

How Trump Became an American Hero

By Bruce Bawer

In my young adulthood – which, roughly speaking, spanned the decades between the Carter presidency and the dawn of the computer age – most Americans, it seemed to me, were patriots, people who never took their liberty for granted. Of course, members of the Greatest Generation, who'd fought in World War II, were still around in massive numbers to remind us by their presence of what they'd done – and what we owed to the memory of their sacrifice. Still, for all our patriotism, the overwhelming majority of Americans didn't seem to be particularly preoccupied with politics, or to be fiercely partisan. For one thing, the two parties seemed to overlap to an unusual extent: the GOP had its share of liberals like Senator Jacob Javits; the Democrats had Southern conservatives aplenty. For another, very little of what went on in Washington, D.C., made it into the half-hour-long evening news shows or the relatively small amount of space devoted by even major newspapers to political news.



Trump at a rally on July 24, 2024 in Charlotte, North Carolina (Prashantraj Singh/Shutterstock)

Back then, the GOP was the turf of the corporate elite and country-club set, while the Democrats were in thrall to the unions and race hustlers. But both parties fought for the

support of the ordinary folks in the heartland. For a long time, the GOP's chief strategy was to promote "family values," while the Democrats promised handouts in the tradition of the New Deal and Great Society. Still, there were election years in which the two major presidential candidates were both uninspiring and the differences between them seemed minimal.

Meanwhile, largely under the radar of the media and the political establishment, immense changes were taking place in the U.S. Well-paying jobs, the sort that had brought prosperity to the great American middle class, were exported to Mexico and elsewhere, leaving millions of once well-off householders high and dry. And the mass immigration of low-skilled workers put struggling working-class Americans on the unemployment line. Political candidates of both parties scrupulously avoided these issues – issues that mattered desperately to tens of millions of voters – and the so-called journalists who interviewed them failed to press for answers.

Then cable news came along – and, sometime later, the World Wide Web – and an increasing number of ordinary Americans, now exposed to far more political news and commentary than ever before, found themselves drawn into the fray. And along, too, came Donald Trump. To most Americans, he was a TV star. But I'd grown up in New York City, where he'd been a major local media figure long before *The Apprentice*, so he'd been on my radar since my childhood. From the beginning, he was unique. He seemed to bridge the gap between outer-borough Joes (like me, he was from Queens) and Manhattanite masters of the universe. He spoke his mind, and he spoke like a regular guy. He certainly didn't come off as a potential politician, although he'd obviously thought very deeply about the ways in which America's leaders were taking the country in the wrong direction. He brought up issues, economic and otherwise, that most politicians didn't. And if you actually listened to him, you realized that he was one hell of a smart cookie.

Like most other observers, I didn't take it entirely seriously

when he first declared his candidacy for president in 2015. But then I watched the GOP debates. They were a revelation – not just for me, but for millions who were used to what many of us now recognize as the phony, careful, vacuous, and clichéd language of most professional political discourse. Trump not only violated the old rules. He exploded them into bits. And it struck a chord nationwide. More than any of his competitors, he took on subjects that real people cared about, and he addressed them with a unique candor and bluntness.

I started to grasp what some people meant when they talked about the “uniparty” – Republicans and Democrats in entrenched positions of power who had an understanding among themselves that certain topics were off the table. Indeed, Donald Trump helped many of us to realize that the parties were entering a whole new era when it came to whom they really belonged to and what they really stood for. The Democrats, promoted ever since the days of FDR and LBJ as the heroic champions of the working class, had become the ideologically rigid home of corporate globalists and the credentialed elites, not to mention the woke power brokers in Hollywood and Silicon Valley, all of whom seemed determined to turn ordinary Americans into something on the order of feudal serfs. Now Trump turned the GOP – whose Eastern establishment leaders had taken for granted their ability to install a third empty-suited Bush in the White House (“Jeb”) – into the party of constitutional American values and those ordinary Americans. His was an authentically big tent, one in which you were welcome as long as you loved America, put your country first, rejected open borders, and didn’t think that a boy can become a girl.

Trump wasn’t interested in pushing any of the old buttons. Because he wasn’t some cheap political hack. He was in the game for the right reasons. You could feel it. He didn’t need the money. He didn’t need the fame. Yes, he enjoyed the attention. He visibly reveled in his increasing popularity among the people whom Hillary and her ilk smeared as

deplorables – but whom he palpably respected and wished to restore to prosperity and pride. Speaking at gigantic rallies to which enthusiastic middle Americans flocked, he talked to them with an unprecedented frankness, understanding, humor, and camaraderie. He talked about the things that mattered to them and that he understood in a way that only a successful businessman with a long history of dealing with elaborate regulations and tax codes, involvement in high-level international business deals, and observing with care the slimy, self-serving machinations of the “Deep State” – the corrupt, unelected permanent establishment inside the Beltway (which he quite properly referred to as the “Swamp”) – could understand.

Yes, Trump was a product of the Ivy League, but he wasn't a creature of it. He'd made major contributions to the Manhattan skyline, but his manner and his accent marked him as a product of the outer boroughs. You began to hear over and over that, unlike other politicians, he was precisely the same in private as in public. And you began to read stories about how he'd grown up mixing with the construction workers who built his skyscrapers. He knew how to talk to them. He didn't feel uneasy in their presence. In fact, he actually enjoyed their company. He took pleasure in his wealth but had never let it turn him into a snob. Yes, Bill Clinton had come from a dirt-poor Arkansas town, but Yale and Oxford had transformed him into a perfect member of the elite, every bit of a slick operator (recall his nickname “Slick Willie”) as Trump was a straight talker. Hillary, for her part, was famous for changing her accent in front of groups of supporters depending on which part of the country she was appearing in. George W. Bush had posed as a down-home Texan, but he was the son of a president, the grandson of a senator, and the product of Phillips Andover, Yale, and Harvard Business School. Trump was different. No matter where he went, no matter how high- or low-born his audiences, he always wore the same suit and red tie and always talked in exactly the same way.

Trump, in short, was always Trump. Yes, he was sometimes guilty of exaggeration, but he was never dishonest about who he was, deep down, as a person, or about what he stood for. Even as the legacy media branded him a liar and racist, more and more ordinary Americans – people who can recognize a phony when they meet one – discerned that whatever else he might be, he wasn't a phony. He was the real thing – an authentic believer in the values spelled out in the Declaration of Independence, in the federal system outlined in the Constitution, and in government of the people, by the people, and for the people. He'd walked away from a life of almost unimaginable luxury and into the line of fire in order to serve his nation and help its people. And, as president, he proved it. Repeatedly. Magnificently. Courageously. He created an economic boom, slashed needless regulations, killed unfair trade deals, made America energy-independent, sought to curb the immigration of illegals and potential terrorists, and strengthened our alliances, our military, and our police – all of which directly benefited millions of ordinary American and thwarted the schemes of the elite class. Which is just part of the reason why so many Americans are devoted to him in a way that's unprecedented in modern history, and why his most powerful political enemies – whose priorities lie elsewhere – have done everything in their power to destroy him.

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