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## Trumpism is Exactly Who Many of US Are



During the dark years of Trump and MAGA madness, I often heard from disbelieving and exasperated colleagues that *this is not who we are* as US Americans, an attempt to invoke the country's "better angels" or J. William Fulbright's "two Americas": *One is the America of Lincoln and Adlai Stevenson; the other is the America of Teddy Roosevelt and the modern superpatriots. One is generous and humane, the other narrowly egotistical; one is self-critical, the other self-righteous; one is sensible, the other romantic; one is good-humored, the other solemn; one is inquiring, the other pontificating; one is moderate, the other filled with passionate intensity; one is judicious and the other arrogant in the use of great power.*

My colleagues' comments were usually made in the context of a social media post and written in a spirit of anger, alienation, and shame. My initial reaction was invariably *This may be not be who you are but it definitely an integral part of who and what the United States is.* To believe otherwise is to live in fantasy world of one's own making. I understood the sentiment and empathized with those who expressed it but adamantly reject its logic.

Trump was a symptom not a cause, one that has been in the making for much of US history well before the founding of the country. The conditions that gave rise to Trump and all that

he says he stands for (in reality, of course, he stands mostly for himself) have accelerated in the last few decades. Both Tweedledee and Tweedledum, the two major political parties in this oligarchical system that Gore Vidal once referred to as “the Property Party” with “two right wings,” share responsibility for the sad state of affairs that is the current US disunion. (In a September 2009 interview with *The Times* of London, about three years before his death, Vidal predicted that there would soon be a dictatorship in the US.)

Poverty is on the rise, personal debt has skyrocketed, income and, more importantly, wealth inequality are at record levels. The American Dream, which was always a dream for most US Americans, is long since DOA for all except a few select few. The cultural myth lives on, albeit in tarnished form.

Trump, widely acknowledged by rational people with a knowledge of US presidential history as one of the worst presidents in the history of the republic, received 74,222,958 votes, or 46.8%, of the votes cast in the [2020 election](#) against Joe Biden. This is irrefutable evidence that this is exactly who we are, or at least half of all voters. There are any number of reasons why someone would cast a vote for such an incompetent, unqualified, and ignorant buffoon who is experiencing obvious cognitive decline to boot.

### **Supreme Challenges of Our Time**

One is the mind-boggling percentage of US Americans who are [functionally illiterate](#), i.e., 54%. Yes, that’s over half of all adults, defined as people from 16 to 74, who cannot use reading, writing, and calculation skills for their own and the community’s development. How much do you think they know about their own country and its history, not to mention that of the rest of the world, I ask rhetorically?

Another is widespread racism that dates to the early days of British Colonial America over four centuries ago that began with Native Americans and expanded to include other people of color, including slaves and their future generations, African Americans, and immigrants. It’s a way for people to feel superior to others, regardless of their socio-economic status. It’s what allowed free Blacks in the post-Civil War South to remain subjugated in the Reconstruction era in which Confederate leaders were never held accountable for their misdeeds and crimes, and what Trump built his political career on, such as it is, with the Obama citizenship conspiracy theories.

Yet another, which transcends party affiliation, is [nationalism](#), the irrational yet heartfelt belief that the US is “greatest nation on earth,” reams of evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. Nationalists, both passive and missionary, believe in cultural mythology, reject constructive criticism as un- or anti-American, and fail to see the myriad problems right in front of their noses. The unholy marriage of evangelical Christianity to US nationalism, which one could argue began with the implementation of the Doctrine of Discovery in British Colonial America, is part of the equation.

Failure to recognize problems means an inability to solve them. Speaking of “We’re #1,” the US recently surpassed 26 million total cases and is closing in on half a million deaths from COVID-19. (Viet Nam, in which love of and devotion to country, the definition of patriotism, unites most Vietnamese has fewer than 200 active cases and 35 deaths, as of this writing.)

In a [recent blog post](#), I pointed out that the 74 million people who voted for a train wreck of a president embraced a litany of character flaws and dangerous tendencies. Many still want to blow up a system that has left them behind, as Michael Moore pointed out just before the 2016 election. Some got more than they bargained for. For others, it wasn’t enough, as the 6 January US Capitol insurrection illustrated in spades.

One Trumpy I know of and featured in a blog post entitled *The Trumpy Mindset: A COVID-19-Related Example* is different but there many like him. Unlike most of #SeditionDon’s demographic, which is comprised mostly of non-college educated white males, you know, the ones who got all dressed up for their political Halloween, lethal props and all, and tried to overthrow the US government in early January, this particular white male is well-educated with a professional degree. He is also racist, sexist, and a millionaire. Three boxes checked for a MAGA supporter of considerable means.

Trump’s tax cut bonanza for the wealthy meant this individual’s net worth jumped dramatically during the last four years. For him and many other members of this particular social class, truly the US financial elite, that’s reason enough to vote for the malignant narcissist-in-chief, to hell with the rest of society.

Support for ex-president Trump is support for, or at least tacit acceptance of, abuse, anti-intellectualism, arrogance, authoritarianism, bullying (cyber and offline), cheating, corruption, cruelty, discrimination, division, exploitation, extortion, fascism, greed, ignorance, incompetence, instability, irresponsibility, lies, malevolence, malignant narcissism, misogyny, mockery, nationalism, nativism, racism, (statutory) rape, sedition, sociopathy, theft, traitorism, and xenophobia. You don’t get to pick and choose, even you’re a single-issue voter, which many are.

### **Agree to Disagree? It Depends.**

There is no discussion with Trumpies, the USA’s fallen angels, no middle ground, no mutual respect, no unity, no agreeing to disagree. Corina (@cdvaughn16) graphically illustrated this point when she Tweeted last year, ‘Agree to disagree’ is reserved for things like ‘I don’t like coffee.’ Not racism, homophobia, and sexism. Not human rights. Not basic decency. If I unfriend you during this, is IS personal We do not have a difference of opinion. We have a difference in morality.

Most US Americans grow up learning that there are two sides to every argument. Us vs. them, for and against, Democrats and Republicans. As a result, they end up inhabiting an intellectually limited dual world in which everything is either/or without realizing that arguments can have many different sides and perspectives.

I recently saw this exchange on Facebook in connection with [Martin Luther King, Jr. Day](#) on 18 January by two women. “Yes, we must all learn to live together as brothers. I agree. Hopefully, both sides can do this and not just talk about it. Hopefully, both sides can agree to disagree with each other and respect each other’s opinion without slinging ugly words at each other. I have faith in our nation and know we can do this.” Someone added “I agree completely. America can come back together and agree to disagree, calmly.”

These comments, while perhaps well-meaning, are infused with moral equivalence, the notion that everyone has a right to her or his opinion (true) and that all opinions are created equal (false). This uniquely US American way of looking at the world reminds me of this quote by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a four-term U.S. Senator, ambassador, administration official, and academic: Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts.

People who utter these inane thoughts wonder why we can’t all just get along. The simple reason is that some differences are irreconcilable. We can “agree to disagree” on our favorite ice cream or which is the better vacation destination – the mountains or the beach – but not whether or not people of color are inferior to white people or whether climate change is fake news. Those US Americans who talk about “agreeing to disagree” also overlook the sobering fact that they’re living in a “broken land,” as President Biden mentioned in his inaugural address, a reference rarely uttered by a sitting US president.

### **What’s Past Is Prologue**

The history book(s) to which Kashana refers in the above 2018 Tweet are not the ones used in most US high schools but rather those cut from the cloth of Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*, which blew my mind after I read it in a previous life and set me on a new path of learning and discovery. Recently, that has spilled over into and complemented my hobby of genealogy, discovering my own family’s history, which dates to the early 17th century in British Colonial America and reflects the history of British Colonial America and the US spanning the good, the ugly, and everything in between.

So, whenever you hear US Americans say *This is not who we are* remember that is exactly who nearly half of the electorate is, tens of millions of their fellow citizens who are afflicted with a national psychosis that is not likely to be cured during a four- or eight-year presidential term of office, or even a generation.

As Mary Trump, the former president’s niece, observed in a [recent interview](#), unless the US is able to come to terms with this national psychosis, “there will be a savvier politician parading as a populist who has the same autocratic tendencies, but he’s just better at it. And next time we won’t be so lucky.” Forensic psychiatrist Bandy X. Lee refers to this as a “shared psychosis” in this 11 January 2021 *Scientific American* [article](#), noting, *As for mini-Trumps, it is important, above all, to set firm boundaries, to limit contact or even to leave the relationship, if possible.*) Trump, the self-described “very stable genius,” may very well have

been the warm-up act for a future authoritarian, white nationalist government, thus fulfilling Gore Vidal's 2009 prophecy.

A related existential question, the bloated elephant in the room, is what will unite US Americans, besides a "shared psychosis"? Where is the common ground? What is the source of unity? I and millions of others await the answers to these questions with great anticipation and a healthy dose of trepidation.

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