

# Letters to a Trump Voter - I

24 September 2020

Dear Dad,

I have voted in every presidential election since 1984, and I am pretty sure that I never voted for the same candidate as you. In all that time, I do not think I ever tried to change your mind about your vote. The thought probably never occurred to me. Until recently, it was obvious to me that two intelligent people of good will could have different political philosophies and different political priorities. Our life experiences have been different and so how we look at the world is different. We can agree to disagree.

Of course, that was before Donald Trump.

I have a lot of respect for the difficulty of finding definitive answers to political questions. How big should government be? What should trade agreements look like? Should we support one side in a distant country's civil war? In order to say something intelligent about these questions, one needs expertise, which is time-consuming and difficult to acquire. And even experts disagree about the solutions to problems. Whether we are experts or not, the answers often depend on our subjective point of view, and the optimal answer to someone on the Left will be different than that of someone on the Right.

On some points, however, the answer should be the same whether you are on the Left or on the Right. You don't lie. You don't encourage bigotry and hatred. You try to do a good job, especially if what you are doing affects other people. You don't steal or betray the trust that people put in you. You don't try to make people feel bad just because you can.

Surely I don't have to teach you this, because you are the one who taught it to me.

You know I don't have to spell out what I'm getting at, because you know that I and much of the country plainly see that Donald Trump does all those things, and in so doing shows himself to be utterly unfit to lead the country. Never before has America elevated someone who is so blatantly wrong, wrong not as a Democrat or a Republican but as a human being.

I've had many conversations with people who don't seem to be bothered by what kind of a person Trump is. It's interesting seeing the twists and turns when people try to argue their side.

**Me:** When someone who has made a career out of bashing Muslims, like Trump, makes a tepid response to an attack on Muslims, it is appropriate to call him out on it because the lack of a response may be interpreted by some as a lack of outrage.

**Trump Supporter:** President Trump has not made a career of bashing muslims, I am curious what you refer to.

**Me:** [Trump bashing Muslims](#): examples include speculating that Obama is Muslim born in Africa, promise to kick all Syrian refugees out of the US, talked about closing down mosques, falsely claimed thousands of Muslims in NJ were cheering on 9/11, numerous instances of lumping all Muslims together with violent Islamic extremists, tried to ban all Muslims from immigrating to the US, equates letting Muslims immigrate to committing national suicide.

**Trump Supporter:** While yes half if the comments attributed to President Trump in that article was him being stupid. The other half did have merit.

**Me:** both "him being stupid" and "did have merit" are equivalent to "yes I agree that actually Trump did make a career of Muslim bashing" so I'm glad we can agree.

**Trump Supporter:** Um no sorry, but only agreeing 50% of an article you posted does not mean I agree he's a Muslim basher, thank you, and please play again. <sup>1</sup>

When people spout nonsense to justify a bad opinion, one wonders what the real reason is for their opinion. Some people do give a rational justification. They believe that Trump will be effective in advancing their political agenda, and so any harm that Trump does as a bad leader will be outshone by any good he does by implementing conservative policies. In my opinion those conservative policies are themselves bad, and even if they were good they still may not be good enough to justify choosing someone unqualified for the office, but at least I can recognize these as understandable reasons.

But you have told me that you believe the two parties are basically all working for the same people, and that in practice it doesn't really matter who is president.

If you really believe that, you have even less justification for supporting Trump. Do you know what a Troll is? A Troll is someone who says things on the internet just to wind people up and get them fighting. President Trump is trolling the whole nation. He has taken a nation whose soul was already becoming sick with division and strife and he has

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<sup>1</sup> Actual excerpts from a Facebook conversation, April 2019. For any readers missing my conclusion, "him being stupid" does not contradict "bashing Muslims," it just provides a tepid excuse for it. It's possible "did have merit" was a typo for "did not have merit", but even if only 50% of a long list of Muslim-bashing incidents is true, that confirms the Muslim-bashing.

gained political strength from making the division and strife worse. He's like the Beings of Pure Energy who manipulate the Klingons and the humans to fight each other in that Star Trek Episode<sup>2</sup> in order to absorb energy by feeding on their hatred.

If all the President does is act as a figurehead, why get a bad figurehead?

I don't think that you quite believe that the President is merely a figurehead. A future letter will explain why it is unlikely that Trump will make progress on many of the things he says are a priority. But you don't just think of him as a necessary evil to accomplish valid political goals. You seem to actually like him. I remember a conversation [not exact quotes but pretty close] we had in 2016:

**You:** Trump doesn't have to steal anyone's money. He's already rich.

**Me:** How does it help us to replace the guy who works for a rich man with the rich man himself?

**You:** Because Trump will look after our interests.

**Me:** I bet that's what people who signed up for Trump University thought.

**You:** Yeah, but they were morons.

Perhaps you tell yourself that all politicians lie, all politicians cheat, all politicians say bad things just to advance their own career. It is so obvious that Trump's bad behavior puts him in a class by himself that I can't take the "you just don't notice how corrupt your own side is" argument seriously. I hope to address that in more detail in future letters.

While much of Trump's political agenda has consisted of standard Republican policies of stripping protections from the vulnerable on behalf of the powerful, some of the goals he claims are things that I agree with. I've always been wary of the totalitarian government of China. Integration into the world economy could have made China liberalize, but since about 2016 it has been getting worse. In the US, international trade has allowed owners and consumers to benefit from cheap labor and bad working conditions in other countries at the expense of workers here. Immigration probably depresses wage for lower-paid US-born workers.

These are some of the most difficult questions the country faces and I'm not convinced anyone has a good answers. But Trump in particular is unable to study even the simplest policy issues and seems to make decisions based purely on their effect on his popularity among core supporters. That suggests he would not make headway on these even if he really wanted to.

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<sup>2</sup> Day of the Dove.

But let's step back from Trump to the Trump supporter. I have a distinct memory of a lecture you gave me when I was in elementary or middle school. I think I even remember where we were – outside in front of the house, taking in the garbage cans. You were telling me that one of the problems with the country was that unions had made bad jobs too attractive. Picking up the garbage was a bad job that should be paid badly. This would give incentive to the workers to go find a better, more productive job. Leave the bad jobs to new immigrants, who in turn would eventually get better jobs and leave the bad ones to the next batch.

I hope it is clear to you that your ideas are exactly the immigration policy that Trump ran against.

Which party has traditionally favored protecting industry from cheap imports? The Democrats. Which has supported free trade? The Republicans. True, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which integrated US and Mexican economies, was championed by Democrat Bill Clinton (after he negotiated additional agreement ostensibly protecting labor and environmental standards), whose political strategy was to adopt some Republican policies to shed the Democrats' leftist image. But the agreement was negotiated and signed by Republican George H.W. Bush<sup>3</sup>. In both houses of Congress, majorities of Republicans supported it and majorities of Democrats opposed it.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in 2000, Clinton supported normalizing trade with China but Republicans supported it and Democrats opposed it in the House (though majorities from both parties voted for it in the Senate<sup>5</sup>).

You are rewarding Trump for going against the positions you supported by voting Republican in all those other elections.

Here is another Facebook conversation (different person than before). I don't usually save these exchanges but sometimes I like to come back to them to see if everyone actually said what I thought we said.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/North-American-Free-Trade-Agreement>.

<sup>4</sup> House: Democrats 156-102 against, Republicans 132-43 for; Senate: D 28-27 against, R 34-10 for. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2016/05/09/history-lesson-more-republicans-than-democrats-supported-nafta/>.

<sup>5</sup> House: Democrats 138 to 73 against, Republicans 164 to 57 in favor. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/25/world/china-trade-vote-clinton-triumph-house-237-197-vote-approves-normal-trade-rights.html>. Senate: D 37-7 for, R 46-8 for.

**Me:** My gut reaction to Trump is that [he is a bully](#), and his popularity is a sign that the gut reaction of many in the country is to side with the bully. That's a big part of why I feel it personally. I don't want to be surrounded by the people who side with the bullies.

**Trump Supporter:** Labeling can be a bit distracting but if we are going to do it then lets get to it. If I want to survive or even better thrive always side with the alpha. The odds of a successful outcome are much better with that precept. Of course you can always choose the old mare because she may never kick but you are unlikely to win the race.

Wait, did he answer my complaint about siding with bullies by saying it was a good idea to side with the bully? Sounds like that to me.<sup>6</sup>

I wrote earlier that I always tried to give the benefit of the doubt to people who disagreed politically with me. But support for Donald Trump has put American politics in a new light. I'm talking about the people who gravitate towards the policies that promote war over peace, greed over equality, freedom for discrimination over freedom from discrimination, and complacency over protecting the environment. When those people enthusiastically follow a lying hate-mongering bully, I have to wonder if the benefit of the doubt is deserved.

**Maybe liking a politician who is clearly bad shows that it is precisely the bad things about those policies that attract people to them.**

This is a terrible thing to think, and across America many people are thinking the same thing with a lot less ambivalence than I am. Trump supporters point to this horror as evidence of bias, but a judgement is not biased if it is a true conclusion based on accurate observation. And so Trump has brought us to the stage where the Democratic fraction of the country is thinking the Republican fraction includes a lot of bad people if it could bring such a bad choice to the White House, and Republicans think the Democrats are bad because they hate the Republican leader.

Actually we are beyond that stage. Extremists are shooting each other at political protests, and the President is defending and even encouraging some of the violence<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> I showed you the linked video in 2016 but it didn't seem to make an impression. One of the movie bullies shown in the video was Biff from Back to the Future. According to the guy who wrote the movies, there is a scene in the 1989 sequel in which Biff is modeled on Donald Trump. So not only does Trump act like a movie bully, there is a movie bully based on Donald Trump. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/back-to-the-future-writer-biff-tannen-is-based-on-donald-trump>.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/trump-defends-kyle-rittenhouse-kenosha-shooting\\_n\\_5f4d71aac5b64f17e1419ba5](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/trump-defends-kyle-rittenhouse-kenosha-shooting_n_5f4d71aac5b64f17e1419ba5).

The President has tried to delegitimize and impede the vote<sup>8</sup>, delay the election<sup>9</sup>, and even called into question whether he would leave office if voted out<sup>10</sup> (in my opinion, irresponsible trolling rather than a real threat). This is a situation that would have been unimaginable before Trump. There is a small chance that it will lead to serious widespread violence.

Impending civil unrest should not be among the concerns voters are thinking about before a United States election.

So thanks for helping to bring us close to the abyss Dad. That's where you got us with your first vote for Trump. I do not want to find out what a second vote would do.

Love,  
*B a K*

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-mail-voting/2020/08/13/3eb9ac62-dd70-11ea-809e-b8be57ba616e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-mail-voting/2020/08/13/3eb9ac62-dd70-11ea-809e-b8be57ba616e_story.html).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.snopes.com/ap/2020/07/30/trump-floats-election-delay-amid-claims-of-voting-fraud/>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/23/916221894/trump-says-he-expect-election-results-to-end-up-at-supreme-court>.