



Trump Then and Now

Cal Thomas

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It wasn't a difficult choice to watch the first of the NBA playoff games between Miami and Denver instead of Donald Trump's appearance on "Hannity," but when Denver built a 12-point lead, I switched channels to see if Trump might say something new? Nope, same old denouncing of opponents and the juvenile name-calling, as Ron DeSantis has rightly called it.

Trump's only gracious moment was saying about President Biden's fall at the Air Force Academy, "I hope he wasn't hurt."

People like me who rationalized that a vote for Trump was a vote for his policies and not his corrosive personality made the political equivalent of a bargain with the Devil. With the exception of nominating three conservative justices to the Supreme Court, Trump increased government spending, failed to finish the border wall or make Mexico pay for it, and agreed to shut down the country over Covid, a mistake that curbed learning in schools and ruined many businesses. Then there are the lies he told and still tells and his low view of women.

If he wins the general election – a dubious proposition given the abandonment of Independents – he is likely to ruin the Republican Party, as Wall Street Journal columnist Peggy Noonan credibly argues: "The GOP will disappear as a party. Meaning the primary national vehicle of conservative thought and policy will disappear." Ah, thought and policy. William F. Buckley Jr. thought and had policy ideas. Far less so Trump.

In January 2016, National Review, the magazine Buckley founded, asked several conservatives and libertarians to comment on Trump. The responses are worth re-visiting because of what we now know about him.

David Boaz of Cato Institute: "From a libertarian point of view — and I think serious conservatives and liberals would share this view — Trump's greatest offenses against American tradition and our founding principles are his nativism and his promise of one-man rule."

L. Brent Bozell III (Buckley's nephew): "Trump might be the greatest charlatan of them all."

Columnist Mona Charen: "Trump has made a career out of egotism, while conservatism implies a certain modesty about government. The two cannot mix. Who, except a pitifully insecure person, needs constantly to insult and belittle others, including, or perhaps especially, women?"

Ben Domenech, *The Federalist*: “A government of the people, by the people, and for the people is precisely what the Constitution offers, and what is most threatened by ‘great men’ impatient to impose their will on the nation. ... Conservatives should reject Trump’s hollow, Euro-style identity politics.”

Erick Erickson, talk radio host: “In October 2011, when many of the other Republican candidates were fighting Barack Obama, Donald Trump told Sean Hannity, ‘I was [Obama’s] biggest cheerleader.’ Trump donated to both the Clinton Foundation and Hillary Clinton’s Senate campaign, and to the campaigns of Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid, Chuck Schumer, and other Democrats. In 2011, according to the website OpenSecrets.org, ‘the largest recipient [of Donald Trump’s political spending] has been the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee with \$116,000.’”

Writer Steven F. Hayward: “Restraint is clearly not in his vocabulary or his character.”

Novelist Mark Helprin: “... he has like a tapeworm invaded the schismatically weakened body of the Republican party. ... He doesn’t know the Constitution, history, law, political philosophy, nuclear strategy, diplomacy, defense, economics beyond real estate, or even, despite his low-level-mafioso comportment, how ordinary people live.”

Pundit Dana Loesch: “Popularity over principle — is this the new Right?”

Me: “Anger is not policy. Trump channels a lot of the righteous (and some of the unrighteous) anger of voters and sees the solution as himself. Isn’t a narcissist what we currently have in the White House?”

As did so many others, I bought into the view that Trump was better than the Democratic alternatives. Conservatives who twice voted for Trump should decide now whether they will make a third bargain with the Devil. If Trump’s legal problems don’t defeat him, perhaps a sufficient number of voters will.