



## Theater Of The Absurd: Donald Trump

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Dear Mr. Brecht:

Your Trump-prophetic play, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, was last performed off-Broadway in 2002, starring Al Pacino. The rise of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States is, like the rise of Arturo Ui, resistible, but not for long. Good people must set aside partisan advantage and stand for country.

And many good people have been doing exactly that. Lindsey Graham, senior senator from South Carolina and a noted advocate of a strong national defense, has warned that “if Trump is nominated for president . . . we will get destroyed . . . and we will deserve it.” Both Presidents George Bush have announced that they will not endorse Trump, nor will they attend the Republican National Convention. Republican senators and governors from around the country have echoed—dare I say trumpeted—the same sentiments. The Republican presidential candidate in 2012, former governor Mitt Romney, has been eloquent on the dangers posed by a Trump candidacy. The recoil and horror at the prospect is not limited to the political class.

Conservative intelligentsia from the National Review through William Kristol, to Charles Krauthammer through the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and all the way to George Will have been clear: A Trump candidacy has the potential to destroy the Republican Party and, more importantly, to put the United States in great peril, both economically and diplomatically. David Brooks has written that the Republican Party is approaching a Joe McCarthy moment; people will be judged by where they stood on his nomination.

Some on the right call Trump a RINO—a Republican in name only. In *Rhinoceros*, the absurdist play by Ionesco, people turn into dangerous, unthinking rhinoceroses after repeating meaningless clichés, such as “It’s never too late.” The other characters then start to mindlessly repeat these same clichés. The Trump campaign has been full of totally content-free, mindless clichés like “Make America great again.”

To add to the absurdity and to provide the foundation for the Trump candidacy, we must build a wall (did America have a wall at some earlier and greater time?). The wall—which Trump continues to promise would be one of his first acts as president—is meant to keep Mexicans out and American businesses in. In fact, with regard to keeping Mexicans out, the net flow of people is toward the south, not toward the United States. Holman Jenkins Jr. of *The Wall Street Journal*

reports there is now some evidence that the United States border crackdown has hindered this flow of people into Mexico.

Trump went into Indiana and criticized the Carrier Corp. for relocating factory jobs into Mexico. It is questionable that Carrier could continue to be a viable international competitor without the skilled and efficient labor force available in Mexico. The same is true of Ford Motor Co. More broadly, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has been an economic success for all three countries, to the point that business analysts have referred to NAFTA as our harbor and fortress in a chaotic world. As energy exporters, all three countries can stand together in prosperity. It is absurd to argue that we should wall ourselves off—even if that were possible—from this benefit.

In this absurd drama, the premise that our country would close its borders to people based on a religious test is destructive of our values, catastrophic in its consequences and ignorant of our history. America became special (and great) because it opened its arms to all who could come, had no religious test of any kind, and embraced free-market capitalism. The free flow of ideas, capital and people are inextricably entwined. America cannot divide its welcoming of people by religion, color of skin or ethnic origin—those are human tragedies we have left to other nations.

Another lesser tragedy of a Trump presidential campaign and Republican nomination is the impact such a campaign will have on down-ballot elections. There is the potential—when America shows up at the voting booth and rejects this most un-American effort to make America small again—to reject all candidates who bear the Republican label. While there are partisans in the other party who would cheer this result, we should not. We need a balanced federal government, where no one “faction” (as Hamilton would say) controls all the levers of power. We need center-right market alternatives as much as we need center-left regulatory response.

After Arturo Ui has consolidated power at the end of the play, we are warned in the epilogue that “the bitch that bore him is in heat again.” And so we should be very cautious of the conditions that gave rise to Donald Trump, presidential candidate. As a country, we must move forward to rebuild our infrastructure and, in the process, create more and better jobs. We must have meaningful immigration reform, understanding that open immigration has depressed wages in some sectors of our economy. We must make job training and higher education high quality and easily accessible. We need to address crime and racial disparities across our great country. We need to unleash the productivity that is inherent in Americans and be smart about our tax and regulatory burdens that depress that productivity. And one more thing:

We cannot allow the incivility and ridicule that, because of Trump, now pose as our political dialogue. Governing and reform in this country is not a reality show. The more you treat people like clowns, the more clownish the enterprise will become. We are better than that, and we will continue to make America great.

Sincerely yours,

Vance K. Opperman