

# PROFILE of The Week

By **Dr. DHANPAUL NARINE**

## Donald Trump:

‘I will make this country great again. I will restore it to its former glory and will bring back law and order. We have been cheated for too long. There are persons that have done great wrongs and they must come to justice.’ This is not Donald Trump. It is Alcibiades, a ruthless and flamboyant Athenian billionaire, and a complex character in Antiquity.

Alcibiades lived during the period (450-404 B.C.). Why then is he relevant in 2016? How has he managed to plant himself in the American elections? In order to answer these questions we need to know a little about Greek society and Alcibiades’ role in it. According to scholars of Antiquity, Alcibiades was born around 450 B.C in what is now Turkey. Greece at that time was experiencing political upheavals that would eventually lead to the Peloponnesian War.

Alcibiades was from a wealthy family. His father was a commander that was killed in battle. The young Alcibiades was raised at some point by Pericles but preoccupation with the war meant that Pericles had little time for the young man. Alcibiades was tutored by Socrates. The relationship lasted for a while but Alcibiades gave up his studies and chose instead the politics of excess.

The Greek historian Plutarch described Alcibiades as someone that, ‘ was prone to be led away into pleasure.’ He could be cruel as well. He once attacked a teacher when he couldn’t get a book he wanted. He also hit Hipponicus who was a person of good standing. Alcibiades later apologized and in return he married Hipparete, the daughter

of Hipponicus. But he didn’t treat her well. Plutarch says that while Hipparete was affectionate Alcibiades chose to spend time with other women as he ‘would consort with courtesans’ both native and foreign. Hipparete filed for divorce and on the day of the trial Alcibiades turned up and seized her by the hair and took her to his home.

It would appear that he courted notoriety to get publicity. For example, he ordered the tail of his dog to be cut off because, ‘ I want Athens to talk about this, that it may say nothing worse about me.’ Alcibiades has emerged as a complex figure in war. He was a general in the year 420 and held that post for over fifteen years.

Many in Greece were suspicious of Sparta. Alcibiades’ army was defeated in the Battle of Mantinea by the Spartans. But Alcibiades managed to make alliances with the Spartans and to win favor in Greece. He competed in the year 416 in the chariot races in the Olympic Games and won first, second and fourth places.

But in 415 Alcibiades and his career seemed

to take a strange twist. Athens assembled a large military expedition against Syracuse in Sicily. It was discovered

commit affairs to other hands and thus before long to ruin the city.’ It also led to the criticisms against Socrates that his teachings led to a morally corrupt society. Xenophon argued in the defense of Socrates by saying that Alcibiades was already corrupt before he went to Socrates



The Greek General and Statesman Alcibiades 450-404 BC. He was a billionaire and womanizer that wanted to make Greece great again.

that man-size stone slabs in the city were vandalized. The blame fell on Alcibiades and he was sentenced to death but he had a plan that deceived the Athenians. Alcibiades defected to the Spartans and began to advise them on ways to defeat Athens.

The great Greek historian Thucydides observed that the excesses of Alcibiades ‘gave offence to everyone and caused them to

but this did not wash with the accusers. The knives were out and the hemlock was waiting; the arguments offered in the ‘Apology’ by Socrates fell on deaf ears.

How is the Greek drama relevant to the 2016 election campaign in America? Are there any similarities with Donald Trump? The Athenian Assembly was big and boisterous and the politicians argued with each other to win

popular support. During these arguments webs of deceit and trickery were spun to outwit rival groups and oratory was used to great effect. If there were television and the print media to cover those campaigns it could be the 2016 election season.

Controversy was essential to grab the interest of the public. Opposing groups accused each other of hatching lies and rumors to divert attention away from the pressing matters of the day. Then there was vulgarity. Alcibiades was a womanizer. He was cruel to his wife and had numerous affairs, often belittling women. Does this remind one of the Republican Candidate in 2016?

A politician ought to have a fancy mode of transportation; for Trump it’s his jet with his personal logo. Alcibiades, on the other hand, had seven teams of four-horse chariots. He painted Eros on his chariot, instead of a symbol of a horse or eagle. This was a way of challenging the Establishment.

Athenians were dissatisfied with the politics of corruption in their city and wanted change. They saw Alcibiades as the person that would bring that change even though he was excessive. He said he was the unifier and was even talking to the enemy, Sparta. This is reminiscent of Trump reaching out to Vladimir Putin

and saying repeatedly, ‘ it’s not a bad thing being friends with the Russians.’ But while Alcibiades seduced the Spartan Queen Trump is still to become a Rasputin!

Statecraft and secrecy fit like a hand in a glove. Senator Harry Reid is opposed to Trump having access to state secrets; Alcibiades routinely passed on secrets to Sparta. The latter shifted sides and loyalty and so did Trump who was once a Democrat. Alcibiades shook up Athenian society and Trump is doing the same in America. It is said that Trump was fascinated by early Greek history; one news channel reports that Trump sees himself as the ruler of Mount Olympus!

The Founding Fathers of America were schooled in the classics. They were influenced by Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero and later by Montesquieu, and others. They were able to fashion a system in which there were checks and balances based on the separation of powers. America has a Constitution that works.

But laws cannot prevent the over-reaching tentacles of the ruthless. We read of a woman that broke traditions, is driven by ambition and intrigue, is imperious, was the power behind her husband, and fancies power for herself, as she flips-flops on matters of the day. Sounds familiar? She is Lady Macbeth and she lost the throne!