

When the Sensible Take Leave of their Senses

More worrying than the abrasive groupthink of the national political media are the failings of today's commentariat. The downfall of once-great thinkers like George Will is particularly disheartening.

by Conrad Black



Almost all observers of the current presidential election campaign, regardless of their leanings, recognize that the national political media is overwhelmingly hostile to the president. The results of this election will determine whether their determination to evict Donald Trump from the White House will enhance the reputation of the national political press corps for invincibility when united, or whether they are

brought into severe disrepute as a monolithic paper tiger. Historians of both the presidency and of the American media will opine for many years on why this overwhelming partisanship developed.

My own supposition has been that when Trump announced his candidacy in the spring of 2015, and made clear that he was running to drain the Washington swamp—specifically including what he identified as the rot in the national political media—they all saw him first as a joke, and then as a threat.

It is piquant that Trump, to this point, has outsmarted them largely by recourse to talk radio and to social media, even though the corporate heads of the social media companies are ostentatiously anti-Trump limousine liberals. It is hard not to admire, at least to some degree, someone who has analyzed the complex political system of the country intensively for many years, changed parties seven times in 13 years, and who—looking for a channel where he could transform his great fame as a businessman, reality television star, impresario, and social figure, into the highest political office—outwitted and completed an end-run against the whole system; a system whose shortcomings were the motive and the basis of his campaign. He is a pioneer.

Most of the Washington press corps are accustomed to presidents and presidential candidates who show greater deference to them and avoid ill-tempered direct exchanges with random members of the public such as those in which this president regularly engages through his nearly 200 million social media contacts. And even the president's supporters, who find his bluntness and his informality a refreshing change from the evasions and pomposity of much of recent presidential history, will acknowledge that there is sometimes a gap between the dignity expected of his great office and this president's conduct of it.

But that does not make the relentless professional dishonesty

of most of the national political media in the United States any more acceptable.

The *New York Times*, appropriately to its status for over a century as the country's leading newspaper, led the way with a 2016 declaration that its goal was not to report impartially on national affairs, but rather to contribute to Trump's defeat.

In some respects, the *Times'* candor is welcome and commendable, but it is also disgraceful. It has been followed by virtually all of the influential traditional media, all of whom are guilty of unprofessional conduct. Whether they win or lose their war with this president, all polling indicates they have forfeited the credibility that the sound functioning of a democracy requires the press to retain.

In systematically destroying the believability of their craft, the press is undermining democracy and reducing the likelihood of an electorate adequately informed to vote as sensibly as the national interest of a great nation requires. Trump gains considerable support for holding his own against such a barrage of malicious disinformation from the media.

More worrying than the abrasive groupthink of the national political media are the failings of today's commentariat. The modern and edgy, the woke and provocative, are not people from whom much could be expected and so their failure is more complete than it is disappointing.

More distressing by far are the lapses of the deans of comment, worldly, educated, highly intelligent people, elegant writers, and fluent speakers, who on the subject of the incumbent president dissolve into embittered sloppiness and mythmaking.

One of the most saddening exposures I have had to this syndrome came when I watched my esteemed friend of 40 years, George F. Will, speak by Zoom last week to another friend, Tom

Switzer, of the Australian Centre for Independent Studies.

George rewrites the past as well as the present. He claims that Barry Goldwater completely routed the Republican establishment in 1964, when in reality he narrowly defeated Nelson Rockefeller and then was massacred at the polls by Lyndon Johnson. But Richard Nixon brought the Republican establishment back to power four years later and Johnson and Nixon ended segregation, a matter that Goldwater was prepared to leave to the states, which would have led to a guerrilla reenactment of the Civil War. Ronald Reagan temporarily replaced the old country club Republican elite and specifically the world-weary Nixon-Kissinger view with the determined optimism of California. Reagan, with the help of George Shultz and Caspar Weinberger and others, won the Cold War.

George Will publicly despised the Bushes, regarded Bill Clinton as "a sociopath," and was suitably unimpressed by Barack Obama. I understand how such an academic gentleman finds Donald Trump unsuitable as president, but it is discouraging that he gives him no credit for eliminating unemployment prior to the COVID-19 shutdowns, oil imports, and 90 percent of illegal immigration. Similarly, Trump gets no credit from Will for causing a general western recognition of the Chinese threat, for stalling the Iranian and North Korean nuclear military programs; for rebuilding the armed forces, or for causing the lower 20 percent of income-earners to enjoy a larger percentage increase in income than the top 10 percent, the first serious beginning anywhere to address the income disparity problem.

Will completely whitewashes Joe Biden's mental incompetence and his capitulation to the Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party in a straight Marxist unity agreement. He overlooks the Democrats' assault on the election process in their attempts to bypass the Electoral College legislatively and to make the District of Columbia a state so they could

pick up two senators. He is unconcerned about the Democrats' plan to reopen the southern borders and enfranchise everyone who comes in, and overlooks their obvious desire to top-up in 2020 as required with harvested mail-in ballots.

George Will must know that a Biden victory on a Sanders platform would be the beginning of the possibly irreversible decline of the United States and of the prolonged supremacy of China. He knows Biden has enriched his family through public office, that special prosecutor John Durham is probably about to indict important members of the Obama Administration, and he knows Biden is in the hands of the far-left of his party.

George Will and some of the other eminent commentators know that, whatever his failings, Trump is the only person capable of resurrecting American leadership in the world. Trump has, contrary to what Will has said, shaped up America's alliances in Europe and Asia.

No one with an IQ in triple figures expects anything worthwhile from the Stelter-Tapper-Lemon-Cuomo-Scarborough-Maddow dunciad, and the non-tabloid written press, except for the *Wall Street Journal*, is hopeless. George Will is a great man and has some duty to sound like one, ahead of what he acknowledges to be a very important election. Otherwise, he would be complicit in the Biden-Sanders debacle that will ensue.

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