

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-trump-mosh-pit-1475103216>

OPINION | COLUMNISTS | WONDER LAND

## The Trump Mosh Pit

Only one of Monday's debaters is still in sync with the country's restless mood.



By

**DANIEL HENNINGER**

Sept. 28, 2016 6:53 p.m. ET

It's past time that we all come to grips with the reality that the Trump candidacy has been carried forward to this unlikely moment by forces in the American population that transcend normal presidential politics. These are essentially the same forces that carried the equally improbable Bernie Sanders to 22 primary victories.

I've always found the Sanders phenomenon more interesting, because unlike the well-known reality TV host and brand manager, Sen. Sanders was a 74-year-old Vermont socialist with zero visibility. That this nobody contended with a woman whose political immensity scared off a sitting vice president means that some deep currents are roiling the American electorate.

An agog media class—I was certainly agog—has identified that “something” as anger, frustration, white rage or PC backlash. Call it whatever you want. It's real, and I don't think Monday night's debate killed it. Which is why I don't think Donald Trump “lost” the debate.

This week's media meme—that Hillary Clinton wiped the floor with Mr. Trump—is undervaluing the realities of this unusual election.

We have been through this exercise so many times with Donald Trump. When in July last year he said of Sen. John McCain, “He's not a war hero,” I, like others, thought, he's done. You cannot run for president and say an American military man who was tortured in a

North Vietnam prison camp is no hero. Everyone, including the umpteen GOP candidates, thought Mr. Trump's early primary surge would collapse.

Of course the Trump contraption rattled forward, surviving one awful gaffe after another. The meme then (as now) was that the Trump supporters were basically idiots—now known as the deplorables. Well, it's also true that you can pay a king's ransom to watch the New York Yankees from the box seats with normal people or a lot less to sit in the upper deck with guys who will F-bomb your kids for nine innings. They're all cheering for the same team. Welcome to America. Welcome to the Trump mosh pit.

---

MORE WONDER LAND:

---

- A Debate About Terror Sept. 21, 2016
- Les Déplorables Sept. 14, 2016
- The Way Trump Talks Sept. 7, 2016
- Law and Order: Trump Unit Aug. 17, 2016

Let us turn, then, to who said what in the debate for some understanding of the Trump paradox: How can a candidate get this far by seeming to say so little that we normally expect of a president?

The word “sound bite,” a term of usage originating in television, is now viewed with derision. Except for one thing: Sound bites work. They convey one idea and stick that idea in the mind. Recite, please, one memorable thing Hillary Clinton said in more than 90 minutes. OK, “trumped-up trickle down.” Her debate was well-constructed, but so is a paint-by-numbers picture.

At one point, Mrs. Clinton was talking about “investing in the middle class,” and “making college debt-free” and “broad-based inclusive growth.”

Trump: “Typical politician. All talk, no action. Sounds good, doesn't work. Never going to happen. Our country is suffering because people like Secretary Clinton have made such bad decisions in terms of our jobs and in terms of what's going on.”

Without question much of the Trump side of the debate was a discontinuous morass. But Donald Trump oozes contempt for the status quo. That visceral disdain offsets a lot of missteps and whatever Hillary's fact-check drones are putting up on her website.

There was an exchange on urban violence. Mrs. Clinton said, “We have to restore trust. We have to work with the police” and “we have to tackle the plague of gun violence.” Who could disagree?

Donald Trump. “Secretary Clinton doesn't want to use a couple of words. And that's law and order. We need law and order. If we don't

have it, we're not going to have a country.”

One of these two is catching the mood of the country, and the other just isn't.

Are we demeaning a presidential election by saying it is reducible to sound bites? I once thought so. Until it became clear that Donald Trump, like Bernie Sanders, was somehow detecting the complex tectonic shifts inside American politics.

Some of these shifts are disturbing—blue-collar alienation, eroding civil order in some cities—but unlike his always-hedged opponent, Donald Trump slams into them.

This sort of populism is exciting, but often limited.

Bernie went down because he was too one-note. Inequality wasn't enough. Donald Trump's one-note is trade, but his overweighting of the issue could sink him. Millions of the suburban voters he needs in battleground states have jobs connected to a strong global trading system. They don't want to vote for Hillary, but past some point, the “Nafta” rant may prove too much.

So it's back to the mosh pit. Yankee fans, from the boxes to the bleachers, love their team. But if a guy underperforms or dogs it, they'll boo him mercilessly. Donald Trump survived Monday night. But one more outing like that, and his phenomenal candidacy could get booed off the field.

*Write [henninger@wsj.com](mailto:henninger@wsj.com).*

Copyright 2014 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com).