

Wave the Bloody Shirt



It's not hard to find examples of politicians exploiting tragedy for cheap emotional gain. But it's hard to imagine a more cynical episode than the stunt trump pulled last night during his congressional address.

On January 28, just a week into the trump reign, our Commander in Chief green lighted a military raid in Yemen. By most accounts, the president* took a cavalier attitude toward approving the mission. He could not be bothered to attend to the mission in the Situation Room, preferring to stay in the residence and tweet about trivialities. Leadership.

During the raid, CPO William Owen died, and six other SEALs were injured. An estimated 29 civilians died in the raid, including children. A \$75M Osprey helicopter was disabled; airstrikes were called in to destroy the aircraft to keep it from falling into enemy hands. No strategic intelligence was attained, no strategic hard target or combatant captured or killed. It was a clusterfuck from start to finish.

This woman, Carryn Owens, lost her husband. Her grief is beyond my imagination.



I'm confident in saying that it is also beyond the president's * imagination. Or interest, really, in anything other than its value as a show biz gambit that allowed him to bask in one minute and forty-four seconds of standing ovation tribute, tribute that may have been intended for Mrs Owens and her late husband, but which he treated as his due. He even made her stand up a second time, this woman consumed in mourning and public grief, reduced to a prop in a sick game to let this sick man believe himself to be a popular leader.

Watch the tape. She wants to go away and hide. Now look at trump: the sick bastard is beaming, smiling, waving thumbs up as though he had just had a protester dragged out of one of his rallies. The world is just a reality show set to him. He could care fuck. all. about human feelings, about suffering, about yearning. Give him an applause line and everything is fine.



This is what sociopathy looks like<fn>And isn't Speaker Ryan the cutest little puppy dog?</fn>

Trump quoted the Bible. Trump said "Ryan" was looking down from heaven, and "he is very happy because I think he just broke a record" for the ovation. Huzzah.

Now, take a look at the Joint Chiefs of Staff during this revolting spectacle.



RETWEETS
2,023

LIKES
3,965



Ever since the botched mission, trump has swung between claiming everything went great to blaming the failure on Obama. And then a few days ago, he tried to hang it around the necks of the military.

"This was something that was, you know, just – they wanted to do," Trump said. " And they came to see me and they explained what they wanted to do, the generals, who are very respected."

"And they lost Ryan," Trump continued.

Not one of those generals would deny their responsibility for CPO Owens' death. It's part of the role of leadership. (And by the way, Don, to you his name is Chief Petty Officer Owens. His friends call him Ryan.) The look of disgust on these faces is telling.

Trump, a pretend leader, is never to blame, never culpable for any failure. When things are going well, it's all to his credit, just as when an audience is on its feet cheering, it is because of his magnificent greatness.

FWIW, CPO Owens' father has refused to meet with the president*, claiming that the questions surrounding the approval and execution of the raid make it impossible for him to face trump. He has called for a full investigation, saying, "Don't hide behind my son's death to prevent an investigation."

The schmuck from Queens went one step further. Not only will he hide behind CPO Owens' death to avoid an investigation, he is waving a good man's bloody shirt to wrap himself in applause and adoration.

It's difficult to imagine a more revolting manipulation of genuine grief. Somehow, though, I think we have a long way to go before we hit bottom with this guy.

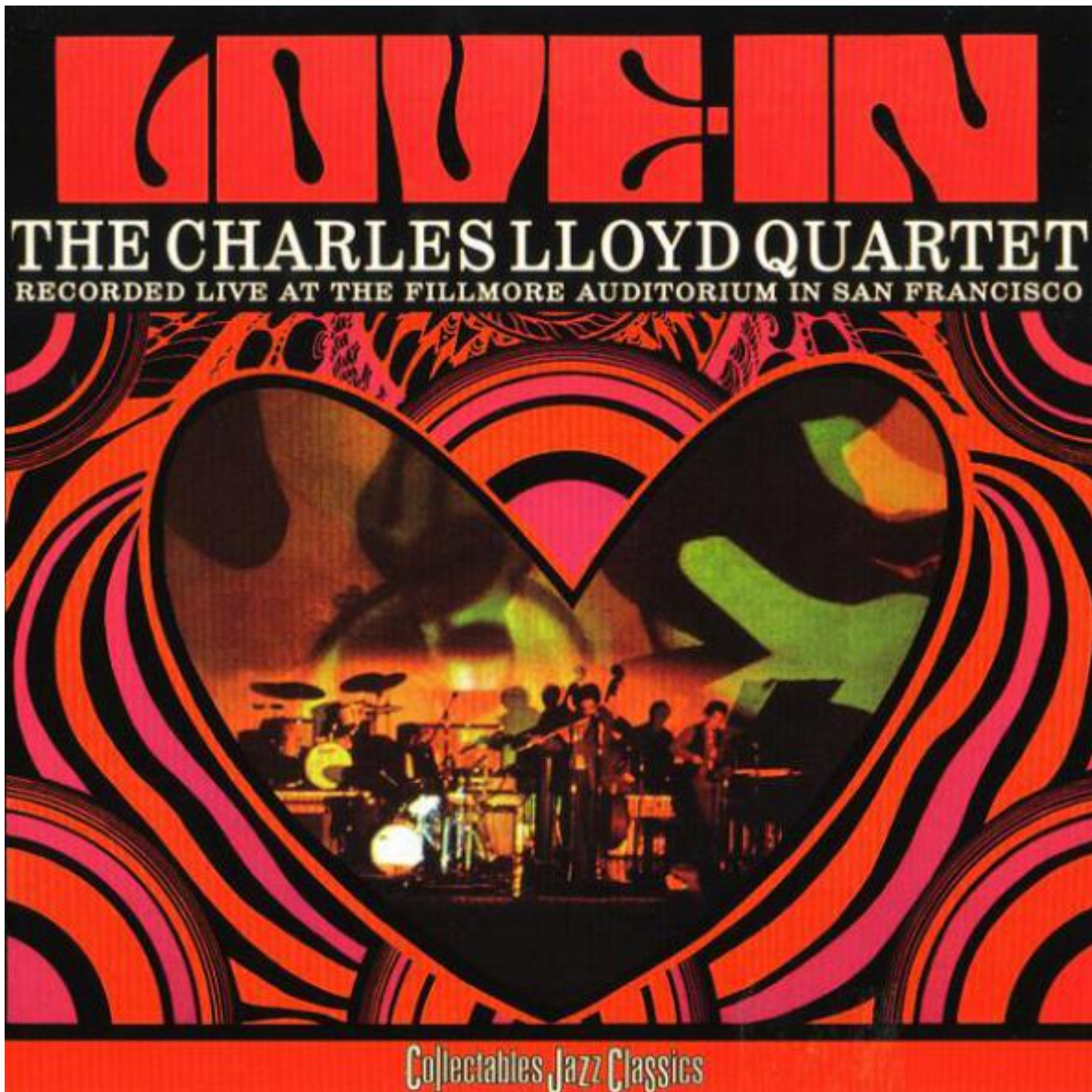
My Favorite World #38



After an outpouring of reader demand, The Writer is back with My Favorite World, a (purportedly) once-weekly feature that highlights some things that make this my favorite world. I had stopped posting MFW after week 37 because it seemed to be not so popular. However, the application of true cash money attached to a request to resume is more than I can deny.

So here: a piece of Terrible Beauty to herald the arrival of Trump.

Charles Lloyd has been on the scene since the 50s. It would be ridiculous to list everybody he's worked with because it's pretty much everybody who counts. His first group as a leader gave big breaks to Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette, and Cecil McBee.<fn>If any of those names is unfamiliar, get to work!</fn> The Quartet was the first jazz group to play the Fillmore, appearing alongside Hendrix, Cream, the Dead, Joplin, Airplane, &c. For many a tripped out hippie, it was the first jazz they ever heard.



What else? One of the first million-selling albums in jazz history. Toured everywhere, including the Far East and the Soviet bloc nations. Lloyd, born in Memphis with heritage derived from African, Cherokee, Mongolian, and Irish ancestors, was one of the first “world music” explorers. He was, as the kids have it, the shit.

He has a new group – Charles Lloyd and the Marvels – featuring steel guitarist Greg Leisz, drummer Eric Harland, bassist Reuben Rogers, and some kid named Bill Frisell on guitar. He has a new album on Blue Note, *I Long to See You*. It is purely beautiful.

Lloyd has never shied from political expression, so on

Inauguration Day<fn>Black Friday</fn>, he released to YouTube a version of Dylan's "Masters of War" by the Marvels with guest vocalist Lucinda Williams. The song is 50+ years old and has never felt dated.

He released this statement with the piece:

Nations have been throwing rocks at each other for 1000s of years. We go through spells of light and darkness. In my lifetime I have witnessed periods of peace, protest, and uprising, only to be repeated by peace, protest and more uprising. The fact that Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" was written in the early 1960s and not during the last decade, makes it timeless and timely. It breaks my heart to think that there are current generations of young people all over the world who are growing up without knowing of Peace in their lives. The words Dylan wrote are a laser beam on humanity. This line, in particular, has stuck with me for over 5 decades:

*"Let me ask you one question
Is your money that good
Will it buy you forgiveness
Do you think that it could
I think you will find
When your death takes its toll
All the money you made
Will never buy back your soul"*

The world is a dog's curly tail – no matter how many times we straighten it out, it keeps curling back. As artists we aspire to console, uplift and inspire. To unite us through sound across boundaries and borders and dissolve lines of demarcation that separate. The beautiful thing is that as human beings, even under the most adverse conditions, we are capable of kindness, compassion and love. Vision and hope. All life is one. Who knows, maybe one day we'll succeed. We go forward.

Lucinda. I do love me some Lucinda Williams. When that woman goes for rasp she can sing the chrome off a trailer hitch. Her delivery here is terrifying and borderline ugly, ugly in that beautiful way that calls up and confronts the horror and fear many of us are feeling in these rickety times. It's a clarion, a beckoning. Hear it.

Now, go plunk down your filthy dollars and buy a copy of this. You won't be sorry.



Hell, it's even got Willie Nelson on one track, Norah Jones on another. Whaddya waiting for?

My Favorite World.

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.

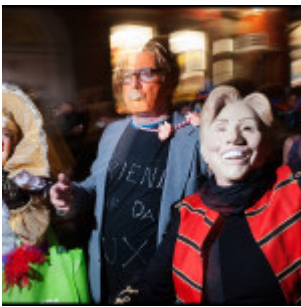
This is our call.

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 pantsuited 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.)