

Introduction

The Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump have shaken the pundits, pollsters and many journalists to their very core, challenging those who 'didn't see this coming' to rethink what it means to build expectations on the basis of reports and discussions emanating from particular communities. Huffington Post reported in the days leading up to the election that Hillary Clinton had a 95% chance of winning the election, and although other venues were a bit more circumspect, they all suggested that the odds were overwhelmingly in her favor. The same applies to the lead-up to Brexit, in which the media covered the many 'rational' voices of those who spelled out the doom that would await a post-Brexit UK, the contours of which are now about to be negotiated. Marie LePen is next, and all of the predictions suggest that she won't make it into the second round, which probably means that...she will.

The serious issue here is not how polls work, when they fail, or what needs to be corrected for future contests, but rather how people can tap into a broader and more representative sampling of ideas, opinions and voices across the political spectrum. In light of how I felt on election evening 2016, I have come to feel that we need a different approach to community, one that favors discussion and problem-solving at more local levels, complemented by media outlets that can provide adequate recording and reporting of the dialogues, the cacophony, the dissent and the marginal voices in a way that aims for representative dialogism rather than partisan wishful thinking.

Along the way, and even more crucial, I have also started thinking (in conversation with David Maraniss, with whom I have taught the course from which the wonderful poetry about 'America' that is published in this issue emerged) about what I'm calling "Home Depot Politics", an arena within which people come together to solve problems, rather than lining up to measure their differences. I happen to spend a lot of time in hardware stores of all sorts, since I've developed an amateur interest in renovation, repair and upkeep of our home and property, and I've derived incredible pleasure and untold valuable information by discussing with those who come together in the quest to figure things out, and to share useful knowledge.

Hardware stores are fascinating places, where the truth of diverse communities meets the challenges of learning tasks as diverse as tiling, fixing sinks or patching lawns. It's at this nexus between individual needs and community knowledge that lies the joy of belonging to a neighborhood, as opposed to the hardened partisan attitudes that form when we imagine ourselves as part of some ideological, national or geographic team or another. As a neighbor, I want to be part of these discussions, which means both listening to, and conversing with, people around me. As a teacher, I consider that my role is that of a catalyst to thinking and an enabler for those who are trying to solve problems, individually or in groups, and providing forums to debate the products of these efforts. And as an Editor, and in regards this journal, *AmeriQuests*, I feel the need to promote a venue for the diffusion of valuable information, but also a platform for idealism that can help us to break through the ceilings, glass or otherwise, that can box us in when the trials become to acute. Hence the title of this issue, and, moreover, the overt goals that it expresses: to cross borders, challenge limits, and offer, all along the way, stimulating factual and useful details of how things work, and how particular insights look when they cross the many borders that they might encounter on the way to their being assessed, debated, and applied.