

**PART ONE**

**THE CASE FOR A DIFFERENT WAY**

## CHAPTER ONE

### AMERICA IN AN EXCEPTIONAL CRISIS

America has always held itself up to be exceptional. And, in many ways, it is. America for two centuries has been a land of ingenuity, invention and dynamism, a country where technology, industry, culture and the arts have combined to produce a place unlike any other on this planet.

Politically, America has also been a beacon for the concept of democracy, albeit one that is wrapped in a very Roman construct of the “republic”. Here the media is free and the people are protected by a constitution that, among other things, sanctifies freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of worship and freedom from authoritarian over-reach in the form of search. The very word “freedom” is baked into the central idea of “these United States”, even if its practice right from the beginning was rather selective. It is a land where, theoretically, people are limited only by their own imaginations and where opportunity is rife. Its people are proud of this America, as they should be, and are proud to be called patriots.

But the reality is that America today is broken. Worse than that, it is exceptionalism gone haywire. The political system crafted by the Founding Fathers has mutated into a governmental structure overrun by special interests and their money which, in its turn, acts like the poison of a very virulent insect and renders politicians incapable of acting in the best interests of both their constituents and the country as a whole. The system that was supposed to balance power between governmental institutions has become one of stasis – the inability of government to

actually govern. The country is divided as never before into opposing camps succored by social media bubbles in which people only converse with and receive ideas from those similar in outlook to themselves. A Congress which, at House level, has been so gerrymandered as to make the concept of representative government laughable is rendered incapable of dealing with the nation's most pressing issues. And the public, so fed up with politics as usual has elected – via a very broken electoral college construct – a President that has shown himself to be a narcissistic incompetent who has single-handedly ceded America's leadership on the world stage to the Chinese and the Russians.

As wealth inequality has spiraled out of control – exacerbated by tax reform that blatantly favored the rich – and social mobility has dried up, poverty and racial inequality have persisted even as unemployment statistics have trended downwards. Persistent, chronic problems that uniquely plague American society, such as mass shootings in schools or public arenas, remain unaddressed, even as the electorate demands reform. Americans are ten times more likely to be killed by guns than are citizens of other developed countries<sup>1</sup> and yet this is supposed to be taken as normal and demands for reform are met with hysterical responses from the NRA and inaction by politicians who are in their pockets.

Other persistent, chronic problems are met with the same inability – or, worse, hostility – to deal with them. Lack of access to healthcare due to exorbitant insurance rates or lack of insurance? When the Obama administration tried to deal with this issue (in a very American way), it was

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<sup>1</sup> The American Journal of Medicine, 2016

howled down as “socialism” and became the focus of innumerable Republican attempts to hole it below the water line. The fact that the U.S.A. spends three times as much on healthcare as other developed nations but with outcomes that woefully lag behind them?<sup>2</sup> Ignored. Or that we have a secondary education system that is completely broken and also has outcomes well below those of our competitors? Ignored. Or that our social safety net is under constant attack by those who need to finance tax breaks for the wealthy? Ignored. And now, how about an EPA that is run by a man who made no bones about his desire to destroy it and a President who clearly has no patience for environmental stewardship?

Amidst all of this, great swathes of the population get left behind. After the Civil War, newly-freed African Americans possessed 0.5% of the wealth of the nation. Today, African Americans own between 1% and 2% of the national wealth. In 2010, the median wealth of black families in the United States was \$3,900, while that of their white counterparts was \$97,000<sup>3</sup>. And yet there are also white families all across “flyover” America who themselves are suffering as automation and offshoring take away their manufacturing jobs and leave them living in shells that were formerly their towns and communities. In both black and white communities faced with infrastructural decay and poverty, crime persists and is fed by the opiate of drugs – whether they be cocaine, heroin, meth or prescription opioids. This leads to an increasing effort on the part of law enforcement to maintain control and, in some places, the militarization of police. Very

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<sup>2</sup> Center for Medicare and Medicare Services, 2018

<sup>3</sup> Economic Policy Institute

quickly, there is a lack of social discourse, a weakening of trust in social and governmental institutions and increasingly virulent outbreaks of “other-ism”.

“Other-ism”, at its simplest, is the attribution of blame to others in society, who appear different to you, for all the ills that you yourself suffer. Who these “others” are has varied over the course of American history. In the early days of the colonies, they were the indigenous Americans. In the Jim Crow era, it was African-Americans. Then there were the Italians, Greeks, Eastern Europeans, Chinese, Japanese and the bogeymen of them all, the Jews. Today, it is Muslims, Middle-Easterners, South Asians and – yes – the Jews.

The issue with “other-ism” is not so much that it exists. Sad to say, there will always be those that wish to pin the blame for their ills, real or imagined, on those who are different than they are. There will always be those who will follow the leadership of some crackpot white supremacist or cult leader. No, the real issue with “other-ism” is when it is used by mainstream politicians either to gain power or to cover up their own incompetence or venality. When that happens, “other-ism” awakens deep-seated, vague prejudices that allow people to turn aside from societal norms, or even their own affirmed values, in a desperate attempt to make themselves heard. That in turn can lead to quiet acquiescence from other political leaders and, ultimately, the population at large. And, when that happens, “other-ism” becomes very dangerous indeed.

For those with historical memory, we saw this in Germany and Italy in the 1930’s and we see it in the long-running conflicts in the Middle East and in tribal conflicts in Africa (think of the

massacres of 1994 in Rwanda, for example). We also see it in the rise of non-State actors such as ISIS, which is entirely based on “other-ism”. And now it is right here on our own doorstep in America. From the outset, Donald Trump used “other-ism” to anchor his campaign, talking about criminal, rapist Mexicans and the expulsion of Muslims and, in so doing, calling out the demons in those feeling left behind. It was no wonder that he had difficulty in fully condemning the white supremacists involved in Charlottesville, since these were the very people fanning the flames of the fire he had started. That, and his blatant misogyny, would have been bad enough. But then a pivotal event happened: Evangelical Christians decided to turn a blind eye to all of this in order to further their own political agenda. Once they did this, they gave the perfect political cover to Republicans in Congress to do the same – hold their noses in the name of furthering their agenda. And so, acquiescence started to take hold. The rot set in and America is at war with itself, in danger of jettisoning its institutions, political processes and values and building an economic (and real) wall around itself as it abandons its world leadership position and blames everyone else for its woes.

The net – and very ironic – result of all of this is that, in the midst of an economic boom, America is filled with anger and hate, families avoid politics at all costs at the Thanksgiving table, and political and social discourse has ground to a halt. Worse, the United States of America is now rated as a “flawed democracy”<sup>4</sup> and the think tank Freedom House talks of democracy worldwide facing its “most serious crisis in decades” as a result.

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<sup>4</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit

In a nutshell, America has become a country lacking in both physical and psychological security, and the world has become more insecure as a result. *And insecurity is a clear and present danger to world peace and stability.*

## CHAPTER TWO

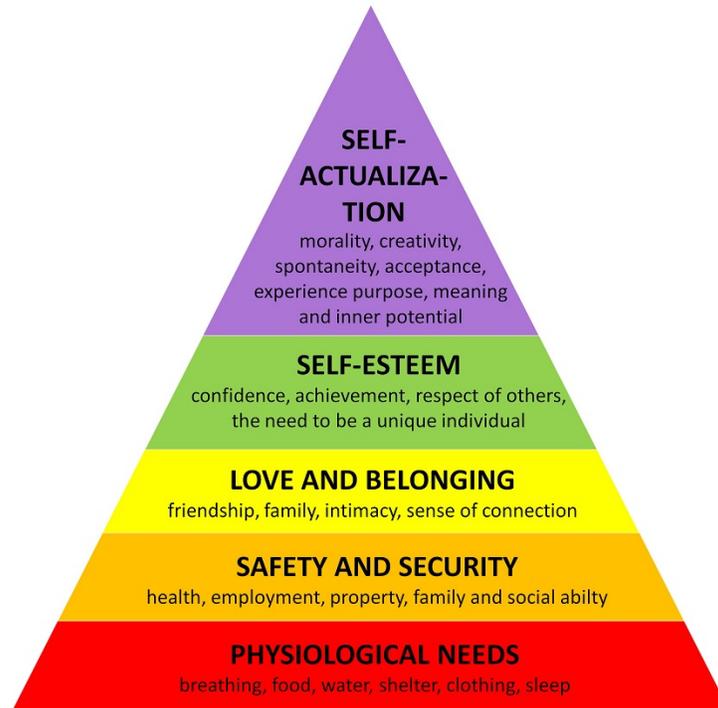
### INSECURITY AND MASLOW'S HIERARCHY

In 1943, American psychologist Abraham Maslow published a paper called *A Theory of Human Motivation* that would go on to shape much of the way in which scientists and sociologists would view basic human decision-making. The concept at the center of the paper was *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, which was essentially a pyramid describing human needs from the most basic (physiological – such as shelter and food) to the most elevated (the need for self-esteem and the ability to “actualize” one’s self to greater achievement).

At the very core of the hierarchy is the concept of “security”, whether that be physical, social or psychological. It is this author’s belief that this concept lies at the very heart of human existence at both individual and societal levels. An individual cannot experience security if the society he or she lives in is not secure (just ask a modern Syrian). And a society cannot be secure unless the individuals who comprise it are secure (ask any Venezuelan).

If we are to find a way out of our current, potentially existential, crisis, therefore, we really do need to understand the concept of security and how it applies to society and government. And we need to understand what *real* security looks like as opposed to that which is secured at the point of a gun.

Let's take a look at what Maslow has to say on this subject from the individual's point of view – best summed up in his pyramid.



The most basic of our needs are **physiological**, things that most of us in the West take for granted, such as a roof over our heads, food on our table, clean drinking water, clothes on our backs and air that we can breathe. In many parts of the world, even these needs are not adequately met, meaning that the baseline of societal security is absent.

For most of us in the United States, however, these needs are met. But there are two “buts”. But No. 1 is that there still thousands of people living on the streets of the richest nation in the world

who do not have a roof over their heads, access to regular food or even clothes on their backs. Talk to the woman huddled in a doorway in the middle of a Nor'Easter snowstorm in New York who, unless she is rescued by police, will surely die of hypothermia; or to the residents of a tent city in the woods a few hundred yards from a shopping mall in Durham, NC. Witness the armies of homeless in prosperous cities such as San Francisco or Portland, OR, many of whom have been "transported" there by towns and cities in the mid-west through the simple mechanism of giving them a one-way bus ticket and telling them not to return. A society that tolerates this "even for the least among us" cannot be held to be secure.

But No. 2 is that, alone among prosperous Western societies, the United States does not provide an adequate barrier against its citizens slipping through the net and finding themselves without these basic needs. Only in the U.S. can you suffer from a serious illness and find yourself bankrupt and homeless as a result. This – and other roads to security perdition such as the loss of a job – means that many Americans live in the shadow of fear that they, too, might join those on the streets of San Francisco or in the woods of Durham. And fear does not imply security.

The second level up in the pyramid is that of **Safety and Security** and it is arguably here that governments have (or should have) the most interaction with their citizens. This is the bedrock that allows for individuals to feel that they can grow in a secure environment and, as a consequence, so can society and the economy. Safety and security can be summarized as the absence of fear combined with the freedom to grow. It does not just relate to physical security (although that is paramount), but also encompasses the security afforded by good health, good

education, good job prospects and overall financial well-being. If we have all of these, we are equipped not only to take advantage of opportunities but also to “weather the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”, as Shakespeare would have it.

As we will examine in more detail later on, here too the United States falls far behind other advanced societies and lets its citizens down. While the country is the most robustly armed in the world and so provides confidence in its ability to fend off external threats, internally its violent crime rate exceeds those of its peers by massive margins, its health outcomes are worse, it lags educationally and the inequality of wealth between one tiny fraction of the population and the masses remains frightening in the extreme. Few are expecting the French Revolution here any time soon, but remember that it was propelled by economic hardship and gross inequality of wealth. “Let them eat cake” might just as well be the mantra of the ruling classes in America today.

On these two fundamental foundations – physiological needs and safety and security – rests the entire ability of both individuals and society to achieve the upper echelons of the pyramid: Love and Belonging, Self-Esteem and Self-Actualization. It is very difficult to feel that you are loved or that you belong if you live in fear of losing your security; and near impossible to achieve that esteem that then enables you to translate all that you are into someone who really leaves a legacy of meaningful contribution to the world.

If you are homeless and without education or income, you are unlikely to become an astrophysicist. If you are African-American and live in the projects, your access to education is less and your likelihood to secure financial independence reduced. If you are sick and cannot get decent healthcare, your entire existence revolves around avoiding the dark pit of homelessness while remaining alive – not much room there for self-actualization.

We will examine these three upper levels in the context of what government should and should not do for its citizens later in the book. The key takeaway here is that is “government of the people, by the people, for the people” needs, if it is to be successful, to take all the levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy into consideration as it endeavors to create the conditions for society’s well-being.

But what if government’s aim is not the well-being of all its people? What if it is not of, by and for the people? What if it is for the few who actually govern? Then a totally new set of rules takes precedence.

## CHAPTER THREE

### HOW TO BECOME A DICTATOR

In 2011, political scientists Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith published one of the most seminal books about politics, called *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics*. The book built on a theory posited by the authors and fellow academics Randolph Siverson and James Morrow called the *Selectorate Theory*. Together, these tracts could almost be republished as *The Idiot's Guide to Why Trump Won*.

Selectorate Theory states that politicians gain and retain power based on the size and actions of three groups of people – the nominal selectorate, the real selectorate and the winning coalition.

These may be described as follows:

<u>Group</u>	<u>Also Known As</u>	<u>US Example</u>
Nominal Selectorate	Interchangeables	Total Electorate
Real Selectorate	Influentials	Those who vote
Winning Coalition	Essentials	Financiers Voters in critical states

In a democracy such as the United States, the *Nominal Selectorate* (also known as Interchangeables) is the total number of people who can vote. The power they hold is in the fact that they have a vote, but the real questions are (1) whether they *will* vote; (2) whether they *can* vote; and (3) whether their vote will *count*. Whether they *will* vote is obviously a factor of how

much a candidate can motivate them to do so, as well as these days (post-Citizens United) the degree to which the candidate can reach them through advertising and an on-the-ground campaign, both of which are dependent on money. Whether they *can* vote today is dependent on local and state laws on early voting, availability of voting stations and purging of voter rolls – all of which are things that state legislatures delight in fiddling with to maximize their own party advantage. Whether their vote *counts* depends on the drawing of voting districts, again something that state legislatures monkey with on an ongoing basis. For example, a recent court ruling found that North Carolina’s legislature had drawn that state’s voting districts with “surgical precision” to mute the effectiveness of the African-American and Democratic vote, resulting in a super-majority of Republicans despite their benefiting from a voting advantage of only 52-48 percent statewide.

Obviously, the Nominal Selectorate is only as powerful as the degree to which it gets off the couch and actually goes to the polls. Those that do so are the *Real Selectorate* or “Influentials”. These are the people that politicians and their moneyed supporters need really to win over. But, even then, they are not created equal (at least not in the American electoral system). Some districts and states are much more important than others to tilt one way or another – they are the ones that will sway the result in the Electoral College. Sometimes, as in 2016, the popular vote will swing one way and the Electoral College vote the other. In this instance, you could say that there was the Real Selectorate and the *Real, Real Selectorate* – i.e. those 70,000 voters in key states that swung the election Donald Trump’s way. In some ways, Hillary Clinton’s downfall was that she miscalculated which states really constituted the Real Selectorate.

But there was another Real Selectorate at play in the 2016 election as well – one that Trump played brilliantly. This was the disaffected white working class vote in flyover states that had lost their economic security. Conjuring “the other” (Mexicans, Muslims, the Chinese) and promising magical solutions (the wall, rejuvenation of coal and steel and mass deportations), Trump awoke a part of the Nominal Selectorate that had hitherto been ignored and brought it into his Real Selectorate. Hillary missed that one completely, even going so far as to call them “deplorables” – probably a fatal mistake.

But what Trump did in 2016 was even more powerful: not only did he awaken a portion of the electorate that had remained quasi-dormant for years, but he brought them into his *winning coalition* (also known as “The Essentials”). This is the bringing together of disparate groups around a narrative, or a story, that, however briefly, binds them behind the candidate and propels them to vote for him or her, *even if much of what that candidate stands for goes against their core beliefs*.

In an excellent article published in The Guardian<sup>5</sup>, George Monbiot puts forward a theory that societies are driven by narratives. Inevitably, they are stories of Restoration that go like this: everything’s a mess; here’s who is responsible; here’s how to fix it; here’s who will fix it (the hero or heroes); the hero(es) will fight the bad guys and win; and everybody will have a much more prosperous future. The “here’s how to fix it part” is usually based on an Utopian theory – restore

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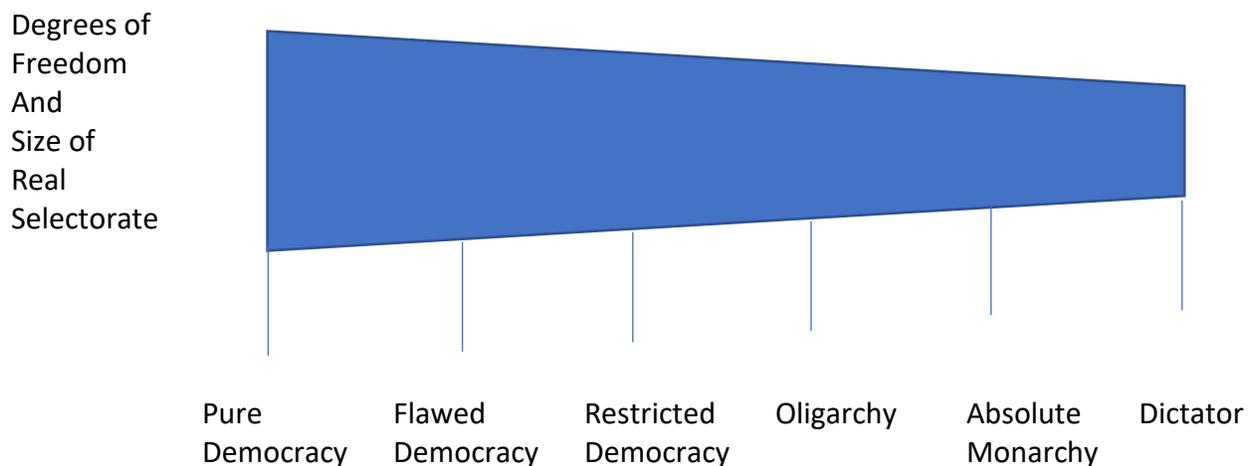
<sup>5</sup> “How do we get out of this mess?” The Guardian, September 11, 2017

the monarchy, trust in a strong man, trust in collectivism or socialism – and the heroes are either individuals or the people as a whole.

The point here is that the story has to hang together. It has to be cohesive, starting with making the targeted selectorate believe that everything is a mess and then taking them through to a solution and a hero who is going to miraculously make everything better. Once people get the narrative into their minds and really start to buy into it, presentation of contrary facts becomes not only inconvenient but downright dangerous and must be expunged. We believe that deriding such “inconvenient truths” (to borrow a phrase from Al Gore) as “fake news” is a modern phenomenon, but in actuality it has been going on for as long as politics has been around, whether representative or not. And presentation of “alternative facts” is also a long-established tradition, the main differences being that, today, these circulate with the speed of light via the wonder of social media, and bare-faced lying in public has become the new and tolerated norm.

Trump’s narrative was classic. America was in a terrible state (or “carnage”, as he put it in his Inauguration Speech), “others” were responsible (Mexicans, all immigrants, China, Europe), only he could fix it and then America would be “great again”. The story resonated big time with the “deplorables” but Trump still had to build a winning coalition out of the selectorate. He was facing sixteen other candidates for Presidential nominee and was winning despite most Republicans voting for one of the his rivals. Put another way, the “deplorables” were carrying him but he needed another, highly compelling, story to bring in another key part of the winning coalition.

If we study forms of government going back centuries, it is clear that they fall on a linear spectrum. At one end are pure democracies (which, though rare, do exist) and, at the other, outright dictatorship. In between, there are a myriad of other options, including “flawed democracies”, oligarchies and absolute monarchies.



Pure or “full” democracies, as defined by the Economist Intelligence Unit in its annual democracy rankings offer not only the greatest degrees of freedom to their population but also have the largest real selectorates, ensuring as far as possible that each vote counts as much as the next. Examples of such societies include most Scandinavian countries, as well as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Flawed democracies, of which the United States is one according to the EIU, tend to limit freedoms more (for example, the ability to vote) and work to reduce the size of the real selectorate in favor of the party in power. If we take this to the other extreme of the spectrum – dictatorship or even absolute monarchy, as in Saudi Arabia – the size of the real selectorate is highly reduced and basic freedoms are severely constrained. In many such countries, the façade of democracy is maintained to provide a loin cloth for the regime, but counts for nothing in terms

of the reality of government or everyday life. Russia and Venezuela would be good examples in our modern world.

As the EIU points out, the status of democracy in the world is not static. Indeed, after growing for many years, it is now on the retreat in many parts of the world. The point to be made here, however, is that democracy *cannot retreat on its own*. Nor can it necessarily retreat because of the actions of one man or one group, unless it is overthrown in a violent coup. Usually, the group concerned – or the wannabe dictator – *uses democracy* to infiltrate the system and then works to change it from within, most often by challenging and dismantling the institutions designed to protect the democratic system. These would include a functioning and independent judiciary as well as a free press. Hitler did this in the 1930's in Germany, as did Chavez in Venezuela. It could be argued the Nationalist Party in South Africa did the same in 1948 – even though they maintained a democratic system, it was a restricted democracy where only whites could vote, leading to a dictatorship of the many by the few. In all of these, the unique principle of democracy – that the minority should be protected from and by the majority – was thrown out the window.

The most important thing to realize here, however, is that none of these players could have gotten away with what they were doing (moving their countries inexorably from democracy to some more limited form of political freedom) *were it not for the complicit acceptance of those in the establishment, in politics, in business, in religion and in the population as a whole*. Had the churches not remained quiet in the face of increasing harassment of the Jews in Germany, maybe the middle classes would have realized that what was happening was unacceptable – and maybe

they would have given spines to their political representatives. Had English-speaking South Africans spoken up in protest at the draconian laws of apartheid, maybe they would have awoken the conscience of the broader white population.

And it is this that Trump recognized and depended upon in his own campaign. The “deplorables” alone would not have taken him across the line, either in the popular vote or the Electoral College. What Trump needed was for the Republican Establishment to swallow their distaste, hold their noses and endorse him. This included not only critical members of Congress (Ryan, O’Connell and Rubio, for example) but also the business establishment and – very importantly – Evangelicals. Once the Christian Right were persuaded to put aside their moral objections in favor of getting the right-wing agenda enacted, Trump was in with a chance.

The problem with such a strategy is what comes next.

For the primary goal of any leader, any politician, is “once in power, stay in power”. To do that, they must show that they are providing results for the winning coalition. In the most crude circumstances – say, in a dictatorship where the dictator was brought to power by a small cadre of army officers – this means enriching those who brought him (or, more rarely, her) into power. Robert Mugabe, erstwhile ruler of Zimbabwe, did this by “redistributing” white-owned farm land to his fighters and his cabinet ministers. Various Latin American dictators enriched their military elites. At the other end of the scale, pure democracy ruling parties have very large winning coalitions (i.e. all the people who voted for them) and so must deliver on the promises that got

them elected in the first place. This usually means that they provide the “public” goods demanded by their electorates, such as welfare benefits, universal healthcare or universal education. The dictator, on the other hand, will usually convert these “public goods” (that is, the tax revenues of the country) into “private goods” to enrich his cronies or, in more polite language, his small winning coalition.

But what about the flawed democracy? How does the politician in power pay off his or her winning coalition? In this instance, the answer is more nuanced and usually involves a mix of real “payments” to those that really count and “smoke and mirrors” to those that only count at election time.

Let us take Mr. Trump as our example. His winning coalition was the “deplorables” backed up by the silent acquiescence of the Republican establishment, inclusive of Evangelicals and the money men bankrolling Republican campaigns. In order to keep all of these behind him, he needed to combine “real” payments to the Republicans, Evangelicals and money brokers; and “smoke and mirror” payments to the base. The former involved tax cuts (a religious tenet of being a Republican but also of direct benefit to the money brokers) and the appointment of a conservative judge to the Supreme Court. But what to offer to the base? It was very unlikely that he could really reopen factories in rustbelt communities or bring about a resurgence of coal in West Virginia. But what he *could* do was to make symbolic moves using all the shibboleths that so enrage his base – trade pacts, immigration and nasty foreign countries. And so you have the withdrawal from PPT, the renegotiation of NAFTA, the much-touted wall, deportations and

tariffs. Viewed from a non-Trumpian angle, all of these could be said to be deleterious to American interests in the long run, but in the short run they act to pay off the base and keep them solidly in his column.

Payment of the winning coalition, therefore, is one element of staying in power. But invariably, there are other things that need doing, such as weakening the remaining institutions that could thwart your agenda or, even worse, turn you out of power. In most erstwhile democracies, there are three such institutions that need to be dealt with: parliament, the judiciary and the press. In Putin's Russia, all three are now subservient to the Presidency. In Venezuela, a fixed referendum deprived the legitimate parliament of its powers. In China, all three institutions sit squarely underneath the Communist Party apparatus which now is also dominated by the Presidency.

In the present day United States, the Trump administration is at war with two of these branches of government and society, while the third has already thrown in the towel. In silently acquiescing to Trump's agenda in order to further their own, the two Republican houses of Congress have allowed their President to redefine the Republican Party itself. Only a Democratic swing in the midterm elections started to turn the clock back, although to what effect remains to be seen. In the meantime, Trump is at war with his own Justice Department and continues to wage war against the media while at the same time using those elements that favor him – Fox News and his own Twitter account – to great effect. All of this is classic strategy. Make no mistake, President Trump is no idiot. He plays the *Dictator's Handbook* game to perfection.

But how could Trump even get into a position to play this game, given all the protections of the Constitution designed to prevent such dominance? And, given that there is a huge other Party out there that commands more than 50% of the popular vote? Yes, there is the role of money. Yes, there is the politicization of the judiciary. Yes, there is blatant gerrymandering. And yes, there is a huge media machine run out of Australia that acts as his PR agency (aka Fox News). But, even so, it was not inevitable that this should happen.

The one missing component in our narrative is the negligent abandonment by the Democratic Party of both its core constituencies and its misunderstanding of the key needs of critical sectors of the population.

