

Donald Trump and the Wall: Perspectives from South of the Border

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Trumpty Dumpty's Wall

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We don't need no education . . .

—Pink Floyd, *The Wall*

The Republican Party appears to be on the cusp of nominating a candidate who could become the second civil war president in American history. The first civil war president, Abraham Lincoln, created schisms so deep that war broke out virtually the moment he took office in 1861. The break occurred along North-South lines and along the lines of federal versus state power. Of course the issue at stake was slavery.

Like Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, Lincoln bitterly divided the country. But President Lincoln's aim was to emancipate—to liberate a population whose rights had been denied. His legacy is unification, not division, despite the fact that extending and guaranteeing rights for African Americans (and other groups later) has been a long and painful process.

Mr. Trump, on the other hand, divides unnecessarily. His comments and actions against minorities, women, and the disabled have been without precedent among candidates for high office and rightly condemned. His proposal to build a wall along the border with Mexico has Mexicans in turn bemused and outraged. But it is the walls within, metaphorical but equally damaging, which beggar belief. Every insult extends the walls, and draws more protesters onto the streets, in what could presage the next four years. The civil war seems to have begun already.

Of course he has divided the region too, throwing gasoline on the sensitive issue

of migration and border security. The announcement that he would force Mexico to pay for a wall sounded understandable alarm bells south of the border. In February he estimated that the wall would cost \$8 billion, a “tiny fraction of the money that we lose [*sic*] with Mexico on trade.” He later implied that war could ensue if Mexico does not pay.

Nativist grumbling in primary season is not new. Patrick Buchanan ran in the 1990s on a platform which included anti-immigration. So it's easy to dismiss Donald Trump as yet another futile dinosaur, but his success represents the desperate sense of vulnerability among those Americans who feel threatened by changes inside and outside their country.

And why is Mexico a threat exactly? Mexico is now a partner of the United States in ways that were unthinkable only 25 years ago, as others point out in this issue. The two-way trade relationship is worth more than \$500 billion per year, benefiting American exporters and consumers and especially American border towns, which thrive on the commerce with locals on the Mexican side of the border.

And when 40 percent of the content of Mexico's exports to the United States was originally imported *from* the United States, who wins and who loses in this trade relationship?

Walls close off legitimate opportunities and raise costs, and this wall would be as damaging to the United States as to Mexico. There are, by some estimates, more than 1 million Americans in Mexico.

I am one of them. Many are retired, others (like me) are married to Mexicans.

Of course, our special personal relationships and circumstances inform our views. But there is more to it than that. I work in an academic institution in Mexico City with educated professionals from Mexico and various foreign countries. Our experience shows that there are countless advantages of an open and cooperative relationship.

For their part, Mexicans admire the United States. In 2014, 70 percent viewed Americans favorably, according to CIDE polling. (Central Americans were viewed less favorably.) Their views are still positive, notwithstanding the raucous stupidity coming from Mr. Trump.

The same percentage of the population (70 percent) was opposed to building walls in Mexico to protect against illegal migration from the south (i.e., from Guatemala, Belize, and other countries). In other words, Mexicans themselves don't hold the same view about those less fortunate to the south that Mr. Trump and his supporters hold.

How long would that last if an American wall were built? Many Mexicans are now returning home from the United States, and the net flow of migrants is negative according to the Pew Research Center. Central Americans are taking their place, but even so, border apprehensions have plummeted by some 61 percent since 2005. Each border agent today takes about 20 migrants into custody per year, down from around 300 in the early 1990s.

I often cross a railroad track north of Mexico City on the way to my father-in-law's village. A notorious train called the Bestia (the Beast) travels this track. There are always Central American migrants waiting here for trains, and looking for food and money to support their journey north.

Around Christmas we dropped off some clothes and toys. The young man who took them told me he was from San Pedro Sula, the Honduran city with the reputation as the world's most violent. There are almost 20 times more murders there per capita than in Mexico City.

Look at this man for a moment. Imagine what it must be like to be on a journey in which you are likely to be targeted by organized criminal gangs, the Mexican police, and perhaps other predators. How desperate your situation must be to risk your own life and that of your young wife and child. The chances are low he and his family will arrive safely (if illegally) in the United States, find work, and settle into a better life. But low chances and bellicose bullying from Mr. Trump have not, and will not, dissuade him from trying.

Of course, Mexico has many problems of governance, security, and poverty, and these help fuel illegal migration. In certain hot spots, violent crime is high. Yet Mexico City's murder rate (about 9 per 100,000) is below that of St. Louis, Detroit, New Orleans, Baltimore, and some 24 other American cities.

Moreover, violence in northern Mexico has not affected U.S. border towns. In 2012, El Paso, Texas, had a murder rate of 3 per 100,000, while over the border in Ciudad Juarez the rate was around 148. In the same year the rate in Chula Vista, California was 2.7 per 100,000, compared

to nearby Tijuana, where it was 39 (in 2015).

Ironically, a wall risks impeding bona fide flows while doing nothing to ameliorate security risks. Drugs flow north; weapons and cash flow south. The 300-plus miles of fence that already exist and the intensive border checks have done nothing to stem those flows, but the movement of commerce remains too slow.

The United States needs to draw smart lessons from the experience of its southern neighbor. Mexico is everything from safe, modern, educated, and international to unsafe, hidebound, parochial, and suspicious. Where it has become better, it is because it was open to the outside world.

America should face the pressures of globalization with neither walls nor wide-open borders but with managed migration flows and smart border checks. It's not sound-bite, half-truth politics. It's serious politics for a complex world.

Meanwhile, let's assume for one moment that, against all the odds and to the eternal shame of American voters, Mr. Trump is actually elected president. What will his job entail? There are many roles a president fulfills, but the two most important are to offer policy choices to Congress and to act as the ceremonial leader of the nation.

Offering policy choices is necessarily divisive, whether it is to propose trade agreements, cut taxes, spend federal money on housing, create a national health care system, or, indeed, to build a wall on the border.

But it is the second role, often unappreciated, that presidents are remembered for. When the country is struck by natural disaster, terrorist attacks,

or some other calamity, the president must go to the scene, roll up his (soon her) sleeves, and stand knee deep in the grief and destruction.

He must draw people together, providing material and moral support where it is needed. He is a healer and a unifier.

Whatever you thought of President Reagan's policy choices, it was his actions after the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster in 1986 that defined who he was as a president. And who will forget President George W. Bush walking with the firemen of New York City among the smoldering ruins of the twin towers? Presidents forget this at their peril, as the same President Bush did in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

President Obama visited victims and first responders of the San Bernardino massacre in December. He listened to their stories, he reassured them. *He was there*. He told first responders that they represented "the strength and the unity and the love in that community." They were a reminder of "what's good in this country."

A president's policy choices can frustrate his job as a unifier, because the policy choices generate antipathy. It takes a skillful politician to be able to do both successfully. The president plays for the home team, but he also sings the National Anthem. What would you think of a singer who stepped up to the microphone but, instead of singing the National Anthem, began to berate the visiting team? It makes no sense at all to elect a candidate who generates wanton antipathy.

In was Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in 1863 that we now remember, not the decisions he made which led to the war, nor the unprecedented activism he pursued

Trump: Seducción mediática y escándalo político

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(indeed, transforming the presidency), nor the deep opposition he fomented in carrying it out.

He avowed “that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Now imagine Donald Trump uttering words like that.

When we hear Mr. Trump tell St. Louis protesters to “Go home to mommy,” we get a sense of how he would stack up against the great Republican who fought the first Civil War. What would he have said to those in New Orleans, waiting on rooftops to be rescued? To the families of the Challenger astronauts?

Unfortunately, there will be opportunities to respond to disasters in the next four years. But Mr. Trump has shown that he can never play this role because he does not have the qualities. He is rich yet petty, influential yet belittling, powerful yet abusive. He is not a leader but a divider.

Note

This article is drawn in part from these sources by the same author: “Trumpy Dumpty’s Wall from the Other Side,” Edinburgh Politics and IR Blog, <https://edinburghpoliticsandinternationalrelations.wordpress.com/2016/04/08/trumpy-dumpty-s-wall-from-the-other-side/>; and “The United States’ Second Civil War President?,” *El Daily Post*, April 29, 2016. ■

Cuando Trump inició su carrera hacia la Casa Blanca, México estaba ahí para ser construido como el enemigo propicio. Pocas veces unas elecciones internas en Estados Unidos habían tenido tanta cobertura mediática en México como ha sucedido en 2016. Quizá, porque pocas veces un pre-candidato estadounidense había tratado a México prácticamente como un enemigo al que amenaza con un muro en frontera sur y con impedir el envío de las remesas de los trabajadores inmigrantes, como lo ha hecho Donald Trump. México se ha convertido en uno de los temas importantes de la campaña electoral en Estados Unidos.

Entre México y Estados Unidos existe una de las relaciones más complejas que hay entre dos países. De acuerdo a una valoración de un ex embajador mexicano en Washington, el comercio diario entre los dos lados de la frontera es de 1400 millones de dólares. Hay 35 millones de mexicanoamericanos, de los cuales hay 11 millones de mexicanos inmigrantes y se calcula que hay unos 5 millones indocumentados.¹

La candidatura de Trump puede ser analizada desde varios ángulos, pero lo que nos interesa entender aquí es: ¿de qué forma se ha construido en los medios? Se trata de unos de los fenómenos más mediáticos que hay en la política, en un mundo en donde la comunicación es el soporte que modula, modela y hace visible a la política.

Existen diversas interpretaciones sobre el fenómeno Donald Trump en las elecciones de Estados Unidos, pero la mayoría expresa temor a que una persona con arranques de xenofobia y racismo, pueda llegar a la Casa Blanca. Unos afirman que se trata de una reacción anti-Obama; otros señalan que no tiene posibilidades de ganar por estar en

contra de las minorías más emblemáticas, como los afro-americanos y latinos; incluso contra las mujeres. Ya pasó el momento en donde había espacios para que Trump fuera rebasado por políticos profesionales y cercanos a las élites conservadoras del Partido Republicano; ya se impuso como el candidato y todo indica que saldrá victorioso de la convención republicana el 18 de julio en Cleveland, Ohio.

La sociedad cerrada como aspiración

Parece que hay una correlación entre la lista de adjetivos que descalifican a Trump, como un xenófobo, racista, machista, ignorante y fascista y la cara que ven sus seguidores, la del millonario exitoso que ahora juega su aventura política y conecta como el líder que esperaban.

En cualquier democracia existe un orden en donde las batallas electorales son una parte de la lucha por el poder. El voto se ejerce por ideas o intereses, por carismas y/o afectos. El juego por el poder siempre hace una promesa de un mejor futuro. Esta visión clásica se ha modificado, sin que desaparezcan sus formas. En esta campaña se ha alterado el orden de tener agendas definidas y coherencia para construir un orden, y en su lugar hay un vaciamiento de la democracia, una expresión de un malestar que polariza y divide de forma radical. Aquí es donde hay que situar los fenómenos reactivos como Trump en Estados Unidos, Le Pen en Francia o Berlusconi en Italia. Los motivos cambian, pero el modelo es similar: un liderazgo que identifica el enemigo a vencer, es decir, a las élites de los partidos políticos tradicionales, los inmigrantes, los terroristas, los de otra religión, los extranjeros, los mexicanos o los musulmanes.