

ASK UNCLE ED

Dear Uncle Ed,

I feel very, very badly for the people who are very scared for their way of life. From what I'm understanding, [Trump is] only really wanting illegal immigrants that have committed crimes to be deported, which I agree with. I feel bad for the lesbian and gay and transsexual community that fear for their way of life. From what I understand, he says he's not going to mess with that.

Somebody called me a racist because I did vote for Trump. Hold on, you don't know me. Doesn't that make you a racist by calling me a racist when you don't know me? I'm looking for a brighter future for me and my children, and honestly I felt l like our country was kind of at risk if we did elect Hillary.**

Signed, K.H. in AL

Dear K.H.

Uncle Ed is glad to see you acknowledge that lots of people are likely to be harmed by the election of Trump. As to immigrants, you are right to be careful in stating Trump's position, because he has several. As to his position on the LGBT community, again, you may be quite right. Who knows?

But you seem to think the only issue is what Trump thinks. That's just not true. Trump was elected as a Republican, and now the federal government is controlled by Republicans. As a group, they have repeatedly promised to get rid of immigrants, as did Trump mostly, and have relentlessly opposed decent treatment of immigrants who live here and their children born here or brought here. They support laws and

rules treating the LGBT community as second class citizens.

You didn't mention the risks facing African-Americans, who are already mistreated by the police, and treated unequally in education, safety and hiring. Trump calls himself the "law and order" candidate, which is Republican-speak for even more aggressive policing and mistreatment of Black communities.

You are offended that someone called you a racist. Uncle Ed is glad you don't want to be thought of as a racist. But, here's the thing. Your vote empowered known racists like Steven Bannon, Trump's campaign manager and now a policy adviser in the White House. The Republican party will do its best to hurt immigrants, the LGBT community, and people whose religion or lack of religion they don't approve, not to mention Blacks and Latinos.

Uncle Ed doesn't know what's in your heart. Uncle Ed doesn't care. Uncle Ed cares about how you act. If you vote for a racist, if your vote empowers racists, then there is no functional difference between you and the most rabid KKK member in terms of the political outcomes for the outgroups. You are operationally a racist.

The most that can be said is that you are willing to accept racism if it makes your life better. That's how you defend your vote. You claim just you want a brighter future for yourself and your children. As you put it: "...our country was kind of at risk if we did elect Hillary." Again, what makes you different from self-acknowledged racists?

What about all the other minorities who will be harmed directly by installing racists in the White House and racism in Congress? You are willing to sacrifice all of them and their children. You are willing to deny them their claims to equal dignity and equal rights in whole or in part.

Equal dignity and equal rights are a crucial part of what it means to be an American. The

Declaration of Independence says that all of us are entitled to equal dignity. The 14th Amendment to the Constitution says that all of us have equal rights under law. Those ideas, however imperfectly we have lived up to it, are the heart of our democracy.

Now, thanks in part to you, we are governed by a party that flatly doesn't believe in that kind of equality. They are perfectly willing to ignore some or all the rights and interests of vast numbers of Americans. the LGBT community, women, Muslims, and who knows, maybe even white male coastal elites like Uncle Ed. They don't think we are real Americans. They expect those despised groups to follow all their laws, to respect their politicians, and to pay taxes, but they do not intend to treat us equally in rights or dignity.

You violated a core American principle. It was thoughtless of you to act this way. Uncle Ed wishes you hadn't. Calling you a racist seems like a mild reproof when you consider the likely consequences for millions of your fellow citizens. Uncle Ed hopes you continue to think about people other than yourself in the future, and refuse to vote for any politician whose first principle is to deny any of us our rights as Americans to equal dignity, and to be treated equally by our government.

* This is perhaps the first of an occasional series. I've been trying to figure out how to respond directly to the stated reasons people give to explain their vote for Trump. It's mostly a way for me to justify my own position. I've been debating whether to post this, but today I saw the movie *HIdden Figures*, which helped me make up my mind.

Lefties, liberals, coastal elites, all of us are constantly told we need to understand and sympathize with the concerns of Trump voters. Trump voters are never told they must work to understand and sympathize with people who voted for the Democrat. In fact, Trump voters are told

that liberals are their enemies, that we hate them and want to hurt them. Of course, they don't read my posts, and I know I won't ever persuade anyone that they made a terrible mistake. But I do wish they were forced to think about why those they believe are The Other might be so angry.

** This is quoted from this New York Times article.

THE HASHTAG DRAIN THE SWAMP AND THE STRUCTURE OF TRUMP'S POWER

I've been a bit of a Debbie Downer on the Twitters of late, because I've been nagging people about anti-Trump humor.

It started weeks ago, shortly after Trump called the press into Trump Tower and scolded them for what he argued was unfair coverage during the campaign. He complained, especially, about a photo NBC had used emphasizing his double chin.

He also complained about photos of himself that NBC used that he found unflattering, the source said.

Trump turned to NBC News President Deborah Turness at one point, the source said, and told her the network won't run a nice picture of him, instead choosing "this picture of me," as he made a face with a double chin. Turness replied that they had a "very nice" picture of him on their website at the moment.

That led to a slew of people spending hours tweeting around memes of the photo.

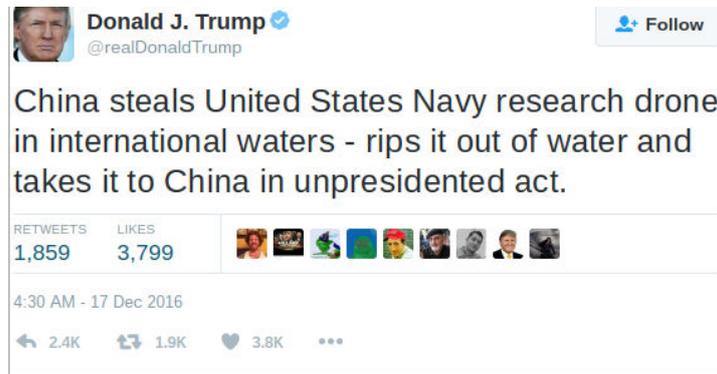


I responded by asking what the theory of change behind it was. How would tweeting an unflattering photo of Trump help Democrats move towards winning back power? How would it prevent Trump from pushing us into fascism?

Given how humor works, it probably would have the opposite effect. Humor functions to create a community – those who find something funny, because they know the cultural references and find the upending of them to be amusing, are on the inside; those who don't find something funny are on the outside. Trump's supporters back him *because* he's their vehicle to punish the snobs who call them "deplorable." Indeed, even a Hillary campaign staffer believes the use of the term "deplorable" is when Hillary lost the race.

Every time those snobs laugh at Trump, it reinforces the reason why supporters (some portion of whom are Obama-to-Trump voters) support him. Because they're tired of elites laughing at them, especially elites with a long history of catastrophic failures.

The same dynamic happened with the fun many had with Trump's misspelling, in a rash tweet attacking China for taking our "research" drone, of "unprecedented" as "unpresidented."



I get that the neologism is actually quite hysterical, a totally apt label for Trump, one I suspect will stick for good reason. But especially in a venue where Trump voters will interact, to make fun of Trump for doing something very human is, in my opinion, pretty counterproductive. Again, lots of people derive a sense of resentment from others making fun of them for speaking funny or improperly; Trump channeled that resentment in part because he speaks more like they do, gaffes and all. The counterproductivity of making fun of the spelling is all the more true given that the substance of the tweet was actually fairly important.

So I've been trying to refrain (with admittedly varying degrees of success) from mocking Trump on Twitter. Calling out his hypocrisies? Sure. Mocking certain Trump surrogates? Why not? But reinforcing the sense of resentment that is the primary engine of Trump's power? Counterproductive.

There are two exceptions of note however. The first is reminding people that Hillary won the popular vote. As it is, 52% of Republicans believe Trump won the popular vote. To the extent it will help, disabusing them of the notion that they, Trump supporters, are a majority in this country is an important step to undercutting his claim he has a mandate (and to undercutting the sense, among doubters, that many many others don't feel the same way).

A more important one, though, is the hashtag DrainTheSwamp. Because it is such a popular hashtag, using it guarantees that a significant

number of Trump supporters will see the hashtag, even weeks after the campaign. Eliminating the “rigged” system of Washington is something they care significantly about. And it’s something that Trump’s voters showed the earliest remorse about over their choice, most notably when a woman Steven Mnuchin had foreclosed on got named Treasury Secretary.

When Donald Trump named his Treasury secretary, Teena Colebrook felt her heart sink.

She had voted for the president-elect on the belief that he would knock the moneyed elites from their perch in Washington. And she knew Trump’s pick for Treasury – Steven Mnuchin – all too well.

OneWest, a bank formerly owned by a group of investors headed by Mnuchin, had foreclosed on her Los Angeles-area home in the aftermath of the Great Recession, stripping her of the two units she rented as a primary source of income.

“I just wish that I had not voted,” said Colebrook, 59. “I have no faith in our government anymore at all. They all promise you the world at the end of a stick and take it away once they get in.”

I’ve seen similar responses after a number of Trump’s other appointments.

In other words, using the DrainTheSwamp hashtag to highlight the many ways Trump is reneging on his promises is actually a fairly direct way to communicate directly with Trump voters in terms they’re habituated to. It works especially well if you use words about Trump reneging on his promises.

It looks like I’m not the only one who thinks this way. Trump now wants the hashtag

discontinued. In fact, he never liked it – he just used it (and released a policy on it) to rile up the crowd.

Donald Trump fired up campaign crowds with a promise to “drain the swamp” of Washington corruption. But former House Speaker Newt Gingrich says the president-elect has soured on that populist rallying cry now that he has won the White House.

“I’m told he now just disclaims that. He now says it was cute, but he doesn’t want to use it anymore,” Gingrich, one of Trump’s most high-profile boosters, told NPR in an interview broadcast on Wednesday.

“I’d written what I thought was a very cute tweet about ‘the alligators are complaining’... and somebody [from Trump’s team] wrote back and said they were tired of hearing this stuff,” said the former lawmaker, whose conduct in the late 1990s earned him a historic bipartisan reprimand.

Trump himself had alluded to mixed feelings about the slogan during a Dec. 8 rally in Des Moines, Iowa, part of his triumphant postelection “Thank You” tour.

“Funny how that term caught on, isn’t it?” he said. “I hated it. Somebody said ‘drain the swamp.’ I said, ‘Oh, that’s so hokey. That is so terrible.’ I said, ‘All right, I’ll try it.’ So, like, a month ago I said, ‘Drain the swamp.’ The place went crazy. I said, ‘Whoa, watch this.’ Then I said again. Then I started saying it like I meant it, right? And then I said it, I started loving it.”

This, it seems, is a key insight. About the only incitement Trump is now trying to tamp down among his mob is the DrainTheSwamp hashtag. Of

course! That's because he's done nothing so much as gild the swamp, much less drain it.

On no other issue is it so clear that Trump has already left his voters in the lurch. Especially in advance of big fights over billionaire nominees, making that more clear seems one of the easiest ways to undercut Trump's power.

Update, 12/22: Oh my.

Trump just tweeted that he has not ditched the DrainTheSwamp hashtag, but does so without actually using the hashtag.



Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump

Someone incorrectly stated that the phrase "DRAIN THE SWAMP" was no longer being used by me. Actually, we will always be trying to DTS.

11:41am · 22 Dec 2016 · Twitter for Android

DONALD TRUMP'S INTELLIGENCE BRIEFINGS AND ELLSBERG'S LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

The spooks and their congressional mouthpieces have again leaked details about Donald Trump not accepting their briefings often enough.

| President-elect Donald Trump is

receiving an average of one presidential intelligence briefing a week, according to U.S. officials familiar with the matter, far fewer than most of his recent predecessors.

Although they are not required to, presidents-elect have in the past generally welcomed the opportunity to receive the President's Daily Brief (PDB), the most highly classified and closely held document in the government, on a regular basis.

It was not immediately clear why Trump has decided not to receive the intelligence briefings available to President Barack Obama more frequently, or whether that has made any difference in his presidential preparations.

An official on the transition team said on Thursday that Trump has been receiving national security briefings, including "routine" PDBs and other special briefings, but declined to specify their content or frequency, saying these matters were classified.

Trump has asked for at least one briefing, and possibly more, from intelligence agencies on specific subjects, one of the officials said. The source declined to identify what subjects interested the president-elect, but said that so far they have not included Russia or Iran.

[snip]

(Corrects to say Iran, not France, in fifth paragraph)

Of course, all this is supposed to generate pressure on Trump to do more briefings. Which would have the effect of briefers getting their face time with Trump instead of the people that Trump is presumably learning about these topics

from – Mike Flynn, as well as lobbyists like Bob Dole, who set up Trump’s call with Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen.

The repeated effort to pressure Trump into accepting briefings from the spooks reminded me of an anecdote Dan Ellsberg has told about what he briefed Henry Kissinger when he first entered government. Ellsberg told Kissinger that being briefed into compartments would, at first, be intoxicating. It would later lead him to disdain anyone not privy to the most secret information. But ultimately, Ellsberg warned Kissinger, “You’ll become incapable of learning from most people in the world.”

“Henry, there’s something I would like to tell you, for what it’s worth, something I wish I had been told years ago. You’ve been a consultant for a long time, and you’ve dealt a great deal with top secret information. But you’re about to receive a whole slew of special clearances, maybe fifteen or twenty of them, that are higher than top secret.

“I’ve had a number of these myself, and I’ve known other people who have just acquired them, and I have a pretty good sense of what the effects of receiving these clearances are on a person who didn’t previously know they even existed. And the effects of reading the information that they will make available to you.

“First, you’ll be exhilarated by some of this new information, and by having it all – so much! incredible! – suddenly available to you. But second, almost as fast, you will feel like a fool for having studied, written, talked about these subjects, criticized and analyzed decisions made by presidents for years without having known of the existence of all this information, which presidents and others had and you didn’t, and which must have influenced their decisions in

ways you couldn't even guess. In particular, you'll feel foolish for having literally rubbed shoulders for over a decade with some officials and consultants who did have access to all this information you didn't know about and didn't know they had, and you'll be stunned that they kept that secret from you so well.

"You will feel like a fool, and that will last for about two weeks. Then, after you've started reading all this daily intelligence input and become used to using what amounts to whole libraries of hidden information, which is much more closely held than mere top secret data, you will forget there ever was a time when you didn't have it, and you'll be aware only of the fact that you have it now and most others don't...and that all those *other* people are fools.

"Over a longer period of time – not too long, but a matter of two or three years – you'll eventually become aware of the limitations of this information. There is a great deal that it doesn't tell you, it's often inaccurate, and it can lead you astray just as much as the *New York Times* can. But that takes a while to learn.

"In the meantime it will have become very hard for you to *learn* from anybody who doesn't have these clearances. Because you'll be thinking as you listen to them: 'What would this man be telling me if he knew what I know? Would he be giving me the same advice, or would it totally change his predictions and recommendations?' And *that* mental exercise is so torturous that after a while you give it up and just stop listening. I've seen this with my superiors, my colleagues...and with myself.

“You will deal with a person who doesn’t have those clearances only from the point of view of what you want him to believe and what impression you want him to go away with, since you’ll have to lie carefully to him about what you know. In effect, you will have to manipulate him. You’ll give up trying to assess what he has to say. The danger is, you’ll become something like a moron. You’ll become incapable of learning from most people in the world, no matter how much experience they may have in their particular areas that may be much greater than yours.”

I’m not actually saying that it’s a good thing that Trump is resisting the spooks, though I do think they use classification to set up precisely this kind of seeming monopoly on information. I do, however, wonder whether Trump has driven this choice, or whether his advisors have.

It seems there’s a fight for the brain of Trump, even while he seems to be preparing to delegate all this stuff to his advisors.