Opinion
News



Omarosa Manigault Newman at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in National Harbor, Maryland, Feb. 24, 2017 (Wikimedia Commons/Gage Skidmore)



by Michael Sean Winters

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @michaelswinters

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

August 20, 2018

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

In the lead up to the Summer Olympic Games in 1992, two of the greatest artists of the 20th century collaborated to write and perform the song that became the theme song of those games: "Barcelona," written and performed by Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballé. The lyrics are mostly gibberish, a vehicle for displaying the extraordinary instruments both geniuses contained within their larynxes. But the music has been filling my mind these days with the name of the great city changed. I am singing: "Omarosa!"

The former Trump reality TV show star and subsequent White House staffer for President Donald Trump, Omarosa Manigault Newman, has turned on her former *padrino*. She was once the highest ranking African-American in the Trump White House and was a frequent campaign surrogate for Mr. Trump before that. She was part of his media empire. I suspect she has been plotting the moment when she would turn on her mentor for a long time. She is now carefully and judiciously releasing snippets of audio recordings she made while talking with others in the Trump orbit. This drama looks to have all the pathos of Shakespeare ("*Et tu, Brute?*") and, like everything else about our president, more bathos than a trashy Jackie Collins' novel.

I watched Omarosa — who is enough of a star to be known universally by her first name, like Oprah — do her round of interviews last week, and she is brilliant and in a very specific way: She is brilliant the way Trump is brilliant. She dominates the screen, sucks all the oxygen out of the room, ignores questions she does not like, teases the viewer with the promise of more, for future information if we just stay tuned.

On MSNBC Thursday, she spoke with Craig Melvin. The whole thing was a tour de force, but it was toward the end of the interview that you realized Omarosa is every bit as dreadful as Trump. He played a video the Republican National Committee had released, a montage of clips on which Omarosa had praised Trump's candidacy. Her encomiums for her former boss were just as he liked them: Over the top. Melvin asked her how hard it was to sit there now that she has broken with the president and watch these repeated showerings of praise from her own lips. She completely

ignored the premise, in exactly the way the president does.

Omarosa noted she was one of the few African-Americans in the president's orbit, an obvious nod to the MSNBC audience and its concern for diversity, and then drove on to her killer conclusion: "I am not going anywhere; I am not going to be bullied; I'm not intimidated, and I am going to go toe-to-toe with him, everything he throws at me. Believe me, my tapes are much better than theirs." Sounds like someone you know? Right down to the words "believe me," which the president usually says just before uttering something that is clearly an exaggeration. She finished, again like him, with a threat: "Donald Trump has met his match." And I believe her.

Advertisement

There has been debate in Democratic circles about whether the party needs a candidate who can play Trump's game in order to beat him at it. It is not a foolish question. When we look back at the 2016 Republican primaries, we see a long list of distinguished Republican politicians who counted on the fact that Trump would implode, that the voters would reject his crass, narcissistic behavior, his race-baiting and his misogyny. They all lost. Is the only way to beat someone like Trump is to lower yourself to his level, adopt his low standards, become a guttersnipe and traffic in insults and falsehoods? This was not an academic question.

Now, thanks to Omarosa, it is an irrelevant question for Democrats. The president has met his match, a creature as vulgar and manipulative and self-absorbed as himself, someone who has long been close enough to him to take notes, to learn from the master, to perfect the art of self-promotion at all costs and to the exclusion of all other humane or political considerations. If dumping on long-time allies plays well by making me look tough, then we dump on our allies. If demeaning African-Americans riles up the base, then demean some African-Americans. Omarosa would do the same and is doing the same, biting the hand that fed her, and the elbow too.

In the song "Barcelona," Freddie Mercury sings, "I had this perfect dream," and Montserrat Caballé echoes, "Un sueño me envolvió." My perfect dream is that Omarosa and President Trump rip each other to shreds. I think my dream will come true.

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

Editor's note: Don't miss out on Michael Sean Winters' latest: Sign up to receive free newsletters and we'll notify you when he publishes new Distinctly Catholic columns.