



**THE FOUR HORSEMEN
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Speaking at the ABMA June meetings in Hilton Head, I confidently assured the audience that my good friend Scott Lewis of Optimus Industries had a better chance of winning the next presidential election than Donald Trump. Writing in the July ABMA newsletter, I suggested that once the summer vapors evaporated, the Trump and Sanders candidacies would have faded into past summer memories of Michelle Bachmann and Herman Cain. I was wrong.

Me and virtually everyone else who follows politics vocationally and avocationally. That includes conservative commentators like George Will, Karl Rove, and Charles Krauthammer, each of whom despise the possibility of a Trump nomination as anathema to the prospects of the Republicans winning the White House in 2016. Each has forecast that Trump's candidacy is a bubble, doomed to inevitably burst, sooner, rather than later. But it hasn't happened yet, with his poll numbers going up every cycle, today topping 30% among Republicans, the first time any of their 17 candidates has exceeded that number.

So what is going on? Have we really entered into a new era of political appreciation or is it just the strength of Trump's unique personality that is keeping his untraditional campaign alive? Combined with his ability to fund his own campaign and his uncanny ability to deliver sound bites in the manner of a reality TV show star in a reality TV oriented culture?

It has to be more than Trump. Because in addition to his ascendancy in the polls, other non-politicians have moved to the head of the pack in both parties. Trump, Ben Carson, Carly Fiorina, Bernie Sanders (yes, I know he has been an elected official for decades which may make him a politician but as a Socialist from Vermont, he still earns the non-politician label). For the establishments of both parties and the media elites, it is a veritable Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, wreaking havoc on the political landscape in ways never before seen.

At the moment, large parts of the electorate are mad as hell and they are not taking it anymore. After years of Congressional inaction, political posturing, and empty rhetoric, voters are not so much saying who or what they are for as they are saying what they are against – traditional politicians afraid to speak their minds. Policy prescriptions are taking a back seat, voters want candidates who are not afraid to speak aggressively, no matter the content of their arguments.

Horsemen 1 – Ben Carson. A distinguished pediatric neurosurgeon with absolutely no electoral or political experience whatsoever. Dignified and soft-spoken, he had a very strong performance in the first Republican debate. A man of deep faith, he is an African-American who may be able to make inroads into the black community, especially its evangelical component, sufficiently to make a difference among minority voters notoriously hostile to the Republican Party. But, he is light on policy specifics – will he hold up when he begins to actually outline his platform, what he is for, not just what he is against?

Horsemen 2 – Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett Packard who absolutely dominated the first Republican “kids’ table debate” and despite a lack of elective experience, shows a strong command of policy issues. Questions on foreign policy that Trump was unable to answer in interviews with conservative commentator Hugh Hewitt, Fiorina knocked out of the park. Questions abound about her tenure at HP which led to her firing – and The Donald recently questioned whether she has the looks to be president (not sure what that has to do with anything but what do I now)? Keep an eye on Carly, for Vice President.

Horsemen 3 – Bernie Sanders, former Mayor of Burlington, Senator from Vermont, an avowed Socialist who is not even a registered Democrat. Sanders is capitalizing on the growing impatience of the Democratic base with Hillary Clinton and her centrist, Wall Street-centric positions. Once Elizabeth Warren elected not to run, Sanders inherited her Occupy Wall Street supporters. He will do well in Iowa and New Hampshire. It is when the campaign moves South on March 1 that Hillary hopes to have built a fire wall against Sanders. It is a fair question – how long will the rest of the country support someone who honeymooned in the old Soviet Union?

And the Fourth Horsemen, in a league by himself, Donald Trump. Outspoken, politically incorrect, opinionated, a candidate who is expertly capturing the mood of an extraordinarily disgruntled electorate – or at least a substantial portion of the Republican Party. His is a candidacy like none other – focused on a single highly controversial issue, illegal immigration, with straightforward remedies, deportation and a big wall. Willing to make personal attacks on his opponents, their heroism, their looks, their faith, Trump has tapped into a discontent that says much about the current state of mind of many American voters.

And he has done so in a way that defies his appeal to his Tea Party supporters. He has expressed support for a tax increase on hedge fund managers, he has admired single payer health care systems in Canada and Europe, he once was pro-choice, and he has spoken fondly of both Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi. Unlike other Republican candidates, he considers Social Security and Medicare to be sacrosanct. While claiming to be a “big” Christian, the details of his faith participation remain scanty. Mostly he is self-referential – “you are just going to love the things I do when I am President.” Take him at his word.

Much of this suggests that popular understandings of the Tea Party base of the Republican Party as a small government, libertarian movement is misplaced (where are you Rand Paul)? Instead Trump is tapping into old school populism – we (the producers) want ours, we don't want them (the parasites) to have theirs. The Republican establishment is abhorred. Even outliers like Bobby Jindal today attacked Trump as an egomaniac, devoid of intellectual curiosity, a carnival act.

So far such attacks just work in Trump's favor. Whether that continues to be the case while the Republican establishment considers its options, I am out of the prediction game, at least until the next newsletter. In the interim, I am reconsidering the bona fides of the potential candidacy of my buddy Scott Lewis.