

Kip Clark: Hello, and welcome to Stride and Saunter Episode 78. I'm Kip Clark.

Caroline Borders: And I'm Caroline Borders.

KC: And today we are going to be discussing Donald Trump which has been a long time coming. To give my own disclaimer regarding my views, I'm not a supporter of his and I disagree with virtually everything that he said but I do think much like any other topic that we've discussed on the show, it is worthy of conversation and further exploration than I think the public liberal discourse has given what he has said and who he is as a person. And again, I will say a lot of things that may appear as though I'm in support of who he is and I'm not going to take the time to reiterate after every statement in this episode that I do not support Donald Trump so please don't misquote what I'm saying or misinterpret some of the things that may be discussed in this episode.

CB: I agree. I'm also not a supporter of Donald Trump. That being said, just because I don't support him doesn't mean there aren't a ton of people that do and that does not mean that they are stupid. They are entitled to their beliefs and in their eyes they are correct. They are right. And we're trying not to write those beliefs off.

KC: Precisely. And this episode is titled "Donald Trump: Wisdom and Walls" because in our perception, we do put up a lot of walls around people we believe are wrong or hateful, or generally speaking a bad influence and we're not saying that you have to agree with those individuals, or those entities, or groups but it is worthy of thinking about why they feel the way they do. And in my opinion, everything about how we've discussed Donald Trump as a country has run off the rails and we're not engaging with one another as equals and as conversational beings and we're capable of such great thought and introspection and I wish we did more of that in all areas of our lives but especially in politics where these outcomes will affect people's lives and I'm aware of that and I think a lot of people have the perception that he's just an entertainer. And I have a theory that that's why he's done as well as he has but I have more than enough to say and I'd love to know where you would like to formally begin this conversation.

CB: As you said, Donald Trump has, kind of, been successful as an entertainer in some ways but I'd rather instead of just looking at it that way, maybe we can start by looking at the root of why he resonates with people. And I'm sure you have a lot of ideas on that front.

KC: I definitely do and one thing that was very apparent in these CNN articles that you've sent me and to our audience as always, we will post the links that we are discussing in the episode notes on our website so feel free to check them out. The young men who were interviewed by CNN and I don't think it's coincidental that they were all young men and young White men all had very similar perspectives of Trump as being charismatic. And I think that he brings something to the political sphere that most people don't see similar, although, some people may hate this comparison to Barack Obama back in 2008. Trump has similar rhetoric of hope and change and politics often uses these words almost more than any other but Trump has been able to capitalize on what people are frustrated about in this country. And often in my opinion where people displace their anger, or frustration, or disappointment about things because these scapegoats he has chosen are not in the wrong and yet people are so willing to latch on to those he has blamed. And I think that he has, in

many ways, succeeded because he doesn't appear to have a stable policy and one reason that many politicians will falter ironically in the arena of campaigning is because politics is complex. It's often boring and muddy involving negotiations and numbers that most people don't want to deal with. They don't want to hear about the accountant's clauses on a trade agreement. They want to hear about how strong our country is going to be or how much money they're going to make in an idealized surreal sense. And Trump is able to utilize that because as far as I can tell, he does not understand the political sphere and does not have any experience in politics which has benefitted him in a very media-heavy culture which propagates the sound bites that he's given and we'll come back to his relationship with the media but what do you think about some of these points?

CB: I would almost argue that he is very savvy in the political sphere. He's tapping into major anxieties that are pervading the American ideology right now and nationalism and he's utilizing that to his advantage. And I think in one interview that I listened to back in the fall with Rachel Maddow. She had a theory that I thought was very compelling that said Donald Trump knows exactly what he's doing and if he doesn't win the nominee, he has hinted that he'll go for an independent which would basically guarantee the Democrats winning. And if that's the case, if the Democrats win because there's no way that he could realistically win if he runs with a Republican candidate as well which would basically guarantee the Democrat winning but then if that were the case, the new administration would owe him completely. That's an incredibly smart move. If he can get either administration to owe him in some way, he's, kind of, got them in the palm of his hand, and that I think is incredibly politically savvy.

KC: That's a very good point. And at the very least, he will make a lot of money off of this in the long run. I know that he is spending his own money to fund this campaign which honestly is something that I respect. I don't agree with any of his values but I do have issues with Washington and that a lot of politicians seem to be bought. And even if that isn't the case, the fact that I have that perception says a lot about the current public image of politics in America. And after his campaign is done however much money he has spent whether he has won or lost the presidential election, there will be book deals and interviews and this man and his essential empire will make a lot of money off of those and I've often thought that as much as we can hate or disagree with or dislike Trump, he represents America in a very troubling way. He's a white male who has made a lot of money doing whatever he can to make money and comes from money that his family has given him and has reinvested and I'm not saying necessarily that he is a smart businessman but again, the bigotry and misunderstanding that he represents is a testament to how America operates if he were a terribly hateful man in a nation that was loving and idealistic and accepting of difference, he wouldn't win. And people wouldn't give him the bandwidth but I think it says a lot about our country that whether he wins or not, he has held our attention for this long because something and I think any things in what he is saying resonates with a lot of people. One of my favorite sources for this episode is on The Atlantic where a number of people were interviewed and gave short blurbs as to why they support Trump and I'd like to read a few for you and the audience now and hear your reaction. One says he will expect greatness from us. He will tell us how to get to great. He will inspire people to be better than they are and have the hope that their efforts will not be thwarted by bigger government. Another person says "Trump is a moderate compromiser. His problem according to the rest of the GOP is that he wants the single-payer healthcare and that he doesn't want to completely defund Planned Parenthood. I don't agree with him but why is it a bad thing to

be moderate? A moderate has a special ability to be a liaison between parties.” Another person said “I’m just a young guy who is immature, a bit antisocial, and with no plans for kids or wife ever. At some level, I don’t really care how things go with America as long as it’s fun to watch.” And I’ll pause there for now. Have any of those particularly resonated or stoked something in you?

CB: It’s interesting to talk about him as a moderate because in terms of immigration, more bigoted statements that he has said about race you wouldn’t think that at all. And I think it demonstrates the essentialization of Trump as a candidate in some ways where I didn’t know that he didn’t want to completely take away funding for Planned Parenthood. That has never been my focus when I read about Trump or when I see him in the media, it’s always about, oh, he said this crazy thing at least in my opinion it sounds crazy but I think when you look at supporters of Trump, it’s interesting because they’re just as skeptical as liberal Americans. And I’m saying that supporters of Trump are probably more conservative. They’re equally skeptical but just about different things. Trump supporters are either concerned about preserving their livelihood in some ways. They are threatened by immigrants and believe that they are entitled in some way to, if not what Trump has at least a way to get there. Then there’s the other side of it which is this young man who is completely apathetic and who really does view, I think, Trump as an entertainer and sees Trump maybe as the way to get the most entertainment out of this election and this political system.

KC: And I really appreciate that you point out the entertainment value he has for a number of people, not just this young man because it’s a very important point to consider and I would urge the audience to think about Donald Trump as both an entertainer and a source of entertainment when commentators especially more liberal commentators like John Oliver and Stephen Colbert make a mockery out of Trump, it has the intended purpose of reducing his stature and making him seem silly and ridiculous which they accomplish in a way, however, there is this paradoxical relationship they create where a positive association is developed because the listener, the viewer, or anyone who consumes that content comes to in some way associate Donald Trump with laughter and therefore pleasure. And I’m not saying that liberal critics will come to like Trump as a result but if they come to enjoy the entertainment that he provides in a world and in a country where our culture surrounding entertainment is very positively enforced then we may find it more difficult to remove Trump from the political sphere because of the entertainment he continues to provide and that we as audiences continue to ask for an encouraged through our laughter and it’s important to me that you bring up the political system because it’s been a source of anxiety for a lot of people who are anxious about his potential victory in this election and to shift to our discourse by which I mean our demographic often on Facebook and how people our age are discussing Trump. A number of people are afraid that he will be elected because of the hateful propositions he’s made. And again, I’m in no support of them but I’ve often asked people who are afraid that he will win if they really believe that congress and other governmental checks in place would allow for these programs to exist and to start in the first place because I don’t really think it’s all that likely that his blatant phobias would be supported in the political system but I also think that’s idealistic of me and we’ve seen worse happen in our history as the human species. I would however point out that a number of people our age have responded to Trump with blatant hatred and one of my least favorite things is how quickly he has won in my opinion. And to elaborate on that, Trump, a man who ostensibly knows nothing about black culture or Muslim culture or anyone different than himself and perhaps may not even know himself in some ways has levied public hatred against these groups as

scapegoats. In response, people like you or I who don't really know Donald Trump have levied hatred against him as representing everything that is wrong. And you can say "Well, no, Kip, my hatred is justified and right and I'm using it as a weapon against those I see is evil." Well, so is Donald Trump and I would encourage anyone who sees hatred as a positive outcome or a healthy tool to use to think about how ceaseless hatred can be and that's one of my main problems with Trump not anything that he's doing politically but everything that he's done socially because people are so quick to hate and when you see someone else hating, it's so easy to claim a moral stance and say "Well, I'm altruistic in hating the hateful." But hatred doesn't end that way and I'm not asking that you love Trump but perhaps in a similar way that Caroline and I are trying to do. Really sit down and analyze especially the uncomfortable feelings that you have about Donald Trump and there's an amazing poster of kids who went to a Trump rally with a sign that says "Make America hate again." Because I do think in many ways he has shown us and is trying to show us that hatred works and I don't agree with that and I don't want that point to be proven because even if it is true, I think that other rhetorics be they love, peace, or tolerance also work and should be given a chance. And if you'll permit me one more point, Caroline, one other thing that I find especially confusing and problematic is that especially again looking at Facebook where many of these conversations are taking place and on other social media as well, people continue to share their anti-Trump feelings with other people who feel similarly. And at a certain point, it is somewhat circuitous because you don't need to convince me, Caroline, of his problematic stances because I agree with you and so really what I see are liberals supporting further liberal beliefs and values and preaching to the choir essentially and not engaging with Trump supporters that conversation has ceased and people on their separate camps are remaining within their separate camps and then really isn't how I think we move forward as a country, a nation but again, a larger community of verbal conversational beings and I think that Trump has tapped into emotional residences and anxieties and fears in people and I think to bridge that conversational gap, people have to speak that language but not use his words. You have to recognize that he has tapped into deep almost primal feelings within people and that if you want to connect with his supporters who may not care about facts honestly, you have to appeal to an emotional side of them and show the value of things like kindness and tolerance because I don't think those people are evil and it really saddens me to think that everyone who is a Trump supporter is going to be labeled that way when they aren't picking up on the same details that perhaps people like you and I are. And I would just encourage those listening, again, not to support Trump but to think more critically about why those who do are in fact in favor of him as a candidate.

CB: No, I totally agree and you talk about the divisiveness of the two arenas where liberals are staying on their side and Trump supports are staying on their side. It's funny because I really think that if two anonymous people were to meet and they were to expose their political preferences and they were just to talk to each other and then get to know each other and find later their political preferences, you really are building a bridge of empathy there where you're finding you have a lot more in common with those people than you would normally think like yes, Trump tends to resonate with white middle class people who think that the system is against them. And they think, as I said before, they are entitled to something else, to something better. And I would venture to say that liberals even though they may be more open to people of different races and different religious backgrounds, at least as that appears to me, I think they feel entitled to something better too. There's a huge convergence of belief regardless of the track they take to achieve it.

KC: Definitely. And in discussing belief, one thing I find fascinating is that everyone is willing to discuss Trump as an icon or a singular image but he is just one person and I find far more troubling the number of people who are willing to agree with him because again to use a metaphor, a fire cannot be lit in an environment which won't support it but I think the flame so to speak of Donald Trump is burning because he has the fuel. There are people who feel similar hatred to negativity towards other groups and it's curious to me that as a nation and in the media we don't see much discussion of why people who support Trump support Trump because whether he wins or loses, those people will likely still feel the same way which is why I really appreciate that The Atlantic which seeks to confront Trump supporters in a very honest way. And I'd also like to cite a great Breitbart article which says at one point that is why the possible excesses of a Trump presidency are less fearsome than many think. Much of what he says he wants to do maybe unwise be 45% tariffs on China were unconstitutional broad surveillance of Mosques but Trump will enjoy less deference from a Republican congress than Obama has and will have no help at all from the mainstream media. That should please constitutional conservatives who want to restore the balance of powers. And I feel it is important to more closely examine his relationship with the media because as we've said before, he does appear to be savvy and while we criticize politicians who flip-flop, for Donald Trump, every new statement seems to make a headline and I'm sorry to say it but he does appear to be winning on that front because he continues to get coverage and as I've said in various other episodes about this concept, visibility is key. If people know what you look like and who you are, to a degree it may not matter what you stand for, they might vote for you. There are instances in the past where candidates would try to have their name appear first on the ballot because voters are very suggestible and that's not to say that they're ignorant or stupid but people have certain psychological loopholes that honestly many politicians know how to exploit and I'd love to know what you think about his relationship to the media as we've seen so far.

CB: I think one of the reasons why he's proven to be so effective is because he existed in the media long before he pursued any sort of political track. He was well-known as the guy who was on The Apprentice, who's this major businessman but also, like, a maverick businessman in a lot of ways. And so when you think about why the media loves him, it's also, kind of, similar why his supporters love him. He's unfiltered, he's anti-establishment, he'll say, kind of, anything to get a rise out of someone or liberals really. He exudes this, kind of, I'm going to say what I'm going to say, I don't care what anyone thinks about it and people like that. And the media likes that because it's so outrageous to a vast population of people then of course it's going to make headlines.

KC: Absolutely. And I'm so glad that you've brought us to how he talks and the way in which he speaks because I think there's a universal appeal to the unfiltered. For those who agree with what he's saying, they're thrilled that he can vocalize thoughts that they're too scared to or feel too socially pressured to express out loud. And for those who disagree with him, it's entertaining to see someone be so, as you've said, outrageous on screen and on air and I know a number of critics of his "honesty" which I would urge us to consider more critically. I don't know that he necessarily believes everything he's saying. As we've said, he's very media savvy and I'd be willing to believe that he's saying whatever he can to get attention because he has received quite a bit of attention and I think that he knows how to maintain it.

CB: And I don't think his supporters would necessarily agree with everything he says but they appreciate that he says it, that it's honest to them.

KC: And I know that critics of his have said "Well, I don't care if he's honest and unfiltered. If a rapist admits that they're a rapist they're still a rapist. I don't applaud them for being honest." And I would gently push back on that and say "Well, I'm not supportive of rape but someone who's admitted a crime or criminal activity or belief is far easier to confront, arrest, and talk to, to try and see why they committed this crime than someone who won't admit to these things." And as I said I wouldn't do to reiterate, I'm not in support of Trump but I would genuinely ask those who disagree with him if you think you could confront him or any of the problematic beliefs his supporters have, if they weren't stated because many of us including myself I think are all very subconscious or conscious problematic beliefs that we are not always aware of and it's so important that something brings that to light whether it's an atrocity or a tragedy because if you do in fact care about being a better person, that's when you have the opportunity to fix something and we can't blame Trump solitarily for a sexist America, or a racist America, or an Islamophobic America, or in general an intolerant America but in some very backwards way to a lot of people, we could thank him for starting a public discourse which again I think many conservatives would simply stop right there and say "Yeah, I agree with him. He's correct. Muslims are evil" but liberals like you and I and others would say "Well, that's not true. One, we need to unpack this and discuss. But two, here are various counter examples to prove that you're acting out of fear." And I recognize that those conversations are uncomfortable, unpleasant, and reveal negative biases on both sides with such dialogues but I come back to this idea that we couldn't confront it if it weren't brought to light.

CB: But I think what people are failing to do is have those conversations because the discourse surrounding Trump is so one sided and value-laden and judgmental against so many groups. People are just like "Well, that's absolutely crazy. That's nuts. We're not going to even entertain the notion that these ideas are true so why even talk about them?" And that's where I feel both sides are being dismissed.

KC: And it's a great irony. We don't express that which we think is so fundamental and true and that lack of expression allows other people to interpret our silence as concession to their more value-laden or hate-filled, or fearful ideals and beliefs. And one last issue that I'd like to discuss and there's a good chance we'll return to Donald Trump someday because he is notorious and brings up a lot of points worthy of discussion as we've said, it's his slogan. Make America great again. I have a lot of linguistic analysis that I'd like to apply but what have you thought about it? And why do you think it resonates with people?

CB: So when I initially think about Trump's slogan I immediately think about the history of the US that people want to get back to which in some ways strikes me as odd because I view our history as ranked with racism and discrimination and sexism. However, these people are going back to the golden days and that's what they think worked. That's what they find effective and prosperous. So, Trump is tapping into this very conservative notion that we need to change but we need to change to go back to what we were and that was what was most fruitful and prosperous for Trump supporters who are predominantly white so why wouldn't that be advantageous for them? It's an

effective slogan in that sense, I think, especially looking at its historical context. Please tell me your thoughts.

KC: Well, I'd first like to say that I'm thrilled you bring up the golden age or this idealized past because one individual on that Atlantic article I'd mentioned earlier said Trump is Jay Gatsby. Is it not better to place your chips on hopes and dreams rather than certain nightmares? Those of us who buy Trump's vision nearly to the point of blind trust are loudly professing our disgust with the current moral situations that taint and threaten our blueprint of the American dream. And I do think that make America great taps into the American dream and not the American reality. If nothing else, America has very effective ideology and potentially bordering on propaganda because the American dream and being labeled a dream is something that is fleeting and ethereal and perpetually in front of you. It's the carrot on the stick that you're always going to chase. And the American reality in my opinion has rarely almost never reflected what the American dream is and that dream has promoted things like manifest destiny and removing countless Native Americans from their lands, slaughtering countless people, enslaving countless people. And so the immediate thing that I also think of is when was America great? I don't remember it ever being "great." I think certain ideals have been great and I do think that our independence from Britain makes a lot of sense but it was one and led to a number of problematic events in history that I'm not supportive of. And to refer to the linguistic aspects that I'd mentioned earlier, it's beautifully vague in a lot of ways. Who's going to make America great again? And it's also brief enough that it's not make America great as it was in the 1950s which is too wordy, again, can imply any period of time. It could be the American Revolution that was America's era of greatness. It could be the civil war to some people which was America's era of greatness. And so it's so well-inclusive that it allows for any individual supporter of Trump to code that with their own interpretation and that's not something people need to discuss. It's one of those unspoken codes. I could give you a high five and don't need to tell you what it means because you know but my personal meaning that I might not discuss with you could be very different and we'll never have that conversation because people don't think about symbols in that way and it's something I wish we would do. And finally, the term great can mean so many different things. It could mean large, not necessarily positive. It could mean prosperous in an economic sense. And I think that Trump in many ways as we've said stands for opulence and wealth to a lot of people and who wouldn't want that if they could have that. And that to me is the problematic thing that many of his supporters I think realistically might never reach that level of economic status but it's the dream, it's that perpetual chase that excites people, and people are very excitable. And so before we close this episode, what are some things that you'd like people to think about?

CB: I think it is important to consider Trump as a serious candidate especially now. I mean, he's the frontrunner nationwide. Six months, nine months ago, we would've been, like, "This is never going to happen." But the reality is it really could. As one person in The Atlantic article pointed out earlier, Trump does have ideas about policy. It's not just Islamophobia and racism that he's preaching. He does have ideas for policies that he would enact and I think that's something that if we do want to have an educated opinion about Trump, it is important to understand where he stands as a politician, not simply as an entertainer or a businessman who gets to say whatever he wants because he has so much money that he can really just say whatever he wants. For me that's eye opening because it is really easy to dismiss him as someone who does not support him. And in order to really and truly dismiss him, it's important to understand his stance on problems in America.

KC: Absolutely. I'd also like people to think especially when it comes to social media how sharing certain headlines with the intention of proving his ridiculousness as a candidate is in fact propagating a certain image of him and perhaps of America to various people you know especially those overseas. And I'd love to hear from international listeners what perception you've gotten of Trump through the media because I think there is a very narrow image projected of him with which I agree in many ways but it's also important to recognize that a lot of what we think we know is based solely in what we've received from larger corporations of media who publish certain information. And again, I would return to the idea of hatred and how easy I think it is to see that as the morally correct course in response to someone like Trump or his supporters and there are other ways in my opinion to show that you disagree and to protest, to educate those who may not understand what he's talking about or who might blindly follow him because he is at this point whether we like it or not a serious candidate who needs to be considered not necessarily as an option for people but as a possible outcome for our nation and for those who don't live here as a president of the US, in our world. And finally I would encourage listeners to have conversations with those who may not share your views and genuinely listen whether it's about Trump or anything, that's the way to learn and you don't have to agree with them but if you aren't willing to give them the chance, in many ways I don't think you're better than Trump who does kick people out of his rallies and has done some very sinister things to protestors that, again, I don't support or agree with but if you aren't willing to hear the other side, perhaps it's better to give up on democracy altogether because it is about discussion, dialogue, and as a collective community coming to a better place and deciding what the majority feels. And I know I said finally but one last point I would like the audience to consider, in what ways does Trump's success reflect the American dream or the American ideal or the American image whether we like him or not, does his popularity tell us something about how certain Americans want to perceive themselves or be perceived by other people. But as always, we do want this to be a conversation among not simply a conversation between and I am hopeful knowing this topic that people will reach out to us so if you have any comments, thoughts, opinions, or feedback of really any kind, you can find us on Twitter or on Facebook.

CB: Where you can like our page and get updates for when we post new episodes.

KC: And you can also email us via [strideandsaunter@gmail.com](mailto:strideandsaunter@gmail.com). And if you enjoyed this episode, consider subscribing to and reviewing the show as well as sharing it with anyone you think might also find it enjoyable or get something out of it. And as always, we thank you very much for listening and from thought to word and voice to ear, this is Kip Clark signing off.

CB: And this is Caroline Borders, we'll see you next time.