting for his opponent. In four years, I will campaign hard to re-take the White House from Hillary Clinton, but for now, she is the only viable choice."

This is the way to rebuild a sober and rational party. I know too many Republicans who acknowledge that the party has become extremist. They want it to change. Here's their chance to chase to tea partiers, the white supremacists, the

obstructionists, the bomb throwers.

For Hillary-averse voters who consider themselves liberal, or progressive, or leftist syndicalist whatevers, it's time to suck it up and support Clinton. Proclaim loudly that Trump is just too dangerous, but dammit Clinton, we're gonna bulldog you and hold your feet to the fire. Find another Bernie to primary her in 2020 if she let's you down too badly.

I get that there are people who really, really, *really* do not like Hillary Clinton. Personally, I'm fine with her; it feels like a continuation of Obama, and I can't get too outraged over that. I'm fairly certain she will disappoint and outrage me at some point, just like every other president in my lifetime.<fn>Some way more than others, natch.</fn>

But I'm comfortable with that because I know it is inevitable. For some folks, the idea of voting the lesser of two evils is too much to bear, and a principled purity vote is more emotionally satisfying. Or maybe you're thinking of staying home, like your crestfallen GOP counterparts who didn't get they nominee the wanted. Above it all.

Whether you're a disappointed progressive or an disappointed conservative, let me say with utmost respect:

> *Fuck your feelings. Use your head.*

Trump is a clear danger. We cannot afford to indulge in preening and moral purity this year. The stakes are too high. Vote, goddamit. And don't waste it.

(Full Disclosure: I voted Bernie in the primary, fwiw. And I like Tim Kaine just fine.)