

Michael Wolff and the Death Rattle of Trumpophobia

He has shamed the sane opponents of Trump into separating from the bloodless assassin.

by Conrad Black



Having encountered Michael Wolff and having had an acidulous public exchange with him, I attest that he is an utterly odious man. He can't write properly, has no professional integrity, and is a sociophobic mud-slinger and myth-maker. His entry into the continuing Trump controversy in its twilight proclaims that we have reached the era of the swiftly evaporating, nausea-inducing nothingburger. And yet, in what will surely prove the one civically useful thing Wolff will have done in his adult life, he has performed almost the final evisceration of the throbbing pustule of deranged Trumpophobia. His book is so overtly and egregiously false, so

completely worthless as an account of what is happening in the White House, the respectable elements of Trumpophobia are finally taking to the lifeboats. They can no longer do boat drill with, and wear the same uniform as, the psychotics, the displaced crooks and decayed servitors of Clintonia, and the violent riff-raff of the extreme Left and Right.

Attempting to mind-read Michael Wolff is a task for a rare specialist of psycho-zoology, a field where I have no standing, but I suspect he thought he could play a role in administering a death blow to the Trump administration. Instead he has produced a work of such filth that he delighted and exploited the politically insane elements of anti-Trumpism, picking their pockets while leading them into the no-go zone of claiming the president is an idiot, a lunatic, and a belligerent menace. Instead of taking the headship of an accelerating dump-Trump movement, Wolff shamed the sane opponents of Trump into separating from the bloodless assassins, the Carl Bernsteins and Maxine Waterses, and into beginning to reconstitute themselves as a loyal opposition. The initial enthusiasm for the Wolff demonography, replete with polite references to Steve Bannon, formerly represented as the puppet-master of the Trump dunciad, gave way to cooler heads recognizing that the game was up.

David Brooks, a civilized and erudite commentator in the *New York Times*, led the way out of the inferno for the conservative anti-Trump intelligentsia. He is far from the grace of conversion, but Mr. Brooks wrote:

The anti-Trump movement, of which I'm a proud member, seems to be getting dumber. It seems to be settling into a smug fairy tale version of reality that filters out discordant information. More anti-Trumpers seem to be telling themselves a "Madness of King George" narrative: Trump is a semi-literate madman surrounded by sycophants who are morally, intellectually and psychologically inferior to people like us. I'd like to think it's possible to be fervently anti-

Trump while also not reducing everything to a fairy tale.

Bingo! Mr. Brooks is on the up escalator. When he has a little altitude, he will recognize that what he has left behind him is not a fairy tale but a fictional horror story.

Trump has mannerisms and foibles that are legitimately unattractive to many, and that is certainly adequate reason to disapprove of him, if there is a better alternative. There isn't. And as Mr. Brooks and kindred spirits, including another old friend with whom I have parted company on this subject but retained cordial relations, Bret Stephens, now also of the *New York Times*, acknowledges, what this president has done is actually quite good, and a vast improvement on his post-Reagan predecessors. Wolff had his three days of national prominence, like so many other Trumpophobes who have had cameo roles, from Khizr Khan to Gloria Allred, but the anti-Trump coalition fragmented. Alan Dershowitz, a Clinton voter in the last election, warned that the effort to escalate perfervid Trumpophobia from criminalization of policy differences (as well as sour grapes over the lost election) to "psychiatrization" was even more sinister and anti-democratic. The leftist media had a few vocal psychiatrists whom they have been trotting out from time to time to claim Trump is mad, and in the last few days they swanned through parts of the lockstep circuit of CNN-MSNBC-CBS-ABC-NBC (which briefly declared itself in favor of Oprah Winfrey for president on January 8, before retracting).

But then, as is his habit, the president sortied out of what David Brooks calls the "Potemkin White House" and dealt his enemies a shattering rebuff. He had the cameras present in the cabinet room for almost an hour as he led, rather magisterially, as all admitted, a discussion of immigration issues with 22 Democratic and Republican leaders of both congressional houses, and sat himself next to leading Democrats Senator Richard Durbin and Representative Steny

Hoyer. The country saw that Donald Trump is reasonable, persuasive, and knowledgeable. To prove to skeptics that miracles occur, CNN's ne plus ultra of fake-news authorship, Wolf Blitzer, uttered words of respectful admiration for the president. On a higher plane, relatively pro-Trump commentator Mollie Hemingway wrote in the *Federalist* (January 8) that the effort to portray Trump as mentally unbalanced and stupid and incompetent was an attempted "coup."

That is exactly what it is. Bernstein especially, after coasting for 45 years on his co-assassination of Richard Nixon, who despite his amply publicized shortcomings was one of the most successful presidents in the country's history, richly deserves a severe comeuppance. His emergence from the catacombs of leftist mythology as he padded around the usually suspect television studios and the overpaid after-dinner circuit, dilating with well-rehearsed earnestness on the "constitutional crisis," should at least require that his mouth be publicly washed out with soap. For those unversed in the pathology of the over-bemedalled Watergate veterans, Bernstein means by his conjured constitutional crisis the 25th Amendment, which in the event of a severe medical incapacity, permits the combination of the vice president, the majority of the cabinet, and two-thirds of both houses of Congress to suspend the president. That he believes there is any chance of the 25th Amendment's being taken seriously on the existing facts shows that he (and not the president) is mad.

It is to this pitiful, water-filled, rat-infested trench of last defense that the stragglers and quasi-deserters of the Trumpophobic flat-earth resistance have retreated, and the buglers urging them forward into no-man's land against the Trump machine guns are the two most fraudulent scoundrels in all of the American information industry: Carl Bernstein and Michael Wolff. The nasty little secret, singing joyously above the battlefield like a lark, is that Donald Trump is a very capable president, and has had the best first year of any

president since Nixon, if not Eisenhower, or even FDR. To appreciate what has happened, a little perspective is needed: Trump's candidacy was a joke; then he was unelectable, then his election could be invalidated, then he could be impeached, and then he could be removed for past harassment of women, or violating the Logan Act, or obstruction of justice, and now mental incapacity.

Donald Trump is a strange cat and an acquired taste, but he is one of the most vivid, and one of the most astoundingly successful figures of American history. I predict that a year from now, David Brooks and Bret Stephens will be at least closet supporters, even if they have sociocultural clothespins on their noses.

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