

**ONE  
NATION  
AFTER  
TRUMP**

# ONE NATION AFTER TRUMP

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A Guide for the Perplexed,  
the Disillusioned, the Desperate,  
and the Not-Yet Deported

E. J. DIONNE, JR.,  
NORMAN J. ORNSTEIN,  
& THOMAS E. MANN



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## INTRODUCTION

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# When a Crisis Is an Opportunity

*The Perils of Trumpism and the Call to Engagement*

American democracy was never supposed to give the nation a president like Donald Trump.

We have had more or less ideological presidents and more or less competent presidents. We have had presidents who divided the country and presidents whose opponents saw them as a danger to everything they believed in. But we have never had a president who aroused such grave and widespread doubts about his commitment to the institutions of self-government, to the norms democracy requires, to the legitimacy of opposition in a free republic, and to the need for basic knowledge about major policy questions and about how government works. We have never had a president who daily raises profound questions about his basic competence and his psychological capacity to take on the most powerful and challenging political office in the world. We have never had a president who spoke more warmly of dictators than of democratic allies, and whose victory came with the assistance of a foreign power that meddled in our election.

We have, in short, never had a president who, from his first day in office, plainly showed that he had *no business being president*.

Trump arouses anger, yes, but also fear—fear about whether our institutions can survive a leader who praises strongmen abroad and sees them as a model for bold leadership; fear about the instincts and commitments of a narcissistic politician who assails and insults revered national heroes, from John Lewis to John McCain, simply because they refuse to fall in behind him; fear about the future of a tolerant, multiracial, and multiethnic nation under a leader who freely demeans whole groups of Americans; fear about an incompetent executive branch staffed by loyalists with contempt for government and little understanding of its critical functions; fear about the country's standing in the world, given his cavalier and often hostile attitude toward long-standing alliances and toward many of our closest friends; fear about the future of gender equality under a president who shamelessly demeaned women and bragged about assaulting them; fear of the likelihood of corruption on the part of a chief executive who refuses to separate himself from his business empire in any meaningful way; and, finally, fear for the future of the United States' great experiment in freedom and democracy.

In his duplicitous reaction to Russia's efforts to undermine our democracy, he has shown us how the dysfunction of our politics puts our nation *directly* at risk. It makes us vulnerable to outside efforts to use our internal divisions to sow chaos and weaken our nation. Trump uses terrorist attacks to personal advantage, as when he responded in June 2017 to the death of seven people and the injury of dozens of others in London by criticizing the city's mayor and trying to score points in our domestic debate on gun control.

And far from bringing us together, Trump demeans his office by regularly turning its power to petty and often cartoonish assaults on his enemies, particularly in the media. Thus, his sexist Twitter outburst against MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski and his

posting of a video two days before the nation's July 4th holiday of his violently wrestling a figure labeled "CNN." These and other episodes we describe in these pages reveal a presidency devoted to the interests, proclivities, and will to power of one man, not to the needs of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

Yet precisely because the crisis created by Trump's rise is so profound, we believe that the popular mobilization and national soul-searching he has aroused could be the occasion for an era of democratic renewal. If Trump is a threat to our democracy and the product of its weaknesses, the citizen activism he has inspired is the antidote, the way to vindicate our long experiment in self-rule. Opposition to Trump is calling millions of Americans to a new sense of citizenship.

We offer *One Nation After Trump* to encourage this new engagement and to insist that the movement against Trumpism needs not only tactics and strategies but also a vision—a hopeful and unifying alternative to his dark and divisive assessment of our country's prospects. His opponents need to offer clear, compelling, and practical ideas that respond to a distemper that led many of our fellow citizens to feel such disgust with the status quo and such anger about their place in it that they were prepared to risk empowering a deeply and obviously flawed demagogue.

We also propose answers to what we see as questions our country must face. In some cases, we suggest that the conventional responses to them are wrong or incomplete. In others, we highlight what we feel are the underappreciated insights of historians and political scientists who draw our attention to the long-term nature of the problems we confront. At the same time, we also acknowledge the very good work that journalists and scholars have done in a short time to help our country understand how we came to this moment and what we face now.

We thus ask: Where did Trumpism come from? Why were nearly 63 million Americans persuaded to vote for him? What is the nature of Trump's threat to our free, democratic republic, and how can those who would protect it take him on? How can we defend those whose rights he undermines? How can we create a politics that is not a zero-sum game pitting Americans against each other along the lines of race, class, gender, region, and background? And how can we begin solving the problems and responding to the legitimate grievances that gave rise to Trump in the first place?

If Trump represents a unique hazard, he did not single-handedly create the circumstances that made him president. He did not become the dominant figure in the Republican Party simply because of his mastery of reality television, cable news, tweets, and the power of the oft-repeated lie, as helpful as these were to his unlikely ascent.

Rolling back the Trump threat requires seeing that *he represents an extreme acceleration of a process that was long under way*. It involves the decline of basic norms in politics, governing, and the media as well as the decay of institutions that are central to republican government. The radicalization of the Republican Party and its primary electorate began three decades ago. Absent these forces, Trump would still be a loudmouthed developer and brand-peddler far removed from the levers of power.

Trumpism can be understood as a protest movement among a minority of Americans to long-term changes in the country's social, economic, religious, and political life. It is, in the literal sense of the term, reactionary. This separates it not only from progressivism but also from a traditional conservatism that, in principle at least, always accepted what Edmund Burke, the first conservative, taught: that preserving what is best in a regime and a society means accepting that change and reform are inevitable.

Burke recommended “a disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve.” Trumpism looks backward, not forward.<sup>2</sup>

Trump took advantage of a trend in American politics toward minority rule, or what might be called “non-majoritarianism.” Our system is now biased against the American majority because of partisan redistricting (which distorts the outcome of legislative elections), the nature of representation in the United States Senate (which vastly underrepresents residents of larger states), the growing role of money in politics (which empowers a very small economic elite), the workings of the Electoral College (which is increasingly out of sync with the distribution of our population), and the ability of legislatures to use a variety of measures, from voter ID laws to the disenfranchisement of former felons, to obstruct the path of millions of Americans to the ballot box. Trump profited from this bias against the majority, becoming president despite losing the popular vote by the largest margin ever for an Electoral College winner.

But he also exploited the seething rage created by economic changes that left significant parts of our country devastated and the citizens of these regions angry enough to turn to a charlatan whom they saw as at least articulating their sense of discontent. Trump’s opponents will not prevail if they ignore the roots of this unhappiness. The conversion process requires listening as well as preaching. It mandates self-criticism and self-examination if the call on others to think differently is to have any chance of being heard. It’s true that some of his enthusiasts have expressed views about African Americans, women, immigrants, and Muslims that demand condemnation. But while denouncing Trump’s supporters for “voting against their interests” or for being “backward” or “reactionary” may be emotionally satisfying to his opponents, it will not persuade any of them to reconsider the choice they made. Worse still, some of the hostility that Trump’s critics express toward

those who voted for him merely mirrors the attitudes encouraged by his own strategists, who would intentionally divide our nation for their own political purposes.

Republican leaders confront an even more profound moral reckoning in acknowledging their role in enabling Trump's ascendancy. For decades, they had taught their supporters to mistrust Washington and hate government. They exploited the Tea Party and other mass movements on the right for electoral gain. Their rhetoric opened the way for Trump's nihilism and his promise to take a wrecking ball to the very system in which these Republican officials were complicit. For the Republican establishment, Trump's triumph ratified John F. Kennedy's warning in his inaugural address: "Those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside."

The times were well suited to a candidate prepared to combine elements of populism, nationalism, nativism, and protectionism, and to marry these to the promise of strongman leadership ("I alone can fix it"). Paradoxically in light of who Trump is, a man deeply immersed in the world of high-level influence peddling, he cast himself as an implacable opponent of powerful moneyed interests and as the guardian of working people. That his own party had championed the role of large donations and that a conservative Supreme Court had struck down long-standing limits on their influence did not deter him.<sup>3</sup>

His nationalism and his forays into old-style "America First" isolationism played to a country exhausted by long and unsuccessful wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. His protectionism was welcomed by many voters—especially in the pivotal states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Ohio—after the disappearance of millions of well-paying manufacturing jobs, many of them to China. His nativism responded to the unease among many native-born

Americans about the rise in the proportion of immigrants in our population over the last four decades. And the Republican Party's success in obstructing Barack Obama's agenda contributed—again paradoxically—to a popular desire for strong leadership that showed little regard for rules or norms.

Trumpism represents something far more important than the scheming of one man. To see clearly where Trumpism comes from is to understand that this worldview did *not* just suddenly sweep the country, does *not* command vast support among the American people, and does *not* represent an irresistible wave of the future. But for Trump and Trumpism to be defeated, Americans must understand the nature of the threat that he poses, the shortcomings in our society that he exploited, and the dangers of his overt and covert appeals to racism and xenophobia. They must also embrace public engagement—from demonstrating and attending town meetings to organizing a precinct, registering voters, working on campaigns, running for office, and, of course, voting itself. Saving our democracy requires citizens to devote themselves to the messy, sometimes frustrating, but ultimately gratifying work of self-government.

Trump poses a challenge for Republicans and Democrats alike. With some courageous early exceptions, Republicans in large numbers were willing to work with Trump and overlook or apologize for even the shabbiest aspects of his presidency in the hope of winning policy victories that have eluded them for more than a decade. Republicans who know better have also been intimidated by the very forces they helped unleash within their own party. They fear primaries, and they fear assaults from the conservative media. They worry that the GOP really has become Trump's party and are thus willing to accommodate him in order to hold on to the power they have.

The Democrats' path has, in one sense, been easier. Opposition to Trump runs so deep among so many Americans that standing up to him has turned out to be the best way to mobilize new forces into politics that could herald a revival of the center-left and the Democratic Party. But Democrats face a complex set of choices, partly because many of their senators, especially those up for reelection in 2018, come from states where pro-Trump feeling ran strong; partly because they are seeking to win over and work with at least some conservatives who may agree with certain Trump policy initiatives but share the center-left and left's deep concern about his authoritarianism and unfitness; and partly because defeating Trump will require both a vigorous defense of the rights of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities—including American families endangered by Trump's hostility to immigrants—and an understanding of the legitimate grievances of white working-class voters who expressed their frustrations by supporting him. Empathy can be hard in a period of profound political polarization, but it is indispensable. At the same time, warm feelings are not the same as coherent policies, and we hope here to show where they can be found.

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The first part of *One Nation After Trump* analyzes the meaning of Trump's ascendancy and the dangers it poses. We open by insisting that Trump's opponents should take heart from the fact that he has never represented an American majority. A large share of the Trump vote was a negative verdict on the status quo (and, in the general election, on Hillary Clinton). His election was not a mandate for Trumpism. Understanding what did *not* happen in 2016 is as essential as understanding what did for moving forward.

So is an understanding of the complicated role of the media. The paradox is that the media, particularly television, facilitated Trump's election and yet is now one of the most powerful forces holding him accountable. We vigorously defend the role of a free and independent media while also pointing to the problems in our media system, the failures of journalism during the 2016 campaign, and the historical roots of Trump's attacks on the press's legitimate and essential role. Truth is the ally of both a free press and our democracy, and it is not well served by the temptation of false balance, the insistence that both sides are equally at fault even when this is plainly not the case.

We then offer three closely related chapters on the decay of the norms essential to democratic government, how this decay can lead to lawbreaking and the rise of autocracy, and how Trump has used populist appeals to gain power, even as his economic policies strongly favor society's most privileged sectors. We use these chapters to detail many of Trump's abuses during his first six months in office. Our purpose is to make clear that Trump's is not a normal presidency, that he lacks the self-restraint a functioning democracy requires of its leaders, and that his ethical misconduct raises systematic doubts about his capacity to govern in the public interest.

Norms, we argue, are often more important than formal rules in ensuring the functioning of a constitutional republic. Trump has violated these basic understandings of how our democracy works in an unprecedented way, yet his behavior is rooted in the evolving politics of the American right. In briefly revisiting arguments we made in our recent books (*Why the Right Went Wrong* and *It's Even Worse Than It Looks*), we trace how democratic norms have been under a sustained attack for decades by an increasingly radicalized Republican Party and conservative movement. Trump is less of an outsider than he seems, and he was building on rather

than resisting recent trends within the GOP. This history helps explain why so many Republican leaders are reluctant to call out Trump's excesses and to acknowledge the risks he poses to our political system. Defeating Trumpism will require reversing longer-term political trends.

This norm-breaking is not simply a matter of political nicety. It is part of Trump's larger assault on our institutions, his tendency to think in autocratic terms, his abusive attitude toward the judicial system, and his disrespect for civil servants and the day-to-day work of government. We show how Trump's words and behavior parallel those of authoritarian leaders, past and present. We also deal with the curious contradictions of the Trump presidency. In many ways, it embodies weakness, the result of his refusal both to engage himself in the details of government and to appoint qualified men and women to the second and third tiers of his administration. Yet it also makes vast claims to power.

Because Trump sometimes resembles the authoritarian populists of other nations and other periods of history, we next discuss the difficulties with populism as a concept, describe the many forms it can take, and examine how the term can be overused and misapplied. We conclude that to the extent that Trump is a populist (in many ways an absurd label for a well-born billionaire developer), he fits into the category of those who define "the people" in an exclusionary way. His purpose is to cast political opponents and members of minority groups as the people's enemy. And whether or not Trump can fairly be called a populist, his policies make clear that he is a phony friend of the working class.

We close the first part of the book by taking on a debate that is of central importance both to understanding our country and to developing strategies for effective opposition to Trump: whether his support depended more on economic discontent or

on a backlash rooted in race, culture, religion, and nativism. It is a debate that often divides Trump's opponents. After examining a raft of postelection studies, we conclude that while the cultural-backlash thesis explains a very large share of Trump's support, the economic backdrop of 2016 was critical to his victories in the key Rust Belt states. We thus point to the dangers of two forms of denial: the temptation to underplay the large role of race, immigration, and cultural conservatism in his campaign and his appeal, *and* the danger of overlooking the desire of many of his supporters to strike back against their sense of economic dispossession. Dealing with both is essential to moving beyond Trumpism.

This leads directly to the second part of our narrative. If we hope to encourage successful opposition and resistance to Trump and Trumpism, our purpose here is also forward-looking. We offer a substantive agenda because we agree with those who say that Trump's opponents have an obligation to offer a coherent alternative vision. At the same time, we insist that those who oppose Trump do so precisely to *affirm* a series of values he has put in jeopardy—about what political leadership demands, how politics should be carried out in a free republic, and how Americans should treat each other across our many differences. Trump's ascent to power is a warning sign pointing to the need for national renewal. The answer to Trump—the way both to defeat him and to solve the problems that led to his presidency—will be found, we believe, in efforts to forge a new economy, a new patriotism, a new civil society, and a new democracy.

It should not have taken Donald Trump to remind us of the profound imbalances in our national economy or to demonstrate that many Americans have been left behind over the last 30 years. Trump-style protectionism galvanized many voters because advocates of trade agreements regularly broke their promises of new

paths to prosperity for communities and individuals distressed by globalization.

Trumpian discontent is typically defined as the product of an angry *white* working class that has suffered as manufacturing jobs have been moved overseas or supplanted by new technologies. True, Trump's supporters were and remain overwhelmingly white, and his appeal was inflected with a white ethno-nationalism. But the process of deindustrialization affects Americans across all races—and, it should always be remembered, a very large share of the American working class is not white but African American and Latino. As the sociologist William Julius Wilson noted in his book *When Work Disappears*, the vanishing of blue-collar jobs in a globalized and technologically sophisticated economy began wreaking havoc in our nation's inner cities long ago.<sup>4</sup>

A new economy will rise from an honest reckoning with the growing inequality and despair in many kinds of communities across our country, and also from an effort to build on the many economic advantages the United States enjoys. It will deal with the legitimate sources of discontent felt both among Trump's supporters and in the neighborhoods and precincts most strongly opposed to him. We do not pretend to offer a full-fledged economic program in these pages, but we do lay out a framework for dealing with the structural barriers to a more just economy. We propose a *Charter for American Working Families*, a *GI Bill for American Workers*, and a *Contract for American Social Responsibility* to offer ways of improving incomes, increasing social mobility, and strengthening communities caught on the wrong end of the economy. Responding to the grievances of the working class—white and nonwhite alike—must be part of the response to the economic struggles of all Americans. Trump's opponents cannot engage in a

false-choice argument about whether to maintain their commitment to the rights of our country's ethnic minorities or to focus entirely on the white working class. Their task is to find policies that serve the interests of both groups, and of all Americans.

A new patriotism is the alternative to Trump's nationalism. It is ironic that despite Trump's calls for "America First," he has imported into American politics a blood-and-soil nationalism far removed from the United States' pluralistic and constitutional traditions. Despite many bouts of nativism, American patriotism has always returned to a definition of national identity rooted in constitutional republicanism and democratic institutions. A new patriotism would defend our commitment to pluralism while also stressing ideals shared across all of our differences. *E pluri-bus unum*—out of many, one—is our brilliant national motto that stresses both the "many" and the "one." Our pluralism must speak to all Americans, upholding both our right to express particular identities and our shared commitment to an equality that Martin Luther King Jr. insisted was "a dream deeply rooted in the American dream." A new patriotism would also reaffirm the United States' commitment to democratic values and renew our alliances with other democratic nations. A foreign policy that walks away from international structures that are themselves products of creative American statecraft is not a form of "realism." It is short-sighted and self-defeating.

And a new patriotism requires that our country rediscover empathy as the antidote to Trumpian division. Left, right, and center have contributions to make in the task of reweaving our nation's social bonds and in insisting that empathy cannot be selective. The injustices confronting African Americans in inner cities and rural areas must bring alive our social consciences, and so too should

the anguish in declining and predominantly white communities in Appalachia and the old factory towns across the Northeast and Midwest.

Recognizing that the economic and social anxieties Trump exploited are fueled by a sense of dislocation and alienation, we also call for a new civil society. Trumpism thrives on division and seeks to deepen rather than heal the polarization in our politics. Trump's approach to politics always requires an enemy. This is true in a personal sense, as was obvious in his, by turns, vitriolic and mocking attacks on President Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and his Republican primary opponents. He also needs a collective enemy, whether at home ("the dishonest media" and Mexican Americans as "rapists") or abroad (ISIS, which truly is an enemy, but also our European allies, whom he regularly denigrates).<sup>5</sup>

It is an irony of Trump's appeal that while his combative rhetoric made him anything but a unifier, many rallied to him out of a yearning for forms of community and solidarity that they sense have been lost. Economic change has ravaged not only individual living standards but also cities and towns that once created thriving forms of civil society through churches and labor unions, veterans' organizations and service clubs, sports leagues and ethnic associations. It is not mere nostalgia to miss the forms of sociability and mutuality that are far more difficult to maintain when communities lose the vitality of a strong economic base. Writers as varied in their views as Robert Putnam, Charles Murray, and J. D. Vance have shown that economic decline is often implicated with family breakdown and the decay of social institutions. Family and community disruption, in turn, push many toward alcoholism, opioid abuse, and suicide, setting off a vicious generational cycle that is hard to break. The rise of what economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton have called "deaths of despair" among middle-aged whites

is a national tragedy and a national emergency. This should be recognized, but so too should the deep hurts in African American and Latino communities. Here again, casting one group's pain against another's is a recipe for division and inaction.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, a new democracy requires answering political dysfunction and a pervasive sense of political cynicism with reforms that would make our system more inclusive and more democratic. As long as so many citizens see the system as rigged (a word Trump used to great effect), they will be reluctant to embrace the work of self-governance. This is why we call for institutional reforms to reduce the power of big money in politics and to protect the voting rights of all Americans.

But all this will only be possible if citizens once again join the democratic fray in large numbers. Trump's election called forth an extraordinary mobilization and drew millions of Americans to political engagement. This new era of civic commitment is essential to stopping Trump and reversing the effects of Trumpism. It is also a prerequisite to healing the wounds in our body politic that allowed him to reach the White House.

We are aware that events during the Trump presidency have moved with an unprecedented speed that far outpaces book-publishing schedules. However, absent a miraculous change in Trump's character we believe the story we tell here will be consistent with further developments. The damage that Trump has inflicted on our system will need repair no matter when he actually leaves office. That is why much of this book is forward-looking. Our nation must begin devising a new politics to move us beyond the chaos he has sown.

Our title consciously echoes the final words in the Pledge of Allegiance, "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." We certainly make no claims to speak for the

Almighty, but the last seven words of the pledge define our hopes. The battle against Trump is a fight against national division—for the idea that we still are “one nation”—and a defense of liberty and justice. Restoring our capacity to work together to protect these values is the best way to put Trump and Trumpism behind us.