



OPINION: TRUMP THE COKE-DRINKER GETS THE ULTIMATE HONOR - RICH LOWRY

Posted on January 18, 2025 by Rich Lowry



In 1942, the Nazi apparatchik Otto Dietrich sniffed, "America never contributed anything to world civilization but chewing gum and Coca-Cola."

He rather understated our significance, but even if he'd been right, giving the world Coca-Cola is a greater contributor to human happiness than most other countries have managed to muster.

In yet another sign of how corporate America is happy to be associated with Donald Trump as he takes office a second time, the CEO of Coca-Cola presented Trump a commemorative bottle of Diet Coke for his inauguration.

Given Trump's legendary attachment to the beverage, it must have been as satisfying to him as winning a Nobel Peace Prize.

In one of what would prove to be a long series of confounding reversals of Trump policies, President Joe Biden removed the red button Trump had installed at the Resolute Desk to instantly order Diet Cokes (and to occasionally prank visitors who assumed the red button had a more momentous purpose).

Coke occupies an outsized place, not just in the U.S. beverage market, but in our culture.

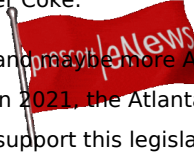
The drink is inextricably part of Americana. The cola has been associated with cutting-edge aspects of our national life since its formulation as a medicinal drink in the late 19th century, from soda fountains, to gas stations, to the movies.

Its logo is instantly recognizable, and its iconic advertising has marked changing tastes in the country down through the decades. The traditional Coke bottle, the green so-called hobbleskirt bottle (a curvier prototype was nicknamed the Mae West), is itself a symbol of America.

In World War II, everyone considered it a national imperative to get Coke overseas to our troops. As Mark Pendergrast notes in his history of the cola, the military brass was all-in. George S. Patton always wanted Coke available, Douglas MacArthur signed the first bottle produced in the Philippines when he returned, and Omar Bradley had a case in his office.

Then, there was Ike. Pendergast recounts a celebratory luncheon in Washington, D.C., after V-E Day in 1945. Dwight Eisenhower was asked if he wanted anything. "Could somebody get me a Coke?" he asked. After finishing it, the future president let it be known he had

one more request. Asked what it was, he replied: "Another Coke."



That Coke is as American as motherhood and apple pie, and maybe more American than the pie, made its dabbling in fashionable left-wing politics all the more disappointing. Under pressure in 2021, the Atlanta-based company denounced the Georgia election law. Its CEO, James Quincey, said, "The Coca-Cola Company does not support this legislation, as it makes it harder for people to vote, not easier."

He was wrong, and clearly joining the corporate parade. Coke also embraced DEI training. Critics dubbed the company Woke-a-Cola.

The commemorative Diet Coke bottle is not as nearly as consequential as Meta's turnabout on its speech policies -- Coke has been creating special bottles for presidential inaugurations for a while now. But the CEO didn't have to personally deliver it to Trump, and Coke didn't have to make a nod to Trump's personal preference with the Diet Coke bottle.

Whereas companies like Coke once felt compelled to go along with the woke tide, Trump's victory is now giving them permission to reject or distance themselves from what seemed an irresistible ideological trend.

By the way, the soda cross-pressures the Trump coalition. While the president himself is a devotee, reportedly consuming 12 Diet Cokes a day, his Health and Human Services nominee, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., is a not a fan of sugary drinks. If Coke finds itself targeted on public-health grounds, it won't be the first time. Going back to the early 20th century, the crusading federal health official Harvey Wiley waged a campaign against Coke for containing cocaine (which had already been removed) and caffeine; the company escaped his clutches.

Regardless of the politics of the day, Coke will surely endure. Nearly 150 years since John Pemberton invented the drink, it's still the real thing.

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