

Trump and the Ugliness of the Charm Defensive

Written by Lauren Rosewarne, Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne

I'm a political scientist with a bit of a [masochistic streak](#). *Of course* I was going to watch the Republican Convention.

Of course I was going to sit through speeches by bronzed crackpots with lacklustre understandings of economic data, crime statistics and globalisation.

Of course I was going to wince through speeches by gay men not only unwilling to lend a hand to their maligned brothers and sisters, but even willing to kick dirt at them.

And of course I was going to ache through shonky used-car spiels from "stars" like [Antonio Sabato Jr](#)

best known for playing Mike in

[All I Want for Christmas](#)

- and

[Chachi](#)

of

[Bob Loblaw](#)

fame.

I was however, much less prepared to hear from [Tom Barrack](#) : Trump's Lebanese-American BFF. While I have few doubts that there's a Craigslist page where you can rent swarthy gents for a game of Ethnic Besties, for the purposes of this article, I'll give Don the, *um*, benefit of the doubt.

Barrack's speech was genuinely lovely. He was eloquent and warm and he convincingly sketched a man very different to the one I dismiss as chock-full of bluster and seeping confected piss and vinegar.

It was gentle and sweet and, alas, another vomituous insight into all that's wrong with contemporary politics.

Trump and the Ugliness of the Charm Defensive

Written by Lauren Rosewarne, Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne

Tom Barrack speech at Republican National Convention (21 July, 2016)

I've written about the [celebritification of politics elsewhere](#). Of the [heinous horror movie](#), for example, of a politician cruising around poor neighbours in a Batmobile. Undoubtedly there's similar shenanigans present in this trainwreck. And BFF Barrack's speech highlighted yet another scungy strand.

Sure, he helped add a splash of brown to the [speakers list](#). But Barrack's real function was as another bit player in one very weird attempt to humanise a monster. This very same spectacle shoved Melania on stage to [pilfer](#) the play of every political wife in history: to convince us that her husband is [likeable enough to sleep with](#). And it's why his offspring turned up: to let us know that, of course, they'll loudly love him and no, inheritance plays no part whatsoever in their suckery.

Each of these players - the [surprisingly appealing oldest daughter](#), that [scarily automoton](#) younger one, [that holy roller nutjob from Liberty & University](#); - comprised a shiny bait-and-switch strategy. Sure, Trump might lack charm, eloquence, grace, insight, warmth, wisdom, kindness, compassion, intelligence, coherence, but hey, that's okay because *look what else we get!* No, not quite an opportunity to put [Charles in charge of our days and our nights](#), but the cast nonetheless conveys the illusion of a package deal. Peddled to all those stars-and-stripes-bedazzled, gun-totin', crucifix-fondlin' audience members is one very slick *ensemble*; that everything will be A-okay because this motley crew will make America great/whole/white/[hooded](#) again.

The day before the Australian federal election, I was a panellist on a [radio](#) program. A question was posed as to which leader we'd rather have a meal with. I was asked last and, uncharacteristically, I made everything all dry and dour. Instead of answering, I identified [my problem with the question](#).

I don't *want* my candidates to seem nice. To seem friendly. To be someone I want to be BFFs

Trump and the Ugliness of the Charm Defensive

Written by Lauren Rosewarne, Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne

with. I don't want to see them burning calories publicly, kissing babies or sitting in their local having a brew. I don't care if they [do or don't bake cookies](#) or [remember to fill their bloody fruit bowls](#)

. I do not - not under any circumstances - want to partake of this revolting game of faux rapport; of believing I'll ever

know

these people. This isn't

Australian Idol

, I don't care about fabricated

journeys

.

Outline your values. List your policies. Detail your implementation strategies. [Price your despicable wall](#)

Name your team.

That's it.

Yep, Barrack made me a little gooey. But I'm a soft touch: I feel that way watching videos of [ro mpin' pandas](#)

and

[television commercials of puppies dressed as lions](#)

. Equally, I know too well that I'd give a similar speech/fake alibi if any of my kin needed it. Doing so wouldn't bolster their leadership credentials.

Gooeyness shouldn't get a vote. Neither should wannabe polities who surround themselves with handsome sprog, affable besties and [former soap star desperados](#). Act like a leader, the rest is rubbish.

And decades on and she's still made to regret it.

Authors: Lauren Rosewarne, Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne

Read more <http://theconversation.com/trump-and-the-ugliness-of-the-charm-defensive-62921>