

Trump's political future depends on whether he can change

by Conrad Black



The Trump era appears to be ending and at this point it seems to be ending in about as undignified a manner as President Donald Trump's millions of critics would have predicted.

As someone generally supportive of this president, I often have regretted the lapses in taste and civility that he has exhibited. It never seemed very important that so many of his speeches and press briefings were filled with self-serving references to himself. When cant and emotionalism (not to mention snobbery) abate, it will be seen that Mr. Trump's accomplishment in coming from completely outside politics or high military service to win the White House – and then implementing a brilliant economic program and fulfilling his pledges to renegotiate disadvantageous trade deals, curb

illegal immigration, bring real assistance to lower-income groups and pursue a foreign policy that was unambiguously in America's national interest without asking anything unreasonable of allies – has been a tour de force.

Like a talented comedian or circus acrobat, only when he has left the stage will it be possible for most people to set aside the entertainment aspect of his performance, whether they liked or were revolted by it, and recognize his remarkable achievements. Within a couple of months, the process of evaluating his record will become much more rigorous, and the frequent gaucheries will start to recede from memory, like the folksiness of Harry Truman, the syntactical problems of Dwight Eisenhower, the crudities of Lyndon Johnson, the banalities of Jimmy Carter, the brown suits of Ronald Reagan and the malapropisms of the Bushes.

Most of the presidents just mentioned, including Mr. Trump, were capable, but none of them, from the most to the least distinguished, was sent to the White House by a casting agency. Nor may any journalistic interpretation be accepted as having the remotest relationship to historical judgment. Richard Nixon was one of the most talented, successful presidents in history but remains in the dungeon of sanctimonious hypocrisy in which the media imprisoned him. Barack Obama glows still in his suave, stylish personification of America's rejection of racism and embrace of the fundamental equality of all men; he was the conjuration of Jefferson the slaveholder's egalitarian vision. Yet, Mr. Obama was in fact (and will be seen by history to have been) a mediocre, below-average president. All he produced was Obamacare (which was unsuccessful), the "green" tyranny (which was nonsense) and the Iranian nuclear agreement (which was a disaster).

Mr. Trump's accomplishments as president are beyond debate and will quickly prevail in the national memory over the nonsense in which he often enshrouded them.

Of course he has not, as he has claimed, done as much for African Americans as Abraham Lincoln or even Johnson did. (Fox News' Harris Faulkner had to remind him when Mr. Trump favorably compared his performance to that of Lincoln: "Mr. President, we are free.") But he did a great deal to improve the economic conditions of African Americans and the persistent allegations of his racism, including from the Obamas, are a shameful defamation, rebutted by the large increase in voting support of African Americans that Mr. Trump achieved last month.

Of course he did not win the election by millions of votes, as he claims; in both his presidential elections, he trailed his chief opponent in the popular vote. But it also is obvious that the ballot-harvesting and skulduggery alleged in the Democratic-governed states of Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin (as well as in Georgia, whose Republican governor and secretary of state have effectively betrayed the president) produced a tainted election; 70% of Republicans, and about a quarter of Democrats, say so. Despite attorney Sidney Powell's exaggerated legal claims, and Rudy Giuliani signing on to a lot of lawsuits where the remedy demanded vastly exceeded the evidence of skulduggery, there is clearly enough to justify Mr. Trump's claim that he was cheated, even if it has been impossible to separate fraudulent "harvested" ballots from genuine ones and to verify authenticity in a large number of cases.

With all that said, how much more easily this Trump term would have gone if the president had used more sugar and less vinegar.

No one can forget the disgraceful antagonism with which he was greeted – not only in Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., promising "scorched earth" and the late Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., saying Mr. Trump was "illegitimate," but also in Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and then-House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., sitting on their hands for six months and

deserting Mr. Trump on the replacement of Obamacare. That the president did not have an uncontrollable reflex to turn the other cheek is understandable, but if he could have handled some of the less toxic chaff thrown at him with the wry humor and even a little self-deprecation for which charming presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan were so renowned, it would have been much more difficult for the national political media to maintain and infect the country with their relentless hatred of him, right to the present.

However, Mr. Trump has won his fight with the media. He has been a successful president and he has driven the media to an inexcusable frenzy of totalitarian dishonesty. They are purring like tabbies and preening their coats at what they take to be their victory, but not 1 American in 8 believes a word they say or print; they are despised, with the rarest exceptions, by the half of the country that admires the president, and considered useful but ethically tainted lackeys and idiots to the ramshackle Trump-hating coalition that soon will govern the nation.

Whether Mr. Trump has a political future or not depends entirely upon him. If he wishes to leave the arena now, he can do so honorably and confident of a comparatively generous historic treatment. The presumptive president-elect clearly is not an individual of the stature or stamina necessary for such a demanding position, and almost nobody claims he is. Democrats are an uneasy and opportunistic agglomeration of corrupt city machines, urban guerrillas, the subversive wasteland of academia, the Luddite teachers unions and the detritus of the old Democratic Party of Joe Biden's Scranton youth.

Mr. Trump has cracked open the Democrats' African American and Hispanic American fiefdoms, and if he acquires more presidential dignity – and an enhanced judgment of when and what to tweet, of when and when not to be back in the people's

faces as he has been, exhaustively, for four years, and can sometimes be discreet and patient – he could still have a brilliant political future. There is no rival to him as Republican leader and, after four years of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, the Democrats will be sitting ducks. Even as his enemies celebrate, Donald Trump, by calculation or inadvertence, will be the chief architect of America's next political decade.

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