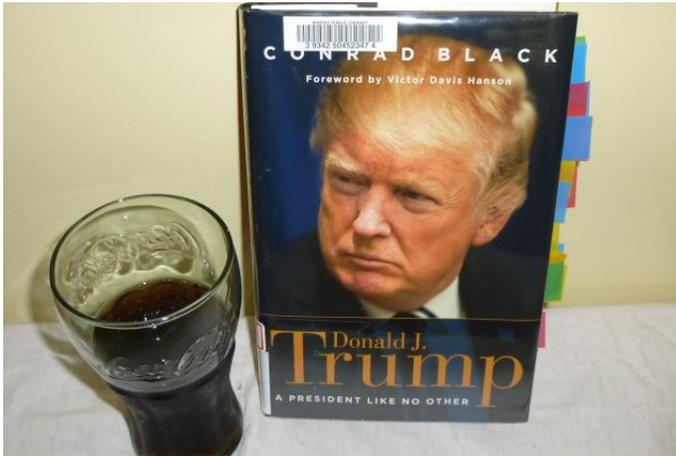


Donald J. Trump: A President like no other

By Rod Fraser



AFTER READING AN excerpt of Conrad Black's new biography of *Donald J. Trump* in a local newspaper, I checked with my library to see if they had acquired a copy. Unfortunately not.

I was now faced with a choice. I could buy the book on my own or show some initiative. I decided on the latter. I sent the library a copy of my book review of *An Honorable Man*, told them they made a great choice in buying this spy novel and thanked them for doing so. I then doubled down on my flattery with a suggestion they buy Black's new book

for their collection.

To my delight, the library responded positively. They liked my book review, appreciated the feedback and told me they had ordered Black's new biography on the President. They put my name down as number one on the waiting list. Who said, "You can't fight City Hall."

Donald J. Trump: A President Like No Other arrived within a fortnight and I was pleased to see it was 215 pages (excluding the notes and index). It was nicely laid out with legible print. These characteristics are important in my advancing years. I don't have the patience for books with a lot of filler and my aging eyes appreciate readable text.

A foreword by Victor Davis Hanson, one of America's most interesting Conservative writers provided an introduction to the book. It was worthwhile in itself. True to his modest and thoughtful nature, Hanson wrote a compelling essay, finishing with these words, "Most readers, like myself, have never met either Conrad Black or Donald J. Trump. But after reading this engaging biography, those of any political persuasion would wish to do both."

Quite so. Black's book is an interesting read, amusing in part and a thorough look at "A President Like No Other." Like him or hate him, who could dispute the appropriateness of the subtitle.

THE BOOK OPENS with a brief history of the Trump family (originally the name was Drumpf) in America, the patriarch of whom was Friedrich Drumpf, who came from Germany in 1885 and eventually settled in the Bronx with his childhood sweetheart, Elizabeth Christ. Friedrich died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, but his wife lived on to the age of 85.

Donald Trump's father, Frederick Christ Trump, was born in 1905 and lived in Queens. Like his son, he was in the real estate business, a "builder of middle-class homes in New York's outer suburbs." One of the facts I found interesting was his choice for a wife.

Mary Anne MacLeod emigrated "from the sparse and remote Scottish Outer Hebrides island of Lewis, in 1930 when she was eighteen." She earned her living as a housekeeper until her marriage to Fred Trump in 1936 at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church. This couple subsequently had five children. Donald was one of the youngest when he was born in 1946.

A PORTION OF the early part of Black's book deals with Trump's financial problems in the 1990s. By the late 1980s, he had accumulated business and real estate interests in Manhattan, as well as a number of casinos in Atlantic City.

To attract crowds to the casinos, Trump initiated

a 837-mile bicycle race called the Tour de Trump, and later promoted prize-fights at his casinos. The bicycle racing enterprise was sold off soon after, but the prize fights were a financial success. In 1988, for example, Trump grossed \$18 million from the Tyson / Spinks fight and other prize-fights (earlier and later) were also profitable.

Unfortunately, the American economy did not keep pace with Trump's business endeavours and the Trump empire was encumbered with \$3.2 billion in debt. At a meeting with his creditors in mid-1990, Trump persuaded his bankers to stick with him. If he were to work through the problems and reduce his obligations on an orderly basis, they were much more likely to realize 100 cents on the dollar, than if they engaged in a fire-sale strategy with liquidators in charge.

I don't intend to go into all the colorful details of Trump's financial dealings in those years, but his triumph is an engaging tale brought convincingly to life by Black's careful research.

This was one of Black's summations: Donald Trump had a "unique combination of desperate cunning, unflagging determination, unshakeable self-confidence, ruthless Darwinian instincts for survival, and a sublime assurance that celebrity would heal all wounds.... His obsession with celebrity would drive his enemies to paroxysms of mockery

and then of fear.”

BY 2004 TRUMP had agreed with NBC to do a show called *The Apprentice*, a reality show where various contestants completed rigorous business-related tasks such as selling or creating an advertising campaign. The idea was to impress the ‘Boss’ who was Donald Trump (and his staff). Those who didn’t measure up were ‘fired’ and the winner became the ‘Apprentice’. It was a very popular show and contributed hugely to the celebrity status of Donald Trump.

As Black tells it, “Trump has always been a highly amusing raconteur, with a gift for tossing off one-liners, and this television experience only added panache to his already greatly accomplished skills as a storyteller, schmoozer, and public speaker.”

It was not surprising then for a man with Trump’s self-confidence, accomplishments and growing celebrity status to seek the Republican Presidential Nomination in 2015. For many people it was a joke. But as the months passed and his Republican opponents dropped out one by one, it was clear to those who watched carefully: Trump was clearly a candidate to be taken seriously.

Surprisingly much of the media did not pick up on this. They reasoned, “if Trump limped through to the nomination, he would be bombed by Clinton as

Goldwater had by Johnson, with 61 percent of the vote to 38.5 percent in 1964.”

This was not to be. Trump beat Clinton fairly and convincingly in the Electoral College, even though he lost the popular vote to her by almost 3 million votes. He was going to be the 45th President of the United States on January 20, 2017. Hilary Clinton would return to private life and a remunerative book deal where she described in detail her take on the election of 2016.

Black does a masterful job of describing the campaign in all its wonderful and tawdry details. I recommend his book. It is well worth the read.

June 30, 2018