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# **Scams from the Great Beyond**

## **The Presidential Edition**



**A Skeptical Look at Our 45<sup>th</sup> President**  
**Using the Tools of a Paranormal Debunker**  
**and Historian**



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## Introduction

“When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.”

Hunter S. Thompson

A couple months ago, as the upcoming presidential election approached, like millions of Americans, I wanted to do more. Of course, I wanted to influence the election, but I also wanted to help Americans understand each other, and how we found ourselves with such an unusual and divisive president. But how?

Searching the mental toolbox, I realized I had a skill set: I knew how to write strange little books. Two had the phrase “Scams from the Great Beyond” in the title. Exposés on weirdness. And we’re living in very weird times.

As I began to write this strange little book, the more I realized that the last two books—with the weirdness, the Satanic cult claims, the UFOs, the fringe groups, people believing the unbelievable despite evidence to the contrary, even belief in reptilian aliens, all explained by a beer-drinking, chicken-wing-eating, hooded-sweatshirt-wearing guru—seemed somehow connected with the political topics we face today. They both need to be explained in the same way.

So the guru comes out of retirement and rides again.

As in all projects, several people helped. The ones who helped the most either requested that their names be left out or said they didn’t care if they were mentioned. I thank them nevertheless.

This book has been priced as cheap as possible. It was written specifically to try and achieve the best possible outcome for the upcoming election, after which I feel this country needs to begin healing. If you find it valuable, please help it have the widest possible impact as fast as possible. Encourage people to read the e-book, which should be either free or next to free. As for the print book, this too is purposely inexpensive. If you’d like, buy multiple copies. Mail them to libraries, bookstores, and individuals in swing states. Hand them out to strangers.

A biographical chapter on Donald Trump was cut simply because it was too long and still growing. You can find excerpts from it at one my blogs: <https://history-for-fun-profit-and-insight.blogspot.com/>.

And please pardon the hasty, inconsistently styled footnotes. My fault. I should have fixed them, but the election is just weeks away. My research indicates that, in a nation of 331 million people and an estimated 150 to 160 million registered voters, and with such an emotionally charged contest facing us, there are an

estimated six to twelve undecided voters. It is important that this book be released as soon as possible so it has the best chance of reaching them.

If you wish to thank me, consider buying as many copies of this book as possible. And while you're at it, consider buying my other books or following my blogs.

If nothing else, remember the lessons this book tries to teach, encourage others to remember them too, and consider donating to the charities mentioned in the final chapter of this book. Hopefully, this book will somehow influence the election (a naïve hope, I know) but also aid in understanding the people who vote differently than you do.

And thanks for taking the time to get this far. With wishes for peace and the best possible future for all of us.

Peter Huston

# Chapter One

## Nature of Fame in the Twenty-First Century

*Trump is an interesting and unique case. He ran the Trump Organization as a business that used his personality to sell products, especially real estate, but he also branded product lines from casinos to steaks, vodka, and an airline—all failures. When he became a reality TV star, a persona of savvy businessman was constructed through careful editing and information management. I would describe his presidency as a personality cult that uses politics and religious right-wing ideology—anti-abortion, antiscience, antidiversity, white power, if not outright racism—to sell himself and, by association, the Republican Party. But the influence goes two ways. Organizations holding those right-wing ideologies use Trump to sell their own political and religious agendas.*

Steven Hassan, *The Cult of Trump*<sup>1</sup>

Donald Trump is in many ways a genius. He does things that show how he understands the nature of fame and the media at a very high level. Mixed with his audaciousness and his boldness, the results have changed the world.

An example of both from *The Making of Donald Trump* by David Cay Johnston:

*A front page New York Times story reported unsuccessful attempts to reach Trump. Instead, the paper got a call from “John Baron, a vice-president of the Trump Organization.” Baron described himself as Donald Trump’s spokesperson. . . . But there was no John Baron. The caller was Donald Trump.*

*For years, Trump telephoned journalists using the name John Barron (or Baron). He posed as a publicist, planting stories about how this or that woman was in awe of him or how some business deal was about to come his way. . . .*

*The technique lent credibility to stories by tricking journalists (whose behavior Trump has said he studied closely). Five years after deceiving the New York Times in the Bonwit scandal, Trump—posing as John Baron—planted the gist of a story about his upstart New Jersey Generals football team. Then, using his own name, Trump confirmed what Barron had said, which got the story published.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Hassan, *The Cult of Trump* (2019, Free Press, New York), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> David Cay Johnston, *The Making of Donald Trump* (Melville House, Brooklyn, NY, 2016, 2017), pp. 135–136. Direct excerpt from the book. Sentences or phrases removed where ellipses indicate. This did not alter meaning but did, for instance, remove references to the Bonwit construction controversy that lies outside the scope of this chapter. Chapter 17 of Johnston’s book, pages 135–138, called “Imaginary Friends,” discusses how Trump used this persona to plot news stories that made him look good or served his purposes, as well as to threaten people with legal action or in other ways. The story of Trump posing as John Baron (or Barron) is widely known and is covered in many other places, such as Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher’s *Trump Revealed: The Definitive Biography of the 45th President* (Scribner, New York, NY, 2016). A quick google or other internet search on the phrase “Donald Trump posing as John Baron” brings up more references to this subject.

Yet no one can be famous in a vacuum. Fame flows through information networks. The fame of a person or thing is connected with this information flow. To understand Trump, his presidency, and the phenomenon of Trump's loyal base, one must understand fame and celebrity and Donald Trump's relationship with, manipulation of, and handling of it. Donald Trump understands this well. Love him or hate him, Trump did something amazing. He became our first president with no political or public service experience.<sup>3</sup> Though his comments reveal great ignorance in many areas, do not underestimate him—many people have and regretted it. He became president by first becoming famous, then leveraging this fame, then manipulating the media and his opponents.

This was not easy. Becoming famous is something most people, including most millionaires, fail at.

The nature of fame and celebrity has changed since Trump's early career, and his approach to fame has adapted with the change. (For more details on Trump's career, see the list of biographies in the back, or find my biographical essays at <http://peterhuston.blogspot.com/> or <https://history-for-fun-profit-and-insight.blogspot.com/>.)

The gap and the boundaries between a celebrity and fans was much larger in the 1970s when Trump's career began. Trump not only enjoyed being famous but also saw fame as valuable in dollars and earning capacity, an asset that would help him make money.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1970s, intermediaries between a celebrity and his work and fans interested in his work were a common part of the system. The same would apply to musicians, poets, graphic artists, and others.

In the 1970s, if an author were to write a book, he'd send it to a publisher. After passing through several editors and staff members, with luck the book would eventually become published, then shipped to bookstores. That's a multistep process with several gatekeepers, each able to stop or modify the project. More layers could be added, including agents, the intermediaries between writers and publishers, or book distributors, the intermediaries between publishers and bookstores. Many gatekeepers could distort or change the message. And readers needed to learn that a new book existed and then go to a bookstore and buy it. This could be a challenge.<sup>5</sup>

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Interestingly enough, according to Kranish and Fisher (page 219) or the article "Inside the Trump TV Empire That Never Was" by Laura Bradley (*Vanity Fair*, April 6, 2017), in 2004 and thereabouts the idea was floated for a fictional drama loosely based on Trump's life called *The Tower*. A script was produced, and the idea was discussed with Trump, who approved it. But there was one change Trump wanted. That was, interestingly enough, that the main character be named "John Barron."

But what's really interesting, and to me more than a little creepy, is that he named his son "Barron" when he was born in 2006. It goes without saying that there already was a Donald Jr., so what's a narcissist going to do?

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication and discussion with Robert Mulligan, historian and retired museum curator, and Iain Randall Strock, author of several books on the presidents, vice presidents, and First Ladies of the United States.

Eisenhower, Grant, and Taylor were important generals.

Hoover was Secretary of Commerce first, and Taft was Secretary of the Treasury, but neither of them had held elected office.

<sup>4</sup> David Cray Johnston, *The Making of Donald Trump*, pp. 77–83. or "Donald Trump at Business School: Scams from the Great Beyond—The Presidential Edition," by Peter Huston. August 22. History for fun, profit, and insight.

<https://history-for-fun-profit-and-insight.blogspot.com/2020/08/donald-trump-at-business-school-scams.html>

<sup>5</sup> Actually in the mid-1990s, soon after my original *Scams from the Great Beyond* book came out, I purchased a book on how an author or publisher could increase sales. It was called *1001 Ways to Market Your Books for Authors & Publishers*, 4th Edition, by John Kremer (Open Horizon Press, 1993). Not a bad book at all, though a bit dated today



This, too, required intermediaries. One could contact local radio or TV stations and see if they might put you on a show. Or one could contact local bookstores about holding a book signing. In some genres, particularly science fiction, authors could try to participate as a guest at a convention where they could interact with fans directly by participating in events.

If a book were published by a large company with a marketing division, a team of professionals would seek publicity for the book. Sometimes authors liked this. Other times, marketing ignored the author's views. Either way, more intermediaries.

Donald Trump completely removed intermediaries from the system when he invented John Barron (or Baron), his imaginary publicist and alter ego. A simple trick, brash and audacious, completely self-serving, embarrassingly simple, childish even, but often quite effective. In hindsight, it seems like such an obviously Donald Trump sort of thing to do.

The media at the time pretty much consisted entirely of TV shows, radio shows, magazines, and newspapers. If one got the rare chance to appear on a really big show such as Ed Sullivan, Johnny Carson, or David Letterman, you'd appear in front of a huge segment of the American population. Mainstream America would now suddenly know who you were.

Sometimes an author could carve out a niche and develop a cult following. In other words, while most people would have never heard of them, for others this author was a personal favorite. Members of this fan base would clamor to know about when the author was releasing his next work and do their best to find out when it would be available even if the mainstream public had never heard of them. (Save this idea: it will become important—very important—later.)

Some authors knew this and understood it.

Robert Sawyer, a Canadian, is an award-winning science fiction author with an international following.<sup>6</sup> In the 1990s and the first decade of this century, Sawyer was often seen at science fiction book conventions. Friendly and approachable, he also held frequent book signings.

Around 2001, I attended a writers' workshop taught by Sawyer in Ottawa, the Canadian capital. And while he focused on constructing and writing stories, he also made a very insightful point about fame.

"If you wish to be a successful writer," said Monsieur Sawyer, "in other words a writer who gets books published regularly and whose books get read and appreciated and who gets reimbursed for his writing, then do not worry about the occasional bad review of your books too much. If someone writes a review or says they hate your books, don't worry about it too much and don't change your writing to try to make them happy. You will never make them like your stuff enough to get them to buy your books regularly."

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But like any book with a thousand and one anythings, some of the ideas were better than others. It actually does have a page or two on the pros and cons of an author selling his books door to door. People have tried it, it seems, and, like almost anything else imaginable, some decided it worked for them.

<sup>6</sup> While William Gibson, author of *Neuromancer*, is generally considered more famous than Sawyer, he is not a native born Canadian. Gibson is a Canadian resident and a dual citizen of both the United States and Canada who resides in Canada.

“Instead,” he explained, “focus on the people who like your stuff. Make them happy. Find a group of people who like your stuff and will look for it and buy it when it comes out. Give them what they want, and do everything you can to make their number grow.”<sup>7</sup>

Years later I realized that this concept was the key to understanding how Donald Trump responds to his base, a group he has on multiple occasions called his “fans,”<sup>8</sup> as well as his critics. He makes his fans happy and ignores or scorns his critics. The fans will follow his work and appreciate it. The critics won’t and don’t.

Think about it. If you wish to be a successful media celebrity, develop a following and make them happy. This is a very important idea.

Repeat it.

### Key Point:

**If you wish to be a successful media celebrity,  
develop a following and make them happy.**

This was a picture of fame decades ago, a period that includes the year 1987 when Trump’s ghostwritten autobiography, *The Art of the Deal*, was released. (FYI, the ghostwriter, Tony Schwartz, has disavowed Trump and the book and donates all the profits he receives from it to charity. He has also recommended biographies of Trump, and this list is footnoted below.)<sup>9</sup>

Today, things have changed, changed in very important ways, ways that Donald Trump understands well. The internet has completely changed information flow.

First, intermediaries between celebrity and fans are no longer necessary. They can reach out to each other directly and continuously.

YouTube and other hosting sites allow people to offer videos for mass consumption directly.

Self-publishing, sometimes renamed “indie publishing,” is now a simple, affordable, and viable option for aspiring authors. New technologies can easily take a manuscript and share it in physical or electronic form with anyone anywhere with an ease and low cost never possible before.

Blogging has taken off in a big way. Physical newsletters are largely a thing of the past. Everything one might wish to read is available with a few clicks of a keyboard.

<sup>7</sup> I want to make it clear. This is really a paraphrase from memory of a tangential point in a lecture on how to use a theme or an idea as a way to structure a story or novel that I attended about nineteen years ago. Although written as a quote, it is a paraphrase of what Robert Sawyer shared with his class that day.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Mercieca, *Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump* (2020, Texas A&M Press, College Station, Texas), pp. 74, 97.

<sup>9</sup> “The Best Donald Trump Books Recommended by Tony Schwartz,” interview by Eve Gerber, Five Books.

<https://fivebooks.com/best-books/donald-trump-tony-schwartz/>

“‘The Art of the Deal’ co-author calls for Trump’s memoir to be pulled or ‘recategorized’ as fiction,” Allyson Chiu. May 9, 2019, *Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/05/09/art-deal-co-author-calls-trumps-memoir-be-pulled-or-recategorized-fiction/>

It's the same way with music. Musical recordings can be easily and instantaneously shared through websites such as Bandcamp.com and others.

Creative types can reach their audience directly without an intermediary.

Remember, “if you wish to be a successful media celebrity, develop a following and make them happy.” Remember how I took that idea and put in big, giant capital letters? I'm doing it again here, too.

### **Key Point:**

## **Creative types can reach their audience directly without an intermediary.**

Even if you operate in just a small niche, you can still have a following. Take Jason Colavito, probably the leading skeptical investigator/debunker of fringe archaeology and ancient astronaut claims. History and the skeptical study of strange claims are two of my biggest interests, making me a fan of Colavito's work. (I wrote two books with the phrase “Scams from the Great Beyond” in the title. Both focused on scams, swindles, and hoaxes relating to paranormal and fringe claims.) We've never met.

Few have heard of Jason Colavito, but is it difficult to follow his writing? Not in the least. Go to Google and type in “Jason Colavito.” Less than a second later, you will have a link to his website, his blog, quotes from his Twitter feed, his author's page with his books on Amazon.com, a YouTube channel that appears to have been both started and abandoned years ago, and a Wikipedia page devoted to him and his work. Some time ago I clicked a couple buttons, signed up for a free newsletter, and now get Colavito's weekly newsletter in my email box. I can check it on my phone during breaks at work with hardly any effort at all.

Thirty years ago, something like this would have been difficult to imagine. Key point, again—Jason Colavito, a minor celebrity you have probably never heard of, can become part of your life, just as he became part of mine, sending you things for free whenever he produces them, wherever you happen to be, along with the implied message that it is normal to read regularly about why reports of ancient astronauts are wrong. After all, lots of people must be doing it or why would there be a newsletter and comments left on his blog?

Jason Colavito is able to reach fans directly, instantaneously, anytime he wishes, something writers never even dreamed of a generation or two ago.

Which brings us to our third key point. The global audience for popular works is much more segmented and categorized than ever before. Why? It's that pesky internet thing again.

Not only can creative types reach their audience directly now, but all those people with their diverse interests, passions, and obsessions can now reach out and find each other too.

And they do. I enjoy collecting and painting small model figures. There are internet forums where adults discuss tips on how to best enjoy this obscure hobby. This is mostly harmless, but even there one can find very unhealthy reinforcement. If I were to post that my wife and children had just left me because I painted too many model soldiers, someone in these forums would tell me this was fine because now I have more time to paint model soldiers and that's a good thing.

Often if there are a small number of pathological, unbalanced people with the same problem, they are likely to seek each other out on the internet, then assure each other their shared pathology is normal and encourage it.

For instance, a friend has a teenage daughter with anorexia, the condition where people diet to excess. This unhealthy psychological condition can be life threatening if the person does not get it under control and learn to eat a healthy diet in healthy moderation. My friend's worries include "pro-anorexia internet forums." These are places where people share tips on how to lose weight drastically, often in unhealthy ways, often encouraging each other to ignore medical advice and focus on getting as skinny as possible. Promotion of emetics (medicines that encourage vomiting), diuretics, and amphetamines is not uncommon. A psychologist I know who specializes in treating these disorders has confirmed this problem.

It gets worse.

There are internet forums where people discuss in great detail the best way to rape and torture women,<sup>10</sup> sometimes encouraging each other to plan real crimes.

There are forums where people cheer on school shootings and discuss them in glowing detail, praising the shooters.<sup>11</sup> According to Joel Finkelstein, director of the Network Contagion Research Institute, a not-for-profit that deals with tracking online hate speech, "They begin to train one another as to how to become more expertly anti-social. Now you have a race to the bottom. Who can say the edgiest, craziest thing? . . . Now, someone goes out and actually commits something. That then causes the entire community to rally, to celebrate."<sup>12</sup>

Yup, the internet is much more than Quaker humor and crocheting tips and cooking video sites. It is a way to segment and divide people, based on self-selection. If you hear a member of Trump's base say something strange, disturbing, or just plain dumb, please remember there are many people they know in person or on the internet who have already told them whatever they said makes perfect sense. Of course, it works at the other, equally strange end of the political spectrum too. But extremists seek each other out and reinforce each other's views now in a way they never have before. Donald Trump understands this. He views it as "market research."

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<sup>10</sup> Google or use your favorite search engine to research "Gilberto Valle" or follows these links: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilberto\\_Valle#:~:text=Gilberto%20Valle%20III%20\(born%20April,he%20described%20were%20mere%20fantasy.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilberto_Valle#:~:text=Gilberto%20Valle%20III%20(born%20April,he%20described%20were%20mere%20fantasy.) Or <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/13/nyregion/gilberto-valle-is-found-guilty-in-cannibal-case.html> or <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/fbi-arrests-nypd-article-1.1191956>

<sup>11</sup> "The online message forums linked to far-right mass shootings | The Cube," by Matthew Holroyd. August 15, 2019. Euronews.

<https://www.euronews.com/2019/08/15/the-online-message-forums-linked-to-far-right-mass-shootings-the-cube> or "Analysing the presence of school-shooting related communities at social media sites" in *International Journal of Multimedia Intelligence and Security* 1(3):232–268, January 2010.

DOI: 10.1504/IJMIS.2010.037540, Alexander Semenov, University of Jyväskylä, Jari Veijalainen, University of Jyväskylä, Jorma Kyppö, University of Jyväskylä or <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/morning-tech/2019/08/05/the-internets-role-in-gun-violence-465127> or <https://www.revealnews.org/blog/hate-report-gaming-app-has-173-groups-that-glorify-school-shooters/> or <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/8chan-struggles-to-stay-online-after-links-to-mass-shootings/> or <https://khn.org/morning-breakout/this-dark-corner-of-the-internet-celebrates-mass-shootings-creating-a-hateful-culture-that-breeds-gunmen/> and perhaps

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17539153.2014.906984?src=recsys&journalCode=rter20> or

<https://www.kqed.org/news/11765841/how-hate-filled-online-groups-encourage-budding-psychopaths-to-kill-others>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.kqed.org/news/11765841/how-hate-filled-online-groups-encourage-budding-psychopaths-to-kill-others>

Now, society has always involved people dividing themselves into groups. But the internet has made it more segmented, more divided.

Have you noted how the “gay rights movement” or “LGBT community” is now sometimes called LGBTQIA or even LGBTTTQQAAP.<sup>13</sup> Why? Segmentation based on self-selection. Even my gay friends find this absurd, but don’t forget these friends of mine were born before the internet existed. Those involved find this normal.<sup>14</sup>

And as the world has become more segmented, strange things are happening with the way information—and fame with it—flows.

Today, in the year 2020, each and every one of us is able to live our lives without being exposed to a conflicting viewpoint outside, perhaps, of work or school. We can, if we wish, receive constant feedback on our phones from people who tell us our pathologies are not pathological at all or our extreme views, no matter what they are, are not extreme at all.

Remember, there’s no such thing as a pathological, unhealthy interest if you search hard enough on the internet.

Again . . .

### **Key Point:**

**There’s no such thing as a pathological, unhealthy interest in the year 2020. If you search hard enough on the internet, someone will assure you that since they do the same thing, whatever you’re doing is perfectly fine.**

This background will help you understand the way Donald Trump is handling his presidency and the United States. Trust me. Believe me. Everyone knows it.

Remember:

### **Key Point:**

**If you wish to be a successful media celebrity,  
develop a following and make them happy.**

**Creative types can reach their audience directly without an intermediary.**

**There’s no such thing as a pathological, unhealthy interest. If you search hard enough on the internet, someone will assure you that because they act the same way, it must be normal.**

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<sup>13</sup> This stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Ally, and Pansexual, although at least one person tells me they should include something called Aromantics in there as well.

<sup>14</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT> accessed on July 27, 2020.



## Chapter Two

### Donald Trump and His Base

*And, you know, it's our people are so incredible—you know, there's probably never been a base in the history of politics in this country like my base. I hope the other side realizes that they better just take it easy. They better just take it easy because some of the languages, some of the words you—even some of the radical ideas, I really think they're very bad for the country. I think they're actually very dangerous for the country. [Inaudible]*

Donald Trump, responding to a question about his press secretary, Sarah Sanders, being banned from a restaurant and how to bring the country together more <sup>15</sup>

If we view Trump as a celebrity, then who is Trump's target audience? Who are his fans? In marketing terms, what demographic, exactly, does he appeal to? In political terms, who is “his base”?

Trump supporters, like any group of millions of humans, are a very diverse group whose actions can have many different motivations.

### The Ultra-Rich

One group that supports Trump are the billionaires and the ultra-rich who are benefiting from his pro-business, anti-environment, anti-regulatory, anti-worker health and safety policies. As Jesse Jackson, the famous civil rights activist who also ran for president, once said, “For all of this talk about the ‘Trump base,’ he actually has two bases. The first base is the little-red-hat boys.<sup>16</sup> The little-red-hat boys get all the attention, because they are loud, and it is easier to tell that story, especially for big media companies. The second base is corporate America. That base is much more powerful.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “Interview: Maria Bartiromo Interviews Donald Trump on Fox News—July 1, 2018” on Fact Base.

<https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-interview-maria-bartiromo-fox-july-1-2018>

a shorter version is here

“Interviewer Asks Trump to Bring Country Together. He Praises His Base,” Jonathan Chait, *New York* magazine, July 2, 2018.

<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/07/asked-to-bring-country-together-trump-praises-my-base.html>

<sup>16</sup> While it is so tempting to describe these hats as “made in China,” it turns out the real ones are actually made in the USA. Alas!

“The hats for Donald Trump’s campaign are manufactured in China,” by Dan Evon. October 7, 2015. SNOPEs.

<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/donald-trump-hat-china/>

<sup>17</sup> “Trump’s real base isn’t the famous ‘white working class’ — it’s the billionaire class -Red-hat hordes captivate the media, but Trump’s most important supporters are better dressed, and more dangerous,” by David Masciotra, February 1, 2020. Salon.

Jackson, by the way, has met Trump on a few occasions and worked on projects with him in the 1990s, although he says the relationship was never close. After the Charlottesville Nazi march, where Trump said, “There were good people on both sides,” one aide claimed Trump had endorsed Jackson for president. Jackson denies this.<sup>18</sup>

As Jackson said, Trump’s supporters include a lot of the ultra-rich. His associates and appointees are also often very wealthy.

Trump has referred to Mar-a-Lago, his resort, as the “Southern White House.” (Undoubtedly a violation of the emoluments clause that prohibits the president from using his office to benefit his private business interests.) The cost of visiting Mar-a-Lago is about \$2,000 or more a night. Becoming a member originally cost a mere \$100,000 but was raised to \$200,000 after Trump became president (another probable violation of the emoluments clause).<sup>19</sup> That does not include the \$14,000 annual membership fee.<sup>20</sup>

Yet as important as the ultra-rich can be, there aren’t that many of them.

## Evangelical Christians

A more numerically important group are Evangelicals. They see supporting Trump as the future of American morality and spiritual health. There is a strong correlation between being “born again” and supporting Trump.

What makes Evangelicals distinct from other Americans is their belief that the Bible is literally true and the inspired word of God. Of course, many of them would insist the word “Evangelical” is not necessary; “Christian” is sufficient, which sort of gets at my biggest issue with Evangelicals—their attempt to monopolize the word “Christian.” If one interacts with them, there is a frequent assumption that they are the only kind of Christian that counts as “Christian” and who consider Christ important. It’s obviously an insular and ethnocentric belief that ignores the uncountable mass of Christians both past and present who follow practices and hold beliefs different from theirs.

Evangelical Christians, generally, dislike a lot of different kinds of people. Perhaps they might say that they don’t actually dislike these people. Instead, they merely wish that these people would become Christians like them and embrace Evangelical beliefs and lifestyle and stop believing and behaving otherwise. However, there is little chance of this happening. Therefore, it’s safe, in my opinion, to say Evangelical Christians do not like large categories of people. Muslims, homosexuals, and members of the LGBT community, people who promote scientific evidence that does not lead to the conclusions they think it should, intellectuals who make snide comments about Evangelicals or religious belief in general, people who do not think Evangelical Christians deserve special treatment, and countless others, including me, I guess, are on their list. Trump doesn’t

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<https://www.salon.com/2020/02/01/trumps-real-base-isnt-the-famous-white-working-class--its-the-billionaire-class/>

<sup>18</sup> “Jesse Jackson: Donald Trump Endorsing Me Is Fake News,” Sam Stein, *The Daily Beast*, August 22, 2017.

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/jesse-jackson-donald-trump-endorsing-me-is-fake-news>

<sup>19</sup> “Mar-a-Lago membership fee doubles to \$200,000,” Robert Frank, *CNBC*, January 25, 2017.

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/25/mar-a-lago-membership-fee-doubles-to-200000.html>

<sup>20</sup> “A look inside Palm Beach, where wealthy Canadians are one degree of separation from Donald Trump,” Ian Brown, *The Globe and Mail*, December 30, 2016.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/us-politics/donald-trump-in-palm-beach/article33453459/>



like these people either, or at least pretends not to, and attacks them in several ways. This make Evangelicals happy. An alliance has been formed.

### Key Point:

## Many Trump supporters support Trump because he hurts the people they wish to see hurt.

Evangelicals, like much of Trump's base, are often single-issue voters or people who put one issue above all others. "Right to Life" and restrictions on abortion alone provide many Evangelicals with reason to support Trump. Personally, I believe Trump's anti-abortion stance is a calculated, insincere political move. His friend and business associate Howard Stern also thinks this and in an interview said, "The guy I knew, I didn't know this was him. I don't believe his stance on abortion for example. The Donald I know, I think he needed to get a few people abortions."<sup>21</sup> Regardless, many Evangelicals believe, and correctly it seems based on his Supreme Court choices, that if they support Trump, he will work to limit or end abortion.

I feel that there are patterns of thought within the Evangelical Community that have primed them for accepting Trump. Within the Evangelical Christian subculture, there are many beliefs about history, science, and the world beyond that conflict with the hard evidence.<sup>22</sup> In no particular order, these include that the founding fathers of this nation were Christians who intended the USA to be a "Christian nation," the world is six thousand years old and was created by God in a week, evolution is not scientifically proven, faith healers can perform miraculous cures inexplicable to science (something allegedly demonstrated many times yet ignored by scientists), and the story of Noah's Ark is a historical fact, among others. Of course, not all Evangelical Christians believe all these things, but most believe the majority of them.<sup>23</sup> Holding these beliefs will bring one into conflict with not just science but also history, anthropology, most of your neighbors if you live in any place with a sizable population (more on this later—it is important), most of the media, and most of the educational curriculum of any good school, college, or university.

Which means if you are an Evangelical Christian and go out much or read widely, sooner or later you are going to come into contact with things that contradict or challenge your deeply held beliefs. And while I've been a bit disrespectful in these pages, let's make it clear. Christianity, with its emphasis on being able to start a new life and find a new identity and transform oneself, is sometimes exactly what some people need to get their lives where they want them to be. Christianity allows one to begin again with a clean slate.<sup>24</sup> And Evangelical Christianity, despite its logical flaws, political dangers, and other faults, is easy to understand and embrace for someone in serious need of a change in their life or beliefs. Some, without these beliefs, might fall

<sup>21</sup> "Radio legend Howard Stern Recalls Interviewing Donald Trump," uploaded on May 13, 2019 by ABC News. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqj2kCszGZc>

<sup>22</sup> An earlier draft of this chapter detailed these issues, claims, and the evidence and the way Evangelicals dealt with them in excruciating and unnecessary detail. If you would like to read it, it is available online at <http://peterhuston.blogspot.com/2020/08/understanding-trumps-evangelical-base.html> (Trump's Evangelical Base, August 26, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Again, see my very long and overly detailed essay, "Trump's Evangelical Base."

<sup>24</sup> Years ago, I had a friend who was a member of a thoughtful and progressive Christian sect. In college, he dated a woman who was a "Born Again," Evangelical Christian. He enjoyed their relationship, but he often complained of meeting her friends. Many had a tendency to launch into "before I met Christ, I was a sinner, but now am reformed, and I'm going to tell you how low I was and how happy I put those days behind me" stories at first meeting. Usually these involved drugs, prostitution (both providing and procuring), and worse. His normal reaction was "But we've just met? Isn't this a bit personal to share so soon?"

apart or slip back into dangerous addictions or other problem behaviors. So it's not all bad, even if it's not all true.

But how does one behave when deeply held beliefs are exposed to contradictory evidence? Two ways:

Reduce contact

Undergo cognitive dissonance

These are key points, so I will repeat them. **BUT THIS TIME IN BIG CAPITAL LETTERS.**

### **Key Point:**

**When people are confronted with something that challenges**

**their deeply held emotional beliefs, they tend to do two things:**

- 1. Reduce contact**
- 2. Undergo cognitive dissonance**

Real quickly, “reducing contact” means you try not to go near or speak to or hear the ideas of people with different beliefs than yours any more than you have to. I think that’s pretty clear and straightforward.

“Undergoing cognitive dissonance” is a bit more complicated and requires explanation. First, “cognitive” refers to “cognition” or “thought.” “Dissonance” means “tension, lack of harmony, or conflict among the elements or parts of something.” Therefore, the term “cognitive dissonance” refers to when a person’s thoughts contradict each other, and they start to become aware of it. When this happens, people tend to react in specific ways (technically, reducing contact with the source of a conflicting idea is one of these).<sup>25</sup>

Just understand that while Evangelical Christians tend to portray things as a black/white, yes/no, good/bad dichotomy of “you believe the Bible and support God, or you don’t do either,” this position often requires either lack of understanding of the facts or a bit of interpretation, selection, appeals to authority, and recasting or reframing of things. These mental gymnastics often seem arbitrary to people who are not part of their subculture.

### **Key Point**

**Interpretation, selection, appeals to authority, and recasting or reframing of things are an important part of being an Evangelical Christian in modern American society.**

As we will see, this Evangelical Christian tendency toward “interpretation, selection, appeals to authority, and recasting or reframing of things” carries over when explaining Trump.

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<sup>25</sup> One of many sources on this is *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion*, Marc Galanter (Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1999, 1989).

But first, let's look at these thought styles and Christian education. To reduce cognitive dissonance, you create a "Christian school" (ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL) that uses "Biblically sound theories" (ALTERNATIVE THEORIES) to teach "Creation science" (ALTERNATIVE SCIENCE).

. Even if many people, particularly Evangelical Christians, don't quite understand what science is EXACTLY, they do, at least, have a vague idea of what it should look like. "Science" should come from THEORIES and be promoted by EXPERTS.

Therefore, if you want to justify a science curriculum that contradicts actual science in many ways, and in a way that will satisfy many people, at least non-scientists, then you need to find ALTERNATIVE EXPERTS who offer and promote ALTERNATIVE THEORIES that lead to ALTERNATE CONCLUSIONS, the conclusions you wish to believe. Of course, you don't just call them "alternate experts." A better term would be "Creationist scientists" or "Biblically sound scientists." The term "scientists"—everyday, garden-variety scientists—will often work fine. Most people, whether they understand science or not, are impressed by "scientists." If you can't find a "scientist," try "experts." "Experts" is a vague, catchall term.

Now the challenge is to make sure that your "experts" are respected by your target audience. This is easier than it sounds because THEY WANT TO BELIEVE. You are offering them a way to reaffirm their preexisting, deeply held beliefs. In other words, helping them reduce COGNITIVE DISSONANCE.

While the use of "experts" can be easily abused or misunderstood, there is no doubt that "experts," rightly or wrongly, convince a lot of people. In his book *House of Cards: Psychology and Psychotherapy Built on Myth*, Robyn Dawes, a professor of psychology, offered an important critique of how the entire concept of "seeking experts" can be misused and become misguided, particularly if no expert exists and there is no possibility of developing expertise in the actual area in question, as is often the case when the basic thing you are trying to prove is ridiculous.<sup>26</sup>

Credentials help acceptance. If you don't have any, it's easy enough to get some. Though it's easier than ever to do so, few people check credentials carefully. I've got a legal right to use the title "reverend" thanks to the Universal Life Church. It means little, and I don't. And there are several ways to get credentials that look good even if they don't mean what people think. A few years ago, I was at a self-defense/martial art event where one of the instructors used the title "doctor" and said she had a PhD. We had a few interactions and I realized that she often did not speak, reason, or act like a person with a PhD in her advertised field. I looked into it (thank you, internet!) and discovered her PhD was from an unaccredited, strictly online college and not useful for licensure. She also claimed to be a "certified conflict communications instructor." That was from the small organization she and her associates had created themselves.<sup>27</sup>

If an organization offers "certification" in a field, try to determine what exactly the credentialing body is, how and why they were formed, and what their certification really means and who recognizes it. Many people don't, and the result is that irrelevant credentials can still impress people.

If people are already predisposed to believe, have been taught to respect authority, and feel that their fellow "Christians" (i.e., Evangelical Christians) are honest people who can be trusted, they are especially vulnerable. Countless examples of fraud and misrepresentation within the so-called "Christian community" have happened. People are often anxious to believe. They want to reduce cognitive dissonance. They use

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<sup>26</sup> Robyn Dawes, *House of Cards: Psychology and Psychotherapy Built on Myth* (The Free Press, New York, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Details of this are also available at my blog: <http://peterhuston.blogspot.com/>

“interpretation, selection, appeals to authority, and recasting or reframing of things” and consult with a few “alternative information sources.” Common pattern.

It’s easy to find “alternative information sources” that offer a “Christian” (meaning “Evangelical Christian”) explanation for almost any subject where science conflicts with their religious beliefs. It’s quite interesting stuff, even a lot of fun if you’re in the right mood and don’t take it too seriously, but as science or history it fails. What’s sad is that these “alternative information sources” are often carefully labeled as science or history.

Taking the important issue of reconciling the Biblical account of Noah’s Ark with the scientific evidence for dinosaurs—prehistoric creatures whose very existence, many would assume, is completely contradictory to the Bible—it’s simple enough to find a few books that argue there’s no contradiction there at all.

*Noah’s Ark: A Feasibility Study* by John Woodmorappe (Institute for Creation Research, El Cajon California, 1996) for instance is a large and fascinating collection of essays and discussion arguing that the case for Noah’s Ark as a historical event is not just proven but also scientifically quite possible. While I confess I have not read it yet, my copy of *Dinosaurs on the Ark* by David Larsen (TEACH Services Publishing, Ringgold, GA, 2009) clearly says “Science/Life Sciences/Evolution” on the back and clearly is intended to be used to teach “science” in an alternative school curriculum. And for the children, we have *The Great Dinosaur Mystery and the Bible* by Paul S. Taylor (Chariot Victor Publishing, Colorado Springs, CO, 1987, 1989). My favorite part of that one is the illustration of the ancient Chinese chariot being pulled by dinosaurs (post flood, of course).

These things are out there. With the increasing segmentation of the media and the way authors and publishers seek out and maintain contact with their target audience, and vice versa, these things find the people who most want them. As discussed in chapter 1, what Jason Colavito and Robert Sawyer can do, the Evangelical Christian community can do too.

Sometimes these “alternative information sources” lead to problems.

In the 1980s and into the 1990s, there was a widespread problem with fanciful and distorted beliefs in Satanic cult activity in the USA. This belief distorted both law enforcement and therapist training. It even led to the arrest and conviction of several people on bizarre, disturbing, yet false claims of horrific abuse of children. I wrote about these things in my previous books and elsewhere.<sup>28</sup>

Today, the pattern not only continues but, in many ways, seems to have increased, perhaps due to foreign propaganda tapping into the flow of alternate information.

We can easily see parallels and similarities to the Satanism hysteria in today’s Pizza-gate and QAnon conspiracy theories and their wild-eyed and very dangerous but well-intentioned believers.

And, as always, there’s more, and it’s also bad. For instance, when it comes to the issue of global warming or human induced climate change, not only do members of the Evangelical Christian subculture show

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<sup>28</sup> For instance, see “Examining the Satanic Panic: A Personal Perspective On ‘Satanism,’” Peter Huston, *Skeptical Inquirer*, volume 18, no. 3, Spring 1994.

<https://skepticalinquirer.org/1994/04/a-personal-perspective-on-satanism/>

“Washed up, Sold Out, and Spreading Hysteria,” a review of *Selling Satan: The Tragic History of Mike Warnke*” by Mike Hertenstein and Jon Trott. Reviewed by Peter Huston, *Skeptical Inquirer*, volume 19, no. 1, January/February 1995.

<https://skepticalinquirer.org/1995/01/selling-satan/>

See also Peter Huston, *More Scams from the Great Beyond* (Paladin Press, Boulder, CO, 2002).

belief patterns different from the mainstream population,<sup>29</sup> but some Evangelical Christians in private “Christian” schools teach it very differently using, you guessed it, “alternative information sources” and “alternative experts” who deny human-induced climate change. And they have found a Biblical justification for it, too. According to one source:

Pastor Robert Jeffress, a member of Trump’s Evangelical Advisory Board, appeared on Fox News to discuss the movement.

*Somebody needs to read poor Greta Genesis, Chapter 9, and tell her the next time she worries about global warming, just look at a rainbow. That’s God’s promise that the polar ice caps aren’t going to melt and flood the world again,” he said in response to the Sept. 20 protests.<sup>30</sup>*

Not only has this subculture shown a great willingness to accept the statements of Donald Trump, no matter how outrageous, misinformed, or self-contradictory, Trump has shown an odd willingness to use their sources as well.

These are often sources that most Americans have never heard of. Primarily through his website Info Wars, Alex Jones has become one of America’s most prominent fear, hate, and conspiracy mongers. He is surprisingly influential in some circles. The first time I ever heard of Alex Jones, it was from an Evangelical Christian acquaintance sincerely trying to answer a question I had sincerely asked about claims of Russian influence in the then recent 2016 election. What’s more significant is that while I had never heard of Alex Jones, Donald Trump had already appeared on his show campaigning for the votes of his listeners for a full half hour. Trump publicly praised Jones, saying, “Your reputation is amazing. I will not let you down.” Trump’s associate Roger Stone, who like so many Trump associates was later convicted of criminal charges, was a regular on the show.<sup>31</sup>

And often what these sources offer is not science or news. It’s often dangerous.

<sup>29</sup> “Religion and Views on Climate and Energy Issues,” Pew Research Center, October 22, 2015.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2015/10/22/religion-and-views-on-climate-and-energy-issues/>

“Assessing the Influence of Educational Interventions on the Climate Change Beliefs of Evangelical College Students,” Brian Webb, Master’s Thesis, Harvard Extension School, 2016.

<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/33797259>

“What evangelical Christians really think about climate change,” Kashmira Gander, Grist (originally published in *Newsweek*), October 18, 2019.

<https://grist.org/article/what-evangelical-christians-really-think-about-climate-change/>

“Why conservative Christians don’t believe in climate change,” by Bernard Daley Zaleha and Andrew Szasz.

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Vol 7 (5). 19-39. 2015

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0096340215599789>

<sup>30</sup> “Why Many Evangelical Christians Believe Climate Change is a Hoax,” by Jillian Cheney, September 27, 2019. Religion Unplugged.

<https://religionunplugged.com/news/2019/9/27/climate-change-and-evangelicals-why-do-so-many-of-them-believe-its-a-hoax>

<sup>31</sup> “Alex Jones and Donald Trump: How the Candidate Echoed the Conspiracy Theorist on the Campaign Trail,” FRONTLINE, July 28, 2020.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/alex-jones-and-donald-trump-how-the-candidate-echoed-the-conspiracy-theorist-on-the-campaign-trail/>

“FRONTLINE Investigates Alliance Among Alex Jones, Roger Stone & Trump and How Conspiracy Theories Took Center Stage; July 28 at 10,” WOUB Public Media, posted on July 22, 2020.

<https://woub.org/2020/07/22/frontline-investigates-alliance-among-alex-jones-roger-stone-july-28-at-10/>

The Frontline documentary is well worth seeing and very disturbing but informative.

Much of the anti-mask, anti-social distancing misinformation material, often of questionable and suspicious origin, that is undermining our nation's pandemic response is being spread through these networks. Again, "interpretation, selection, appeals to authority, and recasting or reframing of things" and consult with a few "alternative information sources." The pattern continues, and people are dying because of it.

## Extremist Groups

Although Evangelical Christians are the largest subculture or group that supports Trump, there are others.

Several extremist groups support Donald Trump. In most cases, these groups have few if any shared goals and no shared ideologies. The only thing they usually have in common is that they are angry and frightened by changes in the modern world. They all feel large groups of "others" want to hurt and misuse them, and they feel Donald Trump recognizes the threat and opposes it. They hope that Donald Trump will protect them from their perceived enemies and control, attack, and destroy the groups they fear.

### Key Point

#### **Many Trump supporters support Trump because he hurts the people they wish to see hurt.**

A great deal has been made about Donald Trump and his attitude and alleged attitude and relationships, again real and alleged, with neo-Nazis and white supremacists.

Many white supremacists and neo-Nazis support Trump. Kevin MacDonald, a retired psychology professor described as "the neo-Nazi movement's favorite academic," wrote about the significance of Trump's victory in the November 2016 edition of the *Occidental Observer*, a publication that says it covers "White identity, interests, and culture." Excerpts from his essay are illuminating: "Fundamentally, it is a victory of White Americans over the oligarchic, hostile elites that have run this country for decades. Trump accomplished a hostile takeover of the Republican Party and won without the support or with only lukewarm and vacillating support from much of the GOP elite."

And: "When Trump announced, it was hard to take it seriously, but his comments on immigration, American nationalism, political correctness and trade certainly struck a chord."

And: "And it quickly turned out that he understood the anger in White America far better than anyone else and he was willing to say what they wanted to hear—most of all the White working class."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "An Historic, Quite Possibly Revolutionary Victory!" Kevin MacDonald, *Occidental Observer*, November 9, 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20161126151314/http://www.theoccidentalobserver.net/2016/11/an-amazing-victory/>

More simply and equally disturbing, Richard Spencer, another “alt-right” leader celebrated the 2016 election results by proclaiming “Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!” while giving a Nazi salute at a gathering in Washington, DC. Other white nationalists returned the salute.<sup>33</sup>

American white nationalists believe that our country and white American people, their people, are in danger. (There’s that fear thing again.) The alleged danger comes from immigration by non-whites and preferential treatment to non-white minorities who, according to them, often breed faster than whites. This process is being accelerated and encouraged, they say, by self-hating white liberals and, of course, since we are speaking of Nazis, Jews.

A lot of Trump’s policies, such as his anti-immigration, anti-Muslim, and strong border security stances, resonated with them, as did a lot of his anti-liberal, anti-politically correct, anti-intellectual elite rhetoric. And, if they looked into Trump’s past, there was evidence there to satisfy them that he also held some of their views. There was his race and housing lawsuit,<sup>34</sup> for instance, as well as his activism and public calls for the death penalty for the Central Park Five.<sup>35</sup>

Which begs the question: How did Trump respond? Through use of a communication technique called “paralipsis,” or saying things in a way that lets you later deny saying them. (While examples follow, paralipsis and other Trump rhetorical techniques are covered more in chapter 3.) He kept his distance while implying support, yet in a deniable way. And he did this often.

Trump retweeted messages or memes from white supremacist sources. For instance, in November of 2015, he retweeted a graphic of homicide data that had originated at a white nationalist website that indicated Blacks were responsible for most homicides in the United States. The information was wildly inaccurate and the statistics virtually all wrong. When confronted on *The Bill O’Reilly Show* on Fox, Trump denied responsibility and replied with statements that included “I didn’t tweet, I retweeted somebody that was supposedly an expert,” and “Am I gonna check every statistic?”<sup>36</sup>

On April 27, 2016, *GQ* magazine published a profile of Melania Trump that discussed some of her family secrets, including the existence of an estranged half-brother in Slovenia. The article was written by Julia Ioffe, a Russian Jewish immigrant journalist. Melania Trump took offense, as did Donald.

Andrew Anglin, a white supremacist neo-Nazi leader, responded with a call to action on Stormfront, his white supremacist website and internet forum. The headline on his article read, “Empress Melania Attacked by Filthy Russian Kike Julia Ioffe in GQ!” and the article said, “Send her a tweet and let her know what you think of her dirty kike trickery. Make sure to identify her as a Jew working against White interests or send her

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This was found through a briefer quote on page 89 in “Demagogue in Chief,” Jennifer Mercieca (Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, 2020). Curiously, if one goes to the *Occidental Observer’s* website, the original English language essay has been replaced with a French language version.

<sup>33</sup> “Demagogue in Chief,” Jennifer Mercieca, p. 89.

<sup>34</sup> “Trump’s 1970 Racial Bias in Housing Lawsuit,” by Peter Huston. History for Fun, Profit, and Insight. September 23, 2020.

<https://history-for-fun-profit-and-insight.blogspot.com/2020/09/trumps-1970-racial-bias-in-housing.html>

<sup>35</sup> “Donald Trump and the Central Park Five --Calling for the Death Penalty for Innocent People,” by Peter Huston. History for Fun, Profit, and Insight. September 24, 2020.

<https://history-for-fun-profit-and-insight.blogspot.com/2020/09/another-excerpt-from-cut-chapter-of-my.html>

<sup>36</sup> “Trump Retweets Bogus Crime Graphic,” Robert Farley, Fact Check, November 23, 2015, updated November 24, 2015.

<https://www.factcheck.org/2015/11/trump-retweets-bogus-crime-graphic/>

the picture with the Jude star from the top of this article. Gogoogogogogogo. Because I'd bet dollars to hot dogs that she's a LOLCOW."<sup>37</sup>

Over the next several months, Ioffe received over 19,000 harassing tweets and other forms of electronic and distance harassment, up to and including death threats. Many contained Nazi imagery, anti-Semitic imagery, threatening images, and Holocaust references and imagery making it quite clear where it had originated.<sup>38</sup>

On May 4, 2016, Wolf Blitzer of CNN asked Trump directly, "What's your message to these people?"

Trump responded, "I haven't read the article, but I heard it was a very inaccurate article and I heard it was a nasty article."

Blitzer followed up asking Trump about the death threats.

His response: "I don't know about that. I don't know anything about that. Do you mean fans of mine? I know nothing about it. I don't have a message to the fans." (There's that peculiar word "fans" again.) On Stormfront, Anglin took this as encouragement and approval.<sup>39</sup>

Again, actions were done in Trump's name by neo-Nazis. Trump denied any knowledge of it or acknowledged who they were. The neo-Nazis took this as approval and encouragement by the president. This is a pattern, not an isolated incident.

As an aside, Andrew Anglin, the above mentioned neo-Nazi leader, lives overseas in hiding, according to some reports in Russia.<sup>40</sup> This is not the only time Anglin has called for a "troll storm" against a Jewish target.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, these incidents and Trump's response are not unique. In Boston in August 2015, two brothers, Scott and Steven Leader, ages 38 and 30 respectively, were arrested after urinating on a sleeping 58-year-old homeless Mexican man and beating him with an iron pole. Although not necessarily affiliated Nazis, Scott Leader told the police, "Donald Trump was right. All these illegals need to be deported." (The homeless man was actually a legal resident who worked harvesting crops seasonally.)

<sup>37</sup> Jennifer Mercieca, "Demagogue in Chief," p. 97.

A "LOLCOW" or "lolcow" is internet slang for someone who cruel people find enjoyable to electronically harass. See "LOLCOW" at <https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Lolcow>, accessed on September 6, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> "Journalists targeted with more than 19,000 anti-Semitic tweets during election," Callum Borchers, *Washington Post*, October 19, 2016.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/04/29/journalist-faces-barrage-of-anti-semitic-attacks-after-profiling-melania-trump-but-why/>

<sup>39</sup> Jennifer Mercieca, "Demagogue in Chief," pp. 97–98.

<sup>40</sup> "Who Gave Neo-Nazi Publisher Andrew Anglin A Large Bitcoin Donation After Charlottesville?," Luke O'Brien, *Huffington Post*, June 12, 2019.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/andrew-anglin-bitcoin-mysterious-donor\\_n\\_5d011cc6e4b0304a12087e0c](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/andrew-anglin-bitcoin-mysterious-donor_n_5d011cc6e4b0304a12087e0c)

<sup>41</sup> "Anglin allegedly included phone numbers, email addresses and links to social media profiles for Gersh's immediate family, friends and colleagues, encouraging his followers to 'make your opinions known.' If they were in Whitefish, he suggested, they could even 'stop by and tell her in person.' By April 2017, when the SPLC filed its lawsuit against Anglin, Gersh and her family had received more than 700 hate-filled messages. (Sherry Spencer condemned the trolling in a public statement on Medium, according to NPR.)" Excerpt from "Montana judge orders neo-Nazi website publisher to pay \$14M," Matt Volz, *Washington Post*, August 8, 2019.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/07/16/andrew-anglin-daily-stormer-tanya-gersh-million-verdict/>



When asked for his reaction by Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly, Trump responded, “It would be a shame, but I haven’t heard about that. I will say the people that are following me are very passionate. They love this country. They want this country to be great again.”

Once again, same pattern. Deny responsibility, then praise the people who performed the horrible act in his name.

It should be mentioned that a few days later, after outrage grew and the Mexican government became involved, Trump changed his tone and tweeted, “Boston incident is terrible. We need energy and passion, but we must treat each other with respect. I would never condone violence.”<sup>42</sup>

And not just Nazis support Trump. Ironically, he is often supported by the most extreme, most orthodox and religiously conservative segment of the Jewish population. (And, if someone can pull that off, never, ever underestimate them.) Although Jews make up only 2 percent of the American population, and the majority of them vote Democrat, the Jewish population is not monolithic. There is an insular, religiously conservative segment that opposes women working outside the home and gay rights, and, in fundamentalist style, emphasize the importance of traditional religious texts. They often consider themselves the only “correct” form of Judaism, proselytizing to other Jews. These people tend to support Trump, largely because of his support of Israel and the prominence of his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, in his administration.<sup>43</sup>

And then there are the truly fringe extremists. On the internet there are many forums created by people with a common interest. Some of these interests are undoubtedly pathological. These include forums where men rationalize the importance of and share tips on how to dominate and control the women in their lives, including their wives and girlfriends.<sup>44</sup> These forums are known collectively as “the manosphere,” with one prominent forum called “the red pill forum.” On these forums, there is widespread support for Trump. Their basic rationale is there are strong forces in the world that wish to harm heterosexual white men and their interests, giving an unfair advantage to women, feminists, and people who work to erode the value of masculinity. Trump, they believe, is the only leader able to address, confront, and stop them.<sup>45</sup>

And as if that is not enough, a Chinese religious sect/cult called Falun Gong is also a strong supporter of Trump. Outlawed and persecuted in China, this group hates the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese Communist Party hates them, or is it the other way around? Regardless, because of their strong opposition to

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<sup>42</sup> Jennifer Mercieca “Demagogue in Chief,” p. 92.

“Trump changes tone on homeless man beaten in Boston,” by Staff. August 22, 2015. Christian Science Monitor.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2015/0822/Trump-changes-tone-on-homeless-man-beaten-in-Boston>

“Trump-inspired brothers plead guilty to beating homeless immigrant.” May 17, 2016. CBS News.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-inspired-brothers-plead-guilty-to-beating-homeless-man/>

<sup>43</sup> Steven Hasan, *The Cult of Trump*, (Free Press, New York, 2019), pp. 185–188.

“How and why the Jewish American voter might be changing,” Mya Jaradat, *Deseret News*, August 30, 2020.

<https://www.deseret.com/indepth/2020/8/30/21403046/jews-for-trump-jewish-american-voters-republicans-pompeo-jerusalem-republican-national-convention>

“Leading Orthodox rabbi endorses Donald Trump for reelection,” by Shira Hanau. July 29, 2020. Cleveland Jewish News.

[https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/jta/leading-orthodox-rabbi-endorses-donald-trump-for-reelection/article\\_e82364e2-5c1a-5afd-a470-8a00c69d722b.html](https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/jta/leading-orthodox-rabbi-endorses-donald-trump-for-reelection/article_e82364e2-5c1a-5afd-a470-8a00c69d722b.html)

<sup>44</sup> <https://wicked-solutions.blog/2019/06/03/misogyny-politics-and-reddit-how-the-red-pill-forum-helped-trump-win/> or <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/701155?mobileUi=0&> or

<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/04/reddit-red-pill-forum-started-by-new-hampshire-politician.html>

or <https://money.cnn.com/2017/11/10/technology/culture/divided-we-code-red-pill/index.html>

<sup>45</sup>Jennifer Mercieca, “Demagogue in Chief,” pp. 168–170.

the Chinese government, the group and their paper, *The Epoch Times*, are strong Trump supporters and becoming more influential in American conservative circles because of it.<sup>46</sup>

## The “Mainstream” Trump Base

Although they are not alone, these organizations and people are outliers. Trump accepts support wherever it comes from and does not disavow any segment of his “fans.” Instead, he embraces them, makes them feel welcome, and accepts their support, their votes, and their donations of time and money and welcomes their harassment of his critics.

But what about the classic “Trump base,” the men and women who wear the red hats and consider themselves ordinary, mainstream, everyday Americans who yet are gripped with fear that their livelihoods, their future, and their nation are slipping away and heading in the wrong direction and no one cares and no one, no one except a wealthy New York City swindler, is able to help them.<sup>47</sup>

It’s difficult to measure and analyze Trump’s base. In the 2016 election, both candidates were very unpopular. A lot of people voted grudgingly. And among voters who disliked both candidates, the majority voted for Trump. Commentator Charlie Cook defined Trump’s base as the people who say they “strongly approve” of him in polls and estimated it as about 32 percent of voters when he wrote in 2018.<sup>48</sup>

Who are these people?

## White

Well, for one thing, they tend to be white. I know it sounds cliched, like something a self-loathing white liberal would say, but, gosh dang, it’s the truth. Now, most people in America are white. Therefore, a lot of groups in the United States are white. However, in the 2016 election, according to a Pew Research Center study, 88 percent of Trump voters were white, while only 60 percent of Clinton voters were white. As for the other racial categories in the survey, 19 percent of Clinton voters were Black while only 2 percent of Trump voters were Black; 14 percent of Clinton voters were Hispanic while only 6 percent of Trump voters were Hispanic; and 7 percent of Trump voters were classified as “other” while only 4 percent were in this category.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> “Trump, QAnon and an impending judgment day: Behind the Facebook-fueled rise of The Epoch Times,” Brandy Zadrozny and Ben Collins, NBC News, August 20, 2019.

<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/national-international/usw-inside-the-secretive-media-outlet-that-became-one-of-trumps-biggest-supporters/133215/>

“This Chinese Cult is Not Your Friend,” J. J. McCullough, uploaded on May 16, 2020.

<https://youtu.be/1JaPzJKycxc>

<sup>47</sup> “Sizing Up Trump’s Base,” Charlie Cook, The Cook Political Report, December 14, 2018.

<https://cookpolitical.com/analysis/national/politics/sizing-trumps-base>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> “For Most Trump Voters, ‘Very Warm’ Feelings for Him Endured,” an examination of the 2016 electorate, based on validated voters. Pew Research Center, August 9, 2018.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/>

Now the fact is that since 1972, most whites have voted Republican in national elections.<sup>50</sup> Still, Trump's base tends to be white to an extent that a non-white Trump supporter sticks out in the crowd.

## Male

They also tend to be male. Again, in national elections, males tend to vote Republican at a higher rate than women. In 2016, 53 percent of men voted for Trump, and 54 percent of women voted for Clinton. How many of these male Trump voters could be considered his "base" is tough to say.<sup>51</sup>

## Rural, White, Low Education, Feeling Voiceless, and Quick to Make Decisions

Trump's base tends to be very rural. And while it sounds like an ugly stereotype, the evidence does indicate that a large part of his rural base is white and has low education.

Using the same Pew Poll, in the 2016 election, 32 percent of Clinton voters were classified as urban, compared with 12 percent of Trump voters; 48 percent of Clinton voters were classified as suburban compared with 53 percent of Trump voters; and finally, only 19 percent of Clinton voters were rural compared with 35 percent of Trump voters.<sup>52</sup>

A great deal of study has gone into analyzing counties that voted heavily for Trump in 2016, particularly those that swung heavily toward him but have not traditionally voted overwhelmingly Republican. The findings are significant. Counties with low levels of education and a largely white population tend to have voted heavily for Trump. In other words, if you live in a place where people are mostly white and have little knowledge of or contact with non-whites, then your neighbors are more likely to have voted for Trump than if you live in a more mixed area.<sup>53</sup>

Focusing on education, again, most American voters, and most Americans in general, have not been to college. So while it should be no surprise that most of Trump's base has not gone to college, what is

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<sup>50</sup> "Trump voters haven't been driven by racism. If anything, it has repelled them," Musa al-Gharbi and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, NBC News, August 6, 2020.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-voters-haven-t-been-motivated-racism-if-anything-it-ncna1236027>  
National Exit Polls 2008.

<https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2008/results/president/national-exit-polls.html>

<sup>51</sup> "Trump's Base: Broadly Speaking, Who Are They?" John Dean, Justia, February 16, 2018.

<https://verdict.justia.com/2018/02/16/trumps-base-broadly-speaking>

<sup>52</sup> "For Most Trump Voters, 'Very Warm' Feelings for Him Endured," Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/>

<sup>53</sup> "The Story of Trump's Appeal: A Portrait of Trump Voters," Robert Griffin and Ruy Teixeira, Voter Study Group, June 2017.

<https://www.voterstudygroup.org/publication/story-of-trumps-appeal>

significant are the patterns that emerge when 2016 Trump voters are compared to Hillary voters or if we examine educational levels and compare them with the geographic voting patterns in the last election.<sup>54</sup>

Again, looking at the Pew Poll we find 28 percent of Clinton voters had a high school education or less, while 34 percent of Trump voters did; 29 percent of Clinton voters had “some college” while with Trump voters the percentage was 37 percent; 43 percent of Clinton voters were college grad or higher, while with Trump voters the number was 29 percent.

When categorized by both race and educational level, the results were more striking. While only 26 percent of Clinton voters were “White, non-college,” with Trump voters the percentage jumped to 63 percent, whereas 34 percent of Clinton voters were “White, college,” and 26 percent of Trump voters were “White, college.” Some 30 percent of Clinton voters were classified as “non-White, non-college” but with Trump voters it was only 7 percent, and 9 percent of Clinton voters were “non-White, college,” while with Trump voters it was 4 percent.

Life and finding economic success has gotten more difficult for non-college-educated men in recent decades. Full-year employment for non-college-educated men dropped from 76 percent in 1990 to 68 percent in 2013. In the last twenty-five years, while real wages increased for men and women with four-year degrees or higher, for non-college-educated males they fell in a noticeable way. In West Virginia, a state that voted heavily for Trump in 2016, the mortality rate for males has grown since 1980.<sup>55</sup>

Education tends to make a person more employable and better able to adapt to changes in the job market. And the job market and economy are changing, which produces fear, stress, uncertainty, and a desire for the sorts of quick and simple solutions that Trump has promised (e.g., “bring back coal”). Therefore, it should not be a surprise that these counties also tended to have populations that worked in low-skill jobs and were particularly vulnerable to economic change.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the counties where people voted strongly for Trump tended to be areas where people were most vulnerable to economic change and feeling most desperate.

Curiously, but not terribly surprising perhaps, there is also evidence that areas that heavily supported Trump in 2016 over other Republicans have higher rates of health problems, such as obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure. This was discovered by correlating the county voting patterns with public health data.<sup>57</sup>

Among voters in the Republican primaries, when surveyed, those who considered life worse now than fifty years ago were more likely to support Trump than other Republican candidates.<sup>58</sup> This supports the picture that is forming of Trump voters and supporters being frightened and concerned about the future.

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<sup>54</sup> “For Most Trump Voters, ‘Very Warm’ Feelings for Him Endured,” Pew Research Center.

<sup>55</sup> “The Story of Trump’s Appeal,” Robert Griffin and Ruy Teixeira.

<sup>56</sup> “The Story of Trump’s Appeal. A Portrait of Trump Voters,” Robert Griffin and Ruy Teixeira.

<sup>57</sup> “The presidential election, illness as indicator: Local health outcomes predict Trumpward swings,” *Economist*, November 19, 2016.

<https://www.economist.com/united-states/2016/11/19/illness-as-indicator>

“The Story of Trump’s Appeal. A Portrait of Trump Voters,” Robert Griffin and Ruy Teixeira.

<sup>58</sup> Those who said life was worse now than fifty years ago were 10 percent more likely to vote Trump than those who thought life was “better” and 13 percent more likely to vote Trump than those who thought it was “about the same.”

“The Story of Trump’s Appeal. A Portrait of Trump Voters,” Robert Griffin and Ruy Teixeira.

<https://www.voterstudygroup.org/publication/story-of-trumps-appeal>

## Education and Lack of Voice and Voting Trump

Education serves several purposes. It helps people work within the system and learn how to find and use their voice.

An acquaintance works in a government office at a low-level job answering routine phone calls for an agency that deals with the public. Many of the most emotional callers clearly do not have much education. This might be no fault of their own, but it makes guiding them through their problem to a satisfactory conclusion much more difficult. Understanding letters and writing a response, using websites, following instructions, knowing who and how to contact people for advice. Education helps with all of these important life skills.

When people can't get assistance from their government, they often feel frustrated and voiceless and have little faith in the government or its fairness. They often feel ignored, cut off from the rulers. Since they can't get the system to work for them, they conclude, the people who do benefit from the system must not care about them. Ultimately, they may rage about educated elites and assume the world is not fair and others are getting special treatment at their expense.

And while I'm not saying that all Trump supporters have as much trouble with the bureaucracy as the people I described, I am saying they often feel very frustrated with the system, voiceless, and like whatever is happening in the world is not working out for them and no one important cares and there is not much they can do to change it. Factories in their town close, often having been there for a century or more, and no one does anything. No one builds a new factory. And they worked hard, they were loyal, and it's not fair.

A RAND survey found that during the Republican primaries, Republican voters who answered yes to the question "people like me don't have any say about what the government does" were 86.5 percent more likely to support Trump than Ted Cruz. That is a huge percent and a very significant correlation.<sup>59</sup> One author wrote, "This feeling of powerlessness and voicelessness was a much better predictor of Trump support than age, race, college attainment, income, attitudes towards Muslims, illegal immigrants, or Hispanic identity."<sup>60</sup>

A couple years ago, a friend gave me a book titled *Donald Drains the Swamp* as kind of a gag gift.<sup>61</sup> It's author is a Trump supporter who appears to be both an Evangelical as well as a Yale graduate (based on his bio). Written in the style of an illustrated children's book, it tells the story of "Donald the Builder," a highly respected member of a tribe of cavepeople who are concerned about the nearby swamp and the horrible dinosaur creatures that live in it, thriving on the corruption and waste that the swamp breeds.

Some excerpts:

"But the king of all the cavemen went to live in a white castle in the middle of a swamp, far, far away. So because he never saw or talked with the people he ruled, he forgot all about them—and all the people were sad."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "Who Are Donald Trump's Supporters, Really? Four theories to explain the front-runner's rise to the top of the polls," Derek Thompson, *The Atlantic*, March 1, 2016.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/who-are-donald-trumps-supporters-really/471714/>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Eric Metaxas and Tim Raglin, *Donald Drains the Swamp* (Regnery Publishing, Washington, DC, 2018).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp. 4–5.

Later: “The King has forgotten all about us!” they said.

Donald nodded. “I’ve noticed.”

“We tried to talk to the King, but the creatures who live in the swamp take up all his time. We try to get his attention, but they always stop us, Would you talk to the King and ask him to help us?”

“I can try,” Donald said.<sup>63</sup>

Later in the story, Donald heads off to visit the King on behalf of the good yet frustrated people of the tribe. On the way he stops to speak to the swamp creatures, awful dinosaurs such as the “lobby-o-saurus” (no, I’m not making this up), and tells them that he’s going to dig a big trench and drain the swamp. The creatures that live in the swamp don’t like this at all.

“You’re mean!” they said. “We need this swamp! Where will we live?”

“I can build you a nice cave, near where I live. Lots of us live there,” he said.

“ECHHH!” they said. “We can’t stand the people who live outside the swamp!”

“They’re uneducated.” (says another dinosaur)

“—They’re uncultured!” (says a different dinosaur)

“—They’re DEPLORABLE!” (says a fourth dinosaur)<sup>64</sup>

And, well, it’d be really bad to give away the ending to such a great story, so I’ll just say all this leaves Donald the Builder determined to go out, drain that swamp, and end this terrible system that doesn’t care about the good cavepeople the way Donald the Builder cares about them and excludes them from opportunity.

Which, silly as it sounds, does give a good sense of the way many of Trump’s base see him and see the system they live under. After years of living with economic insecurity and a feeling of helplessness and a sense that no matter what they do, no one cares and nothing changes, along came a man who was an outsider from the system and announced that he did care, that the problems were caused by outsiders, that it was okay to be angry about it, and that he was going to change things if only they let him and followed his lead.

Which sounds good, but please go back and reread Donald Trump and look at the long list of broken promises, unpaid debts, shady connections, and lies that follow him everywhere he goes.

There was a study done that indicated that Trump supporters tend to be “low information voters.” In other words, they tend to make up their mind and form strong opinions based on very little information, and this effects how they vote. You know, the sort of people, when asked by bored reporters or survey people to give their views on US trade with Wakanda<sup>65</sup> or if we should bomb Agrabah,<sup>66</sup> reply quickly with very firm,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, pp. 10–11.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pp. 33–34.

<sup>65</sup> “US government lists fictional nation Wakanda as trade partner,” BBC, December 19, 2019. (I completely admit this example is not fair, but it is funny.)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50849559>

<sup>66</sup> “A Lot of Americans Support Bombing the Fictional Country from Aladdin,” Tessa Berenson, *Time*, December 18, 2015.

<https://time.com/4155228/amiercans-bomb-aladdin-agrabah/>

emotional answers. Though the study is not, in my opinion, terribly well-constructed, the conclusion fits my impressions and is well worth researching further.<sup>67</sup>

## Attitudes

Surveys have consistently shown that people who strongly supported Trump in 2016 tend to have more negative attitudes toward immigrants, Muslims, and feminists.<sup>68</sup> Which is interesting because the data cited above shows they are statistically less likely to know such people personally than most Americans, and there are indications that Trump supporters are more likely to come to strongly held, emotional positions using less information than most voters.

## Information from nontraditional sources

There are indications that some of the strongest Trump supporters, when they do research issues, do so using poorly chosen sources that often provide misinformation and false data. This leads to poor conclusions. As they say in computers, GIGO, or “Garbage In, Garbage Out.” I think more research needs to be done on the way nontraditional, “alternative” sources of information influence voters, their attitudes, their perceptions, and their choices. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned so-called “Christian science curriculums” as well as Alex Jones’s Info Wars and other outlets for false news and bizarre and disprovable or disproven conspiracy theories. There is considerable evidence that these are being used by special interest groups and foreign powers to influence our election. There is also a great deal of evidence that Donald Trump has benefited from these. With the increasing segmentation of the population and their media through self-selection, I think these will be a growing problem.

## Older

Trump supporters tend to be older voters. In the 2016 elections, voters over fifty tended to favor Trump. This is consistent with the claim that many Trump voters and much of his base live in counties where people have low education and little racial or ethnic diversity. Residents in such places tend to be older. The younger people there often leave, seeking their fortune elsewhere, and don’t come back.

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<sup>67</sup> “The Cognitive and Emotional Sources of Trump Support: The Case of Low-Information Voters,” Richard C. Fordinga and Sanford F. Schram, *New Political Science*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2017, pp. 670–686..

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2017.1378295>

<sup>68</sup> “The Story of Trump’s Appeal. A Portrait of Trump Voters,” by Robert Griffin and Ruy Teixeira. June 2017. <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/publication/story-of-trumps-appeal>

## Income

Are Trump supporters poor? While the stereotype is that Trump voters are white, uneducated, ignorant, and poor, the reality is much more complex.

Trump gets a great deal of his support from low-income people. In the Republican primaries, he did very well with voters whose households made under \$30,000 a year, 20 percent of Republican voters, when compared with the other Republican candidates.<sup>69</sup>

In the general election, most of the low-income votes went to the Democrats, the traditional pattern. There are large numbers of low-income minority voters, and the majority of them voted against Trump. Among white voters, however, income did not correlate much with a tendency to favor either party, something that has not occurred before.<sup>70</sup>

## Geography

Geography is a factor. Obviously, Trump gets stronger support in some parts of the country than others. Of course, this pattern is largely the traditional Republican/Democrat or Blue State/Red State divide. In American elections, there is a traditional pattern of which states tend to vote for each party. While a few states change and swing back and forth, most tend to follow the same voting patterns that they followed in previous elections. If you wish, go to your favorite search engine and use key words to find maps of the electoral vote totals by state for the past few elections, and you will quickly see the pattern. Trump tends to be more popular in the “red states,” the ones that have voted staunchly Republican for the past few decades. It’s interesting to speculate as to how much of this is due to actual support for Donald Trump himself or merely the sense that he dislikes the same people they dislike, Liberal Intellectuals. If you want to see something really interesting, and I say this without comment, compare the blue state / red state patterns with a map of the Confederacy in the American Civil War.

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<sup>69</sup> “The Story of Trump’s Appeal. A Portrait of Trump Voters,” Robert Griffin and Ruy Teixeira.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter Three

# Donald Trump's Rhetorical Style

*We don't win. We don't win anymore in our country, Sean. We used to win. We don't win anymore. We used to win with trade. We don't win with trade. We don't win with war. We can't even beat ISIS. And we're gonna win. If I win, I will tell you, if I win, we all win, because we are all going to win.*<sup>71</sup>

actual quote from Donald Trump

It's my belief this is no accident, no fluke. Donald Trump, despite all the above, is a rhetorical genius and a master manipulator. Diplomat? No. Statesman and public administrator? No. Negotiator . . . we'll come to that in a separate chapter. But rhetorical genius, master manipulator, salesman supreme. In these areas, the man has mad-skills.

Donald Trump does not communicate with the public in the way most politicians do. He avoids fact-based arguments and carefully researched proposals. Instead his arguments tend to rely on emotion delivered and salesman techniques such as repetition and appeals to social proof and authority.<sup>72</sup> He has contradicted and continues to contradict himself often, and he lies constantly,<sup>73</sup> but a noticeable slice of the population finds him persuasive and convincing, seeing him as a great leader come to save the USA from threats of all kinds. How is this happening?

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<sup>71</sup> At 6:18 to 6:35 on "How Trump Manipulates The Media," uploaded by *Charisma on Command* on July 2, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IctC0Uf8zc&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=35>

<sup>72</sup> "Donald Trump's Debates: 5 Mental Tricks You Didn't Notice" uploaded on February 8, 2016 by *Charisma on Command*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LR6EA91zLo&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=2>

<sup>73</sup> "President Trump has made more than 20,000 false or misleading claims," Glenn Kessler, Meg Kelly, and Salvador Rizzo, *Washington Post*, July 13, 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/07/13/president-trump-has-made-more-than-20000-false-or-misleading-claims/>

<https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/fact-checker-analysis-president-trump-has-made-more-than-20000-false-or-misleading-claims/>

or

<https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/fact-checker-analysis-president-trump-has-made-more-than-20000-false-or-misleading-claims/>

## Simple Statements with Simple Vocabulary

Unlike most politicians and the other candidates in the campaign, Trump tends to use very simple vocabulary. His words tend to be shorter and more common. If put in written form, Trump's speeches and statements are consistently at the lowest reading level of any of the other candidates.

His speaking style is unique, and with a bit of practice it is quite easy to get a sense of when he is speaking off the cuff and when he is giving a prepared speech written by someone else.

## Repetition

Perhaps Donald Trump's most important communication technique is repetition. He uses repetition in a way that no other politician has used before. He repeats ideas and slogans again and again, but also individual words. Again, again, and again. And again. "Win" is a particular favorite. In the video "How Trump Manipulates the Media" on the YouTube channel *Charisma On Command*, a clip is shown where Trump uses the word "win" twelve times in seventeen seconds in a debate during the 2016 campaign.<sup>74</sup>

This does not seem to be an accident. Compare the above quote with a different one from the same time period, this time to the editorial board of the *Washington Post*:

"I mean, actually I think it is presidential because it is winning. And winning is a pretty good thing for this country because we don't win anymore. And I say it all the time. We do not win anymore. This country doesn't win. We don't win with trade. We don't win with . . . We can't even beat ISIS."<sup>75</sup>

FYI, that's fifty-seven words, and seven of them are either "win" or "winning" and some sentences are identical. This style of speech and use of these phrases appears to be carefully chosen.

And, of course, there's this one:

"We're going to win. We're going to win so much. We're going to win at trade, we're going to win at the border. We're going to win so much, you're going to be so sick and tired of winning, you're going to come to me and go, 'Please, please, we can't win anymore.' You've heard this one. You'll say, 'Please, Mr. President, we beg you, sir, we don't want to win anymore. It's too much. It's not fair to everybody else.' And I'm going to say, 'I'm sorry, but we're going to keep winning, winning, winning, We're going to make America great again.'"<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> At 6:18 to 6:35 on "How Trump Manipulates The Media" uploaded by Charisma on Command on July 2, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IctC0Uuf8zc&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=35>

<sup>75</sup> "A transcript of Donald Trump's meeting with The Washington Post editorial board" Opinion by Post Opinions Staff, March 21, 2016. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/03/21/a-transcript-of-donald-trumps-meeting-with-the-washington-post-editorial-board/>

<sup>76</sup> "Trump: 'We're going to win so much, you're going to be so sick and tired of winning,'" Tom Lutey, *Billings Gazette*, May 26, 2016. [https://billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/trump-we-re-going-to-win-so-much-you-re-going-to-be-so-sick/article\\_2f346f38-37e7-5711-ac07-d1fd000f4c38.html](https://billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/trump-we-re-going-to-win-so-much-you-re-going-to-be-so-sick/article_2f346f38-37e7-5711-ac07-d1fd000f4c38.html)

That's 103 words and 11 of them are "win" or "winning."

Or this one:

"So we don't win anymore. But we're going to start winning. We're going to win with our military. We're going to knock the hell out of ISIS. We're going to win for our vets."<sup>77</sup>

Thirty-four words, four of them "win" or "winning."

And I really could find other examples. Really. Believe me.

If something is repeated enough, then it becomes stored in the brain. Things become associated with it, and we come to accept it as the truth, or, if not truth, it then often becomes the opposing point in a dichotomy, half of a two-sided debate. And half of a two-sided debate is still a pretty strong place for an idea to be. Remember, if someone is working hard to disprove your idea, they are still taking it very seriously. How many brands of carbonated cola beverages are available for sale in the USA? I have no idea, but it's a large number. So why does everyone always view the choice as "Coke or Pepsi"? Think about it. Simple. Repetition, repetition, repetition, and repetition through advertising.

So how does Donald Trump get an idea into your head and the heads of your neighbors? Same way: repetition. And often they are simple ideas. Ridiculously simple ideas. (Like ending illegal immigration by building a wall.<sup>78</sup>) Yet it's often the simplest ideas that most easily take root in our brain. And they stay there. People are repeating and spreading his ideas, repeating them to their friends, even, sometimes, if they don't agree with them. Regardless of why, the ideas are still being spread, still taking root in people's brains.

It's like all those jingles and songs from old TV commercials. Still stuck in your brain. Why are they there? Why can we still remember slogans sometimes even long after the products have ceased to exist? Simple. Repetition, repetition, repetition.<sup>79</sup>

Build the wall! Build the wall! Know what I mean? A beautiful wall, the best wall, and Mexico will pay for it. Believe me!<sup>80</sup>

According to Mark Liberman, a professor of linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania who has studied Trump's speech, repetition is also a simple way to avoid awkward pauses when speaking. To someone like Trump whose public image hinges on projecting confidence, awkward "ums" and "uhs" should be avoided at all costs. Though speaking with repetition brings attention to itself, some negative, it can also be liturgical, bringing a sense of purpose and importance to an otherwise mundane statement.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> <https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-poughkeepsie-ny-april-17-2016>

<sup>78</sup> Years ago, I wrote about illegal Chinese immigration. See Peter Huston. "Tongs, Gangs, and Triads -Chinese Crime Groups in North America." 1995. Paladin Press. Boulder CO

<sup>79</sup> "Donald Trump's Debates: 5 Mental Tricks You Didn't Notice" uploaded on February 8, 2016, *Charisma on Command*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LR6EA91zLo&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=2>

<sup>80</sup> There's just one thing that always puzzled me about Trump's wall. Surely, somewhere, some way, he and the people he associates with must, in my opinion, be making money off the project. And although I did not find myself with time to look into it, I just knew someone in his circle had to be getting rich off the wall somehow. As I write this, a week or two ago news came of the arrest of Steve Bannon.

<sup>81</sup> "7 Public Speaking Tips We Can Learn From Donald Trump" uploaded on November 13, 2017, VICE News.

Repetition is even more effective if used by someone with authority.<sup>82</sup> Well, to many, Trump is someone with authority, and someone they listen to.

## Repetition of Paired Phrases

Trump uses paired phrases often and uses them effectively. While most of these are insults, a topic covered later, there is a special power in paired phrases. Their repetition can become locked in a person's thoughts in special ways. If repeated enough, the paired phrases become instantly recognizable, like an advertising slogan. Even if not believed by the listener, if heard enough, they still become a point that must be discussed and addressed. Hillary Clinton supporters may not have believed that "crooked Hillary" was really "crooked," but they could easily have found themselves spending time arguing exactly why they did not.

"Lying Ted" for Ted Cruz, "dishonest press," "fake news," "failing *New York Times*," "Muslim ban," "low-energy Jeb," "Sleepy Joe," and many, many more.<sup>83</sup>

Trump's phrases usually follow a "pejorative adjective and proper noun" structure.<sup>84</sup> David Poepell is a professor of psychology and neural science. He states that when humans hear words in this pattern repeated often, their brains tend to store them together as a "fixed belief." "That fixed belief now becomes the glasses, the lens, through which you view the world," says Poepell.

According to Poepell, fixed beliefs chip away at our ability to be skeptical. "Once we've fixed a belief of some form, you've encoded it. Now to override that requires more work. So, if you find yourself susceptible to the simple pairing of ideas, things become very dangerous. And that's when the notion of fake news becomes extremely salient and dangerous. And by the way, that counts for everyone. That's kind of a nonpartisan danger."<sup>85</sup>

Even if one doesn't take the paired phrase seriously or find it believable, there is still a compulsion to think about it and consider it. For instance, while doing my research, I came across the paired phrase "foul-mouthed Omar" for the first time. Although I assume it refers to Ilhan Omar, the controversial US representative from Minnesota, I found myself wondering about "foul mouthed." Where did that come from? How did he choose that nickname? Without other information, there was just one thing I could be sure of and

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05tp0VscN8A&list=PLSwKsHkJJTzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=7>

<sup>82</sup> "What We Can Learn From Donald Trump's Speech Patterns." YouTube, uploaded by NBC News, January 19, 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJ7Pw5qJ9bY>

<sup>83</sup> "List of nicknames used by Donald Trump," Wikipedia, accessed on August 20, 2020.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_nicknames\\_used\\_by\\_Donald\\_Trump](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_nicknames_used_by_Donald_Trump)

<sup>84</sup> "Inside the fairy tale mind of Trump," Jon Allsop, CJR, September 27, 2017.

[https://www.cjr.org/special\\_report/trump-fairy-tale.php](https://www.cjr.org/special_report/trump-fairy-tale.php)

<sup>85</sup> "Trump's language and our brains" uploaded on December 19, 2016, Quartz.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5T5Q9yzXnQ&list=PLSwKsHkJJTzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=8>

that was that if I dug into it, I'd find a story about Ilhan Omar, and it would not be flattering.<sup>86</sup> I declined to investigate, but it took willpower.

To conclude, we're going to give special mention to one of Trump's favorite phrases. If you watch a lot of clips of Donald Trump speaking, not only will you notice that he uses repetition, but the phrase "believe me" gets used a lot. If repeated enough, people tend to believe it. This is especially true of people who respect and listen to Trump. If Trump says "believe me," the bulk of his base tends to believe him.

## Word Placement

Many have noted that when Donald Trump speaks, he often uses nonstandard grammar. As with so much about him, what at first appears humorous and ignorant upon examination shows great utility and hides several very effective rhetorical techniques.

We mentioned before that Donald Trump uses repetition to hammer in the emotional theme of his message. If you repeat the word "win" enough, people will know you are determined to win.<sup>87</sup> But there are other ways to emphasize a message.

One of these is in word placement. Placement of words in a sentence or line in a speech affects their power and influence. Words at the beginning and end of a sentence or speech get remembered better and have more power and impact. If you listen to Donald Trump speak, because of his nonstandard grammar, he is able to more easily put words where he wishes in sentences or speeches. So, when he speaks of "winning" and uses the word "win" as he often does, "win" is much more likely to appear at the beginning or end of a sentence and not in the middle. There is actually a word for this, the placement of words at the beginning or end of sentences to increase their impact and effectiveness. The term is "symploce." Trump uses symploce a lot.<sup>88</sup>

As if the word "symploce" was not sufficient for impressing friends, winning Scrabble games, and getting good scores on the GREs or SATs, "exordium" is also good to know. Exordium refers to the way the beginning of a narrative sets the tone for the rest of the narrative. I first heard this term on an NBC news report entitled "Is Donald Trump Treating the Presidency Like a Magic Show?"<sup>89</sup> Yup. He, like most politicians, uses it and uses it well, but his use of symploce—putting words at the beginning and end of a sentence, phrase, or speech utterance to give them special power and emphasis while using nonstandard, awkward-sounding grammar—makes him unique.

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<sup>86</sup> "Trump's nicknames ranked, as he locks in on 2020 foes and foils," John T. Bennett, posted August 26, 2019.

<https://www.rollcall.com/2019/08/26/trumps-nicknames-ranked-as-he-locks-in-on-2020-foes-and-foils/>

<sup>87</sup> Again, at 6:18 to 6:35, "How Trump Manipulates The Media," *Charisma on Command*, July 2, 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IctC0Uf8zc&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=35>

<sup>88</sup> "Donald Trump: His words and body language," uploaded on January 21, 2017, Sky News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrrfHwj0P0iU&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=14>

<sup>89</sup> "Is Donald Trump Treating The Presidency Like a Magic Show?" NBC Left Field, uploaded on July 6, 2017, NBC News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPGtUvkDlqQ&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=19>

As Sam Leith, a literacy expert and author, said of Trump, “He obeys no known laws of English grammar, but that can be very effective because he speaks in very emotional terms. . . . Everything good is ‘great.’ Everything bad is ‘failing’ and ‘crooked.’ You wind up with something with no logical structure to it but a whole series of very emotionally loaded words.”<sup>90</sup>

And not only does the quantity of emotionally loaded words affect their impact on the audience but so does their placement. The strange and clumsy-seeming structure of Donald Trump’s speech patterns often hides a conscious choice of word placement to have the most emotional impact and influence on his listeners.

## Nicknames, Insults, and Renaming

If there was one thing that quickly set Donald Trump apart from his opponents in the 2016 presidential race (aside from his simplistic proposals), it would be the way he called people names and threw insults at his rivals and critics. Like much of Trump’s behavior, this served many subtle purposes and proved very effective, while his critics and targets dismissed it as childish or bizarre.

Jonathan Chait, writing for *New York* magazine, described it thusly:

*The power to define his opponents with belittling nicknames is perhaps Trump’s most distinctive and feared political skill. Labels like “Low-Energy Jeb,” “Lyn’ Ted,” and “Liddle Marco” seemed both to emasculate his primary rivals while establishing Trump as an alpha male. “Crooked Hillary” created a frame that fit every real and imagined scandal afflicting his opponent, including the publication of stolen emails from her campaign that should have registered as a Trump scandal. The nickname method seemed to demonstrate that the entire political Establishment had overestimated the intelligence of the average persuadable voter, and Trump struck it rich by discovering the correct level, which was approximately that of a seventh-grade cafeteria table.*<sup>91</sup>

In addition to establishing his position as the “Alpha male,” the discourse leader who needs to be responded to, these insults also serve to dehumanize his opponents, rivals, and critics in the eyes of his supporters. Many have remarked on the way in which Trump uses rhetoric, language, and, ultimately, policies that dehumanize people and treat them as objects, tools that can be manipulated or hurt to achieve his goals.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> “Donald Trump: His words and body language,” uploaded on January 21, 2017, Sky News. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrrHwj0P0iU&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkIDH&index=14>

<sup>91</sup> “Trump Isn’t Even Good at Inventing Mean Nicknames Anymore,” Jonathan Chait, June 30, 2020. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/06/trump-nicknames-sleep-joe-corrupt-joe-bully-campaign-losing.html>

<sup>92</sup> For instance, Jennifer Mercieca describes “reification,” the dehumanizing and treating of people as objects, as one of six key styles of rhetoric used by Trump in her book, *Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump* (Texas A&M Press, College Station, TX, 2020). The use of nicknames and insults to dehumanize people is also described in “The dangerous power of Trump’s ‘fairy tale’ nicknames,” Jon Allsop, CJR, May 13, 2019. [https://www.cjr.org/the\\_media\\_today/trump\\_buttigieg\\_neuman\\_nickname.php](https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/trump_buttigieg_neuman_nickname.php)

Jennifer Mercieca has used the term “war tactic” to describe the way he commonly refers to people he does not like as “vermin, rats, disgusting people, whatever.” The use of these terms is often a justification for later mistreating them.<sup>93</sup>

And he does it a lot. According to Jon Allsop, writing for the highly respected *Columbia Journalism Review*, “On Twitter he has clocked up more than 175 different insults that fit this linguistic pattern since the start of his presidential bid in 2015. [Note: This was written in September of 2017, three years ago. Undoubtedly the number is higher now.] They run a surreal gamut from ‘wild Bill’ Clinton, through ‘absentee governor John Kasich,’ to ‘goofball atheist Penn Jillette,’ of the magic duo Penn and Teller. Megyn Kelly accounts for five separate insults, including ‘crazy,’ ‘doopy,’ ‘lightweight,’ and ‘highly overrated.’”<sup>94</sup>

As I write, mid-August 2020, Wikipedia has a full and lengthy page entitled “List of nicknames used by Donald Trump.”<sup>95</sup>

Use of insults aids not just in dominating rhetoric and dehumanizing Trump’s opponents, rivals, and critics; it also serves to simplify perceptions of the world. This makes it easier for many voters to decide they understand issues, and in a way that fits Trump’s goals and needs. Simplification of the narrative is a big part of how Trump works.

As Allsop wrote, “Consciously or not, Trump is feeding us nuggets packed with enormous linguistic power. They appeal to a childlike desire to make an easily digestible morality tale of a complicated world.”<sup>96</sup>

Allsop spoke to Jack Zipes, a fairy tale expert and professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota. “Voters feel it’s familiar to them,” Zipes continues. “He has a unique intuition. He’s able to use these pejorative adjectives in a way which really does overpower the opposition.”<sup>97</sup>

Much of Trump’s appeal is that he offers a sense of purpose and mission to his followers. He presents a version of reality where there are terrible, horrible problems looming in the future, but he promises that he and he alone is the man with the skills and capabilities and ability to save the country and make things right and preserve all that is good in the world, but he needs the help of his base. An important part of this is vanquishing his enemies, the evildoers who are working to undermine society and destroy things that are good. It’s a simple and effective narrative, and part of what makes it effective is to keep the roles simple. Jon Allsop describes it as a “fairy tale narrative,” and the use of names that involve a simple adjective (usually a negative one) and a simple name fits the fairy tale style. As he noted, in fairy tales names of characters often fit this pattern, e.g., “big, bad wolf” or “Little Red Riding Hood.”

There’s at least one more advantage to the frequent use of insults and nicknames for his opponents, rivals, and critics. By renaming people and things, Trump quickly establishes an “in-group” of people who know, recognize, and use these nicknames and an “out-group” that doesn’t. Much of Trump’s base takes great

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<sup>93</sup> “Very stable genius? Is Donald Trump a rhetorical master?” Uploaded on April 10, 2019, Guardian News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvzJlqxznTM&list=PLSwKsHkIJTzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=11>

<sup>94</sup> “Inside the fairy tale mind of Trump,” Jon Allsop, CJR, September 27, 2017.

[https://www.cjr.org/special\\_report/trump-fairy-tale.php](https://www.cjr.org/special_report/trump-fairy-tale.php)

<sup>95</sup> “List of nicknames used by Donald Trump,” Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_nicknames\\_used\\_by\\_Donald\\_Trump](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_nicknames_used_by_Donald_Trump)

<sup>96</sup> “Inside the fairy tale mind of Trump,” Jon Allsop, CJR, SEPTEMBER 27, 2017.

[https://www.cjr.org/special\\_report/trump-fairy-tale.php](https://www.cjr.org/special_report/trump-fairy-tale.php)

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

pride in identifying with him and being part of a mass movement dedicated to change. Using new terms and new forms of language is one of the ways in which people show and recognize affiliation with a group. Trump knows this and uses it to his advantage.<sup>98</sup>

## Ad Hominem Attacks

One of Trump's most disturbing practices is the way he attacks people. Clearly, this behavior distinguished him quickly and early in the 2016 election campaign, separating him from his opponents as well as, by definition, most civilized adults. When a person responds to an argument not by responding to the argument itself or its logic or facts but instead by attacking the person who made the argument, this is called an "ad hominem" attack. While commonly seen on lists of logical fallacies to be aware of and avoid if you wish to avoid faulty conclusions, Donald Trump uses it regularly.

While it does not prove anything, calling people "stupid," "horrible," and "weak" instead of responding to their arguments or statements does satisfy many people. And it has the advantage of allowing one to respond to critics without doing research or having any knowledge of the subject. This can be an important advantage if you have trouble reading, don't like to read, and don't really know much about the issues.

When Trump holds a news conference and responds to the tough questions by screaming things like "that's a nasty question, and you are a terrible reporter," as he does frequently, this is an example of an "ad hominem" attack.

Donald Trump uses these not just to attack individuals but also institutions, and he does so with surprising effectiveness, undermining their credibility with his base.

Sometimes he uses them in a series, a string of attacks.

One instance of this began with Trump making a strange claim that he had personally seen Muslims celebrate the destruction of the Twin Towers immediately after the September 11 terrorist attack of 2001. On November 21, 2015, Trump told a rally crowd in Birmingham, Alabama, "I watched when the World Trade Center came tumbling down. And I watched in Jersey City, New Jersey, where thousands and thousands of people were cheering as that building was coming down. [ . . . ] So something's going on. We've got to find out what is going on." (For more on Trump's use of fear and objectification of people, see chapter 4.)

Soon, controversy erupted. The statement was accused of being bigoted and untrue. The event he described is not recorded as happening. Although Trump claimed to have personally witnessed it, no one else seems to have seen it, and the closest anyone has come to even understanding what he is talking about is a persistent but discounted rumor of Muslims celebrating the event in Patterson, New Jersey. This has been investigated and discredited by both the police and the press.

Having made the statement, the next day Trump called into the ABC news show *This Week*, where George Stephanopoulos challenged him about the claim. "The police say that didn't happen and all those rumors have been on the internet for some time. Did you misspeak yesterday?"

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<sup>98</sup> No source. Personal analysis.



How did Trump respond? Did he admit a mistake? Did he offer proof or evidence that the event happened as he had described? No, of course not. He responded with an ad hominem attack on the people and institutions that said it didn't happen. "It did happen. I saw it. It was on television. I saw it. George, it did happen. There were people cheering on the other side of New Jersey, where you have large Arab populations. They were cheering as the World Trade Center came down." He continued by questioning Stephanopoulos's character and motives for saying the event never happened. "*I know it might not be politically correct for you to talk about it, [emphasis added]*<sup>99</sup> but there were people cheering as the buildings came down—as those buildings came down. And that tells you something. It was well covered at the time. There were people over in New Jersey that were watching it, heavy Arab population, that were cheering as the buildings came down. Not good."<sup>100</sup>

Now, please forgive me if I spend the next two paragraphs going off on what I think is a very interesting and important tangent, but it does give a chance to reemphasize Trump's tendency toward repetition, the way he dominates a conversation and responds to an accusation by not giving the other side a chance to respond, as well as his unusual style of speaking. This statement has 110 words and 12 sentences. Aside from asserting that George Stephanopoulos cannot talk about this because it's not politically correct (thus providing a motive for Stephanopoulos's alleged dishonesty), twice he asserts simply that it happened, once he says he saw it, once he says it was on television, four times he says people were cheering, twice he mentions the large Arab population in the area where people were allegedly cheering, once he says it was well covered at the time, and then he adds, as a final piece of emphasis, that this was not good. In other words, twelve sentences, thirteen assertions, and not a single piece of new information. Instead, it's all repetition of the same basic statements that were previously made.

Because I love this sort of thing and many have noticed Trump's unusual style of communicating, let's analyze this. We have 110 words. Of these 110 words, 81 of them are one-syllable words (almost 74 percent), 25 are two-syllable words (almost 23 percent), none are three-syllable words, three are four-syllable words ("population" and "television," about 3 percent), and one, "politically," is five syllables long (slightly under 1 percent). Commentators and analysts have noticed that of all the candidates, Trump spoke at the lowest reading level. If written, it would be about a fourth-grade level. Part of understanding the Donald Trump phenomenon is understanding how he took a large number of disenfranchised, often uneducated people and made them interested in who became the next president. (For more on this, see chapter 2, "Donald Trump and His Base.")

Returning to the main point, Trump made no attempt to prove his statements but instead tried to dominate the conversation and impugn and question the motivations of his critic, George Stephanopoulos. And as he did this, Trump continued to send a repetitive series of simple, emotional charged, easy-to-understand statements aimed at anyone who might be listening.

What followed was an attempt by many to check, recheck, confirm, and disprove the claim that on September 11, 2001, large numbers of Arabs cheered in New Jersey as the buildings fell down. At first glance, it seemed unlikely that such an event would happen without it being recorded and documented or without large

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<sup>99</sup> Note how he is asserting that George Stephanopoulos cannot speak the truth about this event because of "political correctness." In other words, he's knowingly lying to appease the unnamed forces that only permit newscasters to make "politically correct" statements. And Trump had long ago convinced his supporters that "political correctness" was nothing but a bad thing that forced people to live in fear and tell falsehoods.

<sup>100</sup> Jennifer, Mercieca, *Demagogue for President: -The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump* (2020, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX), pp. 50–52.

numbers of people noticing and discussing it. Still, media outlets and others begin researching the matter. They found nothing.<sup>101</sup>

Meanwhile Trump doubled down, reasserted his claims, expanded on them,<sup>102</sup> and even demanded an apology from those who questioned his statement, the whole time failing to offer any proof of any sort whatsoever to any of his claims.

The closest anyone came to confirming the claim was a single article that ran in the *Washington Post* on September 18, 2001. It was written by Serge Kovaleski and Frederick Kunkle. While few recognize the names, today most Americans might recognize a picture of Serge Kovaleski. He suffers from a birth defect called arthrogyposis that affects his ability to move his joints. Trump's later exchange with Kovaleski became notorious.

The reason the article was unique and not supported by other reports is because it was mistaken. The *Washington Post* later retracted the article, admitting their mistake, and Trump knew it. Did Trump tell his fans and supporters? No, of course not.

Instead, at a Trump rally in Columbus, Ohio, he told the crowd that the media and the press would undoubtedly deny their own article, something that they had already done. Trump told the crowd, "I could

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<sup>101</sup> "Trump Doubles Down On Claim He Saw Thousands Cheer In N.J. On 9/11," Eyder Peralta, NPR, November 22, 2015.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/11/22/457012242/trump-doubles-down-on-claim-he-saw-thousands-cheer-on-9-11>

"Trump Insists He Witnessed Cheering Muslims on 9/11" Kim Lacapria, Snopes.

<https://www.snopes.com/news/2015/11/22/donald-trump-cheering-911/>

<sup>102</sup>

[16:40:02]

MURRAY: Now Trump is saying he watched from his Manhattan apartment as people jumped from the Twin Towers on 9/11.

TRUMP: I have a window in my apartment that specifically was aimed at the World Trade Center because of the beauty of the whole downtown Manhattan, and I watched as people jumped, and I watched the second plane come in.

MURRAY: While people were seen jumping from the towers that day, Trump's apartment in Midtown is roughly four miles from where the World Trade Center towers stood.

TRUMP: Many people jumped, and I witnessed it. I watched that.

MURRAY: Trump also stubbornly defending his widely debunked claim that there were large crowds in New Jersey celebrating the day of the 9/11 attacks, pointing to a line in a the *Washington Post* story published a week late that said law enforcement had detained people allegedly seen cheering on rooftops in Jersey City.

TRUMP: Holding tailgate style, tailgate, you know what that means? Tailgate, that means football games, Ohio State, thousands of people, in parking lots, on roofs.

MURRAY: While government officials, and even the reporter who wrote that story, say the investigation uncovered no such celebration, Trump points to his Twitter followers as evidence to the contrary.

TRUMP: So, all of a sudden, I'm getting all of these tweets, I saw it, I was there, I was this—but I saw it. I saw it.

From <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1511/24/cg.02.html>

show you how dishonest they all are. I might like that better. Let them say that. But they'll find some reason to deny it. They'll call it a typo—it was about a . . . it was a very long and winding typo. They'll try to deny it, but I don't think they'll be able to.”<sup>103</sup>

As a reminder, from the beginning Trump has encouraged his base to distrust, scorn, and ignore the media. This was done largely through a series of continuous attacks such as this one. During these attacks, when the media criticized Trump or exposed wrongdoing or dishonesty by Trump, Trump and his campaign staff would describe the reporting or statements as part of an on-going battle between Donald Trump and his enemies, the corrupt Washington D.C. establishment, the corrupt politicians who benefited from and ran the system, and the mainstream media who served the system. Trump had, after all, promised to “drain the swamp” and remove corrupt politicians and their lackeys and benefactors. If this was the case, the “denizens of the swamp” could be expected to fight back.<sup>104</sup>

As his “fans” often get their information about the world from “alternative,” less reliable, often flawed sources, and many don't read or even understand the way newspapers work, they were vulnerable to this kind of propaganda.

Now as an aside, that's 56 words. Of those, 45 or 80 percent are one-syllable words, 10 or 18 percent are two-syllable words, and 2 or 3 percent are three syllables (percentages are rounded off, thus the 101 percent). There are six sentences. Three are about the press being likely to deny the article (something they already did). One is about the press being dishonest in general. Two are about how much Trump doesn't care or enjoys it when they deny things they did. Again, no new evidence is presented. Merely attacks on journalism and the press. This is, again, an ad hominem attack, attacking the credibility, character, and competency of a critic instead of addressing the criticism itself.

Yeah, I love those numbers. Sorry.

So, how did Trump respond? With a different logical fallacy. He told the same crowd, “I received hundreds of phone calls over the couple days since I said it from people saying, ‘Mr. Trump, you're right. You're right. We saw it. We live in New Jersey. We saw it. You're right.’”<sup>105</sup> This style of argument—arguing that since many people are saying it, it must be true—is another common logical flaw. It is called “ad populum,” appealing to the people, and, quite frankly, it doesn't prove anything except a lot of people are saying something. (More on this later.) Whether or not a lot of people say something is often completely irrelevant to the truth of the matter. Perhaps more troubling is that there is no proof, zero proof, that these hundreds of people making these hundreds of phone calls (how did they get his number, I wonder?) even existed. We live in the early twenty-first century. Did not a single one of these hundreds of people put their statements on a blog or a YouTube channel? Could they not have found a single media outlet that would share their views and recollections? And, of course, did none have pictures or documents to back up their claims? (Which is, of course, why ad populum arguments are not considered valid proof.)

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<sup>103</sup> Page 52, Mercieca, Jennifer. “Demagogue for President -The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump.” (2020, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX)

<sup>104</sup> For a curious children's book style view of this world-view, you could do worse than to read Metaxs, Eric and Raglin, Tim. “Donald Drains the Swamp!” (2018. Regnery Publishing, Washington DC )

<sup>105</sup> Jennifer Mercieca, *Demagogue for President*, p. 52.

Meanwhile, Trump's then campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, spoke to Breitbart News, closely tied to Trump adviser Steve Bannon, claiming that Trump had offered the media proof of this claim. Breitbart ran the interview and the quotes but never shared the "proof."<sup>106</sup>

Soon, at a rally in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, Trump claimed that he had "very strongly and very correctly" said that "they were dancing in the street and they were dancing on rooftops. . . . taking heat because you know the liberal media they want to guard that; they didn't want that out because it's not good for them. I could have said I misspoke, I'm not big on that, am I? I'm not big on apologies."<sup>107</sup>

Despite the fact that, if true, the claim should be easy to document and prove, the only evidence that any of this actually happened was the long-retracted *Washington Post* article. What did the author of the article say, and how did Trump respond?

First, Serge Kovalski reminded people that his article had been retracted and explained that, although they had reported what they'd heard, the claims had later been disproven.

Second, while it would normally be irrelevant, it became immediately very relevant that Kovalski had a very visible birth defect. Normally, discussion would focus on the facts. In this case, however, to Trump, Kovalski's condition presented an opportunity for attack, another chance for an ad hominem argument. Rather than offer the public and the media "evidence," evidence his campaign manager had claimed to already have and already offered the press, Trump responded by mocking the reporter's disability. Another ad hominem attack.

For the record, some of his supporters claim Trump either did not mock Kovalski's disability or was not aware of it. I do not understand this. As for the former claim, video exists proving Trump mocked the reporter's disability. As for the second, while Trump says he does not know Kovalski, it must be mentioned that time and time again Trump has denied knowing or meeting people when it has easily and frequently been proven that he has met and spent time and socialized with the people who he denied knowing (see chapter 6). Kovalski has asserted that he and Trump had spent much time together, reminding people that they had known each other since the 1980s, were on a first name basis, and that he had interviewed Trump on multiple occasions in his office at Trump Tower and flown with Trump on Trump's personal airplane.<sup>108</sup>

Trump responded with further attacks on Kovalski personally and on the press and journalism in general. Having impugned Kovalski's character, he also accused the reporter of taking advantage of his disability by defending himself from Trump's childish mockery and intentionally using the controversy to attract attention and promote his career.<sup>109</sup> Again, another ad hominem attack. Again, no evidence that the event that he claimed "hundreds" of people had witnessed had actually happened.

There are still people out there accepting Donald Trump's arguments that (A) Arabs in New Jersey cheered and held parties when the Twin Towers fell down, and (B) Trump did not know the reporter and never mocked him. Some of these people will argue with you for hours over this, particularly on social media. They will send you links to videos and demand you watch them immediately.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, .age 54.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, page 56.

<sup>110</sup> One such person sent me a link and was quite offended I did not drop everything I was doing immediately and watch it. When I did watch it, I found it completely unconvincing.

It's kind of sad.

Need another example? Hugh Hewitt, a conservative radio show host, reminded Trump about his promise to release his tax returns. "A year ago, you told me on my radio show—the audio and transcript are out there on YouTube—that you would release your tax returns."

Trump's response: "'First of all, very few people listen to your radio show. That's the good news. Let me just tell you—which happens to be true. Check out the ratings.'"

For the record, Trump still has not released his tax returns, and it's been over three years. He now has lawyers in court fighting subpoenas to see his tax returns.<sup>111</sup>

## Ad Baculum: Threats of Force or Intimidation

Though Trump often responds to things with insults and name calling, other times his responses take the form of threats of assault, violence, even murder or assassination. Often, he makes these statements in a way where he simultaneously seems to both advocate and deny personally advocating such attacks, i.e., a "I'm not saying that it would be good if he got hurt, but some might think it would be good if he got hurt. Ha-ha, know what I mean?" type statement. (See chapter 6.)

One classic case involved the treatment of protesters at a Trump rally on March 1, 2016, in Louisville, Kentucky. It is documented that Trump shouted "get 'em out of here" and gestured at at least four protestors. Members of the crowd grabbed the protesters and dragged them out. As they did, Trump said, "Don't hurt 'em." Then joked, "If I say 'go get 'em,' I get in trouble with the press." The protestors say they were pushed and shoved by the crowd, and one of them, age seventeen, was punched in the stomach.

The protesters sued Trump for inciting violence. The suit took a long and complicated path (like so many Trump legal matters) and ultimately wound up in federal court. On September 10, 2019, over three and a half years later, the court decided that Trump was not liable for provoking the violence.

The judge in the case, US Circuit Judge David McKeague, wrote, "If words have meaning, the admonition 'don't hurt 'em' cannot be reasonably construed as an urging to 'hurt 'em.'"<sup>112</sup>

The problem with the judge's argument, of course, is that sometimes through tone and context words can be used to indicate the opposite of what they appear to mean when written on paper. Trump knows this and uses it to his advantage regularly.

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"Trump Mocking Disabled Reporter Thoroughly DEBUNKED," uploaded on November 3, 2016 by HumanDrillBit. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEODcXcP3Zw&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1a3iITVTaQYcZefYyi\\_filFVfQEKTD1pvBfUsk3nZFcurNuzmiuEGkM70](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEODcXcP3Zw&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1a3iITVTaQYcZefYyi_filFVfQEKTD1pvBfUsk3nZFcurNuzmiuEGkM70)

<sup>111</sup> Reported in multiple places. "Trump Insults Hugh Hewitt When Asked About Tax Returns: 'Very Few People Listen to Your Radio Show,'" J. D. Durkin, MEDIAite, February 25, 2016. <https://www.mediaite.com/tv/trump-insults-hugh-hewitt-when-asked-about-tax-returns-very-few-people-listen-to-your-radio-show/>

<sup>112</sup> "Sixth Circuit Clears Trump in Suit Over Rally Violence," Kevin Koeninger, September 11, 2018. Courthouse News Service. <https://www.courthousenews.com/sixth-circuit-clears-trump-in-suit-over-rally-violence/>

One of the most notorious examples of this occurred when Trump spoke of Hillary Clinton at a rally on August 9, 2016:

*Hillary wants to abolish, essentially abolish, the Second Amendment. [crowd boos] By the way [crowd boos some more] and if she gets to pick, if she gets to pick her judges, nothing you can do, folks. Although the Second Amendment people, maybe there is. I don't know. [crowd laughs and cheers] But I will tell you what, that will be a horrible day, if, if Hillary gets to put her judges—right now, we are tied and you see what's going on.<sup>113</sup>*

Did Donald Trump advocate or make a joke about people shooting Hillary Clinton? The crowd that laughed seemed to think so. Many people outside the rally were quite concerned. If so, if he had encouraged or made threats of violence against an opponent or critic, then he made an “ad baculum” attack. But, legally speaking, due to his use of the phrase “I don’t know,” it’s difficult to say he did with absolute certainty. And that is an example of “paralipsis,” the “the someone should do this but maybe not and I’m not saying they should, ha-ha” style of speaking that Trump uses on a regular basis.

## Big Ideas and Branded Ideas

Part of the popularity of Donald Trump is that he uses “big ideas.” Often, big simple ideas, but ideas that people can easily remember and visualize. Build the wall, Muslims ban, drain the swamp (again, easily remembered, simple, two- or three-word phrases, virtual slogans). Realistic or not, each of these offers an easily visualized big idea, promising big change, in the way that Trump alone would promise. Ethical, desirable, or not, the scope and style of these ideas made them take on a life of their own. Even the people who oppose these ideas the most, even the people who consider them the most ridiculous and the most un-American, would tell their friends about this man and his “crazy ideas,” spreading his brand and word of his proposals even further.

This approach also established Trump as a challenger, an outsider, someone who promised he would shake things up, get things done, and bring great change. To people who are frustrated, as much of Trump’s base is, such proposals resonate. They shout “I am not like the others here. I know what you want, and I will give it to you.” By comparison, how many proposals, big proposals, realistic or otherwise, can you remember from any of the other Republican candidates of 2016? These big ideas established Trump as the challenger, the man who need to be responded to. To have a mission, or simply be perceived as having a mission, one must speak of big ideas. The world of Trump and his base is a world of strong emotion and big, simple ideas.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Jennifer Mercieca, *Demagogue for President*, page 56.

Now, if you are wondering, that’s 72 words. 55 Fifty-five or 76% percent were are one- syllable words, 9 or 13 percent% were are two- syllable words, 7 or 10 percent% were are three- syllable words, and 1 or 1 percent% was is a four- syllable word, “essentially.” While that’s a higher level of vocabulary than most Trump statements, among the 7 seven three- syllable words used, two were “Hillary” and two others were “amendment,” as in “second Second amendmentAmendment.” make Make of that what you will.

<sup>114</sup> “Seven GENIUS things you can LEARN from DONALD TRUMP (even if you hate him),” Even Carmichael, July 4, 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtOLIEu8Slk>

Some argue that these big ideas are part of the narrative that Trump, the storyteller, offers his audience/fans/base. “There is a fairy tale–like aspect to all his talk and presentation, because he wants to take charge of the narrative,” Zipes says. “Most fairy tales are stories about hope. Whether he does it consciously or not, Trump has found a way to narrate a story in which he is the star.” Zipes is a college professor whose academic focus is fairy tales.<sup>115</sup>

## Social Proof, Name Dropping, And Appeals To Authority

A “social proof” is a category of rhetorical techniques where claims are reinforced not by evidence or logic but instead by saying something like “everyone knows it” or “lots of people believe it” or “smart people think it’s a good idea.” In other words, the “proof” for the claim is not really proof at all. Instead it is more like peer pressure or appeals to authority. While such styles of argument are often included on lists of logical fallacies to be avoided, the sad fact is they do convince a lot of people. Trump uses them regularly.

For instance, when challenged on his performance or standing in some debates, particularly by journalists or interviewers, he has responded with, “Everyone says I won all of those debates.”<sup>116</sup>

According to author Charlie Houpert, creator of the very interesting and informative YouTube channel *Charisma on Command*, “If everyone in the world thinks Donald Trump won, then that is very, very powerful.”

He also says, “We look to see what the herd is doing, and we do that especially when we are overwhelmed with information.” And Trump is very, very good at overwhelming people with information or misinformation. Houpert elaborates: “Trump knows this. And he is very, very careful about avoiding negative social proof as well.”<sup>117</sup>

If you watch enough Donald Trump interviews, it’s not uncommon to see him caught in a lie or challenged on facts. When this happens, a common response from Trump is to interrupt the interviewer as soon as possible, then repeat, repeat, and repeat the claim without giving the interviewer a chance to elaborate or reaffirm the statement. Then he shifts into giving his résumé or “elevator pitch” of his accomplishments, real, alleged, and disproven, repeating them without allowing the interviewer a chance to repeat his challenging statements. Then he follows this with statements about how “a lot of people say” or “a lot of people know” or “everyone says” or “a lot of people really like what I am doing” or “I get hundreds of calls and letters each day from people who say ‘Donald Trump, we like what you are doing. Keep it up.’”<sup>118</sup>

Along the same lines, another Donald Trump quote:

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<sup>115</sup> “Inside the fairy tale mind of Trump,” Jon Allsop, CJR, September 27, 2017. [https://www.cjr.org/special\\_report/trump-fairy-tale.php](https://www.cjr.org/special_report/trump-fairy-tale.php)

<sup>116</sup> “Donald Trump’s Debates: 5 Mental Tricks You Didn’t Notice,” uploaded on February 8, 2016, *Charisma on Command*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LR6EA91zLo&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=2>

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LR6EA91zLo&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=2>

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

*But I began it talking about other things. And those things are things I am very good at. And maybe that's why I'm center stage. People saw it. People liked it. People respected it. People like what I say. People respect what I say.*<sup>119</sup>

Forty-four words and the word “people” is in there five times. Repeat, repeat, repeat, and use social proofs.

For instance, Trump frequently mentioned his standing in the polls during the debates and still seems quite concerned with his numbers in the polls. When his positions or desires contradict those of more informed people, when the evidence presented by experts and scholars shows problems with his ideas, how does he respond? According to Jennifer Mercieca, one common way Trump responds is with “appeals to the crowd, the wisdom of the crowd, his crowd knows more than the elite, the corrupt, establishment politicians, the media.”<sup>120</sup>

One thing I find particularly disturbing is the way he not only claims many people like things or he is receiving calls, letters, and emails from large numbers of people, but that often no one else is able to find any evidence these anonymous crowds of people actually exist. For instance, in the above example of the disproven claim that large numbers of Muslims in New Jersey had cheered on September 11, he claimed “hundreds” of people called him saying they had seen these too. However, none of these “hundreds” of people were ever produced.

But when it suits his fancy, he also turns around and does things in the opposite way. When challenged on the wisdom or specific details of a plan, he often responds by naming a well-known and respected person and saying, “Well, I spoke to [famous person] and [famous person] likes it.”

This is almost the polar opposite of an ad populum claim. The implication is that if someone with a title or special standing likes Trump or one of his proposals, then it must be good. This is called an “appeal to authority” and is another logical fallacy.

According to Mercieca, “The message is received. That is, ‘Smart people support Trump.’” She continued: “He doesn’t fall back on the merits of the tax plan. He falls back on the social proof and the appeal to authority.”

Again, Trump often claims support from unnamed authorities, “some very smart people,” whose identities or real opinions cannot be verified or confirmed.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “Donald Trump’s Incredible Powers of Persuasion,” uploaded on February 1, 2016, *Charisma on Command*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvVfj0ov8k8>

<sup>120</sup> “7 Public Speaking Tips We Can Learn from Donald Trump,” uploaded on November 13, 2017, VICE News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05tp0VscN8A&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=7>

<sup>121</sup> “Donald Trump’s Persuasion Techniques,” uploaded on September 26, 2016, DIY Mentalism.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrqrvCHc5DA&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=17>



## Nobody Knew and Very Few People Know

Keep an eye out for these two phrases when Trump speaks. I'm not saying that they mean "I just learned . . ." but they might mean, "I just learned . . ." (As I've noted, that "I'm not saying . . . but . . ." speech pattern is called "paralipsis" and Trump uses it a lot.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> "Language Expert: Donald Trump's Way of Speaking is 'Oddly Adolescent,'" YouTube, uploaded by MSNBC, September 16, 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phsU1vVHOQI&t=19s>



## Chapter Four

# Donald Trump's Techniques of Emotional Manipulation

Donald Trump: “So, yeah, there’s a certain energy you have to get. You have to build up the energy.”

Jimmy Fallon: “But you don’t have notes. You just go out with no notes. I mean, did you, do you . . . just make up stuff? [crowd laughs] How do you remember, how do you remember numbers? How do you remember stats?”

Donald Trump: “You know, you know, I’m blessed with a great memory but it’s very interesting. When I speak, when I speak in front of large crowds, when you are reading a speech, it’s much easier. But you don’t get the reaction. We would not have twenty thousand people in Dallas, as an example. You don’t get the reaction, a lot of people watch, it was live, the . . . you know, when I did Alabama, it was really an amazing, it was like, you know, a love fest. If you’re reading or if you have a teleprompter, or if you have a teleprompter or in any way are reading a speech, or even looking down all the time at notes, you’re not going to get the reaction from the crowd, so I go out and I really, you know, it’s a riskier proposition, ’cause when you read, you’re not gonna make any mistake, other than stumbles, you’re not gonna make any mistake. When you do it just off the cuff, now, I know what I’m gonna say, but it’s a riskier thing, it’s a much better, when you get it right, it’s a thing of beauty.”

Jimmy Fallon: “Who would be the person at the debates that you are targeting? Who is your biggest threat?”

Donald Trump: “I just think, in terms of targeting, any voter. That’s what I’m targeting. I want them to vote. I want them to love Trump. And I want them to know I’ll do a great job.”

SEGMENT OF DONALD TRUMP INTERVIEW BY JIMMY FALLON, *THE TONIGHT SHOW*, SEPTEMBER 11, 2015 <sup>123</sup> <sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> “Donald Trump Talks About Preparing for Presidential Debates,” uploaded on September 12, 2015, *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIQctpKN3Hc>

By the way, this actually is a very interesting interview. Fallon was very friendly and went easy on him and as a result, Trump is much more relaxed and calmer than in many interviews.

<sup>124</sup> Just as a point of interest, this was transcribed and quoted as the following in the *Forbes* article below: “When I speak in front of large crowds, if you read a speech—it’s much easier—but you don’t get the reaction. If you’re reading or you have a teleprompter or even looking down all the time at notes, you’re not going to get the reaction from the crowd. It’s a riskier proposition because when you read you’re not going to make any mistake. When you do it just off the cuff, it’s a riskier thing but when when you get it right, it’s a thing of beauty.” I read it and thought, “That does not sound like Trump’s style of speaking at all.”

Although all politicians use emotions and appeal to emotion to sway crowds and manipulate people, Trump does it more than most, often bypassing rational argument and fact completely. And he's very good at it. Furthermore, he often gets his base to react so emotionally that they reject rationality and science.

## Fear

Donald Trump uses fear to motivate and manipulate his listeners to an unprecedented extent. Fear is one of the most primal and powerful emotions that a person can feel. If something causes fear, it captures our attention, increases our adrenaline, motivates us to action, and reduces our ability to think carefully and critically.<sup>125</sup> When people are afraid, often their first responses involve trying to become unafraid. Often this means becoming angry and then mean.

If you are feeling sociopathic, there are a lot of advantages to having a large number of people who are feeling angry and mean and are motivated to act in the ways you encourage them to act. Demagogues and tyrants have known this for millennia. Some illustrative Trump quotes:

“There is a great hatred of America by large segments of the Moo-zlim population. Twenty-five percent agreed that violence against Americans here in the United States is justified. Sharia law authorizes murder of nonbelievers, beheadings, and more and more unthinkable acts. It's going to get worse and worse. You're going to have more World Trade Centers. It's going to get worse and worse, folks.”<sup>126</sup>

“When Mexico sends their people, they're not sending their best. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they're rapists.”<sup>127</sup>

“China is taking our jobs. They're taking our money.”<sup>128</sup>

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“Donald Trump Reveals His Best Public Speaking Tip On The Tonight Show,” Carmine Gallo, Forbes, September 13, 2015.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/carminegallo/2015/09/13/donald-trump-reveals-his-best-public-speaking-tip-on-the-tonight-show/#5efedb341af8>

<sup>125</sup> Remember the quote from Frank Herbert's classic science fiction novel *Dune*? The chant the Bene Gesserit are taught as part of their mental disciplines? “I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.” Remember how a great deal of martial arts or emergency services training is intended to bring you to the point where you can fight and act without being controlled or having your rational brain reduced by fear? Fear can easily make you stupid, cause you to make mistakes, and get yourself and others killed.

<sup>126</sup> “Donald Trump's Incredible Powers Of Persuasion,” uploaded on February 1, 2016, *Charisma on Command*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvVfj0ov8k8>

In this one, Trump is clearly reading from a prepared statement for much of it. The point where he stops reading is where he says, “It's going to get worse and worse.” Notice how the average length and number of syllables drops dramatically at that exact point.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

“Syrians are now being caught at the southern border. We don’t know who they are. They could be ISIS.”<sup>129</sup>

All these are Trump quotes clearly intended to produce fear.

Notice that the targets of fear in his 2016 campaign were out-groups, nonvoters. Interestingly and perhaps disturbingly, as the 2020 election approaches more and more of Trump’s targets, the people or groups of people that he uses to cause fear in his base, are other Americans. In other words, Trump is now encouraging Americans to fear each other, just the opposite of what a president should do, and that is a very dangerous thing.

Finally, after causing fear in his listeners, Donald Trump offers himself as the solution to the problem. If you are scared, then support Donald Trump. Who let this danger be created in the first place, who let it continue? The political insiders. The politicians and the establishment, including the press. Who can help you? Who can save you? Donald Trump, the man who is not part of that establishment, a man who (allegedly) ran for office to end the danger, and make things good (just like they used to be, whenever that was).

The message “Donald Trump is the only one who can save us from the scary things” is reinforced by the way Trump dominates and often humiliates his opponents and rivals in debates and in the media. (Discussed elsewhere in this book.)

Donald Trump–type promises like “no one will ever mess with us” (an actual quote describing what he promised to do with the military) make it very clear that he is promising to end the fear and make things good (“again,” like, whenever they were apparently supposed to have been better).

“We’re going to start winning so much that you’re going to get used to winning instead of getting used to losing. Whether it’s military, whether it’s trade, health care, we always lose. We’re going to always win again.”<sup>130</sup>

Another “win” quote? Yes. This one has thirty-eight words, with only three of them being “win” or “winning,” but it clearly follows the same theme and pattern. Two things. If you watch the video, this is obviously a rehearsed and practiced statement. I suspect it was written by someone else. Second, note the way he uses gestures and eye contact to emphasize points and communicate alleged sincerity. (See chapter 6, Donald Trump and Body Language.)

## Herd Behaviors

Humans, in precivilized times, lived in small groups wandering and seeking food and shelter. They were a life-form that often responded not as a solitary creature but instead as part of a group. At times, they show what can loosely be described as “herd behaviors.”

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<sup>129</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>130</sup> [Ibid.](#)

In some of his excellent *Charisma on Command* videos, Charlie Houpert, author and expert on charisma, communication, and public speaking, states that Trump uses communication techniques that rely on herd behaviors. In other words, he encourages what some might describe as a “mob mentality.” Under such circumstances, people become very emotional, irrational, and tend to follow the group without thinking. When in such a state, people can be very dangerous and easily become violent. And, in an election time, they can sometimes stop analyzing facts and weighing issues and instead just follow the lead of their friends and perceived community, voting as they do.

According to Houpert (who introduces himself as “Charlie” on his videos), humans are more likely to do this under certain conditions. One of these is when they are scared. And it’s very clear that Trump is encouraging people to be scared. A second is when they are confused and suffering from information overload, something else Trump is a master of creating. Under such conditions, people tend to follow the lead of others with little thought.

## Dehumanize People and Humiliate People

Donald Trump speaks bluntly, and he often speaks of people in ways that make it easy to forget that they are human at all. “Murderers,” “rapists,” “animals,” and so on are commonly used words in the Trump vocabulary. “Mexicans,” “Muslims,” and “Syrians” are described as people we would not wish to have as neighbors or in our community, until it’s easy to forget that “Mexicans,” “Muslims,” and “Syrians” are humans, too. (As I write this, my upstairs neighbors are an elderly Albanian couple, “Mooz-lims” as Trump would say. My biggest problem with them is when their four-year-old grandson comes to visit and, from time to time, scampers happily on my ceiling. Needless to say, I don’t find them threatening.)

Lately the rhetoric has shifted. Now we’re hearing about the scary threats, all much exaggerated from “antifa,” “Black Lives Matter,” and “extreme left Democrats advocating socialism and Marxism.” Still, the message is the same. These evildoers are out to destroy us and need not be considered human.

Which begs two important questions. The first, why does he do this?

Several reasons.

First, the perceived existence of an outside threat brings a group together more tightly. And, as discussed in chapter 1, with today’s highly segmented media and social media networks, once a group is formed, they can easily reinforce each other’s views, resulting in an intensification and increasing extremeness of their beliefs. Remember “Pizzagate”? Have you noticed the spread of a strange and bizarre belief in something called “QAnon”? Either of these is evidence that once a group gets formed, turns inward, and starts cutting out contradicting information, their beliefs can get really, really strange and weird, really, really fast.

Second, fear. As noted above, Donald Trump creates fear and encourages fear to achieve his goals. Wildly exaggerating threats that outside groups pose and depicting their members as savage, irrational people who wish to hurt and destroy the American people for no reason except that they are evil and savage increases fear. Fear is good for Donald Trump.

Third, earlier in this chapter it was noted that herd behavior increases when people are scared. Trump's base are more likely to vote and listen to him and follow the example of other members of his base without hesitation or question when scared. Fear increases their support for Trump.

Fourth, scared people who feel savage, irrational outsiders are determined to hurt them are much more likely to violate social norms and behave badly. Why is this important? As I write, Donald Trump recently encouraged his supporters to vote twice, once by mail and once in person. This is a serious violation of voting laws. (Some deny he ever did this. Paralipsis again.)

Finally, as we are seeing with the border wall, increasing fear, encouraging emotionalism, reducing rationality, and stoking irrational fear of perceived outsiders causes a lot of different things to happen and when this happens, there's a lot of opportunity for graft. Recently, Steve Bannon was arrested for border wall-related fraud. Meanwhile, portions of what has been built are in danger of collapsing, making one wonder if the builders spent the money they received properly. When those kids, children of people dehumanized by Donald Trump, were separated from their parents at the border, why in the world were many then flown to New York State to be housed and fed by agencies connected with Betsy DeVos and her family?<sup>131</sup> Ignoring the morality of separating the children from their families, were there no closer, less expensive ways to house them? Fear, and fear caused by Donald Trump, can cloud a situation and let a lot of graft be hidden.

So that's the why. Now we come to the how.

First, Trump often uses rhetoric designed to produce emotion—primal emotions and primal fears. To quote Mercieca again, “Trump’s rhetoric was designed to appeal to his followers’ fears but also appeal to their sense of disgust because—on a very basic level—what causes us disgust should be purged.”<sup>132</sup>

Second, through exaggeration and distortion. As with so much that Trump has said on several subjects, when he has spoken of large numbers of Americans harmed or murdered by illegal aliens, he uses no time frames and gives few sources. When he speaks of a ban on Muslim immigration to prevent Muslim terrorism, he fails to mention that not only were none of the September 11 terrorists immigrants (they had all overstayed business visas) but also not one of his several attempts at a ban on immigrants from primarily Muslim nations ever included Saudi Arabia, a nation he has close business ties with.

His talk of rewriting or reinterpreting the Constitution so that the dreaded and completely exaggerated threat that “anchor babies” will stop bringing in the ongoing invasion also produces irrational fears. For the record, if a child is born in the USA, he or she does indeed become a US citizen. Globally speaking, this is indeed a valuable thing for a child to have, and many parents around the world are willing to go to great length

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<sup>131</sup> “Hundreds of Separated Children Have Quietly Been Sent to New York,” Liz Robbins, *New York Times*, June 20, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/20/nyregion/children-separated-border-new-york.html>

“DeVos Family Money Is All Over The News Right Now,” Anya Kamenetz, NPR, August 2, 2018.

<https://www.npr.org/2018/08/02/630112697/devos-family-money-is-all-over-the-news-right-now>.

“Christian Non-Profit Faces Scrutiny Over Government Foster Care Contract for Separated Children,” Dan MacGuill, Snopes, June 26, 2018.

<https://www.snopes.com/news/2018/06/26/bethany-christian-services-family-separation-betsy-devos/>

“Some Contractors Housing Migrant Children Are Familiar to Trump’s Inner Circle,” Ben Protes, Manny Fernandez, and Kitty Bennett, *New York Times*, July 4, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/04/us/migrant-families-contractors-campaign-contributions.html>

<sup>132</sup> Jennifer Mercieca, *Demagogue in Chief: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump*, (2020, Texas A & M University Press, College Station, TX), p. 111.

to obtain it for their children. However, as far as their parents go, it is only later, as an adult, that they can sponsor their parents or other family members to come live in the USA, and prior to that they must show sufficient proof of income to be able to care for them. So giving birth to an “anchor baby” is not a path to a quick and easy legal right to live in the USA but perhaps at best the start of process where one might be able to immigrate in a couple decades.

And then there’s the way Trump distorts the family reunification aspects of the immigration system, relabeling them as “chain migration,” despite having personally benefited from it. (Two of Trump’s wives were immigrants, his mother was an immigrant, and both of his paternal grandparents were immigrants. Four of those five people used family ties when coming to live here or to later bring other family members.)<sup>133</sup>

There’s a story that Trump likes to tell about a person who takes in a sick and injured poisonous snake and tries to nurse it back to health, only to get bitten, . . . BECAUSE that’s what poisonous snakes do. And he tells it to illustrate that illegal immigrants will hurt you, even if you are nice to them.<sup>134</sup>

## Audience Participation

“I always hear about the elite. You know, the elite. They’re elite? I think, you know what, I think we’re the elites. They’re not the elites.”<sup>135</sup>

Mercieca has spoken about how Donald Trump often speaks of “his beautiful people,” his followers who are never going to desert him.

Trump often addresses his audience as if it were a private conversation. He uses phrases like “you know” and “right?” in a way that indicates he is engaging *with* the audience, forming a bond with them, rather than just speaking *to* or *at* the audience. He asks his audiences questions like, “Which do you like better? ‘Made in America’ or ‘Made in the USA?’” or “Which is better? ‘Person of the Year’ or ‘Man of the Year?’” or my favorite, “Everybody, who likes me in this room?”<sup>136</sup>

“There’s unbelievable love in this room. It’s all the same.” [Someone in crowd yells, “We love you Donald.”] “I love you, too. I love you. Who said that? Stand up!” [He points to the audience.]<sup>137</sup>

## Find a Common Grievance

“You know you’re not allowed to use hairspray anymore because it affects the ozone, you know that, right? Hairspray is not like it used to be. It used to be real good.”

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<sup>133</sup> You can learn more about this in several places, included posts on my blog, <https://history-for-fun-profit-and-insight.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>134</sup> Jennifer Mirceica, *Demagogue for President*, pp. 113–114.

<sup>135</sup> “7 Public Speaking Tips We Can Learn From Donald Trump,” uploaded on November 13, 2017, VICE News. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05tp0VscN8A&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=7>

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*



Real Donald Trump quote from a Trump rally<sup>138</sup>

Like so much that Trump does, at first glance, the above statement seems simply moronic and weird, easily dismissed, like the candidate himself as well as his supporters. Most intelligent people who are interested in substantial issues affecting the nation and the world would prefer to hear thoughtful discussions on how best to address and improve things. Yet when examined more deeply, again like so much Trump does, it is a carefully calculated, well thought out communication tactic that serves several purposes.

Finding a common grievance is one of the ways Donald Trump builds an emotional bond with his audience. While some of these grievances might seem foolish and unimportant (Has the quality of hair spray really declined? Or have we finally established exactly when they believed America was truly “great”? Back when hairspray damaged the ozone layer?), this is an effective way for Trump, a man born to wealth from New York City, to quickly develop the perception of a bond and common link with the people who make up his base, despite a huge gap in wealth and opportunity.

According to Mark Liberman, a professor of linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, “When he talks about politics you get the impression he’s talking about a well-rehearsed peeve.”<sup>139</sup>

No doubt about it. When Trump speaks he complains a lot, and about a lot of things, not just hairspray. Roads, airports, use of the Spanish language, politically active athletes. To his listeners, this increases their sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo, their sense that he understands, and their sense that Trump is a man with a mission who will make sweeping positive changes from his place of power.

Mercieca points out that this is just one more way he establishes a common enemy shared by him and his base, turns them against that enemy, and then polarizes people to take sides.<sup>140</sup> Yes, hairspray can be a common enemy that bonds and unites people. Seriously. Foolish as it sounds.

## Leverage the Underdog Effect

America loves the underdog. There’s something in our culture where we love to see the little guy rise up and, against all odds, defeat overwhelming forces and achieve success. And if one knows how to leverage this, one can sway a lot of people and get them to root for you and support you.

And Donald Trump knows this fully well.

Trump has been criticized and his misstatements and misconduct exposed by all major news networks, countless celebrities, heads of foreign nations, the important members of both major American political parties, academia, famous scientists, and pretty much everyone who has watched him and was not making money off of him. Even the pope has called out Donald Trump on his behavior. Perhaps this is why he had to fill speaking

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

slots at the Republican convention with his children and their wives and girlfriends. (I don't know about you, but I was just dying to learn what Eric Trump's wife had to say.)

And when this happens, how does he respond? Does he apologize and change his behavior? Of course not. Instead he doubles down, recommits to whatever lie or atrocity he has committed himself to, and then complains people are picking on him, "the little guy." He is, he reminds us, not part of the establishment, not playing the game by the old rules and instead working to get things done and give the American people what they deserve (he says). Therefore, all the forces of the establishment are trying to silence and destroy him so they can go back to doing things the old way, where the American people suffered and the establishment benefited.

Does the historical narrative back this up? No. Has Trump benefited from government and bureaucratic corruption in many ways? Undoubtedly. If you were to look at the list of wedding guests at his wedding with Melania, a list that included the Clintons and multiple billionaires and politicians and liberal entertainers, does it look like the guest list for an establishment outsider? Absolutely not. Nevertheless, he says it. People believe it. It works for him.

If you watch, Donald Trump whines a lot. He has even gone so far as to say he has been treated more unfairly than any president in history. While an absolutely absurd statement, this is not just idle whining by a coward who's never faced a real physical challenge in his life. This is also an attempt to leverage the underdog effect. And with some members of his base it works.<sup>141</sup>

## Use of Suspense

Donald Trump likes to hold people's attention and keep them overloaded with information and their brains cluttered. He also seems to really enjoy being the center of attention, just apparently for the sake of being the center of attention.

And one of the ways he does this is through the use of suspense. Often instead of saying, "Here's my latest decision," and then saying it, what he often does is say, "I have made a decision on this important matter [e.g., the Paris Climate Accords] and will announce it next week." By doing so, he keeps the audience, in this case pretty much the entire world, in suspense, their attention fixed on him and wondering what he is going to do next.<sup>142</sup>

"He is the modern P. T. Barnum," says Jennifer Mercieca.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> "Donald Trump's Persuasion Techniques," uploaded on September 26, 2016, DIY Mentalism.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrqrwCHc5DA&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=17>

<sup>142</sup> "Is Donald Trump Treating The Presidency Like a Magic Show?" NBC Left Field, uploaded on July 6, 2017, NBC News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPGtUvkDlQ&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=19>

<sup>143</sup> "7 Public Speaking Tips We Can Learn From Donald Trump," uploaded on November 13, 2017, VICE News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05tp0VscN8A&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=7>

## Chapter Five

# Donald Trump and the Truth

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN DONALD TRUMP AND GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS, ABC NEWS, JULY 31, 2016:

STEPHANOPOULOS: Let's talk about Russia. You made a lot of headlines with Russia this week. What exactly is your relationship with Vladimir Putin?

TRUMP: I have no relationship to . . . with him. I have no relationship with him.

STEPHANOPOULOS: But if you have no relationship with Putin, then why did you say in 2013, I do have a relationship. In 2014, I spoke—

TRUMP: Because he has said nice things about me over the years. I remember years ago, he said something—many years ago, he said something very nice about me. I said something good about him when Larry King was on. This was a long time ago. And I said he is a tough cookie or something to that effect.

[CUT]

STEPHANOPOULOS: Yet you said for three years, '13, '14, and '15, that you did have a relationship with him.

TRUMP: No, look, what . . . what do you call a relationship? I mean he treats me . . .

STEPHANOPOULOS: I'm asking you.

TRUMP: . . . with great respect. I have no relationship with Putin. I don't think I've ever met him. I never met him. I don't think I've ever met him.

STEPHANOPOULOS: You would know if you did.

TRUMP: I think so.

STEPHANOPOULOS: I mean if he—

TRUMP: Yes, I think so. So I've . . . I don't think I've ever met him. I mean if he's in the same room or something. But I don't think so.

STEPHANOPOULOS: But a . . . I just want to clear this up, because you did say on three different occasions you had a relationship with him. Now you say there is not.

TRUMP: Well, I don't know what it means by having a relationship. I mean he was saying very good things about me, but I don't have a relationship with him. I didn't meet him. I haven't spent time with him. I didn't have dinner with him. I didn't go hiking with him. I don't know—and I wouldn't know him from Adam except I see his picture and I would know what he looks like.

[CUT]

STEPHANOPOULOS: Then why did you soften the GOP platform on Ukraine?

TRUMP: I wasn't involved in that. Honestly, I was not involved.

STEPHANOPOULOS: Your people were.

TRUMP: Yes. I was not involved in that. I'd like to . . . I'd have to take a look at it. But I was not involved in that.

STEPHANOPOULOS: Do you know what they did?

TRUMP: They softened it, I heard, but I was not involved.

STEPHANOPOULOS: They took away the part of the platform calling for the provision of lethal weapons to Ukraine to defend themselves. Why is that a good idea?

TRUMP: Well, look, you know, I have my own ideas. He's not going into Ukraine, OK? Just so you understand. He's not going to go into Ukraine, all right? You can mark it down and you can put it down, you can take it anywhere you want.

STEPHANOPOULOS: Well, he's already there, isn't he?

TRUMP: OK, well, he's there in a certain way, but I'm not there yet. You have Obama there. And frankly, that whole part of the world is a mess under Obama, with all the strength that you're talking about and all of the power of NATO and all of this, in the meantime, he's going where . . . he takes . . . takes Crimea, he's sort of . . . I mean . . .

STEPHANOPOULOS: But you said you might recognize that.

TRUMP: I'm going to take a look at it. But, you know, the people of Crimea, from what I've heard, would rather be with Russia than where they were. And you have to look at that also.

[CUT]

STEPHANOPOULOS: You said you have no investments in Russia. But do you owe any money to Russian individuals and institutions?

TRUMP: No. Not.

STEPHANOPOULOS: No?

TRUMP: The primary thing I did what Russia . . . I bought a house in Palm Beach at a bankruptcy. It was a bankrupt, you know, person. I bought it from the banks. I bought it for about \$40 million. I sold it for \$100 million to a Russian. That was probably five years ago. And that was primarily it.

STEPHANOPOULOS: You partner now with—

TRUMP: Now, well, I sell—

STEPHANOPOULOS: (INAUDIBLE) Grand—

TRUMP: Will I sell . . . many years ago. I don't think they're Russian. I think there were other people, but there were various partners. Will I sell condos to Russians on occasion? Probably. I mean I do that. I have a lot of condos. I do that. But I have no relationship to Russia whatsoever.

STEPHANOPOULOS: No debts?

TRUMP: No debts. I have very little debt to anybody. I don't need debt. You know, it's very interesting, I'm so liquid, I don't need debt. And if I need debt, if I want debt, I can get it from banks in New York City very easily.

STEPHANOPOULOS: You know where I'm going to take this next. Americans could be assured on that if they saw your tax returns.

TRUMP: My tax returns are very simple. They're under a minor audit, a routine audit, as they have been for many years. Every year I get audited. Now, I don't know if you get audited but I have friends . . .

STEPHANOPOULOS: I've been audited.

TRUMP: . . . who are very wealthy that never have been audited. I say—you get audited. I get audited every year. I'm under a routine, audited like routine. And I've been for years, every year.

STEPHANOPOULOS: Is there something—

(CROSSTALK)<sup>144</sup>

When I started this book, I grappled a bit with whether it was appropriate, beneficial, or biased to call Donald Trump a liar. At this point, having spent hours upon hours analyzing the behavior of Donald Trump, there's no dancing around the issue. Donald Trump is a liar, a pathological liar.

It's simply a case of when and how.

## Simplification

When Donald Trump promises big things, he often oversimplifies problems. While on one hand the simplification of complex problems usually produces unworkable proposals that do not achieve the desired goals, unrealistic proposals that hinge on a simplified view of the world do have a strong appeal with many voters. Just think how many times the phrase “bomb them back into the stone age!” has been shouted and how few times it actually worked.

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<sup>144</sup> Transcript for *This Week*, ABC News, July 31, 2016.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/week-transcript-donald-trump-vice-president-joe-biden/story?id=41020870>

Donald Trump tends to simplify. Not only are his proposals big in both scope and goals, they also tend to be easy to understand. Remember, winning an election takes a whole different skill set than actually solving the problems of a nation.

There are many ways Donald Trump simplifies issues.

## False dichotomies

When Trump speaks, describing issues, he often speaks using false dichotomies. There's a tendency to see things as black and white, good and bad, with two opposing sides and little in between or few other options. For instance, responding to the Covid-19 pandemic is often presented as a choice between social distancing, masks, and precautions like handwashing or simply ignoring these recommendations and re-opening the economy virtually as if nothing was happening.<sup>145</sup> Or there was the time he told congress that they could either focus on "ridiculous partisan investigations" (into himself and his administration) or focus on the economy. Obviously, both could happen at the same time.<sup>146</sup> Or an often stated premise that the only options for relations with North Korea were that they could either get rid of their nuclear weapons and we could live in peace, or they could not give them up and inevitably war with the USA would happen.<sup>147</sup> I would add "law and order" or talking to peaceful protesters and considering their concerns. Presenting things as one way or another, with no in-between or other options, means presenting things in a distorted way.

## Vague

Donald Trump's statements, proposals, and promises tend to be vague.

Even his number one slogan, "Make America Great Again," is vague. Think about it.

As an aside, I never liked it. I always thought America was pretty great to begin with. Sure, we have our problems, but we talk openly about them and work together or in groups to find ways to address and confront them. I'm patriotic. I lived in Asia for six years plus, and while I like it there, I live in the United States, my home country, by choice. America, the United States, was and still is a great experiment. Its system of

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<sup>145</sup> "Don't fall for Trump's false dichotomy: It's not a choice between human lives and the economy," by Amanda Marcotte. April 20, 2020. Salon.

<https://www.salon.com/2020/04/20/dont-fall-for-trumps-false-dichotomy-its-not-a-choice-between-human-lives-and-the-economy/>

"Will some people be affected badly? Yes.' As Trump says U.S. must reopen soon, question hangs in the air: Can the economy be saved without sacrificing lives?" by Quentin Fottrell, May 6, 2020. Market Watch.

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/how-do-you-choose-between-economic-deaths-of-despair-and-coronavirus-victims-economists-lawmakers-grapple-with-a-moral-conundrum-2020-03-26>

<sup>146</sup> "Defying Trump's false dichotomy of 'vengeance or vision'." By Frank Vyan Walton for Daily Kos. February 10, 2019.. Daily Kos.

<https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/2/10/1832988/-Defying-Trump-s-false-dichotomy-of-vengeance-or-vision>

<sup>147</sup> "The false dichotomy of 'peace or war' with North Korea," by Bonnie Kristian. June 14, 2018. The Week.

<https://theweek.com/articles/778753/false-dichotomy-peace-war-north-korea>

government include provisions for corrections and the ability to evolve and improve. Despite occasional backsliding, America has improved and continues to improve in many ways as it grows and evolves.

Besides, this slogan “Make America Great Again” is not original. Ronald Reagan first used it in the 1980s.<sup>148</sup> Conservatives love Ronald Reagan. If he succeeded and made America “great again,” why do we need to do it again?

Like many things Donald Trump proposes, it’s definitely vague. “Great” is nonspecific. It is not a measurable or definable goal. Few bosses or department managers would accept “greatness” as the end goal for a business quarter.

As for “again,” when exactly are they referring to?<sup>149</sup> *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* had a very funny segment where they asked Trump supporters this very question and then followed up on the answers given with, “Yes, but what about slavery . . . killing Indians . . . women’s rights,” and so on.<sup>150</sup> FYI, the most common answer was “1776, when the country was founded,” but my personal favorite was “the 1980s. I liked the music.” Nuff said on that.

Despite lack of clarity, “again” implies that since this was done before, it can be achieved again. (When exactly, that’s another issue.) “Again” evokes feelings of nostalgia and strong emotion. Evoking emotions is a salesman’s stock in trade.

“Make” is also vague and nonspecific. It gives no clues as to exact goals, incremental action steps, or the way to get there.

Vague, vague, vague.<sup>151</sup>

And if you keep something vague while making it resonate with the listener in an emotional way, you also create a situation where the listener fills in the blanks. They take the vague statements and use their imagination and background to add enough detail so that the idea makes sense to them. In other words, one side effect of lack of detail is that things become personalized.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> “Donald Trump’s Persuasion Techniques,” uploaded on September 26, 2016, DIY Mentalism.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrqrwCHc5DA&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=17>

<sup>149</sup> “What We Can Learn From Donald Trump’s Speech Patterns” YouTube, uploaded by NBC News, January 19, 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJ7Pw5qJ9bY>

<sup>150</sup> “When Was America Great? The Daily Show,” uploaded on July 22, 2016, *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVQvWwHM5kM>

<sup>151</sup> “Donald Trump’s Persuasion Techniques,” uploaded on September 26, 2016, DIY Mentalism.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrqrwCHc5DA&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=17>

<sup>152</sup> “7 Public Speaking Tips We Can Learn From Donald Trump” uploaded on November 13, 2017, VICE News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05tp0VscN8A&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=7>

## Paralipsis

There are ways of saying things without saying them. Statements that follow the pattern of “I’m not saying \_\_\_\_\_, but it might \_\_\_\_\_.” Or “I don’t know, and I’m not saying they’re right, but \_\_\_\_\_.” Such statements are called “paralipsis.”

Donald Trump uses these kinds of statements regularly. He often uses them to make public statements that he later disavows and denies responsibility for. Often these statements are rumor, innuendo, or just plain false, disproven, or scientifically ignorant. When caught and taken to task for this, he just says, more or less, “I didn’t know. How would I know? I’m just a regular guy.” (And a side effect of this is it reemphasizes his role as a “regular guy,” an “outsider” come to fix a broken system.)

When Donald Trump retweets things he finds, sharing them with literally millions of American citizens who would not have otherwise seen them and then turns around and denies agreeing with them, that is a form of paralipsis. And he does it all the time.

George Stephanopoulos, on his ABC news show *This Week*, once asked Trump about this directly. “You actually sent out a retweet yesterday suggesting that Marco Rubio might be ineligible to be president—a tweet that said both Cruz and Rubio might be ineligible to be president of the United States. Do you really believe that?”

“Well,” Trump answered, “it was a retweet. I mean, let people make their own determination. I’ve never looked at it, George. I honestly never looked at it. As somebody said, he’s not [eligible]. And I retweeted it. I have fourteen million people between Twitter and Facebook and Instagram, and I retweet things and we start dialogue and it’s very interesting.”<sup>153</sup>

(By the way, at various points in his career Trump has made or repeated statements that several of his opponents or rivals were not eligible for the presidency because they were not a “natural born citizen,” generally defined as someone born in the United States or on United States territory. These have included Barack Obama, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Kamala Harris. All of these accusations were false and easily disproven. He denied them all. As for the second half, the extremely nonpresidential and childish “I didn’t know anything about it” excuse, passing the buck, this will be discussed more later.)

More examples:

“I’m not going to call Jeb Bush ‘low energy.’ I’m not going to repeat it. I’m not going to say that ‘Marco Rubio is a lightweight.’ I said I’m not doing it! I will not do it. I will not say that ‘Ben Carson had a bad week.’ . . . I said that I’m not going to say it, so I am not saying it! So, I’m not saying any of those things about any of those people.” (Said at a rally in Birmingham, Alabama, on November 21, 2015.)<sup>154</sup>

Jennifer Mercieca, one of the world’s foremost experts on the language and rhetoric of Donald Trump, has commented that the use of paralipsis, the “I’m not saying but I’m saying” style of speech, often increases

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<sup>153</sup> Jennifer Mercieca, *Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump* (Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX, 2020), pp. 57–58.

<sup>154</sup> Jennifer Mercieca, *Demagogue for President*, p. 58.



the sense of an emotional bond with Trump among his audience. “It also creates this intimacy, ya know, the crowd and Trump are connected because he’s told you what he really thinks.”<sup>155</sup>

## I Know Nothing About It

Donald Trump has a pattern of denying he knows people just as soon as they become a liability.

Among the people he has denied “knowing” or “really knowing” or “barely knowing” but later has been shown to have known were Jeffrey Epstein, Prince Andrew, Stormy Daniels, Serge Kovalski, John Lewis, several members of his administration who he fired after criticizing him, Vladimir Putin, and multiple women who have accused him of sexual assault or unwanted physical advances.

He’s denied knowing much about several things he seems to have known or should have known about. These include white supremacists who have harassed people in his name (see chapter 2), Wikileaks,<sup>156</sup> and the disbanding of the White House pandemic office in 2018.<sup>157 158</sup>

As Ryan Teague Beckwith, a writer for *Time* magazine, wrote, “Trump, as the saying goes, has ‘never met’ a person he doesn’t like.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> “7 Public Speaking Tips We Can Learn From Donald Trump” uploaded on November 13, 2017, VICE News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05tp0VscN8A&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=7>

<sup>156</sup> “20 people who Trump has personally known and then claimed he didn’t,” Natalie Colarossi, *Business Insider*, January 28, 2020.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/people-trump-said-he-didnt-know-but-did-photos>

“Trump Keeps Saying He ‘Never Met’ People He Clearly Knows. Here’s Why,” Ryan Teague Beckwith, *Time*, May 3, 2019.

<https://time.com/5582741/donald-trump-never-met-doesnt-know/>

“Some of the many people Trump has denied knowing,” David Knowles, Yahoo News, December 3, 2019.

<https://news.yahoo.com/some-of-the-many-people-trump-has-denied-knowing-004917055.html>

<sup>157</sup> “Trump says he doesn’t know anything about pandemic office his admin disbanded,” Fadel Allasan, Axios, March 13, 2020.

<https://www.axios.com/white-house-pandemic-national-security-trump-disbanded-e9c2e350-7cb6-4875-9e98-47579530684f.html>

<sup>158</sup> “20 people who Trump has personally known and then claimed he didn’t,” Natalie Colarossi, *Business Insider*, January 28, 2020.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/people-trump-said-he-didnt-know-but-did-photos>

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<https://news.yahoo.com/some-of-the-many-people-trump-has-denied-knowing-004917055.html>

“All the people Trump says he doesn’t know in the Ukraine investigation,” Rashaan Ayesh and Shane Savitsky, Axios, November 17, 2019.

<https://www.axios.com/trump-doesnt-know-ukraine-investigation-sondland-d36224b8-0a1d-4a47-a288-04998bd48851.html>

“Trump Snubs Civil Rights Leader John Lewis: ‘I Don’t Know’ How History Will Remember Him,” Isabel Togoh, *Forbes*, August 4, 2020.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/isabeltogoh/2020/08/04/trump-snubs-civil-rights-leader-john-lewis-i-dont-know-how-history-will-remember-him/#5775b9f83ae9>

<sup>159</sup> “Trump Keeps Saying He ‘Never Met’ People He Clearly Knows. Here’s Why,” Ryan Teague Beckwith, *Time*, May 3, 2019.

## Answering Questions When You Don't Know The Answer

It's been noted by many people that instead of admitting ignorance, Donald Trump often attempts to answer questions about things he knows nothing about.

David Cay Johnston wrote about it in his book *The Making of Donald Trump*:

At one of my first meetings with Trump, I did something I now wish that many journalists had done before the November 2016 election. I brought up a casino issue that Trump did not know much about, intentionally saying something false, a technique that has many uses in investigative reporting. I did this because my Atlantic City sources—even Trump's own people—told me that he knew nothing of the casino business except promotion and raking cash to his personal accounts. I treated these claims with extreme skepticism but to test this claim, I asked a question during that interview which included a falsehood about the game of craps. To my surprise, Trump immediately embraced my faux fact and shaped his answer to it, much the way television psychics listen for clues in what people say to shape their soothsaying. He did it three more times during our meeting.<sup>160</sup>

Naturally, there are other examples. For instance in 1987, he gave this interview where he revealed that while he had many favorite books, his most favorite was one he had not read yet.

Pat Buchanan: "Who are your favorite authors?"

Trump: "Well, I have a number of favorite authors. I think Tom Wolfe is excellent."

Pat Buchanan: "Did you read *Vanity of the Bonfires*?"

Trump: "I did not."

Pat Buchanan: "It's a phenomenal book."

Tom Braden: "What book are you reading now?"

Pat Buchanan: "*Bonfire of the Vanities*." [snickers]

Trump: "I am reading my own book again because I think it's so fantastic, Tom." (addressing Tom Braden.)

Pat Buchanan: "What's the best book you've read besides *Art of the Deal*?"

Trump: "I really like Tom Wolfe's last book and I think he's a great author. He's done a beautiful job."

Pat Buchanan: "Which book?"

Trump: "His current book, just his current book that's just out."

Pat Buchanan: "*Bonfire of the Vanities*."

<https://time.com/5582741/donald-trump-never-met-doesnt-know/>

<sup>160</sup> David Cay Johnston, *The Making of Donald Trump* (2016, 2017. Melville House: Brooklyn NY), p. xviii. |

Trump: “Yes. [closes eyes] And the man has done a very, very good job, and I really can’t hear with this earphone, by the way.”<sup>161</sup>

Later when he decided to run for president, he announced that the Bible was his all-time favorite book. Naturally, because many people are interested in the Bible, and many people are interested in the president and presidential candidates, many people had questions. Again, as shown in this Bloomberg News interview, his answers were again vague. It is particularly interesting considering his support among Evangelical Christians.

Interviewer: “You mention the Bible, you’ve been talking about how it’s your favorite book last night in Iowa, and I think some people are very surprised by that. I’m wondering what one or two of your most favorite Bible verses are and why.”

Trump: “I wouldn’t want to get into it, because to me that’s very personal. You know when I talk about the Bible that’s very personal. [attempts to talk over interviewer while repeating self.]”

Interviewer: “Is there a verse that you think a lot about?”

Trump: “The Bible means a lot to me, but I don’t want to get into specifics.”

Interviewer: “Even to cite a verse?”

Trump: “No, I don’t want to do that.”

Second interviewer speaks up: “Are you an Old Testament guy or New Testament guy?”

Trump: “Probably [stretches out word while thinking] equal. I think it’s just an incredible, the whole Bible is an incredible, I joke very much so, I hold up *The Art of the Deal*, and I say my whole second favorite book of all time, but I just think the Bible is something very special.”<sup>162</sup>

Later, it seems, Donald Trump found what he thought was a better answer in April 2016 and shared it on WHAM 1180AM in Rochester, New York, with host and interviewer Bob Lonsberry, who asked, “Is there a favorite Bible verse or Bible story that has informed your character or your thinking through life, sir?”

Trump responded: “Well, I think many. I mean, when we get into the Bible, I think many, so many. And some people, look, an eye for an eye, you can almost say that,” Trump said. “That’s not a particularly nice thing. But you know, if you look at what’s happening to our country, I mean, when you see what’s going on with our country, how people are taking advantage of us, and how they scoff at us and laugh at us. And they laugh at our face, and they’re taking our jobs, they’re taking our money, they’re taking the health of our country. And we have to be very firm and have to be very strong. And we can learn a lot from the Bible, that I can tell you.”

<sup>161</sup> “Trump Struggled to Discuss Books in This 1987 Interview,” uploaded on June 18, 2019, NowThis News.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v\\_zacohJuCQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_zacohJuCQ)

<sup>162</sup> “Donald Trump unable to name one verse from “favourite book” The Bible, uploaded on August 22, 2019, Kris Griffiths. Taken from a Bloomberg News interview.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERUngQUCSyE>

Many have pointed out that the verse was repudiated in the New Testament, specifically in Matthew 5:38–39: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”

Trump is not good at answering Bible questions. Even with prepared materials, while speaking at Liberty University he referred to Second Corinthians, a Bible book, as “Two Corinthians” while describing just how important it was. Alas, if the subject interests you, you might consider reading the opinion piece “Trump offers revealingly bad answers about the Good Book,” by Eric Zorn, published on October 26, 2016, in the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>163</sup>

Elsewhere in this book, I’ve described Trump as a marketing genius and a master of rhetoric and salesmanship. This area, books and the Bible in particular, seems like an area where he could definitely use some improvement.

## Reacting when Caught in a Lie or Confronted with Other Unpleasant Truths

If you watch videos of Donald Trump long enough, certain responses get repeated. Patterns get noticed. To a large part, that is the theme of this book.

One of those is that when challenged, sometimes with an unpleasant fact, sometimes with an unpleasant assertion, or sometimes with being caught in a lie, Donald Trump responds in a particular way. First, he interrupts, then he starts talking, and he continues talking, repeating himself again and again so that the other person cannot continue or clarify their question, and 90 percent of what the listener hears is Donald Trump speaking.

And he repeats, repeats, repeats the assertion he wants reaffirmed, true or not, embellishing with facts, half truths, anecdotes, and unverifiable reports of conversations with people who may be biased and in some cases can’t be located at all (i.e., the classic “lots of people heard . . .”) and does so, as they say “ad nauseam.”<sup>164</sup>

If this goes on too long, he often shifts into what is often known as an “elevator pitch,” basically a mini résumé.

For those who don’t know, an “elevator pitch is a two- or three-minute résumé-like list of accomplishments designed to impress the listener and let them know what services you have to offer and why they might wish to remember you and contact you later. The idea behind a polished and well-prepared elevator pitch is if a person should find themselves in an elevator with someone they wish to impress and who might be able to help their career, and if they have practiced their elevator pitch, they know exactly what to say. Of

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<sup>163</sup> “Trump offers revealingly bad answers about the Good Book,” Eric Zorn, *Chicago Tribune*, October 26, 2016. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/columns/eric-zorn/ct-trump-bible-huckster-zorn-perspec-1028-md-20161026-column.html>

<sup>164</sup> “How Trump Manipulates People: Rhetorical and Psychological Tricks of Donald Trump,” uploaded on March 12, 2018, Argumentorik: Menschen Überzeugen mit Wlad. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQZELEHEc2Y&list=PLSwKsHkjjTzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=16>

course, it works not just in elevators but also at job fairs, professional workshops, training sessions, or cocktail parties or other social events.

## Deflection with Humor

One very effective way that Donald Trump responds when caught in either a lie or a situation where he is being challenged or accused, often accurately, of having done something shameful or bad is to deflect the accusation with humor.

If you can make people laugh, you can interrupt their anger. People cannot stay angry while they are laughing.

While not a response to dishonesty, one of Trump's classic examples of using humor to deflect an attack was the famous case when Megyn Kelly publicly took him to task for his attacks on women. "You've called women you don't like fat pigs, dogs, slob, and disgusting animals. Your twitter account—"

"Only Rosie O'Donnell," Trump interrupts.

The crowd laughs.

Of course, Kelly corrected him, stating that was not the case, but the crowd loved his response, and her power to dominate the situation was diminished.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> "Donald Trump's Incredible Powers Of Persuasion," uploaded on February 1, 2016, *Charisma on Command*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvVf0ov8k8>



## Chapter Six

# Donald Trump and Body Language

*My handshake with him was not innocent. One must show that you won't make small concessions, even symbolic ones, while not overhyping things either. Donald Trump, the Turkish president, or the Russian president believe in the logic of the trial of strength, doesn't bother me. I don't believe in the diplomacy of public invective, but in my bilateral dialogues, I don't let anything pass. That is how we are respected.*

President Emmanuel Macron of France, speaking to the French press on May 28, 2017, about his meeting and handshake with Donald Trump<sup>166</sup>

*It's true. Trump clearly studied this and thinks this is a way to assert his dominance. Which I think is so sad. That's the kind of leadership, you learn over a cassette tape. [...] Oh please, that's so embarrassing. [...] that just about describes Donald Trump to a "v". It's all optics, all goofy, all . . . hiding deep insecurity. And he's got no substance at all.*

Cenk Uygur of The Young Turks YouTube channel, speaking about Donald Trump's handshake style<sup>167</sup>

Say what you want, Donald Trump is a master communicator skilled at manipulating people's behavior and emotions. As so much of communication is body language, or nonverbal, it should be no surprise that carefully chosen body language enables Trump to emphasize points or ideas in a conversation. This assists him in dominating and humiliating his competition and opponents and pleasing his fans.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> This was quoted in many different places, sometimes with slightly different translations of the original French. One of several was "handshake with Trump 'wasn't innocent.'" See Mark Moore, *New York Post*, May 28, 2017.

<sup>167</sup> "Watch Trump Try His Big Dumb Handshake On Macron," uploaded on May 31, 2017, The Young Turks. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYqLxQW8c3g>

<sup>168</sup> "Top 10 Lessons from Donald Trump's Body Language," Ronald E Riggio, *Psychology Today*, September 17, 2015. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/201509/top-10-lessons-donald-trumps-body-language>

"What does Donald Trump's body language say about him?," Charlotte Cullen, Euro News, August 25, 2016. <https://www.euronews.com/2016/08/25/what-does-donald-trumps-body-language-say-about-him>

## Physical Gestures/Hand Gestures

Donald Trump is from New York City. Like people from the New York area, he uses a lot of gestures when he speaks.

At times, and this is when things get really interesting, these gestures contradict his spoken language. Political satirist Rory Bremner has noted for instance that often his gestures seem to suggest precision but often he uses them when being vague. Bremner uses the example of a common Trump gesture where three fingers are out straight while thumb and forefinger are in a loop. Bremner believes this suggests precision, although it is often used when Trump is being vague.<sup>169</sup> Some call this the “OK gesture.” It is one of several commonly seen Trump gestures.

Let’s look at some of the most common and important.

### 1. “The OK Gesture”

For this one, Trump takes his thumb and forefinger and touches them, making a circle or loop. The other three fingers remain stretched out, pointing toward his audience. This is often done with his left hand. Then while speaking, to emphasize a point, he slowly moves the hand up and down, emphasizing it with each movement of his hand.<sup>170</sup>

### 2. “The OK + L Gesture”

This one begins with the OK gesture but is used when emphasizing a point on a list or to emphasize a key word in a phrase.

Trump will begin reciting the list or phrase, gesturing for emphasis on each point, word, or symbol, and then shift gestures at a key point. The second gesture is formed by releasing the thumb and forefinger, changing the closed “OK” loop into an “L” and then drawing back the three other outstretched fingers and closing them like making a fist. At this point, one has an L gesture.

Here’s a real example: “We are like a third [gesture with OK symbol] world [gesture with the OK symbol] nation [gesture with the L symbol].”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> “Donald Trump: His words and body language,” uploaded on January 21, 2017, Sky News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrrHwj0P0iU&list=PLSwKsHkJTzk42aJGgk0ff1CjRQPYkJDH&index=14>

<sup>170</sup> “What does Donald Trump’s body language say about him?,” Charlotte Cullen, Euro News, August 25, 2016.

<https://www.euronews.com/2016/08/25/what-does-donald-trumps-body-language-say-about-him>

“What Trump’s hand gestures say about him,” Jasmine Taylor-Coleman and Anna Bressanin, BBC News, August 16, 2016.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/election-us-2016-37088990>

<sup>171</sup> “What does Donald Trump’s body language say about him?,” Charlotte Cullen, Euro News, August 25, 2016.

<https://www.euronews.com/2016/08/25/what-does-donald-trumps-body-language-say-about-him>

“What Trump’s hand gestures say about him,” Jasmine Taylor-Coleman and Anna Bressanin, BBC News, August 16, 2016.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/election-us-2016-37088990>



### 3. “The Point”

Trump has a distinctive way of pointing. He uses it to emphasize points, basically “pointing at an idea,” and then reemphasizing with a secondary gesture.

His point is downward slant, approximately 45 degrees, with the forefinger, while the other fingers and thumb are clutched loosely, sort of in a claw, not clenched tight like in a fist or normal pointing gesture. After this is finished, he often waves his hand in a dismissive manner to reemphasize the point. He did the point, for instance, when he talked about the threat his former opponent Hillary Clinton posed to the Constitution’s Second Amendment (right to bear arms).

“She will abolish, essentially abolish the Second Amendment. By the way [point], if she gets to pick [still pointing] [silence, frown, and dismissive backward wave of hand; crowd begins to boo], if she gets to pick judges [dismissive wave, shrug, smirk], nothing you can do . . .”<sup>172</sup>

### 4. “The Open Palms”

Trump uses several gestures where he stretches his arms back, exposing open palms. This seems to be a nonverbal way to say “hey, it looks like we are all in the same boat” and build a connection with his audience.<sup>173</sup>

### 5. “The Wall”

Donald Trump uses another gesture where he puts up both hands and pushes away a few inches in front of him as if pushing on or projecting an imaginary wall. He uses this gesture to emphasize points such as law and order, strange calls for a Muslim ban, and the alleged need for a wall with Mexico.<sup>174</sup>

### 6. “The Precision Moves”

Donald Trump has several moves that he uses to show “precision,” despite a proven tendency toward vagueness. One of these is a double-handed cutting or chopping motion with the hands held in front of his torso, at varied height, and moving up and down a few inches as he emphasizes each point one by one.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> “What does Donald Trump’s body language say about him?” Charlotte Cullen, Euro News, August 25, 2016.

<https://www.euronews.com/2016/08/25/what-does-donald-trumps-body-language-say-about-him>

“What Trump’s hand gestures say about him,” Jasmine Taylor-Coleman and Anna Bressanin, BBC News, August 16, 2016.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/election-us-2016-37088990>

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> “What Trump’s hand gestures say about him,” Jasmine Taylor-Coleman and Anna Bressanin, BBC News, August 16, 2016.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/election-us-2016-37088990>

## 7. “The Wild Gestures”

Occasionally when he is trying to emphasize chaos or confusion, especially when speaking in front of a crowd, Trump will wave his arms and hands in several different directions in front of his body while making confused and silly expressions with his face.<sup>176</sup>

This needs to be mentioned in light of one of Trump’s most notorious acts: mocking Serge Kovalski, the reporter with the disability. (This incident was discussed more fully in chapter 3.) Some defenders of Trump have argued that he was not mocking the reporter. He was merely making “wild gestures” as he sometimes does. I’ve seen videos of both, and I do not agree.

### Alpha Face

“The first thing we notice is Trump’s alpha face. This is his dominant expression,” said Peter Collet, a behavioral psychologist who has studied the body language of Donald Trump. Collet notes that this expression involves lowering brows, narrowing eyes, and the complete absence of smiling. In social situations, most people avoid doing these things because they do not wish people to view them as a threat. With Trump, however, things are different. The one thing Trump wants to convey is that he is a threat,” Collet says.

“Another dominant expression of Trump is the chin jut. By jutting out his chin he is showing everybody that he should be in charge,” says Collet.

But Collet has more to offer. Have you noted all those photos of Trump with that goofy grin? The wide, silly grin that makes him look like a fool? Well, in absence of any context they do indeed appear foolish, but in the right time and place, if used carefully, these are a domination technique.

Collet explains: “There is one expression that is very much Trump’s, and that is the zip smile.” He describes this as when Trump stretches his mouth from side to side, making a massive grin.<sup>177</sup>

To put this smile into context, when Trump wants to dominate and humiliate his opponents, especially in a debate, one of the ways he does this is through body language. When his opponents speak, he often appears to tune out and become bored, uninterested, or even amused by the allegedly foolish things they are saying. Trump’s “zip smile” communicates the message that he is laughing at his rivals.<sup>178</sup>

Acting smug, superior, and completely uninterested is a surprisingly effective way to respond to criticism, especially if you appear to be dominant in the social situation.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> “Donald Trump: His words and body language,” uploaded on January 21, 2017, Sky News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrrHwj0P0iU&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=14>

<sup>178</sup> “The Hostility of Trump’s Debate Style, Explained,” uploaded on September 19, 2016, *The Atlantic*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LkSbewN59M&list=PLSwKsHkJITzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=12>

<sup>179</sup> “Donald Trump’s Incredible Powers Of Persuasion,” uploaded on February 1, 2016, *Charisma on Command*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvVfj0ov8k8>

## Hand Shake

Donald Trump is a master of manipulating crowds and swaying people's emotions. I've emphasized, do not underestimate this man. Many people have and then been haunted by their failure to stop him.

However, there are times he seems to be the poster child for the Dunning-Kruger Effect, the psychological premise that sometimes people are so lacking in knowledge or understanding in a given area and so incompetent that they have no idea they are incompetent and continue to make the same mistakes again and again. And one of these areas, I think, where Donald Trump fails is his unique handshakes.

One of Trump's fundamental beliefs is that almost every interaction has winners and losers. And he is determined to be the winner. As many have noted, including *Time*, the BBC, *USA Today*, and countless other news outlets, Trump carries this attitude over into handshaking. His unique handshake is clearly intended to display dominance. World leaders have noted this and adjusted their handshaking approach when meeting Trump, especially when meeting him for the second time.<sup>180</sup>

So, let's take a moment to look at Trump's handshaking style and its results. Donald Trump's handshake has been extensively analyzed, and it has several distinct and recognizable parts.

First, he extends his hand, palm up, looking a bit vulnerable perhaps. Some have compared it to a beggar's supplicating hand seeking alms.<sup>181</sup>

Second, he takes the extended hand, squeezes hard, and, when standing, pulls the person in close, putting them off balance and invading their body space.

When sitting he often squeezes very hard and for an awkwardly long time. When meeting Shinzo Abe, prime minister of Japan, for instance, he squeezed Abe's hand for nineteen seconds. Abe was the first foreign leader to meet with Trump and was completely unprepared. He was left stunned and confused.<sup>182</sup>

The third step in the unique Donald Trump handshake is when he bends the person's wrist and lifts up a bit, putting them further off balance and making them more uncomfortable.

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<sup>180</sup> "How President Trump Turned Handshakes Into a High-Stakes Showdown," Abby Vesoulis, *Time*, July 2, 2018.

<https://time.com/5325922/donald-trump-handshakes-showdown/>

"Who has faced the Donald Trump handshake and won?" BBC News, May 28, 2017.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-40081069>

"From Macron to Trudeau, a short history of President Trump's awkward handshakes," Caroline Tanner, *USA Today*, April 24, 2017.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2018/04/24/macron-trudeau-short-history-president-trumps-awkward-handshakes/547103002/>

"How to Defend Yourself Against a Trump-Style Handshake: A jujitsu teacher gives some tips," David Moye, Huffington Post, February 16, 2017.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/defend-yourself-against-trump-handshake\\_n\\_58a61427e4b037d17d2619a4](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/defend-yourself-against-trump-handshake_n_58a61427e4b037d17d2619a4)

<sup>181</sup> Chris Ulrich said "hand open, almost like a beggar's pose, giving the other person the upper hand," on "Trump's awkward handshakes with world leaders," uploaded on February 13, 2017, CNN.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T84se4fc4KU>

<sup>182</sup> "Donald Trump: Art of the Handshake," uploaded on February 21, 2017, *Charisma on Command*.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlN\\_-N4wo3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlN_-N4wo3s)

Finally, and in the fourth step, he smiles and pats their hand in an affectionate manner, seeming to try and send a message of “no hard feelings, it was all a joke.”<sup>183</sup>

In many places in this book, I have called Trump a “genius” and a “master of manipulating people and swaying their emotions” and even a “master communicator.” However, in this case, quite frankly, I don’t think this works or produces any real long-term benefit. It merely makes people uncomfortable and hinders real cooperation and discussion. I think Trump’s obsession with “winning” is getting in the way of his ability to achieve lasting and important results. (See chapter 7, “Trump and Negotiation,” for more on this idea.) And, oddly enough, he doesn’t just do it with people he is allegedly competing with but has also pulled this odd handshake publicly on both Mike Pence, his vice president, and Neil Gorsuch, one of his Supreme Court nominees,<sup>184</sup> as well as Rex Tillerson, his then secretary of state.<sup>185</sup>

Some have speculated that there may be other reasons behind Trump’s odd handshakes, noting that he is a known germophobe and probably never enjoyed shaking hands at all.<sup>186</sup>

And once people know that he is going to pull this trick, they prepare for it in advance. (One Ohio jujitsu instructor went so far as to create a YouTube video called “The Defense to Donald Trump’s Handshake.”<sup>187</sup> People don’t like being publicly humiliated. And some of the world’s leaders are resourceful and capable people.

The leader of Portugal, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, a former journalist and legal scholar, for instance, had a meeting with Trump in June of 2018. Trump had been president for over two years, and his reputation for trying to humiliate, dominate, and embarrass other world leaders during their introductory

<sup>183</sup> While the quality of these varies, some sources are

“Donald Trump: Art of the Handshake,” uploaded on February 21, 2017, *Charisma on Command*.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlN\\_-N4wo3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlN_-N4wo3s)

“Trump’s awkward handshakes with world leaders,” uploaded on February 13, 2017, CNN.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T84se4fc4KU>

“‘Clasp, yank, release’: the great Donald Trump handshake tracker,” uploaded on May 26, 2017, *The Telegraph*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYQsJOffg3I>

“Watch Trump Try His Big Dumb Handshake On Macron,” uploaded on May 31, 2017, *The Young Turks*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYqLxQW8c3g>

“TRUMP’S Arm NEARLY RIPPED OFF In Violent Handshake Battle with Portuguese President,” uploaded on July 9, 2018, *The Charisma Matrix*.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXK+BTYGY\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXK+BTYGY_M)

“‘Trump Pump’ Handshake Gave President Upper Hand with Kim Jong Un: Expert,” uploaded on June 12, 2018, *Inside Edition*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMwDiGhSZJE>

<sup>184</sup> “Donald Trump: Art of the Handshake,” Uploaded on February 21, 2017, *Charisma on Command*.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlN\\_-N4wo3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlN_-N4wo3s)

I’ve included many videos in this section. This is one of the better ones and includes a section on how to properly do a business handshake in order to begin a hopefully productive business or professional meeting correctly.

<sup>185</sup> “How To Defend Yourself Against a Trump-Style Handshake: A jujitsu teacher gives some tips,” David Moye, *Huffington Post*, February 16, 2017.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/defend-yourself-against-trump-handshake\\_n\\_58a61427e4b037d17d2619a4](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/defend-yourself-against-trump-handshake_n_58a61427e4b037d17d2619a4)

<sup>186</sup> Chris Ulrich again in “Trump’s awkward handshakes with world leaders,” uploaded on February 13, 2017, CNN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T84se4fc4KU>

<sup>187</sup> “The Defense to the Donald Trump Handshake,” uploaded on February 14, 2017, the Gracie Ohio Jiu-Jitsu Academy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reLrp7NuoXk&feature=youtu.be>

handshakes had preceded him. Despite the fact that Trump is taller and much heavier than him, the president of Portugal at first handshake simply pulled, pulled hard, and yanked Trump off balance. Problem solved.<sup>188</sup>

Similarly, Trump met with Emomali Rahmon, “president for life” of the nation of Tajikistan, at a summit in Saudi Arabia on May 21, 2017. Prepared for the meeting, Rahmon also responded with a firm yank, pulling Trump off balance. Trump responded by stepping forward and trying to smile.<sup>189</sup>

And the Canadians, those polite and well-mannered people who know us well and have lived north of our border since before either of us were really a nation, developed their own response. In Canadian fashion, it was polite, well-mannered, and got the job done with minimal fuss or unpleasantness. When Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau met Trump in February of 2017, he came prepared. In good shape and skilled in the physical art of yoga, Trudeau politely reached out with his left hand, put the hand on Trump’s right shoulder, smiled warmly, and braced himself so Trump could not pull him off balance, calmly winning the dominance game. The Canadian press and people cheered. One Canadian wrote on Twitter, “Great Canadian victories: 1. War of 1812, 2. Gold medal hockey matches, 2010 Olympics, 3. Trudeau-Trump handshake, 2017.” Another proclaimed, “Trudeau resisting Trump’s weird handshake is the biggest display of dominance in the history of Canada.” So much for weird and childish dominance games to proclaim “America first.”<sup>190</sup>

Finally, perhaps no leader anywhere has had as much difficulty with Trump’s odd handshakes as President Macron of France, the man quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Macron has been in a long series of strange, purposely awkward handshakes with Trump. The oddest, in July of 2017, was twenty-nine seconds long.<sup>191</sup> But in the end, even he got his one-uppance, coming prepared for Trump and his handshakes at a G7 conference in August of 2019. While on the podium, in front of an audience and reporters and diplomats, Macron shook hands with Trump and held on, even after Trump tried to pull his hand free. He pulled Trump off balance at one point and at times purposely avoided eye contact (one way to assert dominance is to not look

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<sup>188</sup> “U.S. President Donald Trump hosts President Rebelo de Sousa of Portugal at the White House,” uploaded on June 27, 2018, New China TV.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfrbogBg9dA>

“TRUMP’S Arm NEARLY RIPPED OFF In Violent Handshake Battle with Portuguese President,” uploaded on July 9, 2018, The Charisma Matrix.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXKrBTYGY\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXKrBTYGY_M)

The same man, age 71, also swam out to sea to help in rescuing two women who had been pulled out by the current off one of Portugal’s many beaches. Which is irrelevant to this book but just too cool not to mention.

“Portugal president helps rescue two women in trouble at sea,” BBC, August 17, 2020.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53810463>

<sup>189</sup> “Donald Trump Finally Met His Match In The Handshake Stakes: Trump’s bizarre technique did not faze the president of Tajikistan,” Lee Moran, Huffington Post, May 24, 2017.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-handshake-tajikistan\\_n\\_592535f8e4b0ec129d308cbe](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-handshake-tajikistan_n_592535f8e4b0ec129d308cbe)

“VIDEO: Trump’s jerk handshake technique shut down by Tajikistan leader,” Dannielle Maguire, undated (three years old), Nine.com.au.

<https://www.nine.com.au/entertainment/viral/donald-trump-handshake-tajikistan-emomali-rahmon/1966c1fd-50dd-4970-9f3d-e11410965280>

<sup>190</sup> “‘The handshake’: Trudeau resists Trump ‘jerk and pull,’” Josh Elliott, CTVNews.ca, February 14, 2017.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/the-handshake-trudeau-resists-trump-jerk-and-pull-1.3284460>

“Trump-Trudeau handshake, close up,” uploaded on February 14, 2017, BBC News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxUJV89TkWc>

<sup>191</sup> “Trump’s never-ending handshake with Macron,” uploaded on July 14, 2017, CNN.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DwijfVbBg>

at someone while shaking hands) and then leaned forward and pat the top of Trump's hand in a manner identical to what Trump does. Oh my! Vive la France.<sup>192</sup>

And this, I conclude, is the state of international diplomacy in Donald Trump's America, circa 2020, the year I write. Silly handshakes. Yes.

Which brings us to one of the most disturbing and important questions involving Donald Trump as president: his relationship with Vladimir Putin. Trump calls Putin often, holds one-on-one meetings with him, does not insult him, and in general just plain treats him in a completely different manner than any other world leader. Many wonder if Putin has leverage over Trump, arguing that this would explain much, including his obvious fear of having his tax returns released, and some of his more unusual foreign policy decisions, including insulting and being rude to most of the NATO leaders.

Curiously, and perhaps disturbingly, Trump's handshakes with Putin do not follow the pattern described here, at least not until the 2019 G20 summit. If one watches videos of Trump and Putin from 2016 up until that summit, the handshakes are much more "normal." (I may have missed some, but I tried to watch them all.) At the 2019 G20 summit, for some reason something changes and he tries to use his unique "dominance handshake" on Putin but with less than remarkable results.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> "Trump vs. Macron - "Macron WON'T LET GO!" | Handshake Battle at G7," uploaded on September 5, 2019, The Charisma Matrix.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkw1EuY07EI>

"President Donald Trump and Macron Face Off In Another Handshake Tugging Contest," uploaded on August 27, 2019, MSNBC.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RnuHtGC\\_9k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RnuHtGC_9k)

"Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump Had Another Awkward Handshake Battle and Macron Won This Round," Evan Brechtel, Second Nexus, August 28, 2019.

<https://secondnexus.com/news/emmanuel-macron-donald-trump-handshake-awkward>

<sup>193</sup> What follows is an extensive list of YouTube videos of Putin and Trump shaking hands, sometimes with my descriptive comments:

"Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin share first official handshake," uploaded on July 7, 2017, *The Telegraph*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-Pfv2i5uQM>

"Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin finally have that handshake," uploaded on July 7, 2017, The Straits Times.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XZnq-KAgmY>

### **Silly Analysis**

"Trump & Putin: The HANDSHAKE!" uploaded on July 11, 2017, TMZ.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rL0H4wHxgoI>

### **November 2017 APEC**

"Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin shake hands at Apec," uploaded on November 10, 2017, Guardian News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YloJb8Ar0E>

### **July 2018 Meeting, Helsinki Finland**

"Watch: Trump and Putin shake hands," uploaded on July 16, 2018, *The Telegraph*.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oba\\_OQ3exMo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oba_OQ3exMo)

### **November 2018**

"President Trump, Vladimir Putin Greet Each Other In Paris," uploaded on November 11, 2018, Today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vcF7akFT3M>

"Raw Politics examines Trump and Putin's exchange in Paris," uploaded on November 12, 2018, Euro News.

## Chapter Seven

# Donald Trump and Negotiation

*I don't do it for the money. I've got enough, much more than I'll ever need. I do it to do it. Deals are my art form. Other people paint beautifully on canvas or write wonderful poetry. I like making deals, preferably big deals. That's how I get my kicks.<sup>194</sup>*

*Crazy Dennis Rodman is saying I wanted to go to North Korea with him. Never discussed, no interest, last place on Earth I want to go to.*

Donald Trump, May 7, 2014, tweeting, the year Dennis Rodman visited North Korea and watched a basketball exhibition with Kim Jong-un<sup>195</sup>

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SCC9bG37x4&t=2s>

More silly analysis:

“Trump Can’t Control Himself Around Putin,” uploaded on November 13, 2018, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4DdLYb5AvQ>

### 2019 -changes

“Trump YANKS Putin’s Arm: AGGRESSIVE Handshake At G20, Social Coach Explains,” uploaded on July 4, 2019, The Charisma Matrix.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E\\_NDqQ4T9D0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_NDqQ4T9D0)

“Trump and Putin Meet at the G-20 Summit,” uploaded on June 28, 2019, VOA News.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jo-Jiil1Ues>

<sup>194</sup> Page 1. Trump, Donald and Schwartz, Tony. “The Art of the Deal.” (1987, Time Warner Books, New York.)

<sup>195</sup> “Trump and Kim Jong-un, and the Names They’ve Called Each Other,” by Matt Stevens, March 9, 2018, The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/world/asia/trump-kim-jong-un.html>

“‘All-Star Celebrity Apprentice’: Dennis Rodman Fired Over A Spelling Error (VIDEO),” April 8, 2013. Huffington Post.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/all-star-celebrity-apprentice-spelling-video\\_n\\_3035280](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/all-star-celebrity-apprentice-spelling-video_n_3035280)

*“I would get China to make that guy disappear in one form or another very quickly . . . I mean this guy’s a bad dude—and don’t underestimate him. . . . Any young guy that can take over from his father with all those generals and everybody else that probably wants the position, this is not somebody to be underestimated.”*

— Mr. Trump, February 10, 2016, speaking about Mr. Kim on CBS This Morning <sup>196</sup>

*“It’s not a mere threat but a reality that I have a nuclear button on the desk in my office. . . . All of the mainland United States is within the range of our nuclear strike.”*

— Kim Jong-un, January 1, 2018, in his annual New Year’s Day speech<sup>197</sup>

*“North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the ‘Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.’ Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!”*

— Donald Trump, January 2, 2018, responding by tweet

*“I probably have a very good relationship with Kim Jong Un.”*

— Donald Trump, January 11, 2018, in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*<sup>198</sup>

Donald Trump, clearly, has many skills. However, despite the image he and his fans believe, the one promoted in the ghostwritten *The Art of the Deal*, it’s questionable if negotiation is actually among them. In that book, there’s a quote from Trump on how one becomes a master of the art of the deal—in other words, a skilled negotiator.

*More than anything else, I think deal making is an ability you’re born with. It’s in the genes. I don’t say that egotistically. It’s not about being brilliant. It does take a certain intelligence, but mostly it’s about instincts. You can take the smartest kid at Wharton, the one who got straight A’s and has a 170 IQ, and if he doesn’t have the instincts, he’ll never be a successful entrepreneur.<sup>199</sup>*

In other words, it can’t be taught or explained. It’s entirely instinctual. I would argue that this rarely is true when it comes to understanding how people do things. I would argue that in order to really understand something and do it well, one needs a good understanding of the basic fundamentals and the underlying techniques, as well as when to apply them. And if you really understand them, then you should be able to explain, verbalize, or demonstrate these techniques. Some would argue this is one of the fundamental beliefs

<sup>196</sup> “Trump and Kim Jong-un, and the Names They’ve Called Each Other,” Matt Stevens, *New York Times*, March 9, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/world/asia/trump-kim-jong-un.html>

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Donald Trump and Tony Schwartz, *The Art of the Deal* (1987, Time Warner Books, New York), pp. 45–46.



of Western intellectual tradition. Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, for instance, believed that to really understand something one had to know its parts, its patterns, and be able to explain them.

And if you are able to look at overall ability in an art as the end result of one's abilities in several underlying skills and techniques, then you should be able to look at these skills and hone them.

In the quotes above, Donald Trump makes it clear that he believes entrepreneurship and negotiation ability are both skills that cannot be taught or learned. You either have the ability or you don't. This implies that he has never spent time successfully learning how to hone or improve his abilities in these areas and does not consider studying to improve these skills a worthwhile use of time.

Which is a bit ironic, as he is a graduate of a respected business school. There is good reason to question how much he learned in business school and even if he understood the fundamental lessons in some of his core classes.<sup>200</sup> And the results of his business deals, when analyzed, are mixed at best, and often relied on special deals and favors from government connections.

In fact, it needs to be stated that often people who are truly incompetent at doing something are incompetent exactly because they lack the understanding of how that something should be done. They don't know what the underlying skills are that need to be utilized and may lack them entirely or substitute a different one instead (yelling loudly and bullying instead of showing empathy, for example). Again, it's called the Dunning-Kruger effect. Though it does not necessarily prove it, the above quote from Trump, that deal making cannot be taught, is instinctive, and one either has it or one doesn't, is consistent with someone who is showing the cognitive bias known as the Dunning-Kruger effect.

But what do other experts think of Trump's skill as a negotiator? One interesting opinion comes from Canada.

In March of 2018, the CBC (or Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) interviewed Glen Whyte, a professor at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. His specialties include managerial negotiations. Since coming to office, Trump had been working on trade policies with many of the traditional American trading partners, Canada among them, and met with the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, several times. Back in the United States, however, Trump had recently bragged at a fundraiser about how he had invented statistics on the spot and lied to Trudeau during their recent trade negotiations.<sup>201</sup> Obviously, this attracted a great deal of attention in Canada and made many question the best way to deal with a trade partner who negotiates dishonestly.

The CBC asked Professor Whyte for his opinions on this sort of behavior and his opinions on Donald Trump as a negotiator. While admitting that such behaviors were not uncommon in negotiations, he also said that that did not make them productive or beneficial and there were better ways to negotiate. Whyte was quite cynical about Trump's ability as a negotiator. When asked, "On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate his deal making?" Professor Whyte responded, "I'd rate him about a zero."

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<sup>200</sup> "Donald Trump at Business School—Scams from the Great Beyond: The Presidential Edition," Peter Huston, History for Fun, Profit, and Insight, August 22, 2020.

<https://history-for-fun-profit-and-insight.blogspot.com/2020/08/donald-trump-at-business-school-scams.html>

<sup>201</sup> "Trump Admits to Making Up Trade Deficit In Talks with Canadian Prime Minister," Tamara Keith, NPR, March 15, 2018.

<https://www.npr.org/2018/03/15/593844812/trump-admits-to-making-up-trade-deficit-in-talks-with-canadian-prime-minister>

He elaborated: “He displays a very common bias in negotiations called the mythical fixed pie, the belief that negotiations are in general a zero sum, win-lose, ‘the way I succeed is to ensure that you fail,’ and vice versa. It’s someone who’s very focused on getting a large piece of what is potentially a very small pie when in fact you might be better off by getting a very small piece of a very large pie. So he’s very much focused on the value-claiming side of negotiations rather than the value-creation aspect of negotiations, which is unfortunate.”

In other words, Trump’s focus on winning and losing, determining winners and losers, can be a serious disadvantage when negotiating. Whyte said “competitive negotiators” such as Trump are often able to get “more than their fair share,” but they “are not very good at creating a large pie.” He elaborated that when negotiating, focus on competition, being “fluid with the truth,” a “tendency to rely on intimidation, threats, bluster, and so on” is a disadvantage to productive long-term negotiations. “It’s a very primitive view as to what negotiations are all about.”

Whyte argues that a highly competitive style of negotiation with a focus on “winners” and “losers” ignores the way negotiation as leading to cooperation and “win-win” value creation. In other words, while negotiation can be used to determine who gets a bigger piece of a pie, it can also be used to find ways to work together to increase the size of a pie. Whyte emphasizes that if one increases the size of a pie sufficiently, then even if one gets a smaller portion of the pie, one can still, in the end, get a larger piece of pie. This, he feels, is the way an ideal negotiation should go.

Trump generally sees negotiation as a zero-sum game. In this view, there is a fixed prize and the “winner” of the negotiation is the party that gets the bigger portion. This view of negotiation fits Trump’s personal preference for situations where he can display domination and control of others. This zero-sum, winner-loser view of negotiation is common but primitive in Whyte’s opinion.

“Not to say that competition isn’t relevant in effective negotiation, but there’s a lot more to it than that. What does an effective negotiation produce? Well, it produces enhanced relationships; people walk away feeling good or believing that they won or did well, which is not the case when you are dealing with a bully. A lot of mutual benefit is created in addition to those benefits being allocated relatively fairly, and few of those outcomes are achieved when all you do is threaten, intimidate, lie, and so on.”

Whyte emphasizes that Trump’s inability to negotiate toward a mutual win and his lack of understanding of the finer points of negotiation and deal making shows up in multiple areas in his administration, including the unprecedented and disturbing turnover in personnel and advisors.

“You can see it in all the damage of his inner circle. Instead of resolving differences through a process, for example, negotiation, he fires people.”<sup>202</sup>

## **Korean Peninsula**

But what about on the international scene? How did Trump do in the area of negotiations and deal making between nations? To understand this, let’s look at one of his most famous negotiations: the series of talks with North Korea and its dictator, Kim Jong-un.

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<sup>202</sup> “Donald Trump’s negotiation style,” uploaded on March 17, 2018, CBC News.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJPDGnu\\_Am4&list=PLSwKsHkjiTzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=13](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJPDGnu_Am4&list=PLSwKsHkjiTzk42aJGgk0ff1CiRQPYkJDH&index=13)

When Trump became president, he was warned that one of the biggest diplomatic challenges he faced was dealing with nuclear-armed North Korea. And it was a big challenge, a very complex, high-stakes situation. North Korea is a heavily armed and militarized state, ruled by an unpredictable and erratic ruler, with an isolated population and a troubled, often failing economy. It borders on Russia, China, and South Korea and is close enough to Japan to be a military threat. North Korea would have been a problem to stability in the region and the globe even if it did not have nuclear weapons.

Yet North Korea has had nuclear weapons for approximately fifteen years (the exact time is unknown) and has been increasing and improving its nuclear arsenal and missiles. Economic sanctions have long been imposed on the nation trying to pressure it into reigning in its nuclear testing. North Korea has continued testing missiles and nuclear weapons, hoping this will get the sanctions lifted. Yet the sanctions continue, increasing economic instability. One of the world's few surviving Communist states, its people often suffer food shortages, and some fear North Korea is on the verge of economic and political collapse. If this were to happen, both China and South Korea could receive uncontrolled numbers of desperate refugees entering their nations, and none could predict what would happen to its nuclear arsenal.<sup>203</sup>

At the time of this writing, Donald Trump has met with Kim Jong-un three times with little real change in the situation. There are no plans for further meetings. It's difficult to point at real accomplishments in these meetings, and they seem deadlocked. Not exactly a great demonstration of mastery of the art of the deal.

The exact course of the negotiations since Trump assumed office is complex and involves many officials and countless meetings big and small between representatives of several nations. Not just the United States and North Korea but also South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia, and United Nations agencies have been involved. Summarizing it is not easy, and it is recommended that people who wish to understand the full story research further. Here, we will focus on Donald Trump's skill or lack thereof as a negotiator.

Trump officially became president on January 20, 2017. Prior to this, North Korea, under the rule of Kim Jong-un, third generation of the Kim family of dictators, had tested a wide variety of missiles, raising alarm and tensions in the region and internationally.

In early April of 2017, Trump met with Xi Jin-ping of China for the first time. Recall from the quotes above that in February of 2016, Trump had told the American public that he would solve the North Korea situation easily by getting China to "make that guy disappear." This did not happen. Instead, Xi told him the situation was complicated, and Trump left impressed by what he learned, stating, "[Xi] then went into the history of China and Korea. Not North Korea, Korea. And you know, you're talking about thousands of years . . . and many wars. And Korea actually used to be a part of China."<sup>204</sup>

This needs to be put in context. The quote implies that Trump had known little to nothing about the history of Korea prior to this meeting with the premier of China. Second, the quote is offensive and worrisome to many peoples and governments in Asia, including both Koreas. For reasons stemming from its traditional,

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<sup>203</sup> North Korea has had nuclear weapons since around 2003 or 2006, depending on what evidence one accepts.

North Korea Nuclear Timeline Fast Facts, CNN Editorial Research, June 21, 2020.

<https://www.cnn.com/2013/10/29/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-timeline--fast-facts/index.html>

<sup>204</sup> This quote was widely reported by one interesting source in "Was Korean Peninsula part of China? Xi and the Han dynasty game plan—Kim Jong Un's disobedience could lead to drastic change in Asia's geopolitical landscape," Katsujii Nakazawa, Nikkei Asian Review, August 28, 2017.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Was-Korean-Peninsula-part-of-China-Xi-and-the-Han-dynasty-game-plan>

premodern tribute system where it would demand or request tribute and gifts from neighboring states that it never actually ruled or conquered, the Chinese government now tends to state that it used to rule several parts of the region that it traditionally never ruled or ruled for only a short period of time. Sometimes it implies in its media and propaganda that this means it should now be the rightful ruler of these regions, and some of its more jingoistic citizens believe it as well. Therefore, it implies Trump had not done his homework, as this was not a wise thing for the president of the United States to repeat.

Within the United States government, work on the problem continued. This included American statements to Congress, the United Nations Security Council, and the press, as well as a meeting between Trump and the newly elected president of South Korea. Kim and his government continued to test missiles, including new ICBMs capable of reaching the US mainland. There were also tweets and exchanges of public threats and name calling between Kim and Trump. This lasted several months.<sup>205</sup>

*“North Korea has just launched another missile. Does this guy have anything better to do with his life?”*

— Mr. Trump, July 3, 2017, by tweet<sup>206</sup>

In August 2017, North Korea threatened a missile strike against Guam, the US territory in the Pacific.

*“North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.”*

— Mr. Trump, August 8, 2017, to reporters at his golf club in Bedminster, NJ, on a working vacation

Talks and cooperation between North and South Korea increased. In March of 2018, the South Koreans announced that the North would be willing to meet with the United States. Trump agreed to meet with Kim Jong-un to discuss permanent denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This first meeting between a US president and a North Korean leader would be a historic event. Meanwhile, the US insisted “all sanctions and maximum pressure must remain.” Eventually a meeting was scheduled to be held in Singapore on June 12, 2018.

Kim and Trump both met, separately, of course, with other foreign leaders to discuss the summit ahead of time. In May 2018, North Korea released three imprisoned US citizens and destroyed one of its nuclear testing sites.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> “Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, FACT SHEETS & BRIEFS, Arms Control Association, last reviewed July 2020.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>

<sup>206</sup> “Trump and Kim Jong-un, and the Names They’ve Called Each Other,” Matt Stevens, *New York Times*, March 9, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/world/asia/trump-kim-jong-un.html>

<sup>207</sup> “Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, FACT SHEETS & BRIEFS, Arms Control Association, last reviewed July 2020.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>

Although there was talk of canceling the talks over a statement Vice President Spence made at the UN and the North Korean response, the event was held as scheduled. As part of this, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with a high-ranking North Korean general in New York City. Afterward, he told the press, “I have been very clear that President Trump and the United States objective is very consistent and well known: the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”<sup>208</sup>

On June 12, 2018, the leaders of the United States and North Korea met face to face for the first time in a hotel in Singapore, agreed-upon neutral territory. At the end of their conference they signed a statement with many fine goals but little details on when and how, exactly, they would be achieved.

The joint statement was brief, and its four key components can be easily quoted in full:

**The United States and the DPRK commit to establish new US-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity.**

**The United States and DPRK will join their efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.**

**Reaffirming the April 27, 2018 Panmunjom Declaration, the DPRK commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.**

**The United States and the DPRK commit to recovering POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.**<sup>209</sup>

Following the summit, Trump announced that he was canceling US–South Korean military exercises, taking the US military and South Korean government both by surprise but pleasing the North Koreans.

Since then Trump has often praised Kim Jong-un effusively and has spoken often of the great bond and love they share.

Over the next few months, high-level talks continued between the two nations, but problems began to develop. While Pompeo described the July talks as “productive” and being held in “good faith,” the North Koreans publicly issued statements claiming the US proposals were “unilateral and robber-like denuclearization demands” that went “against the spirit of the North-U.S. summit meeting.”

Although relations between North and South Korea improved, there were signs that relations between North Korea and the US were not as good as they had once appeared. The North Koreans clearly wanted the US to lift or help lift some of the sanctions on their nation. China and Russia condemned the US for unilateral action against North Korea, calling for a more cooperative international approach to achieve peace and stability in the region.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> “READ: Full text of Trump-Kim signed statement,” CNN, June 12, 2018. [https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/12/politics/read-full-text-of-trump-kim-signed-statement/index.html?utm\\_term=image&utm\\_content=2018-06-12T07%3A08%3A27&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twCNN](https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/12/politics/read-full-text-of-trump-kim-signed-statement/index.html?utm_term=image&utm_content=2018-06-12T07%3A08%3A27&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twCNN)

“Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, FACT SHEETS & BRIEFS, Arms Control Association, last reviewed July 2020.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>

<sup>210</sup>

On New Years Day 2019, Kim Jong-un announced that his nation that would be willing to meet with President Donald Trump. After a ninety-minute meeting at the White House between Trump, Secretary of State Pompeo, and a high-level North Korean diplomat, the White House announced that a second summit would be held in February, although the location had yet to be chosen.

On February 27–28, 2019, Trump and Kim met in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The meeting was cut short in the middle of the second day and did not resume. No agreement was signed.

A report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies summarized what had happened thusly:

“Both sides failed, however, in the eight months following Singapore to make progress on the summit declaration due to disagreements over the definition of denuclearization and the sequencing of the steps that would be taken to fulfill the promises made in the joint statement. After a new date was set for the Hanoi summit in January, there were some hopes that these differences could be bridged in another high-level meeting between Trump and Kim. But the same issues ultimately appeared to play a role in the breakdown of the presidential-level talks in Hanoi.”

It appears the two leaders misjudged each other. Kim seemed to have hoped that Trump, eager for a foreign policy victory, would offer a major relief in the sanctions relief in exchange for a halt on nuclear and missile testing and limits on existing nuclear weapon stockpiles.

Trump, thinking Kim was brought to the negotiating table because of the pressure the US had applied, thought he could entice Kim with discussions of possible North Korean economic development. Neither happened in Hanoi.<sup>211</sup>

Again, I’m not impressed.

International sanctions continued, and North Korea continued trying to evade them. These sanctions were a major stumbling block in the US relationship with North Korea.

Therefore, in March of 2019, Trump announced through a tweet that he had done something about it. “It was announced today by the U.S. Treasury that additional large scale Sanctions would be added to those already existing Sanctions on North Korea. I have today ordered the withdrawal of those additional Sanctions!” Unfortunately, no one anywhere was able to identify what sanctions or actions he was referring to.<sup>212</sup>

Again, I’m not impressed.

By 2019, North Korea had returned to openly testing missiles.

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“Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, FACT SHEETS & BRIEFS, Arms Control Association, last reviewed July 2020.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>

<sup>211</sup> “Assessment of the Trump-Kim Hanoi Summit,” Sue My Terry, CSIS: Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 28, 2019.

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessment-trump-kim-hanoi-summit#:~:text=On%20February%2027%20and%2028,signed%20by%20the%20two%20leaders>.

<sup>212</sup> “Trump scrapped sanctions on North Korea to please Kim Jong Un, Trump’s shocking North Korea tweet, decoded,” Alex Ward, Vox, March 22, 2019.

<https://www.vox.com/2019/3/22/18277581/trump-north-korea-tweet-sanctions-kim>

In June of 2019, Trump announced that he had received a “beautiful letter” from Kim and something “will happen very soon that’s going to be very positive.”

On June 28, 2019, Trump tweeted that he would visit the DMZ on June 30 and Kim Jong-un should meet him there.

On June 30, 2019, Donald Trump became the first president of the USA to step foot in North Korea when he met with Kim Jong-un at the DMZ, the border between North and South Korea. The two agreed to resume talks in the near future.

North Korean missile tests continued.

Over the next couple months, the two nations occasionally made public announcements about vague plans to meet again.

Sadly, by early December of 2019, both nations were back to threatening each other and boasting of their military might. Since then the world has changed in many significant ways, none of which have increased the likelihood of significant talks or negotiations between the USA and North Korea. There has been the global COVID-19 pandemic, for instance. While it’s very difficult to get accurate information about the infection rate in North Korea, something that the government there is undoubtedly underreporting, official news and propaganda sources speak of widespread quarantines and hospital building.<sup>213</sup> Undoubtedly, the pandemic has been a major distraction from negotiations and other international concerns in both nations. North Korea was also hit with a typhoon, and there have been rumors about Kim Jong-un’s health. The nation has had other things on its mind, just as the United States has.

Still, the topic has come up.

On April 18, 2020, in a rambling coronavirus briefing, Donald Trump told reporters and the world that he had received a “nice note” from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. “No, I think we’re doing fine. Yeah, sure, it’s . . . North Korea, I see they’re testing short-range missiles. And, you know, they’ve been doing it a long time. I received a nice note from him recently. It was a nice note. I think we’re doing fine.” He then asserted without explanation that if he, Donald Trump, had not been elected president, the US would be at war with North Korea, before moving on quickly to his next topic.<sup>214</sup>

On April 20, 2020, the North Korean government responded to this claim. “There was no letter addressed recently to the U.S. president by the supreme leadership” they said in the official state media. “He could have referred to the personal letters that had been exchanged in the past, we are not sure. We are about to look into the matter to see if the U.S. leadership seeks anything in feeding the ungrounded story into the media.” They then warned that the relationship between Mr. Kim and Mr. Trump should not “be misused for meeting selfish purposes” or “for diversion.”<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> “COVID-19 pandemic in North Korea,” Wikipedia, accessed September 9, 2020.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_in\\_North\\_Korea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_North_Korea)

<sup>214</sup> “Remarks by President Trump and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing, HEALTHCARE,” April 18, 2020.  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-2/>

<sup>215</sup> “North Korea Denies Sending a ‘Nice Note’ to Trump,” Choe Sang-Hun, *New York Times*, April 19, 2020.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/19/world/asia/north-korea-denies-nice-note-trump.html>

In early May the North Koreans announced the testing of another missile, their largest yet.<sup>216</sup>

In June of 2020, in a Voice of America interview, when asked about meeting with North Korea again, Trump said, “I understand they want to meet, and we would certainly do that. I would do it if I thought it was going to be helpful.” When the interviewer followed up by asking Trump if he thought Kim would wish to meet with him, Trump replied, “Probably. I have a very good relationship with him, [so it] probably would be.”

Two high-level North Korean officials commented thusly: “Explicitly speaking once again, we have no intention to sit face to face with the U.S.,” said one. “We do not feel any need to sit face to face with the U.S., as it does not consider the DPRK-U.S. dialogue as nothing more than a tool for grappling its political crisis,” said another.<sup>217</sup>

*Foreign Affairs*, a respected source of information and analysis on international relations, reported that the pattern of open and closing negotiations in order to extract better concessions is a common North Korean tactic in diplomatic negotiations. It also reported that according to satellite imaging, there was a “flurry” of renewed activity at some sites where North Korea had constructed nuclear weapons.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> “Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, FACT SHEETS & BRIEFS, Arms Control Association, last reviewed July 2020.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>

<sup>217</sup> “Trump Says He’d Meet with Kim Jong Un Again,” William Gallo, Voice of America, July 08, 2020  
<https://www.voanews.com/usa/trump-says-hed-meet-kim-jong-un-again>

<sup>218</sup> “North Korea Talks Stall Despite Trump Overtures on New Summit. When it comes to meeting with Kim Jong Un, the administration is still sending mixed messages,” Robbie Gramer and Dan Haverty, *Foreign Affairs*, July 9, 2020.  
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/09/north-korea-talks-stall-trump-overtures-new-summit-nuclear-negotiations/>



## Chapter Eight

### The Guru Speaks

In American culture, presenting problems without offering solutions is discouraged. (There's a term for this, by the way: "the Monroe's Motivated Sequence."<sup>219</sup>) But what is the solution to the problems presented in this book?

First, vote. Vote intelligently, and vote regularly each time you get a chance. If you must vote without doing your homework, Robert Heinlein once suggested you find a well-intentioned person whose opinions and judgment you disagree with and just vote the opposite of how they plan to vote and cancel them out. (Unrealistic ideologues, be they political or religious, are often a good choice here. Often good neighbors, yet terrible voters.)

And until you vote, don't be too discouraged. Remember, Trump won the last election by the narrowest means possible . . . in 2016, both Trump and Hillary Clinton were very unpopular candidates. Forty-five percent of Americans did not bother to vote for either of them. Third party votes were higher than average too. American presidential elections use something called the Electoral College, which is, essentially, a system where each state gets a number of "electoral votes." The electoral votes are added state by state, instead of counting the overall votes for the nation. (The reasons for this system are historical, and it seemed like a good idea when the nation was founded over two centuries ago.)

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<sup>219</sup> This phrase and the importance of this concept was brought to my attention by one of those "reality self-defense" instructor guys who did not give me permission to use his name in this book. By the way, am I the only one who lost a lot of respect for those guys during the last few years? First, they say things like, "Don't go to protests. It's very dangerous, and you might get hurt." Which is fine, except it's coming from people who enable and encourage others to enter fields like "bar room bouncer" or "corrections officer." And then after years of preaching, "Be aware, do your research, prepare for emergencies, and take precautions in case your life is in danger," half of them decided the COVID-19 pandemic was something best ignored.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monroe's\\_motivated\\_sequence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monroe's_motivated_sequence)

Trump actually lost the popular vote. Clinton won the popular vote. *Time* magazine reported, “According to the independent, non-partisan Cook Political Report, Clinton’s final tally came in at 65,844,610, compared to Donald Trump’s 62,979,636, with a difference of 2,864,974. The total number of votes for other candidates was 7,804,213.”

However, when the votes were totaled state by state, Trump won the electoral vote.

But he did this by the slimmest margin imaginable.

Trump surprised people by winning in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. These states gave him forty electoral votes, the amount needed to win the election. *But*, and I had not quite realized this (I probably should have), he only won by less than 1 percent of the vote in each of these states. In other words, Trump almost lost these states. The numbers are amazing. It was a very, very narrow victory. (And don’t let people tell you your vote doesn’t count.)

As for Trump voters and the “Trump base” (two different things). I doubt if Trump will win this time, but we all must go and vote as if he might if we wish to restore sanity and morality to our country. And if you have friends or neighbors who are registered voters, encourage them to vote. Offer them a ride to the polls, if it helps.

Trump won by the slimmest possible lead before, technically not even a lead. And his popularity has gone down while in office. Many of the Trump voters I know do not plan to vote for him again. They say, and I quote one of them, “There’s something wrong with that man.”

SO . . . vote. Vote this corrupt creep out of office.

After that, I am quite sure there will be a constitutional crisis when he denies the election results and refuses to leave office. This will be ugly, but it will ultimately work itself out.

Legally, if the election is still not decided, there are procedures in place as to who would become acting president on January 20, 2021, and how that would be ultimately resolved.<sup>220</sup> So even if the president tries to hang on to power—and I think he probably will because, if nothing else, there is something in his tax returns that he really does not want people to see—he won't have legal grounds to do so if he loses the election. And it's best to avoid long debates over who won. A large win election day would certainly help make the outcome clear, which explains why I intend to vote in person rather than by mail.

And after that, after all the craziness and tension, after the election, comes the truly tough part.

If Trump wins, then pick one small aspect of what he's doing that upsets you; work to resist, prevent, or mitigate it; and then do your best to live a normal life. It's going to be a group effort. Donald Trump compelled me to join the ACLU and donate small amounts of additional money to them each time he does something awful. Tony Schwartz, author of the ghostwritten Trump bestseller *The Art of the Deal*, long ago disavowed Trump and now donates his substantial royalties from that book to several charities, including the National Immigration Law Center, Human Rights Watch, the Center for Victims of Torture, the National Immigration Forum, and the Tahirih Justice Center, which helps immigrant women and children. It couldn't hurt to take a close look at his choices and see if they might suit you too. (As an aside, Donald Trump also promised to donate his royalties from *The Art of the Deal* to charity. There is no record that he has ever done so. They were not donated to the Donald J. Trump Foundation, his personal charity before New York State government shut it down for misuse of funds.)<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> "Vision 2020: What happens if the US election is contested?" Yahoo News, September 16, 2020.

<https://news.yahoo.com/amphhtml/vision-2020-happens-us-election-160042541.html#referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&amp;tf=From%20%251%24s>

"What happens if there's no clear winner?" Chris Stirewalt, Fox News, August 6, 2020.

<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/what-happens-if-theres-no-clear-winner>

"Trump's off base about what happens if there's no clear election winner. Here's the deal," Pete Williams, NBC News, August 24, 2020.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/trump-s-base-about-what-happens-if-there-s-no-n1237783>

<sup>221</sup> "Trump's co-author on 'The Art of the Deal' donates \$55,000 royalty check to charity," David A. Fahrenthold, *Washington Post*, October 4, 2016.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/10/04/trumps-co-author-on-the-art-of-the-deal-donates-55000-royalty-check-to-charity/>

"Donald Trump's troubled charity foundation to shut down," BBC, December 18, 2018.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46611178>

But if Trump loses, and we no longer have any excuse not to do it. In other words, we must work together to heal the nation and bridge the divides that brought him to office in the first place. We must address the frustration, hopelessness, and sense of voicelessness that led to many people being desperate for radical change and wishing to see someone “drain the swamp.” We must address the reasons why they believed a lying New York City swindler with a proven history of fraud was someone they could trust. And that will not be easy.

But it must be done.

Speaking in general terms, the way to solve problems is to first identify them, then do research, then make a plan to solve or reduce them.

I like to think this book has helped identify several problems. Solving them, though, will require skills, expertise, and knowledge far beyond my own.

## The Economy

A lot of the appeal of Donald Trump, outsider candidate, was that he said he was going to find a way to improve people’s livelihoods and provide them with better opportunities. Trump blamed immigrants and foreigners for stealing their jobs. And a lot of the appeal of Bernie Sanders, outsider candidate, was that he said he was going to find a way to improve people’s livelihoods and provide them with better opportunities. Bernie Sanders blamed billionaires and the capitalist system. And a lot of the appeal of Andrew Yang, another outsider candidate, was that he was going to find a way to improve people’s livelihoods and provide them with better opportunities. He blamed automation and artificial intelligence. Obviously, there’s a pattern here.

Skipping the “why” of the problem, all these people believe that the economy has deep problems and we need to start addressing them. I agree. As Andrew Yang said, Trump is “a symptom of a disease that has

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been building up in our communities for years and decades.” As we saw in chapter 2, Trump supporters are often experiencing real economic problems, and these have in turn caused social and health problems. “These communities are seeing their way of life get blasted into smithereens,” Yang said during the campaign.<sup>222</sup>

If all these people are saying that these communities have deep problems based on their economic situation, and if countless voters and citizens from these communities are saying the same thing, well, it’s safe to say, sadly, these communities have deep problems. It’s time to research, address, and fix this.

## Division of Society

Community building would be a good place to start. Find ways to interact more with their neighbors, and encourage others to do the same. Years ago, when I was a newspaper reporter, I wrote about a program to develop more of a sense of community among upstate New York farmers in rural areas. It also involved educating farmers on farm safety and health issues. Programs like this, yet aimed at many different kinds of people, should be considered. Then, after they learn to interact more with their neighbors, encourage them to interact in a friendly way with people who aren’t their neighbors and are Americans very different from them.

I’ve seen some very close relationships develop between refugees and rednecks, with the result being things like curried venison during deer hunting season. In fact, I once raised some eyebrows when I said, “Navajos are a lot like rednecks. They both like hunting, fishing, and riding around in pickup trucks.” (I went to school with Navajos once upon a time, and, yes, it’s true. You’re going to make friends with most Navajos faster if you ask them about hunting or ranching than if you ask them some question about their traditional cultural philosophies or how they feel about white-Indian historical relations.)

Yes, our society is indeed racially and ethnically divided in many ways, but there are many activities where diverse groups work together with little friction. Music, sports, volunteer activities, cooking and

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<sup>222</sup> “Yang says Trump is the symptom not the cause of the nation’s problems,” *PBS News Hour*, February 7, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/yang-says-trump-is-the-symptom-not-the-cause-of-the-nations-problems>

sharing food—all these activities and so many more can be shared and done by people with very different backgrounds. Martial arts and weightlifting are both places where different ethnic and racial groups mix and interact with almost no friction, something that often seems to confuse some of my more extreme politically progressive friends.

Some people advocate things like “diversity training” and such to reduce problems between different ethnic and background groups. Personally, I am a bigger fan of having people of different backgrounds learn to get along together by having them do different things, things that they want to do anyway, together. Volleyball, potluck dinners, county fairs, community improvement projects, discount bus trips to the beach or casino with integrated buses. That sort of thing. Include a trained mediator to smooth over problems if you wish, but no thought police tactics.

I urge anyone who is designing programs designed to improve relations between different groups to take the time to listen to the thoughts of Jordan Peterson, a Canadian psychology professor who became a darling of the alt-right after refusing to sign a statement at his university that was intended to embrace human rights and promote acceptance of diversity. He said it went too far and questioned if the issues it was intended to address were really that large on Toronto campuses, which tend to be both liberal and diverse, and if the people who would give the required trainings for people who did not comply were qualified. His original public response was three hours long, and I watched an hour and a half of it. It was quite thoughtful and included many valid criticisms. Whether you agree with his opinions or not, Jordan Peterson is an intelligent man whose reaction led to intensification of opposition to such programs. The election of Donald Trump, undeniably, was also due in part to opposition to such programs. People creating such programs need to design them carefully or they may do more harm in the long run than good.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> “Toronto professor Jordan Peterson takes on gender-neutral pronouns,” Jessica Murphy, BBC News, November 4, 2016.  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-37875695>

Avoid well-intentioned programs that produce an ugly pushback. Remember, the election of Donald Trump needs to be seen as part of such a pushback. And the basic concepts are simple. Understand people are different, treat them the way you would want them to treat you, but draw some simple lines and don't let anyone in society, be they black, yellow, red, white, or brown, cross them.

It's like a work colleague who once commented about a required sexual harassment program: "The whole thing can be summed up as 'don't be an asshole,'" he said. And sometimes people who run these programs don't understand that bringing in extraneous issues that need not be included can be counterproductive.

And remember, the truth is that economics is a big factor in how different groups of people get along. When there's enough to share, people like to share. When there's not enough to go around, people tend to form into groups, often along racial or ethnic lines, and then compete. Fix the economy, and hold volleyball games and potluck dinners! Pete's plan for lasting racial and ethnic harmony.

## **Respect for and appreciation of governmental institutions**

A lot of people in 2016 voted for Donald Trump because they did not like their government and wanted to see it change. Others voted for him because they felt the Democratic Party treated them in condescending ways. While the Republicans cut program designed to help them, many still felt the Republicans treated them with more respect.

The Democratic Party, and the government as a whole, needs to do a better job of explaining themselves. They need to do more outreach and respectfully explain the services they offer.

Many of Trump's base feel that minorities, immigrants, and refugees are getting special treatment and services from the government. Therefore, the government needs to work to ensure that all citizens feel they are getting an equal amount of appropriate services for themselves, and do so in a respectful way. If need be,

we might consider looking to Canada and the other democratic nations that compose NATO for tips on how to use the government to help citizens have better lives without the citizens resenting the assistance.

## **Segmentation of the media and the Spread of Misinformation**

An underlying cause of many of the problems we are facing now is segmentation of the media and spread of distorted information or misinformation. For instance, the other day, early September 2020, on Facebook a friend with very different politics than me but some shared background (American, published author, into martial arts, lived overseas for many years, came back, educated but not found the perfect niche yet) posted that “the Democrats are probably going to lose because people have lost respect for Biden due to the widespread rioting.” This fits nothing I’ve seen or heard, and I do not know a single person personally who has switched their vote from Biden to Trump because of it. Most are not really certain what riots he is referring to, but I would assume he is talking about the widespread civil rights protests in places like Portland, Oregon, Kenosha, Wisconsin, and Rochester, New York. The people I know are aware that the sometimes violent protests are taking place in a very small geographic area and that Trump has refused to address in any way the underlying issues that motivate the protestors. His history of ties with racists, his race-related housing discrimination suit in the 1970s, his involvement in the Central Park Five case, and the way he responded to protests by sending in poorly trained federal agents in unmarked vans who used tactics that only made things worse all show Trump is unsuited to deal with demonstrations for racial equality, especially on the rare occasions when participants become violent or destructive. No one I know who was not planning to vote for Trump before is now planning to vote for him now because of these things. And no one I know is calling them rioting.

We are just not seeing the world in the same way.



We Americans are selecting our information sources from a wider variety than ever before, and we're selecting them to suit what we are comfortable hearing. And in a country with a free press and the First Amendment, it's difficult to know how to respond.

One step would be to consider loss of FCC licensing for agencies that knowingly spread misinformation. Another might be to restore or create something like the old "fairness doctrine" that required broadcast stations to offer all sides of an issue. Then again, both of these ideas apply only to US licensed broadcast media, an increasingly unimportant news source for most people in the internet age.<sup>224</sup>

Regardless, it is now more important than ever that we do something about media outlets that knowingly spread false, misleading, or fabricated stories passing them off as valid news and information. I feel confident, yet fearful, that conspiracy theories and bizarre misinformation and strange claims are going to be an increasingly important and increasingly disturbing part of the American national landscape. And there are many dangers that come from this. The Pizzagate <sup>225</sup>and QAnon <sup>226</sup> conspiracy claims, both encouraged it seems by Trump insiders, have led to misguided attempts by armed men to confront or respond to these imaginary dangers. They have also led to the spread of dangerous misinformation about the coronavirus, alleged but disproven risks from standard vaccinations, and even infiltration of our governments by reptilian

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<sup>224</sup> "Everything you need to know about the Fairness Doctrine in one post," Dylan Matthews, *Washington Post*, August 23, 2011.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-fairness-doctrine-in-one-post/2011/08/23/gIQAN8CXZJ\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-fairness-doctrine-in-one-post/2011/08/23/gIQAN8CXZJ_blog.html)

FCC Fairness Doctrine, accessed September 20, 2020.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FCC\\_fairness\\_doctrine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FCC_fairness_doctrine)

<sup>225</sup> "Fake News Onslaught Targets Pizzeria as Nest of Child-Trafficking," Cecilia Kang, *New York Times*, November 21, 2016.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/technology/fact-check-this-pizzeria-is-not-a-child-trafficking-site.html>

"Arrest Made in an Assault with a Dangerous Weapon (Gun): 5000 Block of Connecticut Avenue, Northwest," DC.gov Metropolitan Police Department, December 5, 2016.

<https://mpdc.dc.gov/release/arrest-made-assault-dangerous-weapon-gun-5000-block-connecticut-avenue-northwest>

<sup>226</sup> "What Is QAnon, the Viral Pro-Trump Conspiracy Theory?" Kevin Roose, *New York Times*, September 1, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-qanon.html>

"QAnon conspiracy theorists have been linked to a killing and multiple armed stand-offs. Here are the criminal allegations connected to the movement and its followers," Rachel E. Greenspan, Insider, August 26, 2020.

<https://www.insider.com/qanon-violence-crime-conspiracy-theory-us-allegation-arrest-killing-gun-2020-8>

space aliens.<sup>227</sup> They are one way foreign powers such as Russia, China, and others spread propaganda designed to divide and influence American behavior.<sup>228</sup>

And even at its less extreme, the problem of broadcasters spreading false information is a very real one with insidious long-term damage. For instance, when the History Channel and other sources broadcast a steady stream of programming on ancient aliens claiming that most of what academics believe about early human history is false, they undermine belief in academia, the value of education, respect for real books and real research on early human history, and the belief that if one works hard to study a field and learns all one can, as most professors do, then your statements about that field should be given extra weight.

Regardless, with the way knowledge and ideas flow in the modern age, with the segmentation of the media by self-selected special interest groups, it leaves our country and society very vulnerable to the spread of dangerous ideas and misinformation. And not only is dangerous information spread by accident, but special interest groups and foreign powers spread it by design to achieve their aims at the cost of our society. We need to start taking this seriously.

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<sup>227</sup> “How Covid-19 myths are merging with the QAnon conspiracy theory,” Marianna Spring and Mike Wendling, BBC, September 3, 2020.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-53997203>

“QAnon’s 2020 resurgence,” Stef W. Kight and Sara Fischer, Axios, August 4, 2020.

<https://www.axios.com/qanons-2020-resurgence-41759d2b-7d08-4d6e-bad0-d2a63b6285ad.html>

“Thanks to the Trump administration, one QAnon theory is panning out,” Dana Milbank, *Washington Post*, September 15, 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/09/15/trump-has-exposed-deep-state-it-is-him/>

<sup>228</sup> “How Russia’s Troll Farm Is Changing Tactics Before the Fall Election,” Davey Alba. *New York Times*, March 29, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/29/technology/russia-troll-farm-election.html>

“Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster: Russia Wants To Pit Americans Against Each Other,” uploaded on September 22, 2020, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kdflja0r8g4>

“US election 2020: China, Russia and Iran ‘trying to influence’ vote,” BBC, August 8, 2020.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2020-53702872>

## Education and critical thinking

Since we live in an age of misinformation, our education systems need to be aware of that and include as much misinformation awareness training as possible in their programs. Fortunately, there is already a term for misinformation awareness training. That term is “critical thinking.” Yes, good old-fashioned, long respected “critical thinking.” As my old martial arts teacher, Tom Bolden, used to scream, “What do you need all that fancy stuff for? Basics, basics, basics!” People need to learn and practice as much critical thinking as possible, now more than ever.

This is my third book on critical thinking and hoaxes and lies and misinformation. They all have “Scams from the Great Beyond” in the title, and they all advocate learning to protect yourself from lies and misinformation. And when the president of the United States is knowingly spreading lies to the citizens of the United States—something that admittedly has indeed happened before, just not at this rate—it’s time for educators to emphasize, then reemphasize, then reemphasize again the importance of critical thinking.

## Conclusion

The United States has a pretty good system, and even if it’s showing some problems, if we work together, we can work through them. American democracy has worked for over two hundred years because the people who live here have decided to make it work. There’s no need to stop now just because things have gotten difficult. Learn all you can, filter out the misinformation, try to learn from people who have studied important things, and when you can, try to make the world a better place, starting with the things and people closest to you.

Peace.