

# OPINION

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## World watches as Trump's presidency unravels



**George Will**  
Columnist

This unraveling presidency began with the Crybaby-in-Chief banging his spoon on his highchair tray to protest a photograph – a photograph – showing that his inauguration crowd the day before had been smaller than the one four years previous. Since then, this weak person's idea of a strong person, this chest-pounding advertisement of his own gnawing insecurities, this low-rent Lear raging on his Twitter-heath has proven that the phrase malignant buffoon is not an oxymoron.

Presidents, exploiting modern communications technologies and abetted *today* by journalists preening as the “resistance” – like members of the French Resistance 1940-1944, minus the bravery – can set the tone of American society, which is regrettably soft wax on which presidents leave their marks. The president's provocations – his coarsening of public discourse that lowers the threshold for acting out by people as mentally crippled as he – do not excuse the violent few. They must be punished. He must be removed.

Social causation is difficult to demonstrate, particularly between one person's words and other persons' deeds. However: The person voters hired in 2016 to “take care that the laws be faithfully executed” stood on July 28, 2017, in front of uniformed police and urged them “please don't be too nice” when handling suspected offenders. His hope was fulfilled for 8 minutes and 46 seconds on Minneapolis pavement.

What Daniel Patrick Moynihan termed “defining deviancy down” now defines American politics. In 2016, voters were presented an unprecedentedly unpalatable choice: Never had both major parties offered nominees with higher disapproval than approval numbers.

Voters chose what they wagered would be the lesser blight. Now, however, they have watched him govern for 40 months and more than 40% – slightly less than the percentage that voted for him – approve of his sordid conduct.

Presidents seeking reelection bask in chants of “Four more years!” This year, however, most Americans – perhaps because they are, as the president predicted, weary from all the winning - might flinch: Four more years of *this*? The taste of ashes, metaphorical and now literal, dampens enthusiasm.

Those who think our unhinged president's recent mania about a murder two decades ago that never happened represents his moral nadir have missed the lesson of his life: There is no such thing as rock bottom.

So, assume that the worst is yet to come. Which implicates national security: Abroad, anti-Americanism sleeps lightly when it sleeps at all, and it is wide-awake as decent people judge our nation's health by the character of those to whom power is entrusted. Watching, too, are indecent people in Beijing and Moscow.

*George Will's email address is georgewill@washpost.com.*



### YOUR VIEWS

#### This disease is killing us

This nation is facing its pandemic, and it is long past time it does so. This is not about COVID-19, but about a more insidious virus that has afflicted the hearts and minds of our people for generations upon generations. It is the disease of racism, and it is killing us.

George Floyd was not murdered by police officers because he was black, but because of the blackness in the heart of Derek Chauvin, and those who stood by silently. Officer Chauvin wasn't just choking the life out of Mr. Floyd – he was kneeling into the neck of our country's dream of life, liberty and justice for all.

This is a time for moral leadership, but our president instead forcibly removes people from the sacred space of a church to brandish a Bible as if it were a weapon. As an Episcopal priest, I am outraged by this profane act, but not as angry as I am about the bigotry, hate and violence he has continually stoked in this country. While our nation faces the coronavirus outbreak, he is systematically deporting immigrant children across our borders. While we are in pain from this murder, he chooses to Tweet the words of racists.

Yet one thing my faith has taught me is that there is hope to be found amid the despair. Hate will not have the last word – a new day will dawn, if we keep on pressing on, for light will always overcome darkness, and love always defeats hate.

*Diana L. Wilcox*

*Glen Ridge*

*The writer is rector of Christ Episcopal Church in Bloomfield & Glen Ridge.*

#### Love and support for neediest kids

Regarding “Remember Jordan Falco and the importance of mental health” (Your Turn, May 17):

I read and was extremely moved by the beautiful letter, written by the parents of 16-year-old Jordan Falco, regarding his recent death.

I have been privileged for the last 40 years to work as a school social worker, counseling students with

severe depression, high anxiety and various other emotional difficulties. After reading the sensitive and informative letter, I was reminded of so many of the unique, funny, caring, loving, generous and, yes, “different” (in a positive way) students I have been so fortunate to have known and worked with. Although never having known or been involved with Jordan personally, my true sense is that surely he possessed the same excellent human qualities of my former students.

During this horrific and terrible pandemic, when schools are closed and support systems are greatly compromised, the kids who are affected most are unfortunately the neediest and ones starving for emotional support. I sometimes refer to these as the “forgotten children,” in terms of our current way of life and what our priorities should really be.

We are blessed with many great parents who love and support their children and would do anything for them. Jordan Falco's parents are certainly in this category. The letter they wrote was not only thoughtful and kind, but helpful to other parents, in terms of dealing with their children, in these troubled times.

Bless you, Mr. and Mrs. Falco. Jordan was so fortunate to have such loving, caring and supportive parents.

*Mike Shaughnessy  
Waldwick*

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## Trump in 2020 aims to echo Nixon's 1968 campaign

**Todd Gitlin**

Special to USA Today

We are in a perfect avalanche. Racist violence on the part of police in Minneapolis and Louisville and vigilantes in southeast Georgia have metastasized into national revolt and backlash. Malevolence and incapacity at the White House have worsened a pandemic nowhere near wrapping up. Economic catastrophe and consequent hunger are facts of life for tens of millions of Americans. The whole is more, and worse, than the sum of the virulent parts.

The momentum of chaos, violence and polarization is all the more ominous in an election year, when a significant chunk of the country hopes to extend for four more years the government that brought this to pass. Thoughts inevitably return to the dreadful year 1968, when on top of white backlash, a miserable war was raging toward American defeat; the greatest civil rights leader of the 20th century, Martin Luther King Jr., was assassinated in Memphis; and the political leader most likely to lead a movement for national recovery – Sen. Robert Kennedy – was assassinated in Los Angeles.

Analogies between 1968 and 2020 are not perfect. For one thing, America's war today, ripping the nation apart, is wholly internal, not expeditionary. For a second, America's world dominance is no longer a wasting asset – it is no longer an asset at all. It has van-

ished. Third, in 1968 the Great Society had screamed to a halt and not even President Lyndon B. Johnson was still touting his slogan, whereas today's chaos takes place under a president who promised to “Make America Great Again” and yet, as most of the country sees plainly, he is presiding over shambles. The question to which there is yet no answer is whether President Donald Trump can parlay his ineptitude and national panic into another term.

In 1968, Johnson understood that his leadership was fatally damaged, and declined to seek four more years.

The vice president to whom he tried to bequeath his waning position as the Democratic Party leader was the once crusading Hubert Humphrey who, as the historian Rick Perlstein reminds us, in 1966 responded to a wave of uprisings in American cities with the unguarded statement that if he had to live in the slums, “I think you'd have more trouble than you have had already because I've got enough spark left in me to lead a mighty good revolt.”

Humphrey squandered much of his once liberal aura by refusing to break with Johnson over the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War. Johnson's intractable war-mindedness broke the Democratic Party and brought on primary challenges first from Eugene McCarthy and then from Robert F. Kennedy. Humphrey's attachment to the war cost him dearly on the left.

Presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden today

must stand for racial justice and peaceful protest without appearing to sanction urban violence, but the baggage he carries – the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, the Iraq War vote – is not nearly as heavy as what Humphrey had to carry. Correspondingly, the challenge Biden faces from the left has little of the scale and intensity that left Humphrey in the lurch.

In 1968, Richard Nixon handily mobilized law-and-order sentiment against urban disorder by pinning all the insurgencies, troubles and miseries on Democratic leadership. In 2020, Trump would love to follow suit. Like Nixon, he calls himself “your president of law and order” and blames Democrats for all troubles everywhere: Democratic governors for failing to stop the coronavirus pandemic and Democratic mayors for failing to pacify the cities.

Is a new reconstruction possible?

For all our perilous conditions, this year offers a promise of what the year 1968, with its dashed hopes and bitter disappointments, denied us: a promise that out of chaos a single humanity can emerge to overcome viciousness and stupidity. This depends not on fate, but most immediately on millions of decisions as near as November about who can lead America out of chaos and toward decency.

*Todd Gitlin, a professor of journalism and sociology, is chair of the Ph.D. program in communications at Columbia University.*