

Opinions

Addiction is the story of 2017. But not to opioids.

By **Hugh Hewitt** December 27, 2017

Addiction is the story of 2017.

Not addiction to opioids, though of course tens of thousands of families are mourning this season the death of a loved one to fentanyl or heroin or some other variant of the scourge coursing through the United States.

Not addiction to the toxic combination of power and lust that has metastasized for so many decades and burst onto the public stage in so many places, with the name Harvey Weinstein now synonymous with a sociopathic need to dominate, humiliate and exploit for a twisted set of pseudo pleasures.

And no, not an addiction to President Trump, either on the part of his adoring legions or his self-anointed “worst enemies,” whose ritual condemnations of Trump seem just as calculated to oblige notice of the virtue of the condemners themselves as the president’s tweets are to bring the collective gaze back to him and his agendas, both personal and political.

No, the centerpiece addiction of this year, widespread and growing, is to outrage itself — to the state of being perpetually offended, to the need not only to be angry at someone or something, or many people and issues, but also to always and everywhere be, well, hating. We are all trapped in this ongoing carnival of venom, a national gathering of unpleasant souls like that assembled in C.S. Lewis’s 1959 essay “[Screwtape Proposes a Toast](#)” in the *Saturday Evening Post* (written two decades after Lewis’s famed “Screwtape Letters”). Google and read it. It is remarkably resonant with the times.

This outrage isn’t a current that is always on full strength, like Boston’s Citgo sign. But it never quite turns off either, as once upon a time the television stations did with a ritual playing of the national anthem. (Quaint, especially this year.)

Outrage, rather, pulses, sometimes quicker and sometimes slower, like the human pulse. And like the human pulse, it is nowadays a sign of life. Not to be outraged is to be almost disqualified in the eyes of many from being a participant in politics, even though the perpetually outraged fall across the political spectrum. Not only can they not imagine anyone not being outraged, but also they can’t imagine any kind of outrage save their own.

This may be the fault of Silicon Valley’s algorithms, which provide us with near-constant friendly echoes of what we already believe and a steady stream of bias-confirming stories from bias-bent sources that further bend our biases along the arc they were already traveling (and it isn’t, believe me, some preordained arc of history). All very convenient, these self-congratulatory seances with the unseen millions who agree with us about our own particular outrage.

Wait a bit after this column posts online, then check the comments. It will be a cut and paste of every other comment section of every other column, left, right and center. Just as cable news talking heads are beginning to blur into one long declarative sentence of certainty surrounded by nodding heads.

The amplification of the incendiary and the extreme in the comments section has broken through into podcasts and some into talk radio, cable and network news. Outrage is the kudzu of all media platforms. It will cover us all completely soon enough.

Like some undiscovered Mayan temple covered over by dense jungle, we will eventually all be a blip of angry noise picked up in a galaxy far, far away. “What were they so angry about?” our distant cousins will ask. “All of them, all the time, about everything? Did they ever dance?”

Of course we do. But you’d never know it from the majority of media — broadcast, print, social and all. The kudzu spreads faster and faster, and it seems we can’t do business without it. Its launch year was 2017. An early New Year’s resolution to throw the trend into reverse would be a start, as well as a good, long look in the mirror.

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