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Donald Trump struts in his own pageant

By MAUREEN DOWD
New York Times News Service

WASHINGTON - Some blondes have all the fun.

As Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush get more testy, Donald Trump gets more chesty. And more blond.

It's mind-boggling to contemplate a President Trump trying to make peace between North and South Korea, even as we watch the pugnacious Candidate Trump trolling poor Jeb on Twitter and predicting that poor Hillary would have to run the country from Leavenworth.

But, as Trump would say, deal with it.

The pol who refused to identify himself as a pol on his jury duty questionnaire has utterly scrambled American politics. And he has trademarked the phrase "Make America Great Again."

"I was surprised it was available," he told me.

Certainly, Trump could explode at any moment in a fiery orange ball. But meanwhile, he has exploded the hoary conventions, money-grubbing advisers and fundraising excesses of the presidential campaign, turning everything upside down, inside out, into sauerkraut.

It is a fable conjured up in several classic movies: A magnetic, libidinous visitor shows up and insinuates himself into the lives of a bourgeois family. The free spirit leaves, but only after transforming the hide-bound family, so that none of them can see themselves the same way again.

That is the profound metamorphosis Trump has wrought on the race. The Don Rickles of reality shows is weirdly bringing some reality to the presidential patty-cake.

The Donald's strange pompadour and Hillary's strange server have eclipsed all the usual primary permutations.

Because Trump is so loud, omnipresent, multi-platform and cutting, he's shaping the perception of the other candidates. Once he blurts out the obvious — Jeb is low energy, Hillary is shift, Mitt choked — some voters nod their heads and start to see his targets in that unflattering light as well.

Trump has trapped his Republican rivals into agreeing with his red-meat opinions on immigration or attacking him, neither of which are good options. Trump bluntness only works for Trump, and getting into a scrap with him is like being tossed into a bag of badgers.

Mike Murphy, the chief strategist of Jeb's super PAC, went on the record in a *Washington Post* story with a veiled message to Jeb to stop taunting Trump.

"Trump is, frankly, other people's problem," Murphy said.

The real estate developer has turned a fetish for the biggest and the best — in everything from dinner rolls to skyscrapers — into a presidential vision for 'the silent majority.'

Jeb stooped to conquer Trump, echoing his use of the phrase "anchor baby," only to have the news spilled that Jeb had co-chaired a group that advised politicians not to say "anchor baby."

The real estate developer has turned a fetish for the biggest and the best — in everything from dinner rolls to skyscrapers — into a presidential vision for "the silent majority." He's tapped into a hunger among those who want to believe that America is not a shrinking, stumbling power passed like a pepper mill between two entitled families.

Indeed, in interviews, voters who like Trump often use an anatomical variation on the word brass.

The shame spiral and money pit that followed the false Iraq narrative W. and Dick Cheney put into play to remove the strongman Saddam Hussein — the identity crisis that came with the knowledge that America can no longer whip or outfox anybody — has led many Americans to want a



Maureen Dowd

strongman.

"Trump is the proverbial strongman," David Axelrod says. "There's no one more opposite to Obama. Bush had been impulsive and reckless, so voters wanted someone who was thoughtful and deliberative. Now they've had enough of gray and they want to go back to black and white, and that's

Trump. He knows nothing else."

It's mesmerizing to watch Trump try to turn himself into a real candidate in real time.

He was mocked when he said that he got his national security advice from watching "the shows" on TV. But voters know that top diplomats, spooks and generals led presidents down the tragic paths to the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam and Iraq. Jeb Bush gets his advice from Paul Wolfowitz, who naively bollyxed up Iraq and gave us ISIS. And Hillary and top Republicans say they get valued counsel from Henry Kissinger, who advised Nixon to prolong the Vietnam War for political reasons even though he thought it might be unwinnable.

The neophyte pol belatedly realized that he could not glide past the horror of two Boston thugs accused of laughingly beating a homeless Hispanic with a pole and peeing on him in Trump's name.

He lives beyond parody. There's very little difference between the old Darrell Hammond duck-lipped impersonation of the Trumpster and Trump, the presidential candidate.

Both dwell on how "huge" and "big" his projects are and how "great" his ratings are and how much square footage he has.

(Unlike the Hammond impersonation and Trump's turn as "SNL" host, the presidential candidate shies away from boasting about hot women.)

There is nothing that excites Trump the candidate more than crowing that he has a great big crowd and Jeb has a teeny weeny crowd. He sounded orgasmic as he described to the New Hampshire town hall that his Alabama event this weekend had to be moved from a room that held 1,000 to a room that held 2,000 to a convention center to a stadium.

So Trump should appreciate the task ahead: It's huge.

As Axelrod puts it: "In a parlance Trump would appreciate: We're still in the swimsuit competition. It gets harder in the talent rounds."

Bloodbath averted

The cool response of two Americans and a Briton on a high-speed train exemplify courage

In the spectrum of terrorism's sweep through Europe, last Friday's events on a high-speed train mattered. Three Americans and a Briton took down a man who was armed and carrying 300 rounds of ammunition. Presenting them with the French Legion of Honor in a ceremony at the Elysee Palace, French President Francois Hollande said the men prevented "a tragedy, a massacre."

The two Americans brought their military training to bear on the situation. Spencer Stone is a U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class. Alek Skarlatos is a soldier in the Oregon National Guard. Gov. Kate Brown noted the "swift and courageous action" of the Oregon soldier, and she expressed pride that he was an Oregonian.

Skarlatos told reporters that adrenaline kicked in. So did the soldier's ability to be cool under pressure.

Their intervention on the high-speed train is reminiscent of what apparently occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, aboard a commercial jet that was targeted for the U.S. Capitol. We will never know exactly what happened

on that plane. But it crashed in a Pennsylvania field. It appears that passengers took action against the Islamic terrorists who had commandeered the jet and changed its flight path.

The perverted version of Islam that has created — according to reporting by *The New York Times* — a system of widespread sexual slavery has nothing to recommend it. Like the regime that runs North Korea, ISIS is an extended crime family.

Over weeks and months, we will learn more about the suspect — the man whose massacre was interrupted.

These men on the train did not wait for someone else to act. They averted a bloodbath. That is no small achievement.

Making towns to grow old in

Walkability and community engagement are key

An Aug. 15 story in the *Vancouver (Canada) Sun* asks the question, "What makes a city a good place to grow old?" For a start, the answer it provides is walkable neighborhoods and feeling part of the community.

Columbia-Pacific communities can be somewhat self-congratulatory on both these counts, while we still must strive to improve our towns in a range of ways. Proliferation of trail systems in the past decade has been an especially welcome way of encouraging outdoor exercise, while binding neighborhoods more closely together. And there is a strong tradition of community participation here — thanks in part to a politically engaged citizenry.

Quoting the *Sun's* story both validates what has already been achieved around the Columbia estuary region and highlights some subjects we can still make a better effort to address.

"Around the world, municipal leaders are looking at ways to make cities better for an aging population: New York has re-installed many of the bus benches it had removed to stop homeless people from sleeping on them, this time adding strategically placed arm rests to make lying down impossible. Walk signals at wide intersections have been lengthened — or medians added — to give slow-moving pedestrians a fighting chance of making it across the street....

"Characteristics of an age-friendly city go beyond decent sidewalks. The WHO (World Health Organization) suggests a wide range of amenities, including accessible green space, health care, public transit and safe, affordable housing. Add social participation, respect and the opportunity to keep working if desired.

"Why should we bother? Beyond the notion of fairness for all citizens are the practical and even economic reasons. Using the knowledge and skills of older people in paid or unpaid work is a resource that is wasted if they are excluded. The majority of retirees also pay their own freight, buying goods and services that employ others. In terms of the public

purse, healthy aging can translate into lower hospital costs."

America in general and our region in particular are incredibly fortunate to have a substantial population of robust and engaged citizens in their older years. Among industrial democracies, we have only to look across the Pacific Ocean to Japan for an example of some opposite extremes. A fascinating Aug. 23 story in the *New York Times* (tinyurl.com/GhostHomes) tells of a rapidly aging demographic where the overall population is expected to fall by a third over the next half-century, leaving millions of "ghost homes" unoccupied and decaying within depressing suburbs of Tokyo.

There are many ways in which we can make our towns and rural areas more sustainable for older residents. The best ideas are likely to originate from residents themselves, who know what they need. But here are a few:

- Continue working to improve pedestrian safety. Especially as traffic increases, we need to do more to make sure that crosswalks are prominently marked and situated wherever needed. In addition, many of our towns need better sidewalks.

- We need to keep supporting — and expand as needed — services offered by Sunset Empire Transportation and Pacific Transit System.

- There is never a time to declare victory in terms of parks and green space. With the Pacific Northwest's overall population rapidly increasing, we must do all we can to bank these lands for the future — for recreation, mental health and wildlife.

- Affordable senior housing, continued access to high-quality health care, ensuring that local boards and commissions conduct business transparently and with ample public participation — all these factors and more will make this a great place to live for people of all ages.

Deliberate planning and action can ensure that the attributes we treasure in local communities endure for generations to come.

Jeff Bezos and the Amazon way

By JOE NOCERA
New York Times News Service

The best thing about Jeff Bezos, the founder, chairman, president and chief executive of Amazon, is that he doesn't give a hoot what anybody else thinks. The worst thing about Jeff Bezos is that he doesn't give a hoot what anybody else thinks.

Practically from the moment Amazon went public in 1997, Wall Street has pleaded with Bezos to generate more profits. He has ignored those pleas, and has plowed potential profits back into the company.

Bezos believes that if Amazon puts the needs of its customers first — and no company is more maniacally focused on customers — the stock will take care of itself. That's exactly what has happened. That is the good side of Bezos's indifference to the opinion of others.

The bad side is the way he and his company treat employees. In 2011, the *Allentown, Pennsylvania, Morning Call* published an eye-opening series documenting how Amazon treated the workers at its warehouses. The newspaper reported that workers "were pushed harder and harder to work faster and faster until they were injured, they quit or they got terminated."

The most shocking revelation was that the warehouses lacked air-conditioning, and that during heat waves, the company "arranged to have paramedics parked in ambulances outside" to revive workers who were overcome by the heat. "I never felt treated like a piece of crap in any other warehouse but this one," said one worker. (After the exposé, Amazon installed air-condi-

tioning in its warehouses.)

Last weekend, a lengthy front-page story in *The New York Times* examined how Amazon treats its Seattle-based white-collar employees. Although they have air-conditioning — and make good money, including stock options — the white-collar workers also appear to be pushed harder and harder to work faster and faster.

In the cutthroat culture described by *The Times'* Jodi Kantor and David Streitfeld, a certain percentage of workers are culled every year. It's an enormously adversarial place. Employees who face difficult life moments, such as dealing with a serious illness, are offered not empathy and time off but rebukes that they are not focused enough on work. A normal workweek is 80 to 85 hours, in an unrelenting pressure-cooker atmosphere.

Until last weekend, Bezos was unapologetic about the Darwinian work culture he created. "It's not easy to

work here," he wrote in an early letter to shareholders.

According to "The Everything Store," a fine history of Amazon by Brad Stone of *Bloomberg Businessweek*, Bezos liked to say that he didn't want the company to become "a country club" where people went "to retire." His point of reference was Seattle's other tech behemoth, Microsoft, which developed from a ruthless predator to a sluggish bureaucracy. That is exactly what Bezos doesn't want to happen to Amazon. He wants it to always have the feel of a startup, where the work pace is frantic and the pressure intense.

And you know something? Give him his due: It has worked remarkably well.

It's worth remembering that Amazon is a first-generation Internet



Joe Nocera

company; its peers, including Yahoo and AOL, are a shell of their former selves, even as Amazon has become ever-more important and powerful. Some of Bezos' tenets — such as the importance of openly disagreeing, rather than smoothing things over — seem admirable. Everybody at Amazon is highly competent; the

company doesn't tolerate deadwood. Even when Bezos sent around an email last weekend about the *Times* story, he didn't exactly apologize. He said that he didn't recognize the Amazon that *The Times* wrote about, and that some of the incidents were so callous they should have been reported to the human resources department. But he didn't say they weren't true. That's because they are true.

The real issue Amazon's work culture raises, for blue- and white-collar employees alike, is: How disposable are people?

A previous generation of Americans could count on a social compact; if you stuck loyally by a company, it would stick by you, providing you with a good job and a decent retirement. Long ago, loyalty fell by the wayside, and longtime employees learned that their loyalty meant nothing when companies "downsized."

Amazon — and, to be sure, any number of other companies as well — has taken this idea to its logical extreme: Bring people in, shape them in the Amazon style of confrontation and workaholicism, and cast them aside when they have outlived their usefulness.

For a data-driven executive like Bezos, this kind of culture is appealing, because it maximizes the amount of work a company can wring from fundamentally fungible human beings. The question Amazon's culture raises is whether it is an outlier — or whether it represents the future of the workplace.

Of course, Bezos didn't have to build Amazon the way he did. He could have created a culture that valued employees and treated them well. But that would have required him to care about what somebody else thought. Fat chance.