

The Republican Identity Crisis After Trump

This Presidency poses stark questions about the ideological future of both parties.

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The last weekend in August, 2001, two weeks before the attacks of 9/11, President George W. Bush travelled with his wife, Laura, and an entourage of government officials to a steel mill outside Pittsburgh. He worked the tables at a picnic for members of the United Steelworkers union and their families. I was there as a reporter, and I recall standing just a few feet away from the President on that hot day, listening to him make small talk with the factory workers and watching the sweat soak through his checkered shirt. After the picnic, he ascended a temporary stage and gave a speech promising a “level playing field” for American steel. A few months later, he instituted a tariff on steel imports.

A President serves as the chief executive of the federal government, but he is also the functional head of his political party. Bush was at the steel mill more as Republican-in-Chief than as head of state. Though he couldn't have imagined that Donald Trump, whom he is known to despise, would become President, Bush was trying out a populist turn in Republicanism as he attempted to persuade Democratic blue-collar workers in the Rust Belt to leave their party. Bush's family was solidly anti-tariff; his father had been denied a second term in 1992 partly because two maverick challengers, Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot, both anti-free-trade nationalists, had roughed him up enough for Bill Clinton to be able to win the Presidential election, with forty-three per cent of the popular vote. Bush, by making protectionist gestures, was now departing from the tradition of his father and grandfather. (In the 2004 election, he flipped three counties in western Pennsylvania that he had lost in 2000, and came close to carrying the state.)

If you have Presidential ambitions, you have to think about a collection of policies and stances that could enable you to win by bringing together various groups across the country. Candidates have a number of options about which policies to include. Bush's enthusiasm for steel tariffs didn't last long—he had rescinded them by the next year. So what was in his collection?

Shortly after Bush's victory against John Kerry, he made a swaggering appearance before the press, announcing, “I earned capital in the campaign, political capital, and now I intend to spend it.” He did this by making two big bets on the future of the Republican Party, both of which went spectacularly awry. The first was a relatively permissive immigration policy. He believed that Republicans could appeal to Latinos, the country's fastest-growing minority group. The first flight of ads that Bush ran as a Presidential candidate, in Iowa in 2000, included radio spots in Spanish—“artifacts from a lost civilization,” one of his media consultants called them. In 2004, he got about forty per cent of the Latino vote. Second, he proposed to begin privatizing Social Security—making it similar to an account that people could invest in the stock market, as they did with their I.R.A.s. This was meant to persuade middle-class Americans to think of themselves as members of the “investor class,” as Republicans liked to say, rather than as

grateful beneficiaries of the Democratic Party. The initiative on immigration set off a furious rebellion from the Republican right; the Social Security proposal enraged both Democrats and Republicans. There went Bush's political capital.

The failure of the war in Iraq and Bush's insufficient response to Hurricane Katrina made him deeply unpopular, but the Bush dynasty retained enough of its mystique for Jeb Bush to enter the 2016 Presidential race as the heavy Republican favorite. He aimed to be friendlier than his brother had been both to the markets and to Latino voters. (His Spanish is better than George W.'s, and his wife is Latina.) Most of the other Republican candidates had similar positions, but Donald Trump made precisely opposite bets. He flung around flamboyantly offensive racial stereotypes about minorities, especially Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants. He defended Social Security. He resurrected the Buchanan-Perot position on trade, which both parties had rejected for decades. On foreign policy, he was an aggressive isolationist, hostile to the country's elaborately maintained system of alliances. He attacked big business more often than any Republican candidate in memory. And even if you believe that, because of Russian meddling and the peculiarity of the Electoral College, his victory in the 2016 Presidential election was not truly legitimate, there is no question that he beat Jeb Bush, Scott Walker, Marco Rubio, Chris Christie, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, and the other aspirants to the Republican nomination.

Trump will not be President forever—he may be in the role for only a few more months. It's hard to imagine that the Republican Party could come close to replicating him with another Presidential candidate, unless it's Donald Trump, Jr. But is there a future in Trumpism? This is a live question for both parties. The major political development of the past decade, all over the world, has been a series of reactions against economic insecurity and inequality powerful enough to blow apart the boundaries of conventional politics. On the right, this can be seen in the regimes of Jair Bolsonaro, in Brazil; Narendra Modi, in India; Viktor Orbán, in Hungary; and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in Turkey. There are new nativist and nationalist parties across Western Europe, and movements like the ones that produced Brexit, in Britain, and the *gilets jaunes*, in France. An ambitious Republican can't ignore Trumpism. Nor can an ambitious Democrat: the Democratic Party has also failed to address the deep economic discontent in this country. But is it possible to address it without opening a Pandora's box of virulent rage and racism? Lisa McGirr, a historian at Harvard who often writes about conservatism, told me, "The component of both parties that did not grapple with the insecurity of many Americans—that created the opportunity for exclusionary politics. It's not Trump. It's an opportunity that Trump seized."

The Republican Party has long had a significant nativist, isolationist element. In the Party's collective memory, this faction was kept in check by "fusionism," a grand entente between this element and the Party's business establishment. The best-known promoter of fusionism is the late William F. Buckley, Jr., the theatrically patrician founder of *National Review* and an all-around conservative celebrity. Buckley tried to keep anti-Semites and conspiracy theorists out of the conservative movement, but he was not a standard Chamber of Commerce Republican. His first book attacked liberal universities, his second defended Joseph McCarthy, and in 1957, when Dwight Eisenhower was sending federal troops to integrate Little Rock Central High School, he wrote an article titled "why the south must prevail." Buckley helped define American conservatism as a movement that supported free-market economics and internationalism and welcomed serious intellectuals, including former Communists such as James Burnham, Frank Meyer, and Whittaker Chambers.

Fusionism brought these views together into what seemed for a long time, at least from the outside, to be a relatively workable political coalition. Philip Zelikow, a veteran Republican foreign-policy official and one of hundreds of prominent members of the Party who vigorously opposed Trump in 2016, said, “World War II, followed by nearly World War III, brought the United States into an unprecedented world role. And a vocal minority didn’t accept it. They don’t like foreigners. They think they’re playing us for suckers. There were a lot of Pearl Harbor and Yalta conspiracy theories that we’ve forgotten about. This group concentrates overwhelmingly in the Republican Party.” For a long time, it was kept in check. Now, in Zelikow’s view, it has grown in prominence and become less deferential to the business wing of the Republican establishment, and is “close to being the most influential element in the Party.”

The Cold War made fusionism possible. In the name of helping capitalism defeat Communism, the movement allied Republicans who adored McCarthy with those who despised him, on the basis of a shared commitment to an aggressive American military stance and a super-empowerment of private business. But the isolationist impulse has deep roots in American political culture. It was clearly present during the red scare after the First World War, the repudiation of Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations, and the passage of the 1924 law that severely restricted immigration. As Zelikow put it, “The isolationists believed the U.S. should be bristling with weapons. Foreigners are a viral pathology. The whole point is to keep foreigners away from us.” These attitudes were consistent with a high-alarm version of internationalism that focussed on the Soviet threat. Buckley-style conservatism went from being regularly dismissed as irrelevant, a creed whose following didn’t extend far beyond the small circulation of a political magazine, to being the core principle of Ronald Reagan’s Presidency.

In 1976, Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, was the first born-again Christian to be elected President. But, soon afterward, the group that had helped power his rise became a substantial and reliably Republican voting bloc. As the nation as a whole became more secular, the Christian right grew in strength and in numbers. Beginning with the Moral Majority, in the late seventies, evangelical groups became aggressively political, fuelled by contributions from churchgoers and from rich political donors. Evangelical leaders have embraced opposition to abortion, previously mainly a Catholic concern, as a primary cause. On a parallel track during Reagan’s rise, the business wing of the Republican Party was creating a powerful network of media outlets, think tanks, and lobbying organizations. They were all interested in such libertarian causes as tax cuts and deregulation. In hindsight, the partnership between evangelicals and libertarians wasn’t a natural one, but for a long time it held together in the interest of the Republican Party. Today, more than eighty million Americans say they are evangelicals—including George W. Bush, who in 1985 was born again.

The threat of Communism faded with the end of the Cold War, and, as inequality and globalization increased, many voters in both parties felt left behind. One of the pre-Trump signs of this trend among Republicans was the sudden emergence of the Tea Party, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and Barack Obama’s Inauguration. According to Glenn Hubbard, an economist who chaired the White House Council of Economic Advisers under Bush and was a Presidential-campaign adviser for Mitt Romney, in 2012, and Jeb Bush, in 2016, “There have been tectonic shifts with globalization and technological change. Economics 101 says, ‘It all works out. The gains compensate for the losses.’ But they didn’t. And élites didn’t care—including the Democratic élites. Most people aren’t going to be entrepreneurs. That’s the economic problem. Also, there are cultural factors.” Hubbard started taking Trump seriously in

early 2016, when his younger brother, the country musician Gregg Hubbard, told him that his fans loved Trump. Erick Erickson, a radio host who is one of the leading figures in the evangelical wing of the conservative movement, has the same sense of a broken link between the Republican Party's religious base and its business élite. "The Party today is more populist than conservative," he told me. "It's the populism of a growing percentage of Americans who feel shut out. It's younger, blue-collar voters—a coalition of grievance. They're not conservative or liberal. They have grievances against the élite." Karl Rove, Bush's chief strategist, agreed with this assessment: "In 2016, people wanted somebody to throw a brick through a plate-glass window."

In American politics, white nativism and racism tend to rise in conjunction with economic distress. Quite often, liberal economic reforms have been achieved at the price of compromises with politicians who were anything but liberal on race. The greatest triumph of liberalism in American history, the New Deal, entailed a bargain with the segregationist South in which the Jim Crow system remained firmly in place. In the twenty-first century, rising economic discontent among working-class whites has often caused them to lash out at people from other groups. Albert Mohler, the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Louisville, and a leader of the religious wing of the conservative movement, told me, "There's an anxiety. A world is being demolished before your eyes. It's an instinct that things aren't going as they should. The world is coming apart. Somebody has to say no."

Trump's Republican opponents in 2016, who had been living in a world created by the Republican donor class, didn't see that the Republican coalition had been shattered. After Obama defeated Mitt Romney in the 2012 election, Reince Priebus, then the head of the Republican National Committee (who later followed the familiar trajectory from Never Trumper to Trump enabler to Trump exile), commissioned an inquiry to find out what had gone wrong. The resulting report, known in Republican circles as "the autopsy," noted a significant decline in the Latino vote for Republican Presidential candidates since the George W. Bush high-water mark, in 2004, and urgently called on the Party to reaffirm its identity as pro-market, government-skeptical, and ethnically and culturally inclusive. Romney would have carried Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada if he had replicated Bush's share of the Latino vote. The Republican establishment, and most of the 2016 Republican Presidential field, accepted the autopsy as revealed truth.

This left an opening for Trump to ignore a series of supposedly inviolable Republican bromides. He didn't talk about the need for limited government or for balancing the federal budget. He didn't talk about the United States as the guarantor of freedom worldwide. He didn't extoll free trade. He didn't court the Koch brothers. He did not sign the no-new-tax pledge that the conservative organizer Grover Norquist has been imposing on Republican Presidential aspirants for decades. A new book, "Never Trump," by two political scientists, Robert Saldin and Steven Teles, asserts that Trump was opposed by more officials in his own Party (the Never Trumpers of their title) than any Presidential nominee in recent American history. Nonetheless, he got more votes in the Republican primary than any Presidential candidate ever has. Newt Gingrich, the former House Speaker, who in the nineties laid some of the groundwork for Trump's rise by establishing hot-blooded attack as the dominant Republican leadership style, told me, "He won because he's a dramatically better politician than anybody believed. A substantial part of the country felt demeaned. Talked down to." Gingrich, who was among the first prominent

Republican politicians to endorse Trump, has written two glowing books about the “great comeback” that the President’s agenda represents.

Diane Feldman is a retired pollster who specialized in getting Democrats elected in swing states. In 2018, she worked on the successful campaigns of Senators Sherrod Brown, of Ohio, and Tammy Baldwin, of Wisconsin, two years after Trump carried both states. During that election cycle, she conducted a series of focus groups with people who had voted for Obama in 2012 and Trump in 2016. “Here was a choice that was really different,” she said. “They knew him from ‘The Apprentice.’ They thought he’d get things done. And he’s more interesting than the other candidates. That matters more and more. They’re anti-government, anti-élite. Élite means coastal attitudes: ‘They think they’re better than us, they’re P.C., they’re virtue-signallers.’ ‘He doesn’t come across as one of those people who think they’re better than us and are screwing us.’ ‘They lecture us.’ ‘They don’t even go to church.’ ‘They’re in charge, and they’re ripping us off.’ It is a core difference on what has been happening for the past twenty years.”

Trump’s key insight in 2016 was that the Republican establishment could be ignored, and his primary campaign pitched only to the Republican base, which no longer believed in the free-market gospel, if it ever had. There would be no penalty for violating any ironclad rule of traditional Republicanism. Mike Murphy, a veteran Republican consultant who was affiliated with Jeb Bush in 2016, said, “Trump was a perfect grievance candidate, at a time when Republican voters wanted to blow up the system. I did Arnold Schwarzenegger—he was what Hollywood people call a ‘pre-awareness title.’ People thought Trump was all over the place on Republican-base issues like guns and abortion, and that would do him in. But he hit this note of resentment. He was ‘politically incorrect’—critical of Obama in crude terms. There was definitely a racial subtext.” He went on, “He was very George Wallace. And then there was the strongman thing: Juan Perón in an orange fright wig. He spoke to a fifty-two-year-old shoe salesman in a dying mall in Parma, Ohio. He has those voters in his head.” Charles Kesler, a conservative political scientist and the editor of the *Claremont Review of Books*, one of a small number of Trump-sympathetic intellectual journals, said much the same thing: “It’s a confession of the disrepair of the Republican Party that he won that race. He shouldn’t have won that race. It revealed the inner hollowness of the Party.”

Nobody pretends that President Trump pores over detailed policy briefs. By all accounts from reporters and from Administration defectors, what you see (tweets, rallies, enmities, palace intrigue) is what you get. Even though Republicans controlled the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the White House for two years, Trump failed to achieve his most loudly voiced campaign promises from 2016, such as building that big, beautiful wall and making Mexico pay for it, getting Congress to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and undertaking a major infrastructure-building program. He is running for a second term without having produced any formal platform. What he did accomplish is a surprisingly conventional Republican program: substantial tax cuts, a vast rollback of federal regulations, large increases in military spending, and the elevation to the federal bench of more than two hundred judges with lifetime tenure, including, most likely, three avowedly conservative Supreme Court Justices.

Trump signed into law a cut in the corporate tax rate from thirty-five per cent to twenty-one per cent—far lower than what Reagan was able to get. Glenn Hubbard said, “Jeb would have given you the tax cut. I know because I wrote it. Trump just doubled it.” In 2017, Julius Krein, an up-and-coming conservative intellectual and a former Trump supporter, founded a magazine

called *American Affairs*. He told me, regarding Trump's economic accomplishments, "Laugh if you want, but he ran on an ambitious agenda, which ran counter to the entire consensus. And in office he did almost nothing for anyone aligned with the 2016 campaign. The donors are driving the bus." Trump's racially charged rhetoric has remained constant from his first campaign through his time in office, but, in policy, foreign affairs is the one area where the Trump of the campaign and the Trump of the White House are truly aligned. His hostility toward alliances and treaties has led him to withdraw from the Paris climate accord and the Iran nuclear deal. He has enacted punitive restrictions on immigration. He constantly attacks nato and other international organizations.

The best explanation I've heard for the difference between Trump as a candidate and Trump as the President goes back to fusionism. Governing requires filling thousands of jobs at the highest levels of the federal government with people who know what they're doing, and also having shovel-ready policies in dozens of specific areas. Trump and most of his closest aides had no government experience and no developed policies. Reagan was elected sixteen years after Barry Goldwater's forty-four-state defeat, in 1964. The conservative movement had used that time to develop a governing infrastructure. As Reagan took office, the Heritage Foundation (established in 1973) released the thousand-page "Mandate for Leadership," which included hundreds of detailed suggestions for conservative policies that Reagan could enact.

There was no manual like that detailing the program Trump ran on, and no economic-policy experts ready to enact it. "This was a case where the dog caught the car," Oren Cass, a young conservative activist and thinker who dislikes both Trump and the Republican establishment, told me. Trump's motley crew included people like Stephen Bannon, Corey Lewandowski, and Paul Manafort, who hadn't previously worked in government, or even had leading roles in prominent Republican campaigns. Stuart Stevens, Romney's senior strategist in 2012 and a Never Trumper, told me, "These are evil people. They don't have a sense of right and wrong. The people Trump attracts—these are damaged people. These are weird, damaged people. They are using Trump to work out their personal issues."

Yet the establishment's governing machinery was still running apace, so there were plenty of appointees and policies available from congressional staffs, think tanks, and lobbying organizations—all funded by the Republican donor class. The establishment is set up to supply the Presidential officials who supervise the career civil servants (also known by Trumpists as "the deep state") in federal agencies. A few distinctively Trump appointees—Stephen Miller, on immigration, and Jared Kushner, on the Middle East—pushed through policies that no traditional Republican would have put into place. Otherwise, appointees without previous connections to Trump but with deep connections to the Party's libertarian wing have put in place an enhanced version of the standard Republican program.

The result has been an odd mix of traditional Republican policies and Trumpian rhetorical flourishes. It's hard to tell whether Trump believed in what his Administration was doing or if he was merely focussed on how to square it with his personal branding strategy. Cliff Sims, a White House aide who left in 2018, is the author of "Team of Vipers," arguably the most revealing of the half-dozen tell-all Administration memoirs. In the book, Sims describes a scene from 2017, in which Trump is on the phone with Paul Ryan and Kevin Brady, the Republican members of Congress who were primarily responsible for the tax-cut plan. Trump says, "I think I've got a great name for this bill—it's going to be really cool. We need to call it 'The Cut Cut Cut Act,'

because this is a tax cut. When people hear the name, that's what we want people to know." (The bill became law under the name Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.)

It's also hard to tell whether Trump is truly an economic nationalist or merely a crony capitalist. He railed against TikTok, a Chinese-owned company, demanding that it sell its U.S. division, but then approved a deal that would permit Chinese control to continue and would also benefit two American companies, Walmart and Oracle, the latter of which has a major Trump contributor as a top executive. The Administration's misadventures in Ukraine appear to have involved attempts to get the head of Naftogaz, the national gas company there, replaced by someone who would agree to import liquefied natural gas from the United States. Whatever is really going on, it's clear that Trump in office is far less economically populist than he claimed to be while he was campaigning for his first term.

Trump's judge-selection machinery depends on the Federalist Society, which for nearly forty years has maintained a pipeline for judges with a shared intellectual doctrine. The Federalist Society, which is far more Reaganite than Trumpian, is intently focussed on business-friendly jurisprudence. Liberals have been largely concerned with the threats to the Affordable Care Act, to *Roe v. Wade*, and to same-sex marriage, but whatever happens next on those issues will certainly be accompanied by a wave of decisions favorable to the business wing of the Republican Party. As Grover Norquist says, "The Supreme Court is not all about sex, it's all about property rights." Amy Coney Barrett would be the sixth member of the Supreme Court with ties to the Federalist Society.

Although Trump's campaign didn't emphasize traditional Republican-base issues like guns and abortion, it built strong ties to the base's major political organizations. That has paid off for Trump, who got about eighty per cent of the white-evangelical vote in 2016. Members of the religious right don't always mingle comfortably with corporate executives at social events, and establishment Republicans have sometimes made them feel that they are slightly embarrassing. "Evangelicals used to get a pat on the head and sent away. Trump brought them in," Erick Erickson, the radio host, who did not support Trump in 2016, said. "I still think character counts. Half the days I think I'll hold my nose and vote for him. If he can't be faithful to three wives, how can he be faithful to us? I cannot vote for a pro-abortion candidate. I am not excited about 2020 at all.

As Trump has outsourced economic policy to the establishment, he has outsourced social policy to the evangelicals. Years before he launched his Presidential campaign, some instinct led him to create an alliance with the religious wing of the Republican Party. Nearly twenty years ago, he formed a public relationship with Paula White, a popular televangelist who preaches the "prosperity Gospel," and who has said that she guided Trump toward active Christianity. Since at least 2011, Trump has been appearing at the American Conservative Union's annual Conservative Political Action Conference, a large gathering of activists from the Party base. In 2016 and 2017, Trump released lists of potential Supreme Court Justices, all of them demonstrably acceptable to both wings of the Republican Party, the evangelicals and the libertarians, and then made appointments only from those lists. (He released a second-term list this year.) He selected Mike Pence, an evangelical Christian who had strong support from the Koch brothers and from other major Republican donors, as his Vice-President. As President, Trump has issued a number of executive orders that evangelicals approve of, such as one that rescinded a provision of the Affordable Care Act which required health-care providers to offer

birth control. “He actually did what he said he’d do,” Albert Mohler told me. “It’s the oddest thing.”

Leaders of organizations with strong connections to the Republican base have found themselves being courted by Trump. Norquist may have failed to get Trump to sign his no-tax pledge during the campaign, but he still feels attended to. “I’d run into him, and he’d say, ‘You like my tax cut? You like my tax cut?’ ” he said. “He flipped on abortion. He came down hard on the Second Amendment.” (Trump has said he had a permit to carry a concealed weapon.) Norquist told me that the day after Trump appointed Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court he invited a group of conservatives to the White House, including Norquist, Paula White, and the leaders of the N.R.A., the Federalist Society, and the National Right to Life organization. “He said, ‘Grover likes me because I cut taxes.’ He didn’t say, ‘I like Grover.’ He said, ‘Grover likes me.’ Usually, you want the President to like you.”

Steven Hayward, a well-connected conservative who has written the two-volume history “The Age of Reagan,” told me, “The biggest surprise about Trump is that he has turned out to govern as a conservative, even more than Reagan did. When George W. Bush withdrew from the Kyoto accords, he sent a letter. When Trump withdrew from the Paris accords, he had a big announcement in the Rose Garden. And he doesn’t know Friedrich Hayek from Salma Hayek. He sold out—to us!”

This is likely to be Trump’s last campaign. In talking to dozens of conservatives over the past few months, I didn’t find anybody who likes or admires him in any conventional way. The Republican officeholders who opposed his nomination but don’t stand up to him are displaying either party loyalty or fear: he remains extraordinarily popular with Republican voters, especially in red states, and he is so vengeful that to displease him is to risk political death. Jeff Sessions experienced this firsthand during his run, earlier this year, for the Republican Senate nomination in Alabama. Sessions had a long, successful history in politics in Alabama and in the Senate, and a record of Trump-like views on immigration. He incurred Trump’s wrath when, as Attorney General, he recused himself from any investigations into Russian interference in the 2016 election, which led to the appointment of Robert Mueller as the special counsel. For months, Trump relentlessly mocked and attacked Sessions on Twitter before firing him, in November, 2018. This year, he endorsed Sessions’s Republican opponent, Tommy Tuberville, a former football coach making his first run for political office. Trump tweeted that Tuberville was “a REAL LEADER.” Sessions lost the primary.

Senator Lindsey Graham, who during the 2016 primary season declared that Trump was “not fit to be President of the United States,” quickly became one of his most abject loyalists, expecting that the President’s support would guarantee his reelection to the Senate in 2020. “Lindsey was scared of being primaried,” a veteran South Carolina Republican consultant told me. “Republicans in South Carolina didn’t like him—but he’s getting cheered by Republicans now.” Graham’s strategy may have worked with Republicans in his home state, but he is paying a price for it. His Democratic opponent, Jaime Harrison, who has raised more money in one quarter than any previous candidate for the Senate, has drawn close to Graham in some polls.

Donald Trump is far too bizarre to be precisely replicable as a model for the generic Republican of the future. That raises the question of where the Republican Party will go after he leaves office. The jockeying for the 2024 Republican nomination is already well under way. Did

Trump's ascension represent a significant change in the Party's orientation, and, if so, will the change be temporary or lasting?

Among the Republicans I spoke to, some of whom will vote for Trump and some of whom won't, there are three competing predictions about the future of the Party over the coming years. Let's call them the Remnant, Restoration, and Reversal scenarios.

Most of the 2016 Republican Presidential candidates accepted the post-2012-autopsy argument that the Party, with its overwhelming lack of appeal to nonwhite voters, was in a demographic death spiral. Trump ran a campaign that seemed designed to appeal only to whites—indeed, only to whites who didn't like nonwhites. That worked well in the Republican primaries, and well enough in the general election for Trump to eke out a victory that would have been impossible without the Electoral College system. He also did slightly better with minority voters than Romney had, though minority turnout was significantly lower than it had been in the two elections when Barack Obama was the Democratic nominee.

Could somebody else use the Trump playbook to win a Presidential election? Those who believe in the Remnant scenario think so. It would require extremely high motivation among Trump's base—mainly exurban or rural, actively religious, and not highly educated—along with a strong appeal to affluent whites, continued modest inroads with minority voters, and a low turnout among Democrats. If a politician were able to tap into the deep antipathy toward “élites” in the Trump heartland, he could compensate, at least in part, for the demographic decline of white voters. In the years between the elections of 1996 and 2016, the Democratic Party lost its voting majority in about a thousand of the three thousand counties in the United States—none in major population centers. Trump carried eighty-four per cent of the counties.

Stalwart Trump fans talk about a looming liberal takeover of all aspects of American life, including religious life, and a domination of the middle of the country by sophisticated, prosperous, snobbish, ruthless people. The ur-text for this viewpoint is “The Flight 93 Election,” an essay published in the *Claremont Review of Books* in 2016. Its author, Michael Anton, who worked briefly at the National Security Council in the Trump Administration, has just published a book called “The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return,” in which he warns that “red America might quietly—at first spontaneously, but later perhaps through more explicit cooperation—start to make federal operations on their turf more difficult.”

The Remnant strategy entails relentless attacks. It rests on the idea of an outpowered cohort of traditional Americans who see themselves as courageously defending their values. The obvious candidate to carry out a high Trumpist strategy in 2024 would be Donald Trump, Jr., who is an active speaker in Trump-admiring circles and in the past two years has published two books that excoriate liberals. Several other potential Republican candidates, most notably Senators Tom Cotton, of Arkansas, and Josh Hawley, of Missouri, have demonstrated that they see Trump's success as instructive. Between them, Cotton and Hawley have two degrees from Harvard, one from Yale, and one from Stanford, but both have been steadily propounding populist and nationalist themes. The forty-year-old Hawley, who is only two years into his first term and is the youngest member of the Senate, is a relentless Twitter user, frequently targeting China, Silicon Valley, and liberals who are hostile to religion. Like Trump in 2016, he almost never argues for less government, and often calls for programs to help working people. In the summer of 2019, he gave a speech at the National Conservatism Conference denouncing “a powerful upper class and their cosmopolitan priorities,” which, he implied, had gained control of both

parties. There is also Tucker Carlson, of Fox News, who, like Trump in 2016, has no political experience and a large television audience. He offers up ferocious attacks on élites almost nightly. Charles Kesler told me that, no matter who wins, the Claremont Institute, which publishes the *Claremont Review of Books*, is going to start a Washington branch after the election, to devise Trumpian policies: socially conservative, economically nationalist.

Under the Restoration scenario, if Trump loses, Republicans, as if waking from a bad dream, could recapture their essential identity for the past hundred years as the party of business. They could revive a Reagan-like optimistic rhetoric of freedom and enterprise; resume an internationalist, alliance-oriented foreign policy; and embrace, at least notionally, diversity and immigration. One veteran Republican campaigner with Restorationist leanings says that, if Trump wins, “it’ll blow up the Republican Party. In the 2022 election, we’ll have an epic disaster—a wipeout of epic proportions.” Instead of Trumpism, “economic growth with an emphasis on character, and treating the Democrats as opponents and not as the enemy, is a way forward for the Party.” Many Never Trumpers would feel comfortable again in a Restorationist Republican Party. Restoration could entail a conventionally positioned Presidential candidate, such as Mike Pence or Mike Pompeo, the Secretary of State, if it’s possible for them to shake off their close association with Trump. But the most discussed Restorationist candidate is Nikki Haley, the former governor of South Carolina and a former U.N. ambassador. Haley is the child of immigrants from India (one a professor at Voorhees College, a historically Black college, the other a schoolteacher who started a successful business selling clothing and accessories from around the world) and the sister of a military veteran. She achieved the rare feat of serving in the Trump Administration without either going full Trumpist or falling out with the President. She left, evidently on good terms with Trump, shortly after it emerged that she had accepted rides on private planes from businessmen in South Carolina. She was given a starring role at Trump’s renomination convention, this past August.

Some Republicans who are vociferously pro-Trump sound, in conversations about the Party’s future, more like Restorationists who regard him as a temporary jolt of shock therapy. During the 2016 campaign, Hugh Hewitt, a conservative radio star, hosted Trump on his show sixteen times. He applauds Trump’s tax cuts and his increases in the military budget. Hewitt, who was sitting in front of a poster-size photograph of Abraham Lincoln when we spoke over Zoom, told me, “Trump introduced a combativeness and aggressiveness on the Republican side. We played by country-club rules. They didn’t. There’s a certain roughness to him. He was cruel occasionally. He wakes up ready to fight every day, and you don’t need to fight every day. After Trump, the Party will revert to the norm.”

Karl Rove, George W. Bush’s chief strategist, also struck a Restorationist note. One of Rove’s recent projects was a book about William McKinley, the twenty-fifth President. He regards McKinley, who defeated a populist opponent, William Jennings Bryan, in the 1896 Presidential election, as the first modern Republican politician. Rove doesn’t see populism, or division, as a winning stance for the Republicans. “Biden has the better hand in this election,” he told me, meaning that Biden could be running—to use one of Bush’s favorite terms—as the uniter. But, according to Rove, Biden “won’t play it.” Rove offered up an impromptu speech that he thought Biden should have made about the unrest in Portland: “The murder of George Floyd tears at every beating heart in America. But nothing justifies the violence we see on the streets of Portland.”

The Reversal scenario, though perhaps the least plausible, is the most threatening to the Democratic Party. The parties would essentially switch the roles they have had for the past century: the Republicans would replace the Democrats as the party of the people, the one with a greater emphasis on progressive economic policies for ordinary families. Some Reversalists have praised Elizabeth Warren; criticizing Wall Street and free trade is pretty much a membership requirement. Michael Podhorzer, who works at the A.F.L.-C.I.O., sent me a chart he had made that showed the vote in congressional districts, ranked by median income, from 1960 to today. For most of that time, districts in the bottom forty per cent of income were far more likely to vote Democratic. But by 2010 the lines had crossed—perhaps because of the financial crisis and the Great Recession, perhaps because of the Presidency of Barack Obama—and today poorer districts are far more likely to vote Republican and richer districts are far more likely to vote Democratic. The ten richest congressional districts in the country, and forty-four of the richest fifty, are represented by Democrats. The French economist Thomas Piketty has produced a chart showing that for highly educated voters, who were once mainly Republican, the lines started crossing back in 1968. In 2016, Trump carried non-college-educated whites by thirty-six points, and Hillary Clinton carried college-educated whites by seventeen points. Could Republicans become the working-class party, and Democrats the party of the prosperous? That would bode well for Republicans because, especially in a time of rising inequality, there aren't enough prosperous people to make up a reliable voting majority.

The Democratic Party appears confident that it has the abiding loyalty of minority voters at all income and education levels, and that it dominates the metropolitan areas where a growing majority of Americans live. The coming majority-minority, decreasingly rural country will be naturally Democratic over the long term. But there are holes in this argument. Because minorities are younger than whites and are also less likely to be U.S. citizens, the electorate could remain white-majority for decades. Richard Alba, a sociologist who has written a book called “The Great Demographic Illusion,” which challenges the idea of a rapidly arriving majority-minority America, estimates that in 2060, which is as far into the future as the Census Bureau projects, the electorate will still be fifty-five per cent white. (It was seventy-three per cent white in 2018). And minority voters—especially Latinos, who will be the largest group of minority voters in the 2020 election—may not remain as loyally Democratic as they have been in recent elections, especially if the Republican Party has a leader who doesn't race-bait. Black and Latino Democratic voters are substantially less likely to identify as liberal than white Democratic voters are. They are also more likely to be actively religious, and to pursue Republican-leaning careers such as military service and law enforcement.

What's more, the practical definitions of who's white and who's a minority are fluid. During the past hundred years, many Americans who weren't originally considered white, including the descendants of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, were assimilated into whiteness. In the future, others who aren't now considered white may do so, too. Latinos have a high intermarriage rate—close to fifty per cent for the college educated—and twenty per cent of U.S.-born Latinos have a non-Hispanic white parent. Latinos are also increasingly likely to live in integrated neighborhoods. Reversalists dream of many Latino voters going Republican because they have become uncomfortable with the prevailing political stance (more liberal on social issues, less liberal on economic issues) among college-educated white Democratic voters. In the 2020 primary season, Bernie Sanders easily defeated Biden in California and Nevada because he did far better among Latino voters, who presumably preferred his farther-left economic program,

elements of which the Reversalists would like to appropriate for themselves, without using the term socialism.

Black voters are far more loyal to the Democratic Party, and more likely to emphasize racism as a significant problem in their lives, but Trump has made some inroads, especially with younger Black men. Terrance Woodbury, a leading pollster, said, “This has been pretty concerning to me. Trump is picking up among young voters of color. He has a thirty-three-per-cent approval rating among Black men under fifty. Since Obama left, Black men have dropped in their Democratic support. Why? What is it?” He mentioned the Trump campaign’s Super Bowl ad featuring a Black woman whose prison sentence had been commuted by Trump, and a Trump advertising campaign on Facebook, which aired last December and went unanswered by Biden until August, touting the First Step Act, a criminal-justice measure that he signed in 2018. Woodbury went on, “I asked a focus group, ‘How could you consider supporting Donald Trump, who’s blatantly racist?’ One young man said, ‘I don’t care. They’re all racist. At least he tells me what he is.’ Something about the transparency of the vitriol is trust-inducing to them.”

The Reversalists believe that the Democrats’ embrace of market economics, and their establishment of a powerful business wing of the Democratic Party, especially in Silicon Valley and on Wall Street, during the Clinton and Obama Administrations, has left them vulnerable to an attack from a new, socially conservative and economically liberal strain of Republicanism. Reversalists oppose the Republican donor class. Several have abandoned donor-funded libertarian and neoconservative think tanks like Cato and the American Enterprise Institute, disillusioned with the Party’s indifference to the concerns of middle-class and working-class voters. Oren Cass, one of the leading Reversalists, has founded an organization called American Compass, which is trying to formulate policies that would appeal to members of the base of both parties. “What we’re talking about is actual conservatism,” he told me. “What we have called ‘conservatism’ just outsourced economic policy thinking away from conservatives to a small niche group of libertarians.” Culturally, Reversalists present themselves as champions of provincialism, faith, and work, but they aim to promote these things through unusually interventionist (at least for Republicans, and for centrist Democrats since the nineties) economic policies. Steven Hayward, who calls himself a reluctant Trump supporter, said, “It’s amazing to me the number of conservatives who are talking about, essentially, Walter Mondale’s industrial policy from 1984. The right and the left suddenly agree. Reagan was very popular with younger voters. Younger people then had come of age seeing government failure. Now young people have come of age seeing market failure.”

It can be a little surreal talking to Reversalists—are you at a seminar at the high-theory, market-skeptical Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen, in Vienna, or with a group of Republican Party strategists? People in this camp talk about the failures of “neoliberalism,” “financialization,” and “market fundamentalism,” and condemn “zombie Reaganism.” A manifesto of the Reversalists, and of young conservatives generally, is the 2018 book “Why Liberalism Failed,” by Patrick Deneen, a political-science professor at Notre Dame, which carries a back-cover endorsement from Barack Obama and extolls such writers as Robert B. Reich, Wendell Berry, Christopher Lasch, and Robert Putnam, none of whom is considered conservative.

The favored Presidential candidate for 2024 among the Reversalists is Senator Marco Rubio, of Florida, one of the promising Republicans whom Trump vanquished in 2016. In 2018, Rubio

hired Mike Needham, a former employee of an organization affiliated with the Heritage Foundation who had converted to Reversalism, as his chief of staff. Needham is on the board of American Compass. Rubio has recently been making speeches that call for “common-good capitalism,” which would entail a strong government role in managing the economy and would attempt to attract religious and minority voters. Rubio has also been strongly critical of China, so much so that he has been banned from traveling there. This has the potential of alienating the business wing of the Party, which regards China as an important trading partner. Rubio gave a speech last year accusing “policy élites across the political spectrum” of ignoring the “growing threat” that China represents. Nikki Haley recently gave a speech that didn’t name Rubio but clearly had him in mind as one of a new species of Republican critics of capitalism, who “differ from the socialists only in degree.”

When I spoke with Rubio a few weeks ago, I asked him to explain what he meant by common-good capitalism. “It begins with the understanding that the market is a means to an end, not the end itself,” he said. “The purpose of the economy is to serve people. It’s possible to have an economy that’s performing well in the macro sense, but its benefits are distributed in a way that do not benefit the common good.” Rubio told me that this position came together when he was running for President, as he visited communities outside Florida which were less vibrant than they had been a generation ago, and were now hollowed out. “We thought people would be out of work when the factory leaves, but a new job would replace the old one,” he said. But, he went on, “it doesn’t work that way in real life. What ends up happening is that additional job isn’t created. And the people who are left without a job aren’t going to be able to make that transition. Interacting with that, hearing those stories—it’s something you have to grapple with.”

I asked him what could be done. “It’s tough,” he said. “We have a twenty-five-year orthodoxy in the Republican Party centered around market fundamentalism. Sometimes the most efficient outcome isn’t the best one for the country. Right now, we live in a very binary age, where you’re either one thing or you’re the other. Some people want to call it socialism—which I abhor. Or, if it isn’t socialism, the other side wants to call it market fundamentalism. America needs to take a hard look at its future.” Trump, he said, “has certainly revealed these fracture points. His election caused everybody to go back and ask, ‘Why? Why did people who were not part of the Republican Party decide to vote for him?’ ” He said that the next step was to build the intellectual base for this kind of work: “This is not a four-year project. This is a generational goal. And it could lead to a new political coalition.”

What would the new coalition be? For the past twenty years, Rubio said, the left has argued that coalitions tend to form around race, gender, and ethnicity: “I lived in a minority community. I don’t think we’d wake up in the morning and the first thing we’d realize is ‘I’m a Hispanic.’ The first thing that comes to mind for people every single day is not your ethnicity, it’s the fact that you’re a husband or a wife, a father or a mother, an employee, a volunteer or a coach—somebody who has a role to play.” He continued, “They want to have a job that allows them to have children, to raise that family in a safe neighborhood, with a house that’s safe, that the kids get to go to school, and that, when the time comes, lets them retire. You can find that identity in every community in America.”

He said he recoiled a bit at the tendency to “judge the well-being of the economy by how the stock market is performing. For the past six months, the stock market has had some really good days—and that in no way aligns with what everybody else in the country is going through. It is

possible to have a roaring stock market, and you have millions of people who aren't just unemployed, they may be permanently unemployed." He talked about the inevitable disruptions caused by technological change: "And then it takes policy a decade, two decades, to adjust. In the interim, there's resentment, anger, displacement—all sorts of social consequences. We are now seeing another wave of technological advancement, combined with globalization," accelerated by the pandemic. "It's going to produce new coalitions that don't look like the ones we're used to."

Many Democrats will surely see this vision of the future of the Republican Party as fanciful. Isn't the Party controlled by ferociously right-wing billionaires? Aren't Republican-base voters irredeemable white supremacists who have been bamboozled by Fox News and televangelists? But the Democrats' coalition is no less unnatural than the Republicans'. A political system with only two parties produces parties with internal contradictions. The five most valuable corporations in America are all West Coast tech companies—enemy territory, in today's Republican rhetoric. The head of the country's biggest bank, Jamie Dimon, of JPMorgan Chase, is a Democrat and a Trump critic. There was a stir in Republican circles in 2018, when a conservative journalist eavesdropped, on an Amtrak train, on a long phone conversation that Representative Jerry Nadler, of the Upper West Side, was having. Nadler complained that Democrats were attracting voters who were like the old Rockefeller Republicans—liberal on social issues, conservative on economics. That's who lives in a lot of the wealthy older suburbs—formerly Republican areas that are now Democratic. And the Democrats' minority voters differ enough on measures such as income, education, ideology, and religion that some of them could potentially be tempted to join a Republican Party that wasn't headed by Trump.

Trump has already changed the Republican Party. Its most hawkish element—hawkish in the Iraq War sense—has gone underground, if it still exists. The same goes for publicly stated Republican skepticism about Social Security and Medicare. One must be hostile to China, and skeptical, to some degree, of free trade. Especially since the arrival of the pandemic, it's hard to find a true libertarian in the Party—at least among those who have to run for office. In the future, according to Donald Critchlow, a historian of conservatism who teaches at Arizona State University, "the advantage would go to a candidate who is Trump without the Trump caricature. An old-fashioned Chamber of Commerce candidate would not do well. We're in a new situation, in both parties. Everything's up for grabs." A senior Republican staffer who has Reversalist sympathies says, "Trump isn't good at a twenty-first-century policy agenda," but that work can go on without him. "If he loses, we'll have a massive argument in the Republican Party. Some will say, 'He's a black swan.' To me, the lesson is: he correctly diagnosed what was going on. Let's apply that to conservative economic policy. To me, what's up for grabs is the working-class vote. Not just working-class white—working-class. Does what the President tapped into have to be racial? Can it be about what neoliberalism has done to the country?"

Trump's genius is to command attention, including the attention of people who dislike him. That makes it tempting to think that, when he's gone, everything he stands for will go with him. It probably won't; elements of Trumpism will likely be with us for a long time. Which elements, taking what form, in the possession of which party? Such questions will be just as pressing after Trump as they are now.