

Updating *Authoritarian Nightmare*

Bob Altemeyer October 8, 2020

We finished editing the text of *Authoritarian Nightmare* (“AN”) on June 26, 2020 and sent the manuscript off to the typesetter. Since then four books about President Trump have shot to the top of the bestsellers lists that provide information unavailable when I tried to develop a psychological understanding of the man: Mary L. Trump’s book about her family, *Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World’s Most Dangerous Man*; John R. Bolton’s extensive account of his service as National Security Advisor from April 2018 to September 2019, *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir*; Bob Woodward’s *Rage*, reporting his extensive conversations with the president and his advisors during 2019 and 2020; and Michael Cohen’s *Disloyal*, which details the author’s service as Trump’s “fixer” from 2007 to 2018. Any of these books could show that my analysis landed somewhere between “Terribly Flawed” to “If They Put Your Brains In A Bumblebee, It Would Fly Backwards and Land Upside-down in a Tar Pit.” So I felt it important to compare and contrast these descriptions of the president with the one offered in *Authoritarian Nightmare*, and take my lumps.

As well, Donald Trump keeps doing things that test the durability and depth of my explanation. For example, on that late-June day when we put the book “to bed,” Trump reprised his absurd impersonation of someone who cares about the law and issued an executive order promising severe punishment for defacing public statues and monuments. The following day he laid down a Tweet bombardment aimed at Obamacare and the mainstream media. The next day he (falsely) insisted no one had told him Russia was paying Taliban fighters a bounty for killing American soldiers in Afghanistan.

Each morning when people get up they wonder, “What did the president do now?” It just never ends, and he partly does it on purpose. He uses Today’s Outrage to distract us from Yesterday’s, and besides that he is constantly pumping up his base. But also, as proposed in the book, Donald Trump withers *in his own mind* whenever the spotlight leaves him. Plants can go without sunlight for a time and survive. Trump starts to shrivel inside the instant the light leaves him, so he remains a child searching for a piece of “birthday cake” to throw at somebody so he’ll be noticed. Nobody can keep up with someone acting this badly that often. But some reckoning had to be reckoned about his behavior from July to September, 2020, especially his handling of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Black Lives Matter awakening, and his campaign to get re-elected. We will cover these topics as we move along. Then we’ll face the dark, dark problem of what might happen after November 3rd. At the end of this update, we’ll look at some things that landed on the editing room floor when the manuscript of *Authoritarian Nightmare* was finalized.

Mary L Trump's Book, *Too Much and Never Enough*

Chapters Two and Three of our book sought to explain Donald Trump's presidency in terms of his earlier life, and I acknowledged my reliance on insightful reports provided by Tony Schwartz, Michael D'Antonio, and several chapters in the *Washington Post* book on Trump edited by Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher. Then on July 14, 2020 Mary L. Trump published her book about the Trump family. "Mary L." is Donald's niece, the daughter of Freddy Trump, Donald's older brother. She has no first-hand knowledge of President Trump's childhood; he was attending Fordham University when she was born in 1965. But she had extensive contact for some 30 years with her father's parents (i.e., her grandparents) before they died, and with her father's siblings: Aunts Maryanne, and Elizabeth, and Uncles Donald and the deceased Robert. She watched many family triumphs and tragedies unfold, especially the painful demise of her father Freddy who died at the age of 42 in 1981. The Trump family has many skeletons in its closets, and she is the only one so far to open some of the doors. As well she has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and earns her living being one. Obviously, her answer to that first question asked in *Authoritarian Nightmare*, "What is wrong with Donald Trump?" counts a lot more than mine.

However, *Too Much and Never Enough* focuses, not on Donald, but on the patriarch of the family, Fred C. Trump (1905-1999), particularly on the deeply troubled relationship between Fred C. and his first-born son, Freddy. Donald was born eight years after Freddy, and while Mary L. Trump acknowledges that many factors made Donald the terrible human being that he is, she thinks the "Fred Sr. versus Freddy Tragedy" Donald witnessed and played a role in had an all-important, enduring effect upon the president.

Fred Sr. was determined to acquire as much wealth as possible in his life and leave it to an heir who would multiply the fortune and make the family fabulously rich. Fred the Father chose Freddy the Son, but Freddy did not want the job. Instead he became an airline pilot, against his father's firmly expressed wishes. Fred C. was so angry, according to Mary L., that he cruelly set out to destroy his son's life in every way he could manage. (We shall see in Michael Cohen's book that Donald Trump made the same "offer he can't refuse" to his son, Don, Jr.) And as he almost always did, Fred C. succeeded. Freddy's experience of familial rejection and financial privation, according to his daughter, led him to alcoholism, many health problems, and finally a fatal heart attack. Donald saw how disgusted his father was with Freddy, and like everyone else in the family, including his mother, made sure he stayed on the good side of The Big Guy. Mary L. Trump thinks the president's admiration of dictators and his obsequious desire to be their friend—as well as his own powerful dictatorial impulses—are based upon this searing experience with the dominating authoritarian in his life, his father.

While I (and Tony Schwartz and Michael D'Angelo) thought Donald Trump was powerfully driven by a fear he would not measure up to his father's command to "be a killer" rather than "a loser," I at least did not appreciate the extent to which his efforts to please his father was a primitive act of self-preservation, as Mary L. Trump presents it. But such a deep fear helps explain why Donald pivoted so dramatically after the "switchblade debacle" at age 13 which got him sent to military school. Whereas his father had always tolerated Donald's bullying of peers, and insolence toward his teachers and even his mother, this was the first time we know of that Fred had caught Donald disobeying *him*. In his wrath the father exiled his second-born son from the community and the family he had grown up in. This happened about the time Fred Sr. began grinding Freddy into nothingness. Donald had every reason to believe that could happen to him too, and he spent the next ten years doing exactly what his father wanted him to do, even spending his college weekends working on his father's housing projects. At the end of Freddy's ordeal, Donald had completely adopted their father's point of view and harshly berated his older brother for being "such a loser." Donald had no empathy for Freddy's situation.

Mary Trump's book also offers insight into the president's lack of empathy for anybody, including the people whose suffering he has directly caused. Some psychologists believe we learn empathy early in life through an attachment process with our principal caretakers (usually our mothers) by mirroring back the love they show us. Donald lost his mother for all intents and purposes during this critical period because of her medical problems, and many clinical psychologists would further opine that the lack of attachment then would also cripple his ability to love as an adult. John Bolton says in *The Room Where It Happened* (p. 87) that Trump said whenever he was dating a woman, he always wanted to be the one who ended the relationship—which is a "textbook" relationship-destructive behavior of someone deprived of early attachment. Donald Trump grew up unloved and quite unprepared to love others. He tried to solve the first problem with narcissism. There is no evidence he ever tried to solve, or even was bothered, by the second.

One wonders why the other Trump children so uniformly and quietly went along with the Trump Family Plan to dishonestly accumulate mountains of wealth. The same question arose when their father set out to destroy Freddy, one of their own. The simple answer according to Mary L.'s book: They all had too much to gain by playing along. Fred C. Trump never loved any of his children, Mary says, but they were very convenient pots in which to hide his money in trust funds that were all but impossible to access. Everyone except Donald was trained to never ask for any of it. (They each finally got millions of dollars when Fred C. died, but Donald got far, far more than any of the others.)

The book casts a damaging light on the eldest child, Maryanne, at several points. She did put herself through law school and became a prosecuting attorney in New Jersey. But then she asked Donald if he could fix it that she became a federal judge, and within months it was arranged through Roy Cohn's connections. She had become an appellate judge when the *New York Times* published its expose of the Trump family's criminally hidden wealth in 2018. She resigned before she could be impeached for her role as one of Fred C's "pots." Mary L. Trump also reveals that Maryanne dreamed up the scheme to cut her and her brother ("Fred III") out of the medical insurance plan the patriarch had set up for his extended family, because these two grandchildren challenged the patriarch's will in court. This will, signed when Fred C. was in the final stages of dementia, unexpectedly cut out Freddy's share of his father's estate, which was supposed to pass on to Freddy's two children. This gave Maryanne and her siblings a 25% increase in benefits. Fred III had a newborn son with severe medical problems, so the threatened loss of medical insurance was as heartless as it was unfair. (The attempted intimidation ultimately backfired on the Gang of Four because they had to reveal the funds involved to the court, and the *New York Times* investigators eventually got them through Mary L's copy of the court records.)

Donald Trump comes across as a monster-in-making in Mary L.'s memories, but she seems to pity him because his father was the real monster and Donald turned out to be a blustering but sadly empty shell of a human being. The media gave headlines to the book's allegation that Donald paid someone to take the SATs for him in 1964. The story was denied all around, but if it is true it would hardly surprise one. Also, she noticed that Donald usually got somebody else to do the dirty work in the family after his father died, and take the flack when things went roach-up. She would not have been surprised that the youngest son, Robert, not Donald, went to court to suppress publication of her book.

The book says that in 2004 Donald sold the bulk of the family's real estate holdings for \$700 million dollars, when the bank that financed the transaction thought they were worth almost a billion. This echoes other times in Donald's less than fabulous career as a deal maker when he seemed determined to buy high and sell low.

At the end of the book Mary L. Trump draws the same conclusions about Donald Trump's personality that others, including I, reached with far less authority: "Every time you hear Donald talking about how something is the greatest, the best, the biggest, the most tremendous (the implication being that he made them so), you have to remember that the man speaking is still, in essential ways, the same little boy who is desperately worried that he, like his older brother, is inadequate and that he, too, will be destroyed for his inadequacy" (p. 202).

Maryanne unknowingly seconds the motion. On August 23, 2020, the day before the Republican National Convention began, the *Washington Post* revealed that Mary L. Trump had secretly recorded hours of telephone conversation with her aunt Maryanne. In them the former Appeals Court judge described her brother Donald as being out just for himself, a prodigious liar, cruel, and incredibly phony. All he wants to do is appeal to his base, she said. He has no principles. Trump gave a nonresponse response: “Every day it’s something else. Who Cares? ... Our country will soon be stronger than ever before.”

John Bolton’s Book, *The Room Where It Happened*

The Room Where It Happened by John Bolton¹ provides greater insight into Donald Trump’s presidency than any of the other tomes sitting on my “Trump shelf,” because of its breadth, depth, and detail. It is also fun to read, whether you agree with Bolton’s realpolitik or not, if you like quippy narratives. (Some people, unaccountably, do not.) (I am told.) (Often.) The White House fought hard to suppress his book too, saying it endangered national security. It’s much easier to see that it endangers the president’s security, as it exposes *him* as being the greatest threat to America’s welfare in foreign relations.

I wrote in Chapter Four of *Authoritarian Nightmare* that Trump’s mental shortcomings had grown yet shorter during his presidency, such as his needing to lie to hold “Trump World” together in his own mind, and his inability to think straight. I also hypothesized that his insatiable drive for adulation sprang from deep self-doubts about his abilities that constantly hammered his sense of worth, interrupted his thinking, and hijacked his decision-making. Bolton’s book supports these conclusions page after page—illustrated not by one incident but by nearly everything Trump did in foreign affairs from April 2018 to September 2019 that Bolton witnessed and agonized over first-hand.

Take Trump’s competence. Bolton didn’t have enough twine to plumb the president’s ignorance. The president did not know Britain had nuclear weapons. He thought Finland was a part of Russia. He did not realize Afghanistan was next to Pakistan and it provided a haven for the Taliban. He did not think Japan was threatened by North Korea’s short-range missiles. He unwittingly confessed to his unpreparedness for the office by commenting that while other presidents had refrained from talking about money with foreign leaders, “that’s all I know how to talk about” (p. 295). And even there, as Bolton makes clear, Trump had no understanding of trade deficits and why America might wisely foot the bill for maintaining troops in certain nations because its enemies would gladly take its place.

¹ If I may slide into the shadow of someone famous, John R. Bolton and I have a few things in common. We both come from working class backgrounds, and both went to Yale on scholarships. Furthermore, we both lived in the same residential college there (“Calhoun” it was called then), although I graduated eight years before he did in 1970. Other famous Calhoun grads include Paul Krugman, Jodi Foster, Paul Mnuchin, and best of all, Sandra Boynton.

Trump tried to cover being way, way out of his depth by presenting a public face of firm resolve and fixed purpose (“Make America Great Again”). But Bolton found that both resolve and purpose were sham. No decision reached in “the room where it happened” was final. Aides who lost arguments to other advisors in the Oval Office simply booked another appointment with the president and changed his mind. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo is quoted as saying, “You can’t leave him alone for a minute’ (p. 240). Bolton wrote that after sustained discussion had gotten Trump to agree with him about North Korea’s nuclear program, “but a fluttering leaf could have turned him 180 degrees” (p. 326). As well, Trump proved thin-skinned about criticism in the press—even from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and CNN. He would often flip-flop on policy issues simply because he could not slough off criticism.

Bolton says Trump’s Twitter Flitters in foreign affairs can be traced not only to his cavernous ignorance but also to his lack of principles to guide him. Bolton dreaded the one-on-one meetings with foreign leaders that Trump craved because he feared Trump would give away the farm for a bowl of porridge. Far from being a brilliant negotiator, Trump proved enormously incompetent when dealing with America’s adversaries. Giving him a big parade and a compelling photo op mattered more to him than the negotiating points his advisors had prepared. Any decision that brought him short-term glory was the right one, in Trump’s mind. Always concerned with his image, appearance mattered most.

As for making America great again, Bolton soon realized the force driving Trump’s foreign policy was “Get me elected again.” Trump’s constant goal was to do things that would make him look good so he would have a “gimmie” in 2020—even if it hurt America’s allies or the United States itself. Take his romance with Kim Jong Un, North Korea’s despotic leader. Trump made Un a “player” on the world stage by proposing a summit with him. Bolton, with years of experience dealing with North Korea, pointed out how unwise this was, but to no avail. Trump wanted to look like the president who had done what no previous president had done: establish good relations with North Korea and ended its pursuit of nuclear weapons. He was convinced he could do this through force of personality if he could form a relationship with the North Korean dictator.

Kim gladly accepted the courtship and the two exchanged syrupy, fawning letters. Kim especially gushed, playing chump Trump the way a con man seduces a sucker to play Three Card Monte. Trump publicly declared they were in love and looked like a fool—a fool who thinks that North Korea’s setting off some explosions in a mountainside proved it had stopped trying to make atomic bombs. As Bolton points out, Trump’s efforts have not produced one shred of verifiable evidence that North Korea has stopped developing nuclear weapons, although the president frequently boasts he has pulled this off.

This sort of thing happened all over the globe, as Trump ignored America's interests—as explained to him by staunch Republicans whom he picked to advise him—whenever he thought he could look good by taking a different stand. He threatened NATO allies who he said were not paying their share. He ignored Russia's continuing interference in American elections. He tried repeatedly to “bring the troops home” from Syria and Iraq. He turned a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's murder of Jamal Khashoggi in order to keep jobs in Ohio. He had no interest in buttressing Taiwan's resistance to China's threats. He *did* want to take control of Iraq's oil, and invade Venezuela, which would make the United States a wartime plunderer akin to the Axis powers during World War II.

The most blatant example of Trump betraying America's interests for his personal gain occurred in June 2019 at the G20 meetings, when he astounded people sitting on both sides of a China-USA negotiating table by “pleading with (President) Xi to insure Trump would win” the upcoming election by buying more soybeans and wheat (p. 301). This was outright begging, and for personal advantage. And Trump was entreating a foreign county to help manipulate the American election, which he had most strenuously denied doing with the Russians in 2016. He surely lost “face” with Xi, whose culture places great value on personal dignity, by being a supplicant. Trump was supposed to be so powerful, but here he had humbled himself by asking China to help him. Trump was as well leaving himself open to blackmail by Xi who could reveal the story whenever he wished. And Trump was endangering America's interests by placing the USA in a situation where it owed China a favor—which meant someday doing something America did not want to do. What a disaster! No wonder the White House kept Bolton from printing Trump's exact words to Xi (p. 301).

In case anyone has forgotten, the next month Trump made a telephone call to the president of Ukraine asking for “dirt” on Joe Biden. He would howl and howl that this had nothing to do with the coming election, and Republicans in Congress bayed right along.

As seasoned a veteran as John Bolton is, he realized early on that Trump was more than a disaster likely to wreak havoc on the United States. He presented an unending series of disasters. Besides his ignorance and lack of principles which produced a self-defeating lack of resolve in foreign affairs, and his placing himself ahead of all else in importance, Trump was just unable to think straight long enough to lead a discussion and make a decision. For example, in May 2019 at a meeting of the National Security Council about Iranian attacks in the Persian Gulf, he was asked how much risk he was willing to take on a certain issue. He responded that he had “an unbelievable capacity” for risk. Risk was good. Then he gave a lecture on his views on Iraq, why he wanted to get out of Syria, why America should confiscate the oil in Iraq, and Venezuela, and why he thought China was the greatest cheater in the world as shown in recent trade negotiations. This precipitated a riff on

economic power as the basis of military power. That led Trump to start talking about aircraft carriers, which led him to complain about using new electronic systems to launch and recover aircraft from carriers instead of the old steam-driven systems. The *U.S. Ford* cost \$16 billion so far, and sailors tell you they can fix the steam systems by hitting them with a hammer but they have no idea how to fix the electronic ones. Trump said to convert all the new systems to the old one (pp. 381-382).

If this is so painful to read that you skipped to this next paragraph, imagine what it would have been like to have to listen to it when you are supposed to be reaching an important decision. And it went on and on. When a courageous CIA official broke in to return the discussion to its original topic, Trump highjacked the agenda again by jumping from the Baghdad embassy to “getting the fuck out“ of Afghanistan. Then he returned to aircraft carriers, talking about what a beautiful sight the *Abraham Lincoln* was. Then he wondered if the incoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff should be attending these meetings. Then he raised the subject of whether John Kerry was violating the law by expressing his opinions about dealing with Iran. When someone tried to return the conversation to the Iranian attacks, Trump told a story he had heard about the treatment of white farmers in South Africa (p. 383).

Down at the brickyard in Brentwood, Missouri where I grew up, we would have said “Trump’s biscuit’s not cooked in the middle.” Each idea in our heads is linked to countless other ideas, and the track from one to another passes through a lot of junctions. Our train of thought can be diverted at many places along the way, and we all know people who are forever “going off on tangents” and then going off on tangents off the tangents. Sometimes the train completely jumps the tracks and you can’t see any connection with what came before. When someone has thoroughly lost the ability to stay on track, his thinking becomes a “word salad” and God knows where it will end up. In the meeting summarized above, Trump eventually concluded, “I don’t care if ISIS comes back into Iraq” (p. 383), which totally contradicts the central goal of his Middle East policy.

So many former aides have said that it is impossible to keep Trump focused on an issue, it seems clear that something is fundamentally wrong with his cognitive processes. Trump reportedly asked the head White House physician in January 2018, Dr. Ronnie L. Jackson, to be cognitively tested and he was given the Montreal Cognitive Assessment Test—a ten-minute test used to screen persons who might be developing Alzheimer’s. Jackson said Trump scored 30 out of 30, and Trump declared that the doctors at Walter Reed were amazed because nobody gets a perfect score. He said. When Chris Wallace said during a Fox News interview that it was an easy test, Trump replied, “I’ll bet you couldn’t even answer the last five questions, because they are very hard”

(<https://www.cnn.com/videos/business/2020/07/19/chris-wallace-fox-news-sunday-president-donald-trump-joe-biden-interview-kj-orig.cnn>).

Well, here are the last, “very hard” five questions. See if you can get *any* right.

1. Have someone read the following sentence to you. Then see if you can repeat it.

“I only know that John is the one to help today.” (1 point)

How about this one?

“The cat always hid under the couch when dogs were in the room.” (1 point)

2. Can you name ten words that begin with “F” in a minute? (1 point)

3. What is the similarity between a train and a bicycle? (1 point) How about a watch and a ruler? (1 point)

4. You are asked to remember five words that were read to you five minutes earlier, and which you had to repeat then. (The words are Face, Velvet, Church, Daisy, and Red.) (This is easy if you make up a sentence such as “Jesus’ face on velvet in church made Daisy see red.”) (1 point per correct word recalled)

5. Do you know the date, day of the week, month, year, place, and city you are in? (6 points)

One suspects the astute Chris Wallace, and many children, would get a perfect score on such a simple test. It mainly measures basic memory. (If you don’t know what day it is and where you are, it is not a good sign.) None of the questions requires coherent thinking or the ability to distinguish truth from falseness—abilities the president definitely lacks now. And judgment. Think what it means that Trump believes these are very hard questions.²

How can people work for someone like Trump? John Bolton resigned as National Security Advisor in September 2019 because he found it impossible to maintain coherent policies when Trump kept changing his mind, undercutting him, and blaming him (Bolton) for his (Trump’s) own bad calls. Many others had already left for very similar reasons. But others have stayed, some for all four years. How do they do it? They hear the bumbling

² People who are familiar with Donald Trump’s past might wonder about his volunteering to take a test that might make him look bad. But they will also know he has often “fixed” things by corrupting the process, and wildly misrepresenting results when he cannot. Dr. Jackson had been on the White House staff since 2006 and had enjoyed the trust of Democrats as well as Republicans. Still, Trump nominated him to become head of the Veterans Administration two months after the cognitive results were announced—a cabinet level position for which Jackson was completely qualified if the only qualification was being alive. Opposition from within and without the Administration forced Jackson to withdraw, but he will probably be elected Representative from the Texas 13th Congressional District in the next Congress.

thoughts over and over. They get blasted by the rages when anything goes wrong. They must know Trump lies from one side of the room to the other, and there is no lie he will not tell. They must grasp that the president is so full of himself, he cannot see anything else being as important. They must realize he is totally unfit for office. Yet they continue serving him, implementing his maddest decisions. Why? Some are probably True Believers who may even see Trump as God’s agent. But others will be power-seekers themselves. Neither will dare tell Trump he is wrong. According to Bolton, when Chief of Staff John Kelly resigned he told the president, “Whatever you do, don’t hire a ‘yes man,’ someone who won’t tell you the truth” (p. 245). But that is exactly the kind of person Trump wants.

Bob Woodward’s Book, *Rage*

Bob Woodward’s second book on Donald Trump commanded attention when it was released in September 2020. Based upon seventeen conversations the president freely undertook with America’s most famous investigative journalist,³ as well as discussions with administration officials and Republicans in Congress. *Rage* turned the COVID-19 story upside down when it reported Trump’s recorded declaration on March 19, 2020 that he had known from the start that a pandemic was going to savage America, but he publicly denied it for months, he said, to prevent panic.

Many people apparently believed Trump because the explanation was so utterly damning to him it seemed he never would have made it up to protect himself. After all, he was confessing to being someone in a rooming house who discovered the building was on fire, and then told no one because he did not want the victims to panic. So the sheer idiocy of the rationalization, oddly enough, gave it verisimilitude. But one can find a straighter explanation of the president’s behavior that fits him to a T. The “prevent panic” excuse was actually less damaging to Trump than the truth, which was that he had ignored a whole bucket of warnings for weeks about what was going to happen. He not only kept denying the “building” was on fire, he just let it burn away. And when the fire department came to the door, he sent it away.

What Did the President Know and When Did He Know It? COVID-19 appeared in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and the government, as it had some years earlier with the SARS virus, hid this from the rest of the world. But by December 31 China described

³ Why on earth would Trump agree, indeed propose, these taped interviews? Woodward’s first book, *Fear*, had painted a most unflattering portrait of him. Trump probably believed that if he could develop a personal relationship with history’s most popular presidential biographer, the power of his (Trump’s) personality would lead Woodward to write a pro-Trump book. It’s hard not to see the same narcissistic self-deception in this that shapes Trump’s approaches to North Korea, China, and so on. When Woodward kept asking hard questions, Trump repeatedly complained that the book would be unfair—seemingly trying to pressure Woodward into getting on his side. Which just made him look worse,

mysterious “pneumonia” cases in Wuhan to the World Health Organization. The U.S. Center for Disease Control immediately tried to get more information from Chinese medical authorities, who stonewalled. The CDC nevertheless noticed the disease was quickly spreading, and by January 13 a case turned up in Thailand. The virus evidently could pass from person to person. So on January 18 the CDC instituted screening of all air passengers arriving from Wuhan in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. On this same day the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Alex Azar, telephoned Trump at his Mar-a-Lago home in Florida to explain how serious a threat the disease posed to the United States. Trump however proved uninterested and changed the subject.⁴

On January 21 a Seattle man recently returned from Wuhan became America’s first known COVID-19 patient and the next day Trump made his first statement on the disease, dismissing its importance: “It’s one person coming in from China, and we have it under control. It’s going to be just fine.” When more cases appeared, he tweeted on January 24 “It will work out well.” But on January 28 Trump’s Chief Trade Advisor Peter Navarro sent a memo around the West Wing warning the virus could have very dire consequences.⁵ Azar phoned Trump again that day to warn him of the disaster afoot, and was again rebuffed. But that afternoon Trump met with the top officials of the National Security Council and was told the new coronavirus would be the biggest national security threat he would face in his presidency. That got his attention, but he still did nothing.

Two days later the president told a crowd of supporters, “We have very little problem (with the virus) in this country, at this moment—five. And those people are all recuperating successfully. But we’re working very closely with China and other countries, and we think it’s going to have a very good ending for it, so that I can assure you.” However, every top official in the White House knew China was not playing nice and a “very good ending” was about as likely as pigs flying past a blue moon on a day when the devil can go tobogganing in hell, the way things were going. Thus the next day about twenty advisors gathered in the Oval Office to make a presentation to the president. Azar, Robert Redfield (the head of the CDC), and Anthony Fauci led the way. The chiefs of various intelligence agencies and

⁴ Marlene Lenthang, “Donald Trump dismissed Health Secretary Alex Azar’s January warning on coronavirus as ‘alarmist’ and cut him off during a phone briefing, report says,” *Daily Mail*, April 5, 2020 at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8190167/Donald-Trump-dismissed-Health-Secretary-Alex-Azars-January-coronavirus-warning-alarmist.html> .

⁵ Maggie Haberman, “Trade adviser warned White House in January of risks of a pandemic: A memo from Peter Navarro is the most direct warning known to have circulated at a key moment among top administration officials,” *New York Times*, (Apr. 11, 2020) at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/us/politics/navarro-warning-trump-coronavirus.html> .

numerous other officials backstopped them. Bob Woodward evidently spoke with a number of the people present in the-room-where-it-happened, who said they unanimously made it clear to Trump that a plague was coursing through China, the Chinese government was not cooperating with information about the disease, everybody with dough was flying out of China ASAP, and people could blissfully transmit the disease to others without getting sick themselves. All the king's horses and all the king's men in the Oval Office agreed that the United States had to keep persons from China from entering the country. Trump agreed, and that night he issued his "Travel Ban on China."

Trump has ladled glory on himself from stem to stern for issuing this proclamation, saying everyone in the room was against the travel ban but he insisted on it to protect the country.⁶ (It's a good example of how he often lies by completely reversing the facts. Doing it that way takes very little mental effort.) Actually, it looks like the CDC packed the Oval Office with over a dozen Trump advisors to force him to take the matter seriously. Smaller groups could not penetrate his willful blindness.) Moreover, the "China ban" fits distinctly sideways with Trump's story that he had lied to Americans to keep them from panicking. Declaring a travel ban, and insisting Americans returning from China be quarantined, definitely implies an invisible, spreading danger. Furthermore, if you believe Trump actually knew "all along" the country was in danger but played (COVID-19) down to prevent panic, why did he leave America unprotected when he could have quietly prepared the country for the pandemic heading its way? For example, the Department of Health and Human Services asked the White House's Office of Management and Budget for \$136 million at the end of January and at the beginning of February to combat the disease, and was refused both times. Later Trump would complain that the Obama administration had left the shelves bare of testing materials, respirators, and so on. If this were true, would restocking the shelves have induced panic? Hardly. As many governors and mayors learned later, the president did almost nothing, even "on the quiet," to prepare the nation he led for the crisis ahead.

I think instead that the "candid admission" to Woodward of lying about the danger from the start was just the best lie that Trump could hit upon to cloak his real motivation, which was even more damning, namely to keep the road to his re-election smooth and straight. He had planned from Day One to run on a flourishing national economy, and here his medical advisors were talking closures, quarantines, and self-isolations that would slow everything down to a crawl, and drive the re-election bus into the ditch. So he decided

⁶ Trump has repeatedly said that Joe Biden criticized his travel ban. On February 1, Biden tweeted, "We are in the midst of a crisis with the coronavirus. We need to lead the way with science — not Donald Trump's record of hysteria, xenophobia, and fear-mongering. He is the worst possible person to lead our country through a global health emergency." Given that Trump had been ignoring the virus, Biden's charge of "hysteria" does seem unwarranted. His advisors practically had to burn down the White House to get him to act. But as for "xenophobia and fear-mongering," Trump's branding of COVID-19 as "the China virus" slaps a lot of adhesive onto Biden's charge.

instead to tell the American people they were perfectly safe and life should continue as usual. As the infection spread and began overwhelming the healthcare system, he retreated to saying “Never mind, the virus will disappear once the weather warms up,” which he probably got from some fringe news source.

As many have noted, Donald Trump has a startling inability to accept reality when he wants to believe something else, for reasons I tried to explain in *Authoritarian Nightmare*. He will seek out bizarre sources and toady yes-men to help him lie to himself. He wanted the virus to just go away, so he believed it would be killed by April warmth, or be cured by hydroxychloroquine, or destroyed by bleach, or be prevented by a vaccine that would be ready by October. And no sooner had he finally admitted how serious the situation was, he began pressuring states to “reopen” and return to normalcy, which some did to their sorrow. And he insisted on holding normal political re-election rallies and discouraging the wearing of masks and forcing schools to open in the fall and pushing poorly tested vaccines on the public to rejuvenate the economy and buoy his chances for re-election.

Blaming China. President Trump needed a scapegoat as well as sacrificial lambs. He teed up China, saying he had secret evidence it had created the virus and then negligently allowed it to spread around the world. He had been deceived by China’s President Xi early on, he explained, who had assured him over the phone that the disease was under control. Trump called him on February 6, offering to send CDC scientists to China to help eradicate the disease. He thought Xi would agree to this previously rejected offer because he and the Chinese leader had a personal relationship. But Xi was uninterested. He *did* give the impression that everything was under control in China, according to Matt Pottinger, Deputy Director of the National Security Council who listened in on the call (*Rage*, pp. 241-243). But China had taken dramatic steps to control the disease. By February 6, Wuhan and the province it sat in had been isolated from the rest of China and locked down with stringent quarantine regulations for two weeks. Some 40,000 healthcare workers had been sent to the area, hospitals were being rapidly built, and the infection curve was flattening out.

The Chinese government certainly did nothing to stop the spread of the disease abroad for a long time. But virologists around the world are virtually unanimous that COVID-19 evolved in nature, and was not manufactured in a laboratory. The United States became the world leader in coronavirus deaths not because Xi lied to Trump about how well China was containing the threat, but because Trump ignored for weeks and weeks the strongest warnings from his own experts to defend the country, and then most purposefully lied to the American people himself about what they should do. The blood is on his hands more than on anyone else’s, and deep down inside, beneath layers of excuses, denials, blame-shifting, and rationalizations, he probably knows it.

Other Findings in Woodward's Book, Rage

Rage provides numerous examples of the same mental shortcomings by the president that were presented in Chapters Two, Three, and Four of *Authoritarian Nightmare* to understand his underlying psychological problem. For example, Rob Rosenstein was astounded during his first White House meeting “how the president’s rambling monologue continued in every way but a straight line” (p. 48), and that “the scattershot nature of Trump’s draft letter (about why he fired FBI Director James Comey) showed a disturbed mind” (p. 49). James Mattis commented that Trump has no mental framework for organizing his thoughts (p. 90). Dan Coats, the Director of National Intelligence, commented that Trump wanted to avoid any process that went through experts. “I don’t need these people. I don’t need a National Security Council. I just need myself and perhaps three or four people I trust” (p. 115). His instincts and others’ loyalty to him mattered more to Trump than expertise.

Woodward also provides numerous examples of how Trump refuses to face reality when the news is bad. In person-to-person settings, he immediately swings the conversation to a different, self-aggrandizing topic (which usually, the fact-checking Woodward makes clear, is much less glorious than Trump’s account). And he will not, no matter what you do, deal with the issue at hand. As a prime example, on April 5 Woodward tried to find out the president’s master plan for dealing with the COVID-19 epidemic. “Are we going to full mobilization, a ‘Manhattan Project’ style commitment?” He asked the question six times and got a story about an emergency hospital in New York City, complaints about Democratic governors, disgust with the “fake news media,” and anger at Democrats (pp. 298-300). But never an answer to his question.

Bob Woodward often says he is not a psychiatrist and cannot offer expert opinion on what is wrong with the president. But he apparently realizes something is seriously out of whack, and he too senses the wackiness, weirdness, and wired-in wrongedness are based on a deep-seated sense of inferiority. Thus Woodward tells the story of Rex Tillerson, Trump’s Secretary of State, telling someone the president was a “fucking moron.” “Probably nothing could have triggered Trump’s insecurities more,” Woodward wrote (p. 96).

At the end of the book Woodward says Trump lacks self-confidence because he has undermined so many other people in his life (p. 387). Your friendly blogger is not a psychiatrist either, but I think Trump’s inability to stay on track mentally, his narcissism, his supposed confidence in his instincts, his demands for loyalty, and his aggressiveness are rooted in the fact that he was fiercely raised to be “Number One” in life, its biggest winner, and yet he has failed many, many times. He hears his father saying, “You’re a loser” every time someone criticizes him, and no thought leads *him* to panic more.

So if you had read Chapters 2-4 of *AN* you might have predicted that Trump would destroy himself in the first debate on September 29. Debate coaches will tell you that timely interruptions can throw off your opponent's presentation, and Trump knew his base wanted him to be aggressive. But he wildly overdid it to such an extent that he lost the contest on style points even more than on content. Why did he lose control so much that he quickly was arguing angrily with the moderator as well as with Joe Biden? Because someone was telling him to his face that he was wrong, he was the worst president in history, he was a loser. Even before he became president, Trump would often get so mad when someone pointed out he was wrong he almost fell out of his pants. Remember the hole he punched in the ceiling of his new casino (*AN*, pp. 61-62)? But after three years of being the chief executive in the land, any suggestion that he had made a mistake could produce instant rage.

I was also listening during the debate for how often Trump said his accomplishments were "the greatest" and "the best ever," because I think he especially drops Ego Bombs when he feels inadequate or wrong. I believe he is talking to himself then as much as to others. It's just classic overcompensation, and you probably noticed that he carpet-bombed the stage in Cleveland with superlatives about himself during the debate.⁷

Michael Cohen's Book, *Disloyal*

Michael Cohen's book, like my co-author John W. Dean's *Blind Ambition*, explains with searing self-recrimination how he became corrupted by working for a powerful man. Except unlike John, who was maneuvered into a conspiracy that he courageously tried to end *in situ*, Cohen reveals he was looking to be corrupted and leapt at the chance. As a result, he was sentenced to three years imprisonment for campaign finance violations, tax evasion, and lying to a Senate committee. He wrote *Disloyal* while in jail.

The book contains some salacious revelations about Trump and some of his close associates,⁸ which are branded as lies by the president's defenders who ask, "Why should anybody believe a convicted liar?" I tend to hesitate about Cohen's obviously self-serving stories, but I also know that the only people who can reveal conspiracies and organized criminal activities from "the inside" will likely be conspirators and criminals themselves. So you cannot ignore them if you want to ever find out the truth.

⁷ Did you see the cartoon of Trump declaring, "I have the best coronavirus. The biggest coronavirus. Nobody has coronavirus like I do. These doctors, they tell me it's a very impressive amount of coronavirus that I have. Very impressive. The biggest coronavirus ever seen. Very impressive amount of corona virus"?

⁸ For example, Cohen reveals the homosexuality of one of Trump's top advisors in unnecessarily vivid terms, and discloses the name of an NFL quarterback who was part of the Stormy Daniels affair. Neither seems necessary for telling Trump's story.

Michael Cohen knows the “real, real Donald Trump—the man very, very, very few people know” as he put it (p. 12). If the analysis of Trump’s personality in *AP* amounts to so much snake oil, Cohen’s understanding of the man would make this clear. However, *Disloyal* repeatedly reinforces the points made in *Authoritarian Nightmare*:

Doing anything—and I mean anything—to “win” has always been (Trump’s) business model and way of life...For more than a decade, I was Trump’s first call every morning and his last call every night. I was in and out of Trump’s office on the 26th floor of the Trump Tower as many as fifty times a day, tending to his every demand...(I saw him) in the unguarded moments when he revealed who he really was: a cheat, a liar, a fraud, a bully, a racist, a predator, a con man...Since taking office, he has become the worst version of himself. He is capable of behaving kindly, but he is not kind. He is capable of committing acts of generosity, but he is not generous. He is capable of being loyal, but he is fundamentally disloyal...Donald Trump and I were most alike in a naked lust for power...In the pitiful sight of Republicans throwing aside their dignity and duty in an effort to grovel at Trump’s feet, I saw myself...To Trump, life was a game, and all that mattered was winning. In these dangerous days I see the Republican Party and Trump’s followers threatening the Constitution—which is in far greater peril than is commonly understood—and following one of the worst impulses of human kind: the desire for power at all costs (*Disloyal*, pp. 10-15).

Does Trump Believe His Lies? Michael Cohen is uniquely qualified to shed light on a central question about Trump’s personality: Does he believe his own lies? He surely knows Trump has lied about many things, such as being an A+ student in school. He knows he gave Cohen the job to make sure his high school removed his academic record from its files (pp. 119-120). But when you tell a lie over and over, it can become the truth for you. So when Trump told Biden how much smarter he was academically than the Democratic candidate, he probably really believes it.

Cohen provides a compelling example of how Trump comes to believe his lies. Trump happened upon the charge in conspiracy circles in 2011 that President Obama had been born in Kenya. Trump was thinking about running for president in 2012, so he and Cohen began flooding the news media with stories that he had teams of investigators in Hawaii and elsewhere digging up the truth. He wasn’t investigating anything, and he did not believe the rumors for a second. “I know for a fact,” Cohen wrote, “that he didn’t care if the conspiracy theory was true or not” (p. 114). But he wanted to be noticed by Republicans so he made up a lie that would attract their attention. He was reprising Senator Joseph McCarthy’s infamous, “I have here in my hand a list of 205 known Communists working in the State

Department.” He promised he would soon have a shocking report on the matter. It was completely untrue, but he said it so much, and so loudly that eventually he believed it himself. Cohen wrote, “his mind quickly traveled from naked and shameless exploitation of the birther conspiracy theory to the conviction that it was true. If Trump wanted to believe something because it served his purposes, he decided to begin to believe, a leap of the imagination that was effortless to him, even second nature. What started as a ratings extravaganza morphed into self-delusion before my eyes” (p. 115).

So if you hooked Trump up to a standard lie detector and asked him if Barack Obama had been born in Kenya, he would say “Yes” and the pen *not* go lurching up the way it does in movies when someone tells a big fat porky. And if you doubted the machine’s verdict and asked him again, he would say, “Everybody knows Obama’s not a natural-born American.” But if you pressed him further, say about the birth certificates, he would try repeatedly to change the subject, and stop your questioning by doing all the talking. If you nevertheless penetrated this defense and asked your question about the birth certificates again, his voice would rise, his face would redden, he would start speaking faster and he would probably move closer to you and jab his finger in your direction while he insisted those certificates were all bullshit. And if you asked him for evidence that they were fake, he would probably say, very excitedly, that you were nasty, and fake, working for fake news, and really disgraceful for asking such a question. And if you reminded him that in 2016 he issued a statement saying he now believed Obama *was* born in Hawaii, he would probably say he did that to get the campaign focused on more important issues, and that Hilary Clinton also believed Obama was not an American, or he might deny he ever issued such a statement. If you still kept asking this question, he would probably just get up and leave.

I hope you don’t think Trump has never acted these ways.

As another example, CNBC conducted an online poll in 2014 to determine the most influential business people alive. In the early stages Trump came in 187th out of 200. He immediately ordered Cohen to fix the poll, which Cohen did with the aid of an acquaintance he had met at Liberty University whose company specialized in “Internet reputational management.” (“Poll F---ing” would be another name). Soon votes were pouring in for Trump from nonexistent persons, and eventually he ended up in ninth place, which he and Cohen had decided would be good enough. The phones began to ring “as people repeatedly told him that he deserved the recognition...and his grip on reality appeared to vanish. Before long, Trump believed he really was rated in the top ten and was regarded as a profoundly important business figure” (pp. 187-193). [CNBC discovered the cheating and removed Trump from the list, which infuriated him because by then he really believed he had legitimately come in ninth (pp. 193-197).]

Toward the end of *Disloyal*, Cohen elaborates on the role other people play in Trump's self-delusion. "No one ever tells Trump the truth about his behavior or beliefs, or the consequences of his conduct and ignorance and arrogance, in business or in his personal life and now in politics. Trump truly is the boy in the bubble, imperious to the thoughts and feelings of others, entirely and utterly focused on his own desires and ambitions" (p. 221).

For all of this, Cohen does *not* confirm one of major elements in my explanation of Trump. There are no stories of Trump's thinking constantly going off the tracks, and since Trump tended to see Cohen when he (Trump) was in trouble, you would think there would be plenty. Instead, the way Cohen tells it, Trump would essentially say, "I've got this problem with X. Fix it. Don't let me down. Goodbye." If Trump was this single-minded and coherent with Cohen, despite what others have said, my explanation is missing something important happening in Trump's mind.⁹

Other Revelations in Michael Cohen's Book.

"Trump's theory of life, business, and politics revolved around threats and the prospect of destruction" (p. 12).

"I'm certain that Trump knows he will face prison time if he leaves office" (p. 21).

"He projects his own sins and crimes onto others partly to distract and confuse, but mostly because he thinks everyone is as corrupt and shameless and ruthless as he is" (p. 21).

"Whoever follows Trump into the White House, if the President doesn't manage to make himself the leader for life, as he has started to joke about—and Trump never actually jokes—will discover a tangle of frauds and scams and lawlessness. Trump and his minions will do anything to cover up that reality, and I mean *anything*" (pp. 21-22).

"Let me stop for a moment to point out that I'm not making up Trump's nearly constant use of the word 'great'... That was how he talked. Hyperbole was his instinctual method of communication, exaggerating his own talents and wealth and physical characteristics and achievements, as if by enlarging things he could make them real" (p. 33).

Donald Trump has a very low regard for his son, Donald Trump, Jr. Cohen quotes the president as saying, "Don has the worst fucking judgment of anyone I have ever met" (p. 37). He repeated the criticism before others on various occasions, humiliating his namesake (p. 97). Cohen wondered why Don Jr. stayed around. But the son told him that when he was

⁹ Disconfirmations in data often point the way to better explanations. For example, I thought RWA scores would correlate strongly with Machiavellianism, but they repeatedly refused to do so. Eventually other researchers helped me see that there were two very different kinds of authoritarian personalities, and I was looking at the wrong one. Social dominators are strong Machiavellians.

in his twenties his father told him he had to join the family business and work for him, or else he'd be disowned and disinherited (pp. 97-98).

“Trump didn't take setbacks well, to put it mildly, his form of leadership revolved around anger, fury, rage, and always chaotic blaming and shaming” (p. 100).

As he had with John McCain, Donald Trump has an utterly irrational personal hatred for Barack Obama. Cohen writes: “There were really no words to describe Trump's hatred and contempt for Barack *Hussein* (emphasis Trump's) Obama” (p. 106). Partly this was racist, Cohen suggested, but Obama's successes especially got under Trump's skin. “Watching Obama's Inauguration in 2008 with Trump, with the massive, adoring, joyful crowd on the Mall, incensed the Boss in a way I'd never seen before—he was literally losing his mind watching a handsome and self-evidently brilliant young black man take over, not only as Commander in Chief, but also as a moral world leader and guiding light. It was just too much for Trump. I thought I'd seen the worst of Trump, but when Obama won the Nobel Prize, Trump went ballistic...it was almost like he was hearing voices the way he ranted and raved” (p. 107). Trump even hired an Obama look-alike to be videotaped sitting before him at a desk while Trump belittled and then “fired” him (pp. 108-109). (This was long before Obama's famous dressing-down of Trump at the White House Correspondents' Dinner in April, 2011. Cohen tells his readers that while that “pay back” infuriated Trump no end, it had nothing to do with Trump's decision to run for president.)

Cohen figured that Trump hates Obama so much because Obama is “the only person on the planet whom Trump actually envied” (p. 107). I would put the same underlying sentiment a bit differently. Obama is a great winner in life. That's no surprise. The first African American to win the presidency, like the first African American to crack the color code in major league baseball, had to be someone of overwhelming, undeniable talent. Obama had succeeded against vast odds compared with Trump, who looks like such a loser by comparison. And that's what his deepest, most honest version of himself believes him to be.

“Trump's intuitive way of seeing power...meant a relentless willingness to lie, exaggerate, mislead, and above all brag and boast and boost” (p. 46).

“The Trumps were actually racist, scheming to keep African Americans out of their rental properties” (p. 49).

“Around Trump I felt excited, alive, like he possessed the urgent and only truth, the chance for my salvation and success in life” (p. 56).

“My role as Trump's personal attorney was essentially managing chaos, as he was always, always, always enveloped by crisis and teetering on the brink of disaster” (p. 82). Many of

these crises involved criminal activities, such as sexual assaults. Cohen learned immediately that he would not get Trump's version of what happened, no more than Trump would tell him why he wanted his high school grades deep-sixed. Cohen's job was to "fix" the situation and make it go away, which he was almost always able to do through intimidation, favors, bribery, and other tactics. Since Cohen enabled Trump to "get away with it" so often, he likely increased his boss's assaults, etcetera, producing the "always, always, always" in the quote above.

Trump occasionally had Cohen take "good news" to his wife, Melania Trump, such as a woman changing her story that Trump had tried to rape her (p. 90), or Trump had earned praise from a coveted organization. Cohen's impression was that Melania knew the retraction had been forced, and she was bored hearing about how great her husband was. "If he ever got caught cheating and Melania threatened to leave him, Trump told me, he wouldn't be upset or hurt at the loss, and I suspect she knew it. The relationship was just another deal, plain and simple. 'I can always get another wife,' Trump told me" (p. 181).

"Trump wasn't really the man advertised in *The Art of the Deal*. To start with, after 2008 and the free fall in value of his various real estate holdings, including Trump Tower and his golf courses, he effectively dropped out of the building business" (p. 92), and focused on franchising his name. "He'd endorse pretty much anything, as long as he had a piece of the action and didn't have to put up any money" (p. 93).

When he tested the waters for a presidential run in 2012 he invited over fifty religious leaders to Trump Tower, where he lied up one street and down another about his views on abortion (he had been pro-Choice for years), homosexuality (some of his best friends...), family values (love, acceptance, support—what have they got to do with having a family?), and so on. "As the evangelicals inhaled Trump's...horse shit, they solemnly asked to approach him to 'lay hands' on him...He closed his eyes, faking piety, and gave the appearance of feeling God's presence" (p. 127). Later Trump said to Cohen, "Can you believe that bullshit? Can you believe people believe that bullshit?" (p. 133).

Trump decided not to run in 2012 when Obama's "Long" birth certificate deflated the birther issue. Cohen thought he was glad to slip into the shadows for a while, because he was quite afraid of "stepping into the arena and facing the withering wit and soaring rhetoric and the real danger of humiliation at the hands of the 44th President of the United States" (p. 136). [BA: When Trump had the portraits of Obama and Bill Clinton removed from public view in the White House, my first thought was, "Clinton probably realizes he was moved too so Trump's real motivation wouldn't be too obvious."]

Cohen observes that Trump is able “to attract a certain type of person into his inner world...the likes of Lindsey Graham and Jim Jordan and Mike Pompeo and the other people surrounding Trump. The Boss had an unerring eye for sycophants, yes men, loyal soldiers” (p. 165).

The crowd at Trump’s campaign announcement in 2015 was salted with “a few dozen” actors paid \$50 to be enthusiastic supporters, but Cohen says they proved unnecessary as his efforts to attract a crowd through social media paid off. But when Trump’s infamous attack on Hispanics, Muslims, and so on caused severe business reactions over the next few days, his children came to Cohen and begged him to talk their father out of running for president, as he was killing the bottom line. Cohen did as they asked, but Trump refused. “‘I will never get the Hispanic vote,’ Trump said. ‘Like the blacks, they’re too stupid to vote for Trump.’” (pp. 218-225).

The infamous attack on Mexicans, etcetera in his campaign announcement was ad-libbed. Cohen had prepared “bullet points” which his boss was rehearsing right before his entrance (p. 218), but once he started talking he just ranted. Cohen found the attacks repulsive (p. 220).

“Trump never prepares for anything, ever. Reading reports, taking briefings, seeking context and background for professional encounters—Trump does none of that, trusting that he can fake his way through life. More than that, he preferred to be ignorant, as it allowed him to rely on his gut instincts” (p. 227).

Sean Hannity was for Trump from the start, but had to give numerous other Republican candidates exposure on his Fox News shows. This angered Trump who threatened to severely cut Hannity’s access to his campaign. Cohn brokered a reconciliation in which Hannity humbly said to Trump, “Thank you for believing in me, because I believe in you” (p. 236).

After Trump exploded at Megyn Kelly for her question at the first Republican debate about his treatment of women, some of his supporters camped outside her home and terrorized her, forcing her to flee with her children. Trump did not care, but eventually agreed to be friendly with her on her show if she only asked the questions he wanted asked and she meekly accepted his answers (p. 239-241). This got his rabid supporters to back off. But if she hadn’t agreed to the deal...

“Trump convinced a vast swath of working-class white folks in the Midwest that he cared about their well-being. The truth is that he couldn’t care less...That was a stone-cold fact...To Trump, his voters are his audience, his chumps, his patsies, his base” (p. 250).

“The truth was that all three kids (Don, Jr., Ivanka, and Eric) were starved for their father’s love. They’d received no love from their father as children, abandoned by their egomaniacal Dad and humiliated when he openly cheated on their mother, and now all three were forever trapped in a cycle of seeking his approval” (p. 256).

“(Trump) had long accused others of doing the very things he did; that was a central element of his modus operandi. If Trump claimed you cheated or lied or stole, you could be sure that he’d done those things himself; it was almost as if he had a compulsion to confess to his terrible actions by way of accusation” (p. 286).

Updating the Crisis as We Head Into the Home Stretch

All four of these books focus on Donald Trump, and ultimately we get a pretty clear picture of who he is and why he acts the way he does. In truth, he’s about as complicated as sawdust, and somebody who spends fifteen minutes in a room with Trump can probably see to the bottom of him without even standing up. It’s his followers who bewilder us. You never met folks so doggone confusing. They seem locked into “Countercontrol Mode,” determined to maintain their In-group’s beliefs precisely because the world keeps giving them good reasons for abandoning them. All the revelations in the tell-all books slide right off them. News that Trump has paid less in federal taxes than they have, almost certainly by lying, doesn’t bother them at all. Understanding that he is leading his true believers to an early death makes them want to join the parade. How can one make sense of all this?

Through research, happily. The scientific method works on even dark human mysteries. *Authoritarian Nightmare* threaded these and many other needles by applying the findings on the psychology of authoritarian followers. These insights can be deepened here.

White Supremacy

Donald Trump has constantly misrepresented the Black Lives Matter movement as a violent, left-wing extremist attempt to destroy America. But it’s what his base wants to believe. And as he has spread this lie he has continued to give violent White Supremist groups a pass, and even ally himself with them as he did with his “Stand back and stand by” instruction during the first debate. People who do not understand why he does this do not understand Trump himself, who has been prejudiced against African-Americans for all of his adult life. More to the point, he knows his base is highly prejudiced. He tried from the very beginning to attract people who want America to be dominated by Whites. And he succeeded to a degree that astounds one.

The 24-item Prejudice Scale put on the Monmouth Polls to ferret out the connection between bigotry and supporting Trump sought opinions on this matter in numerous ways. For some statements, agreement indicated bias:

“White people are the major victims of discrimination in the United State. The government is on everybody else’s side but theirs.”

“Instead of complaining and protesting all the time, African-Americans should be grateful for how good they have it here compared to where they came from.”

“Racial minorities have had it good for years in the United States because of all the government programs that help them get ahead of white people.”

“Black people are just naturally more violent than white people.”

“The immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa who have come to America have mainly brought disease, ignorance, and violence with them.”

“Certain races of people clearly do NOT have the natural intelligence and ‘get up and go’ of the white race.”

For other statements, the prejudiced answer was to disagree:

“Black Americans continue to get less than their fair share of our country’s wealth because of discrimination.”

“It will be great if someday America has become such a mixture of diverse people that white persons are in a minority like everybody else.”

“Americans are not exceptionally nobler than the rest of the world.“ American Exceptionalism” is just another ugly ‘master race’ theory.”

“Overall the white race has mainly brought exploitation and suffering to the other peoples of the world.”

“It is good to live in a country where there are so many minority groups present, such as African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians.”

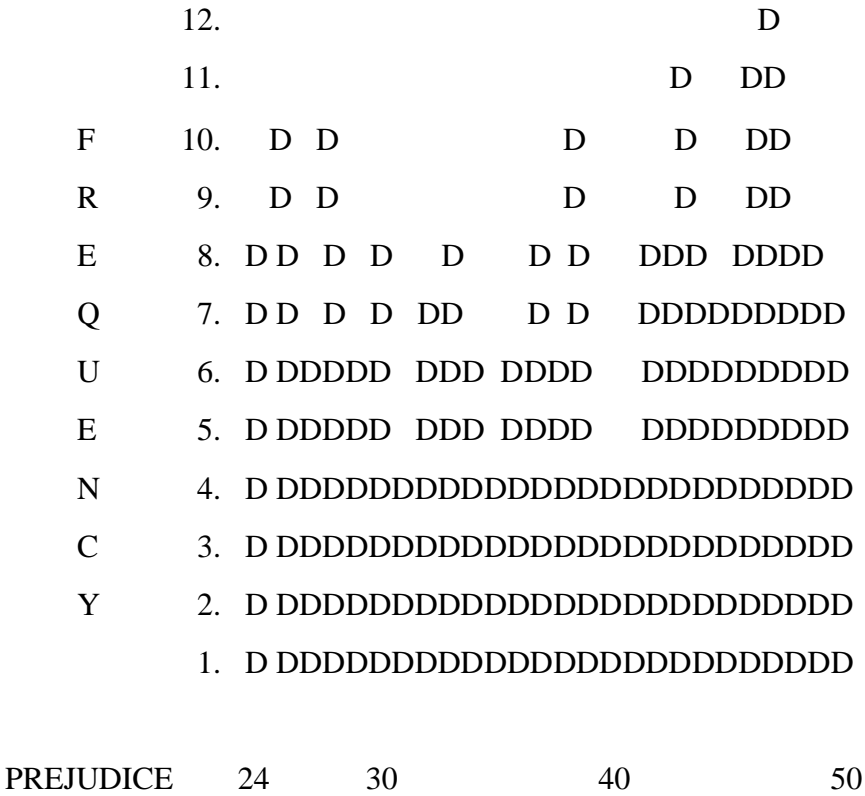
“Most minorities on welfare would rather work, but they can’t get jobs that pay a living wage.”

Trump’s supporters in the poll answered *all* of these statements in the prejudiced direction. And these answers correlated highly with their answers to other statements tapping prejudices against Jews, Muslims, persons with “different religions,” and so on, showing that pro-White, anti-Black attitudes are part of a larger package of ethnocentric beliefs and attitudes that really have nothing to do with the groups being discriminated against, and everything to do with how prejudiced people think.

The extraordinary high connection between being a relatively prejudiced white person and approving of Donald Trump's presidency is shown in the following two charts. Chart 1 shows the evaluation of Trump by each of the 202 white respondents who scored in the bottom quarter of the Prejudice Scale, according to how low they scored. Every single one of them *strongly disapproved* ("D") of Trump. The second chart shows the evaluations of Trump by the 202 white respondents who scored highest on the Prejudice Scale in terms of how prejudiced they were. Five highly prejudiced subjects *disapproved* of Trump, four said they had no opinion, and the other 193 approved of his performance, the vast majority strongly so ("A"). As this poll sampled a nation-wide, reasonably representative collection of Americans who are likely to vote in the next election, and used highly reliable and valid measures, there can be no doubt that Donald Trump has drawn the most prejudiced people in American society to his side. Moreover, nearly all of his strongest supporters are highly prejudiced (see Page 218 in *Authoritarian Nightmare*). Can anybody offer a plausible alternate explanation of the data?

Chart 1

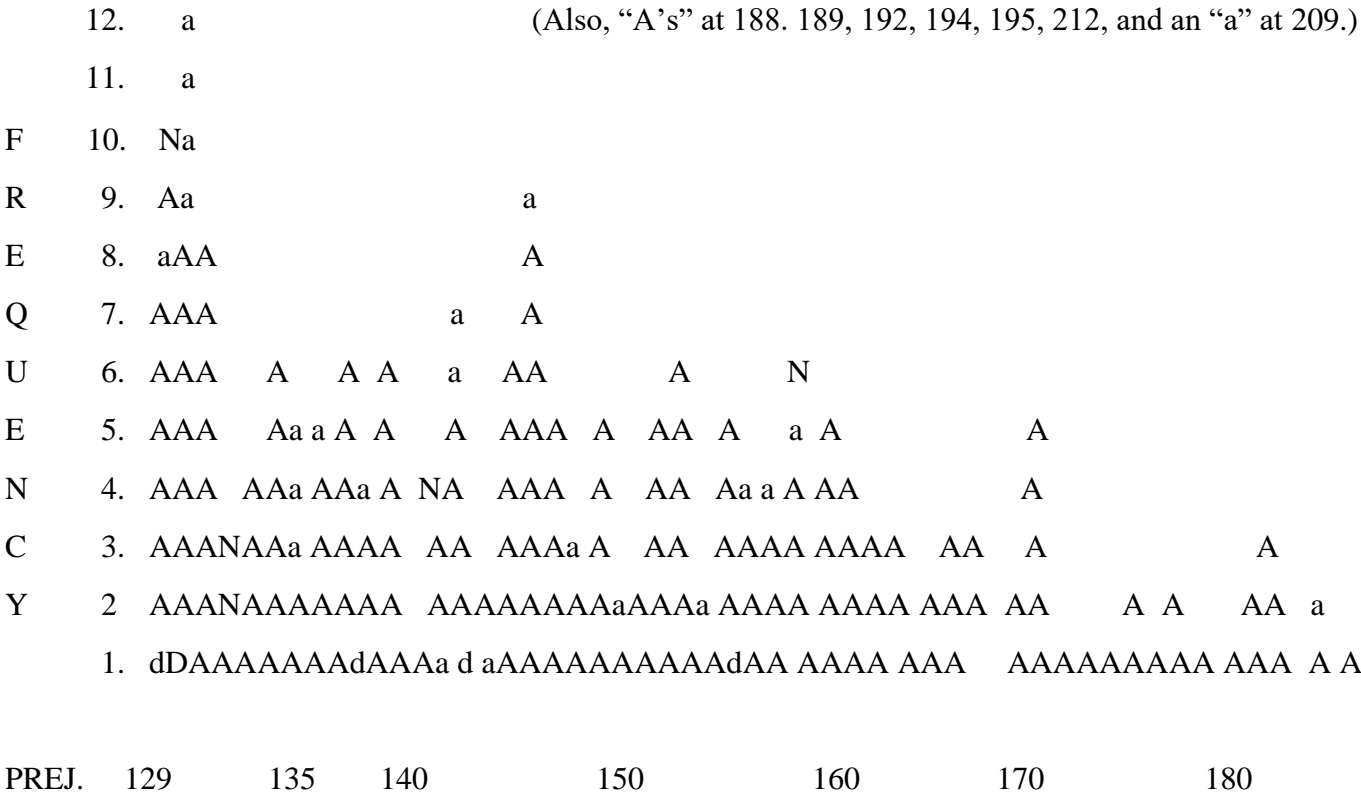
Approval Ratings of President Trump by the Least Prejudiced White Subjects in the Monmouth Poll



Explanation: The bottom quarter (N=202) of the 805 white Prejudice scores ran from 24 to 50. Eight subjects scored a rock-bottom 24. All of them “Strongly Disapproved” of Trump’s presidency, which is indicated by an upper-case “D.” No one scored a 25. Ten subjects scored 26, and all of them also strongly disapproved of Trump’s performance. In fact, everybody who scored in the bottom quartile had the same reaction to Donald Trump.

Chart 2

Approval Ratings of President Trump by the Most Prejudiced White Subjects in the Monmouth Poll



“D” indicates the subject *strongly disapproved* of Trump’s performance.

“d” indicates the subject *somewhat disapproved* of Trump’s performance.

“a” indicates the subject *somewhat approved* of Trump’s performance.

“A” indicates the subject *strongly approved* of Trump’s performance.

“N” indicates the subject *was not sure*.

The President's Illness

When the morning news on October 2 reported that Donald Trump had tested positive for COVID-19, I confess my first thought was, “Aha! This is the ‘October Surprise.’” I thought Trump was faking it, the way he had set up phoney dramas with Vince McMahon of World Wrestling Entertainment, and he would soon stage “the greatest recovery from a disease of all time,” proving the virus was not nearly as dangerous as the experts said. So you can color me black-hearted and paranoid, and rightly conclude that my future ‘pinions could prove as valuable as snow tires on downhill skis. (Or surfboards.) (Or blenders.) (Your turn.)¹⁰ One thing’s for sure: the meds he’s on now haven’t helped his cognitive processes.

How Will Trump Try to Get Re-Elected?

Well we still have the October Surprise to look forward to. Trump said he deserves the Nobel Peace Prize, but the U.N. World Food Program won instead. He is openly flaying the Justice Department to get out and find some evidence, any evidence, of voter fraud. We can be sure the Trump campaign will also be working intensely on voter suppression. The GOP has launched endless lawsuits to stop states from adopting vote-by-mail plans, as well as blatantly tried to corrupt the postal service. They have passed laws in states making it harder in one nasty way or another for poor people to vote. Texas Governor Greg Abbott decreed that there will only be one place per county where people can drop off absentee ballots. Two “conservatives” were charged in Michigan for making robocalls to phones in Detroit and cities in four other states falsely saying that the government will post contact information about people who voted by mail so law enforcement officers can serve old warrants, debt collectors can locate debtors, and so on. Registered voters have been “de-registered” in some states if they had not voted in past elections. Numerous states in which Republicans control the electoral process are trying to impose tight windows for accepting mail-in ballots. Trump has openly called for his supporters to position themselves at voting stations, supposedly to stop voter fraud, but in reality to intimidate voters. Meanwhile the only official who has urged his supporters to violate the election laws is Donald Trump, who twice told his followers to vote by mail, and then go to the polling station on election day and see if they can vote again. Which is a crime.

¹⁰ Yes, “the ending” turned out as expected, except I did not anticipate that Trump would claim the incident demonstrated his outstanding leadership. Instead, the scene in which Trump resolutely returns to the White House (they needed two “takes” to get the effect) really just shows how ignorant and selfish the man is. He still doesn’t know that the masks mainly keep infected people from spreading the disease to others. So when he dramatically took his off before entering the White House, the real message was, “I’m infected, and I’m coming in there to put all of you at risk.” If there’s leadership in deliberately exposing yourself to a deadly disease and urging others to do so too, then catching it, then using up seven doctors to get a leg up on it for you, so you can go off and contaminate others and tell the world that an expensive and unproven drug will cure their loved one’s disease, it’s a helluva kind of leadership.

What Do the Polls Say?

The polls have shown since February 2017 that more registered voters disapprove than approve of Donald Trump's performance as president. (See Nate Silver's aggregate at <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/voters/> .) The spread has gone up and down a bit over time. Trump's approval rating rose about 5 percentage points when he started holding the daily COVID -19 news conferences with Dr. Fauci and other experts. Even though he had failed to stop most of the disaster and deaths, he looked presidential and the country wanted reassurance. Then he lost that gain when he started pushing untested and absurd cures and pressured states to "open up" their economies prematurely. His numbers jumped a little (about 2%) later when he sent federal security forces to Portland, OR to control sometimes riotous crowds of demonstrators. But although he did everything he could to frame himself as Mr. Law and Order, that too evaporated. He probably could not get a "1968 Nixon Effect" because various mayors and governors made it clear he was making things worse. Trump's reaction to the Black Lives Matter demonstrations pushed his approval rating down about 4%, but that effect also waned over time as a tiny number of violent left-wing extremists made themselves, not George Floyd, the public face of the protest.

On October 4th Nate Silver's aggregate of registered or likely voters showed 44.7% approved of Trump's performance and 52.2% disapproved—a gap of 7.5% which had been (52.2% versus 44.3% =) 7.9% on September 29, *before* the debate. So Trump's godawful performance had no effect on his popularity. But as forgiving as his base may be, he keeps giving the rest of the country reasons to vote against him. Fully half of the likely voters are saying they definitely are Not Going To Vote For Trump No Matter What, and that is why the GOP is resorting to so many kinds of voter suppression. As Trump himself said, the Republicans cannot win if everybody gets to vote.

But Should We Trust the Polls?

Trump doesn't, if they show him losing. Instead he believes they are "cooked" by the media to make him look bad. As evidence, he says he did enormously better in 2016 than the polls predicted, and he told Bob Woodward (*Rage*, p. 223) one should add 7-10% to his polling total to see how he is really doing. He believes in the "shy Trump supporter" who tells pollsters he hasn't made up his mind, or is going to vote Democratic.

There is always "noise" in the raw results, caused by honest but inevitable sampling a few too many of These and a few too few of Those. Beyond that, polls are done in different ways (e.g., human interviewer versus not-so-human online), and different pollsters adjust the numbers they got in different ways, and in different ways, according to different

demographic models of the electorate the pollsters choose to follow. And some polls are conducted for political parties and PACs, and know who is blackening their bottom line as well as their reputation. But these differences should largely cancel out when you take all the polls into account, unless some pervasive distortion such as the shy Trump voter exists. Why didn't they? Or did they?

The 2016 Election. Pundits as well as Trump thought pollsters should feel bare-assed and red-faced in 2016 because almost all of them predicted Trump would lose. But Trump won in the Electoral College, not in the voting booths across the land. On average, the polls at the end of the campaign said Hilary Clinton would get 45.7% of the votes, and Trump 41.8% (Nate Silver's aggregate again). She ended up getting 48.2% and he got 46.1%. So both predictions underestimated the result, especially that for Trump, but Hilary still won the popular vote by 2.1%. Almost all the polls said she would get more votes in total, and they were right. By no means did they underestimate Trump's support by 7-10%, however, but rather by 4.3%. The polls proved less accurate on the state level, of course, which use smaller samples and where Trump pulled off razor-thin upsets in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. That's what won the Electoral College.

Monmouth's Patrick Murray did what every high need-achievement person does: find out where he made his mistake. He (and likely others) did not anticipate the increased role that educational attainment would play in determining choice. Second, Murray found an appreciable number of "likely" Clinton supporters stayed home. (Personal communication, September 24, 2020.) FBI Director Comey's "email" announcement, the DNC Wikileaks, and Russian disinformation all took their toll, and the campaign ended badly for Clinton. As well, the exit polls found the vast majority of those who made up their minds at the last minute, after some pollsters had drawn their conclusions, chose Trump.

The 2018 Midterm Election. Pollsters had no reason to feel the least red-faced after the 2018 election because almost all of them got the Main Event right: The Democrats took control of the House of Representatives. An analysis of the 435 races is a touch tiring. But the Siena College--*New York Times* Poll gathered data in most of the districts and was off only about 3% on the average—a remarkable showing. Beyond that, most pollsters ask a "generic question" about which political party the subject generally favors. In aggregate they found 50.7% of the likely voters preferred the Democrats in the last week of the campaign, and 42.0% favored the Republicans—a gap of 8.7%. The actual results, after the Undecideds decided, were 53.4% versus 44.8%, a gap of 8.6%. That's pretty damn good. If you believe the 2018 midterm election was a referendum on Trump, there is not much evidence of the "shy Trump supporter" here either

Trump's best chance for an honest victory lay in Democratic complacency.¹¹ Will all those people who despise the president actually vote for Joe Biden? Or will they figure "It's a done deal," stay home, and then scream to the heavens when Trump wins again the same way he did last time? Trump's supporters know they are outnumbered, but that makes them all the more determined to vote. They see themselves as heroic foot soldiers bonded soul-to-soul who will fight to the last to keep Trump in the White House. They will vote because they believe intensely in their cause, they think they are indebted to Trump who has given up so much to fight for them, and because they owe it to each other. If those who oppose Trump do not vote to the last woman and man, thinking the victory is in the bag, they will end up holding it.

What Will Trump Do If He Loses the Election?

If and when it becomes clear that Trump will lose the election, he will almost certainly try to stay in power, "legally" or illegally. On September 23, 2020 he was asked for the umpteenth time if he would peacefully give up power if he lost the election in November, and for the umpteenth time he refused to say he would. Instead he repeated his argument that the only way he could lose would be if the election was unfair, mainly because people were allowed to vote by mail. As the Director of the FBI said the next day, there is as much evidence of widespread voter fraud in American elections as there are elephants pole vaulting in your bedroom right now—although those were not Director Wray's exact words. Still, Trump has developed a rationale, however flawed, for staying in power should he lose, and you can bet his base will accept it without hesitation—even though most of them said in Chapter 10's Monmouth Poll that they would not. He will be convinced in 99% of his own mind that he lost because the Democrats cheated, so he is entitled, nay *required* to remain president if justice is to prevail. And the vast majority of his supporters will feel he same way. They will all be wrong, but they will never accept that. So what will they do?

¹¹ A history professor at American University, Allan J. Lichtman, claims to have successfully predicted each of the presidential races since 1984, including Trump's 2016 dramatic upset, with a 13-point evaluation of the party presently in the White House. For example, did that party win the last midterm election? Did the party's candidate have an easy time getting nominated? Is the president seeking re-election? If the party gets a "Yes" to at least eight of the 13 questions, it will win the presidency again. If it gets six or more "No's" the challenger will win.

Has the model "batted a thousand," as is claimed? It predicted Al Gore would win in 2000, and when he lost in the Electoral College Professor Lichtman said his 13 questions predict who will win the popular vote. But when the Democrats got six "No's" in 2016, and should have therefore lost the popular vote (which they actually won), Professor Lichtman apparently thought the model predicted who would win the Electoral College. As well, Lichtman strapped on a parachute when he predicted Trump would win, saying Donald Trump was so bizarre his system might not work this time. As well, Lichtman thought the Democrats would lose because the Libertarian Party would get over 5% of the vote. But it only got only got 3.3%. So when you read that these thirteen questions have amazingly predicted all these presidential elections, including Trump's, there should be three asterisks following the claim.

One can think of a dozen ways votes can be shifted from one candidate to another, or lost, or challenged, or destroyed. And Trump and the Republicans have not been exactly subtle about this. Their major nonviolent way to continue in power will be to challenge the election in any and all ways they can, hoping to move the ultimate decision to the Supreme Court where they believe the fix will be in. Toward this end they have dispatched teams of lawyers near and far, determined to gum up the process of declaring winners in states the Democrats win for as long as possible. The electoral college votes will be officially declared in each state on December 14th (we erroneously said December 8th in our book), and by the 2000 precedent involving the Florida “hanging chad” recount, the 2020 recount will end on that day and whoever is ahead will be declared the winner. In Florida in 2000 the Republicans, in an operation organized by Roger Stone, staged the “Brooks Brothers Riot” that invaded the room where the Miami-Dade County recount was taking place and “shut it down.” There is no reason to believe the GOP would not do something at least as desperate this time, maybe dressed as hairy, bedraggled Socialists waving copies of *Das Kapital*, especially in states where they control the electoral process but still lose the election.

If all the voter suppression, “dirty tricks” and court challenges fail, Trump will predictably *threaten* violence and the nation has to be prepared for the threat. He has allied himself with armed militia groups and his next utterance to them may be to “lock and load.” He also has detachments of armed forces within the Administration, such as within the Department of Homeland Security, who have obeyed his orders thus far. He can federalize states’ National Guard units and at the minimum try to keep them from fulfilling their Constitutional duty to suppress armed insurrection. He will be the lawful president until January 20, 2021, and it has surely occurred to him that he might be able to use his lawful powers to overthrow the Constitution without any interference from people who have sworn allegiance to the Constitution. That’s having your cake, eating it, and throwing it too.

Trump’s acceptance of militia groups has encouraged their growth and their boldness. Today the FBI arrested 13 men who were plotting to kidnap the (female, Democrat) governor of Michigan and hold her on trial for “treason” before the election. One expects there will be similar incidents ahead. Officials as well as votes will have to be protected.

Throughout his life, Donald Trump has used threats to get what he wants, usually wielding (or creating) the appearance of having enormous power which convinces his opponents to back down. He almost never has had to follow through, and John Bolton describes several situations when Trump changed policy rather than act out his threats. You can predict that he will use the threat of civil war, publicly or more subtly, to strike a deal that lets him remain president, or at least escape prison for the crimes he has committed. He will not care one hoot how many people would die in attacks on city halls and state capitols,

nor what civil war would do to the country and its security in the world. This is the “Era of Trump,” he believes. He has been told he is The Chosen One, God’s agent, he is the most adored man in America, and anything is justified.

The best way to prevent all of this is to vote against Trump and his gang, and convince somebody else to vote against them because the stakes are so high. Most people do not realize it. Tens of millions of people have no intention to vote, even though their lives will go down the drain if America does. Meanwhile, the people who are going to be on the spot if push comes to shove, the men and women in the governments who are not allied with the president and who recognize a defiance of the people’s will and an attempted seizure of power when they see them, have to decide what they are going to do when democracy is about to go under and reaches out to them.

I am not advocating violence. The situation can be met with resolve, noncompliance, and an outpouring of love for our freedom and demonstrations of our commitment to the ideals that have been America’s highest goals. May these things carry us through the trials ahead. We find ourselves in a real pickle, but we can get out of it if we stick together.

Four Scraps from the Editing Room Floor

John Dean and I agreed at the outset that he would have editorial control over *AN*. It would inevitably be known as his book that he wrote with somebody else, so it would reflect much more on him if it were a mess. With that understanding we collaborated thoroughly over the many months of writing, and neither of us hesitated to “red ink” the other’s writing. He surely accepted my criticisms with more grace than I did his, and definitely made some of my chapters better by pointing out, for example, that I had “gone into the weeds” (i.e. been too technical) here and there. Mostly, he did his best to protect readers from my worst assaults on proper spelling—taking out many deliberately misspelled words that I thought emphasized a point or would put a smile on one’s face. He also removed endless violations of the rules of grammar that I have seldom observed when I thought they stood between me and succinct communication. He threw out many of my free-range metaphors. Most of all, he defended the Chicago Manual of Style against my forays into unconventional formatting and expression. (I know conventionalism is one of the three defining elements of something bad that I’ve heard about, and that lets me be a little freer than I’d be otherwise.)

John agreed to much of my phrasing, even when I had set it on “Stun.” But inevitably, when he exercised his right to have the final say, he cut many things I thought should have been left in. But we had agreed all along that I could put his cuts on this website, so here is the “deleted scenes” part of this DVD, showing the four things I most wish had remained in the book.

The Back of the Jacket Cover

I started writing this book about fifteen minutes after John phoned me in August 2018 and suggested a 50-50 collaboration on “a book about Trump.” I conjured up a vision of what would happen if Trump were re-elected and wrote it down, thinking it would make a good “hook” on the cover of *Authoritarian Nightmare* to interest potential readers. I realize it’s now way too long for a dust jacket, but I think all of the things mentioned would happen, and putting some of them on the cover would work better than what the book ended up with.

Forecast

A cold front sliding down from Canada nearly ruined President Trump’s efforts to make his inaugural crowd on January 20th, 2021 the largest in American history. But his supporters, more zealous than ever, assembled massively in Washington DC by cars, buses, trains, and planes landing nearby at TRUMP National Airport and braved the biting chill for hours. When Trump took the oath of office the crowd extended beyond the Washington Monument halfway to the TRUMP Memorial, where craftsmen had nearly finished reshaping the statue of Lincoln into one of Trump. His supporters felt they had to be there to celebrate their victory in November, which the President pronounced the greatest event in the history of the world. It had once again been a stunning upset, as Trump had been behind in the polls throughout the campaign. But nearly all of his ardent supporters voted, while various clusters of his opponents did not. Some put their feelings about the Democratic candidate ahead of all else and did not vote. As well many Democrats had been unable to vote on election day, and many mail-in ballots from Democratic districts in swing states had gone missing. But the Supreme Court refused to intervene, 5-4.

President Trump had said he was owed more time as president than the Constitution permitted, and his followers were taking up the cry. “We’ll have to see,” he said after his re-election. “But since we won again the American people obviously want me to be President, probably for more than four more years. And who can say no to that?”

There really was no one to say no to him. Trump had already established enough executive powers during his first term to keep Congress from doing anything against his wishes, even in areas where the Constitution specifically granted the House or Senate sole power to act. He ruled by self-declared “emergency powers.” Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to assemble and protest, freedom from unlawful search and seizure, and virtually every other liberty Americans take for granted were evaporating. The “Haves” got even more, while the “Have-nots” got smaller and smaller shares of the nation’s wealth. Camps were set up in rural areas to hold “Half-Americans,” “degenerates,” and anyone in the press who criticized Trump.

An historian at Trump-Harvard University later wrote that American democracy died because most Republican office-holders wanted it to, and others in government put their personal interests ahead of their country. The proper authorities as always reviewed the professor’s analysis and, deciding it was not threatening to the State, allowed it to circulate—provided it contained the usual conclusion that President Trump saved the country from ruin by taking control of everything

in 2021. Which is why everyone swears the Loyalty Oath to him before every baseball, football, and basketball game. Which is why so many people are willing to report “disloyal” behaviors by their acquaintances to the secret police to help “stomp out the rot.” Which is why 25-foot statues of President For Life Trump have appeared in most American cities. Which is why Trump’s picture is on all the money. “They say it’s all my money anyway,” Trump said.

Now all of this forecast may or may not happen. But we’ll tell you one thing for sure: Nearly half of the Americans who are eligible to vote on November 3, 2020 won’t particularly mind if it does, and many of them actually want every bit of it to happen. That ought to bother you some. This book is mainly about these people.

The Right Stuff

Because the right-wing authoritarianism scale is called what it is, I have had to deal with the connotations that “right” and “left” have today. Why are Trump’s supporters “right-wingers,” and the radical Communists who Trump insists have taken over the Democratic Party “leftists”? I thought the explanation was worth a page in the book. I was wrong.

The original meaning of “right” and “left” in English probably referred to the hand with which one did most one-handed tasks. Since about 90 percent of humans are “right-handed,” the word “right” naturally acquired second meanings of “preferred” and “trusted.” It may not have taken long for the usage to create such expressions as “sitting at the right hand of God,” as in Psalm 110 and many other places in the Bible. As “right” gathered a broader meaning of “blessed,” it easily came to mean “correct” and “good” as well. At the same time “left” was left (don’t you know) with the dregs. It gathered a connotation of “un-preferred” that broadened to “unwanted” (as in “left-overs,” “left out,” and “left behind”) to “wrong” and “evil.” Similarly the Italian word “sinistra” which means “on the left” gave us “sinister” in English.

Ironically our right hands are controlled by the left hemisphere of our brains, and most people are right-handed because the left half of their cerebral cortex dominates the right half when it comes to using our hands. If people in ancient times could see what was going on in their brains, which as it happened they could not, the tribal chief’s right-hand man would have been seated to his left. And The Powers That Be would have absconded with the word “left” to describe their exalted place in society. The best people would consider themselves “in the left,” where “moral leftness” was. The first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution would be called the Bill of Lefts. People would be self-leftious. British motorists would still drive on the left, and Americans would think there was something not left about that. Left? Left-on, bro.

Politically the phrase “being on the right” in English goes back to 1548 when Edward VI let the House of Commons meet in St. Steven’s Chapel in Westminster

Palace. The benches were set up in the choir stalls to the sides of the altar, facing each other rather than facing the altar. In the late 1600s when political parties were formed it became customary for the party with the largest number of seats to sit (naturally) on the right hand of the person running the meeting. You can see this on the BBC News tonight, and you will notice that Members bow slightly when entering and leaving the House. They're not kowtowing to the Speaker, they're genuflecting, sort of, before the altar (which was removed centuries ago).

But the terms "Right-wing" and "Left-wing" themselves arose in France in 1789 during the French Revolution, when delegates to the newly formed National Assembly sat to one side or the other of the President of the Parliament as they did in England. But where you sat depended on what you stood for. The nobility, called the Second Estate, sat to the right (of course) of the President, and the Liberal Deputies (the Third Estate) sat to the left. (They said they wanted to, thumbing their noses at the nobility's craving to have language as well as the angels on their side.) The phrases "right-wing" and "left-wing" did not enter British politics for a long time, until the late 1930s. They seemingly first appeared in the United States during McCarthyism when the Senator from Wisconsin, who knew a thing or three about casting malicious aspersions, termed Democrats "leftists."

The "Four F's"

When Donald Trump was in high school, boys' oft-spoken attitude toward girls was summarized by the swaggering "Four F's:" "Find 'em, Feel 'em, Fuck 'em, "Forget 'em." Most of our pretentiousness *was* pure pretense, of course. If "getting to first base" meant you had touched a girl's naked breast, a lot of guys who talked big about the Four F's in the early 1960s hadn't even arrived at the ball park yet. But when they did get there many—often with guidance from girls who knew how richly satisfying a romantic relationship could be—many learned to love.

That may never have happened to Donald Trump, who instead seems to have lived most of his life according to the Four F's and the other off-spoken ambition of masculine bravado: putting as many "notches on your gun" as you could. (Just a metaphor of course, unless you were really, really stupid.) Trump's fellow student, Sandy MacIntosh, put it this way: The "biggest advice in our lives came from *Playboy* magazine. That's how we learned — That's what we learned about women, so that was all (I had in) my adolescence. And that's why getting out of military school was difficult. You had to realize that you couldn't just follow the *Playboy* philosophy. But I think that the things that we talked about at that time in 1964 really are very close to kind of the way Trump talks now, about women and minorities and people of different religions."

In case you were wondering, I try to be funny now and then in my writing for three reasons. First, if the thought or the image *is* funny, it makes the reading more enjoyable. Many people have said that *Authoritarian Nightmare* is an “easy read,” despite being in essence a science book, and I think the bits of humor help make it so. The second reason involves something called the “contrast effect.” A good way to make the dramatic dramatic, known to playwrights for over two thousand years, is to intersperse some humor among the horrors. Arousing the same emotion over and over without interruption deadens it. Put in something opposite, and the next time you want to make a point, it will stick better. Finally, I’ve been studying *Man At His Worst* for fifty years now, from one tyrant and his followers and holocaust to the next, and you really need a sense of humor to study authoritarianism.

The Epilogue

When I had written the ending to Chapter Twelve, even with a rousing last sentence about our rendezvous with destiny, I felt we needed to show how we could get out of “the pickle” by establishing a basis for our redemption through what social psychologists call a “superordinate goal.” So I wrote an Epilogue, which landed on the editing room floor for reasons I could not understand.

Epilogue

The Monmouth survey revealed that the most prejudiced people in America tend to support Donald Trump, and you will find among their many stereotypes a belief that the “white race” is intellectually and morally superior to African Americans, Asians, and Native Indians. These notions, however, were declared scientifically bankrupt a long time ago, and not just because research shows the stereotypes of various groups are misleading and often just plain false. Research has shown that the whole idea of “race” has no scientific validity.¹ Some might say this conclusion shows how stupid scientists can be because everybody can see there are white people, black people, yellow people, and so on. Well, these observers can also see the sun goes around the Earth every day, not to mention that the Earth is also flat. Perceptions that seem obvious can be wrong, and most perceptions about race are hardly obvious.

Look at the so-called “white race,” and you find they differ enormously in skin color from person to person. And none of them comes close to being white. In fact, a truly white person would probably make your hairs stand on end. Human beings vary way too much in skin color, hair texture, facial features, and so on to conclude there are three, four, or a hundred different races of people. This becomes especially clear when you look at the genetic determinants of these visible features. Human DNA is an all-over-the-map mish-

mash of different genes produced by eons of interbreeding from one part of the planet to the other. You probably have some Neanderthal DNA that slipped into your family tree one starry night thanks to nature's most outrageous Romeo and Juliet. (Author Altemeyer suspects Juliet was probably the Neanderthal; author Dean is not so sure.)

We believe we belong to a “race” because we have only the tiniest knowledge of our ancestors. You probably knew your four grandparents. And you may know the names of some of your eight great-grandparents. But unless someone in your family is into genealogy, you are completely ignorant of your 16 great-great grandparents, even though they lived quite recently in the 300,000-year timespan of our species. Your DNA came from thousands of individuals you know nothing about. If you are “English,” do you think your ancestors always lived in England? Not a chance. Only the very recent ones did. This is why people who send in a saliva sample to some ancestry analyzer get surprises like, “They say I’m 40% British, 30% Italian, 20% Finnish, and 10% Moroccan! What the hey?” And that may just describe your ancestors of 5000 years ago, not 50,000.

Where did you come from, really? If you are a “white” dude, or dudess, your immediate ancestors probably came from Europe. But *Homo sapiens* only established permanent residence there about 40,000 years ago. Those *sapiens* came from the Levant and settled along the Mediterranean coast, and a second group later migrated from the steppes of Central Asia into central and northern Europe.² So if you are “Italian” you could just as easily say you came from the Near East. If you are “British” or “German,” like your authors, your ancestors 45,000 years ago were likely Asians who combined the invention of the wheel and the domestication of horses and started the first wagon trains west. Before that they lived mainly in the Middle East, so you English folks could say you were originally “Iranian.” But that too would be wrong. All these groups came out of Africa, where the evidence indicates *Homo Sapiens* originated, and only permanently moved to the Eurasian continent maybe 75,000 years ago. As a species, we were born in Africa and it is virtually certain that we were not “white.”³

Accordingly, all Americans are African-Americans. In the final analysis we all came from the same place, and your ancestors and those of NBA players, including Yao Ming, lived with one another there for almost all of our species' history. What's the difference between us? Not *who* our ultimate ancestors were, but *when* our ancestors left Africa. The forebearers of most “white” Americans arrived in the New World in the last 400 years from Europe, most of them desperate immigrants seeking a better life. The ancestors of almost all “black” Americans were kidnapped in West Africa and brought to the New World very much against their wills, where nearly all of them were enslaved for the rest of their lives. The Europeans who did this thought it perfectly moral to do so, just as they thought it quite ethical to keep the descendant “Kizzies” and “Chicken Georges” as human chattel—many of them sired by white men who not only disowned their own sons and daughters but made

them slaves.^{i,4} And after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation and the 14th Amendment that Donald Trump thinks he can swish away with a wave of his hand, slaves' descendants continued to suffer disadvantages almost as severe as slavery for generations, and still do so today. Their poor health/poverty explains why they do so much of the dying from COVID-19. "White" African-Americans did this to their brothers and sisters, and some of them still do, believing they have the right to rule America because they desperately cling to the belief that they are superior.

But that is all wrong. Terribly, terribly wrong.

¹ [Jennifer K. Wagner](#), [Joon-Ho Yu](#), [Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe](#), [Tanya M. Harrell](#), [Michael J. Bamshad](#), and [Charmaine D. Roy](#). "Anthropologists' views on race, ancestry, and genetics." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, November 22, 2016.

² David Reich, *Who We Are and How We Got Here*, New York, Pantheon Books, 2018.

³ Skin color in humans is determined by a number of different genes which mainly give us brown and yellowish casts. Mutations in some of these genes, most of them after *Homo sapiens* left Africa, led to a lightening of skin color. This proved adaptive in latitudes removed from the equator where dark skin inhibited the production of Vitamin D. Europeans and light-skinned Asians developed lighter skin according to how many of these mutations an individual inherited. The San people, most of whom live in Botswana, are light brown and they are usually considered the oldest existent group of *Homo sapiens*. However, the *sapiens* who left Africa about 75,000 years ago were not San, but another very early version of our species who had a different mitochondrial DNA. So what color were we when we were "born"? Definitely not white. You can forget the paintings of Adam and Eve produced by European masters.

⁴ DNA testing has confirmed that Alex Haley (1921-1992), the author of *Roots*, did not get his Y chromosome from Kunta Kinte, but rather from a Scottish overseer of slaves named William Harwell Baugh (b. 1827) who lived in northern Alabama. (Patrick Sawyer, "DNA proves Alex Haley had Scottish roots," Telegraph, February 28, 2009, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/4885075/DNA-proves-author-Alex-Haley-had-Scottish-roots.html>.) Harwell sired Alec Haley (1845-1918), who sired Simon Haley (1892-1973), who sired Alex Haley. Alec Haley's wife, Queen (1857-1944), also had a white father who owned her mother, Easter.

Acknowledgments

Jean Altemeyer proofread the manuscript for this article and had the exquisite fun of pointing out another hundred or so of my many mistakes. In return I promised to get to work on the needed household repairs that have accumulated in the “Jobs Jar” over the past two years. My friends Ken Murdoch and Paul Neubauer got the essay on this website in its several formats, and I offer my sincere thanks, but I’m not going to replace their kitchen floors.

