

# ***Marginal Gains***

A PolSoc publication

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October 2018

**Bob Woodward on Trump -  
how bad is it?**



**FEAR**

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**TRUMP IN THE WHITE HOUSE**

# What does Woodward's book tell us about Trump?

By Mr GJ Affleck

Bob Woodward is one of America's most respected reporters and (together with Carl Bernstein) uncovered the Watergate scandal which led to the resignation of President Nixon in 1974. His book about Trump sold 1.1 million copies in its first week on sale, and provides a devastating portrait of a dysfunctional White House led by a man who is simply unfit for the job. Here are some of the key points from the book.

Mr Trump's advisers are repeatedly stunned by the president's lack of interest in, and knowledge of, major issues.

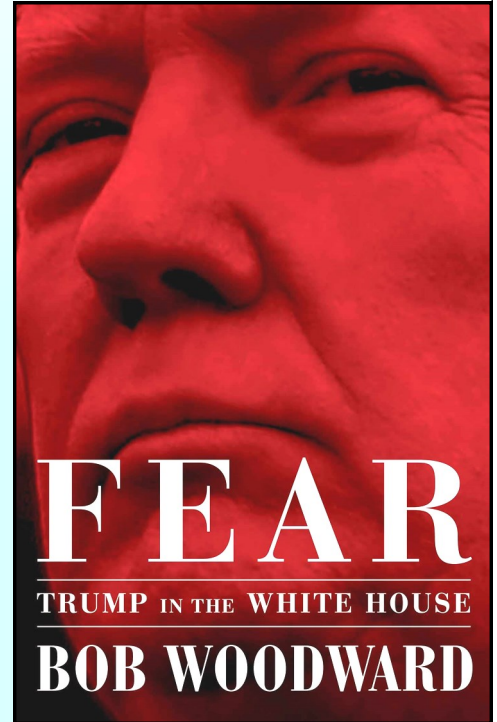
***'Mattis told people that Mr Trump had the same level of understanding as a 'fifth or sixth grader.'***

In a July 2017 meeting between Trump, the military and members of his cabinet, he asked: 'When are we going to start winning some wars?'. Mr Trump complained as those around him tried to explain the purpose of the war in Afghanistan and then criticised the generals and cabinet members in the room, leaving Secretary of State Rex Tillerson exasperated. 'He's a fucking moron', Mr. Tillerson said.

At a January meeting of the National Security Council, Mr Trump asked why the United States was spending so much on the Korean Peninsula. Defence Secretary Jim Mattis replied that the administration was trying to prevent World War III. After Mr Trump left the room, Mattis told people that Mr Trump had the same level of understanding as a 'fifth or sixth grader.'

On another occasion Gary Cohn, the former chief economic adviser to Mr Trump, removed a letter from Mr Trump's desk that the president had planned to sign, withdrawing the United States from a trade deal with South Korea. Cohn told a colleague that he had to 'protect the country.' Mr Trump apparently never realized the letter had disappeared. Cohn also had to explain to Mr Trump why he couldn't just print money and use it to pay off the federal debt!

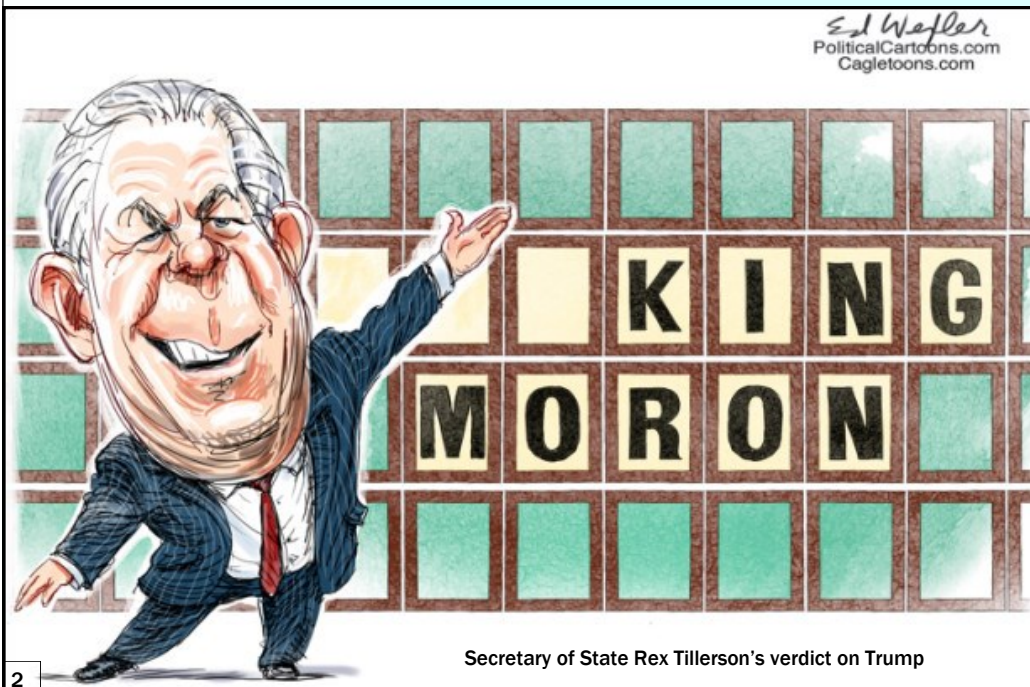
Woodward also prints a summary of the July 2017 meeting written by a senior White House official: 'It seems clear that many of the president's senior advisers, especially those in the national security realm, are extremely concerned with his erratic nature, his relative ignorance, his inability to learn, as well as what they consider his dangerous views'.



***'So we're going to have a very inaccurate book, and that's too bad ... accurate is that nobody's ever done a better job than I'm doing as president'.***

John Kelly, the chief of staff, quickly became disillusioned with Mr. Trump. Mr. Kelly once called Mr Trump an 'idiot' and said the White House staff was operating in 'crazytown'. 'It's pointless to try to convince him of anything', Mr. Kelly bemoaned in a meeting. 'He's gone off the rails'.

Shortly before the book was published, Woodward had an eleven minute phone conversation with Mr Trump. On the call, Mr Trump, sounded worried, claimed that it would be a 'bad' book for him, and that Woodward did not understand just how successful he had been in office: 'So we're going to have a very inaccurate book, and that's too bad ... accurate is that nobody's ever done a better job than I'm doing as president'.



Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's verdict on Trump

# The true impact of Trump

By Tom Williams

The election of Donald Trump caused widespread panic and distress for many Americans and many across the world who believed that his divisive rhetoric and bold policies would destroy America. Nearly two years on from his election 'the wall' does not look like it will be built any time soon and the Supreme Court's decision to declare the travel ban unconstitutional shows how the brash campaign promises Trump made have withered away.

Disregarding policy, what is the wider impact of the Trump presidency on society? The polarising nature of Donald Trump has created a tribal atmosphere where people are forced to pick sides and this is the true impact of the Trump presidency. US Society has drawn a line in the sand with the majority of the mainstream media on one side

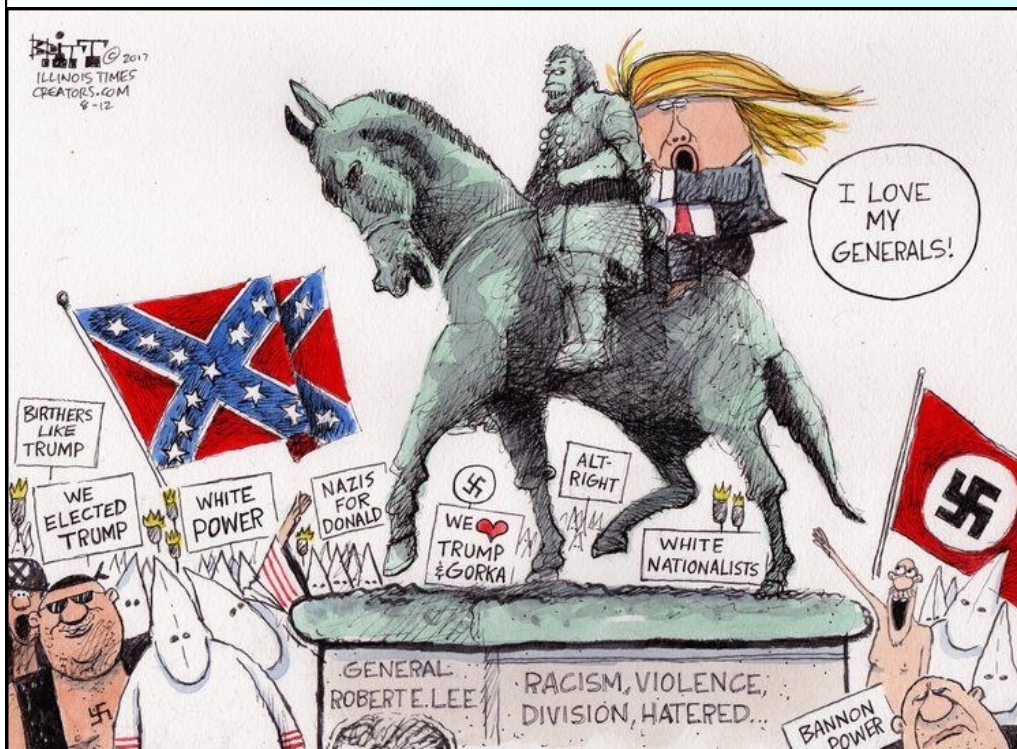
***'Modern day American politics requires someone to label themselves either as a 'Make America Great Again' hat wearing Trump supporter or as a member of the resistance fighting to remove Trump from office'***



condemning anyone who dares to support any aspect of Trump's presidency be it purely policy or his unconventional methods.

On the other side many conservatives within America have used the Trump presidency not to focus on the policies that they think would benefit the country but as an excuse to attack the character of their political opponents.

The consequence of this is a situation in which there is limited opportunity for progression and discussion of ideas and an increasing focus on an individual's political position not their ideological beliefs. Modern day American politics requires someone to label themselves either as a 'Make America Great Again' hat wearing Trump supporter or as a member of the resistance fighting to remove Trump from office.



The erosion of the middle ground has made it incredibly difficult to scrutinise the Trump administration from either political angle, this is potentially dangerous for democracy and politics as a whole as it may see the erosion of the foundation of the US political system and the creation of a system which discourages people from questioning the norm, which forces them to align themselves to their political party and does not allow them the opportunity to deviate from their 'team' position.

The true impact of the Trump presidency does not lie in the policies that he has pursued or the acts that he has passed; instead it is about the divisive, team orientated society that has evolved from his polarising nature.

The line has been drawn in the sand and it could take a long time for it to wash away.

# How powerful is President Trump?

By Matthew Ritson

The President of the United States is the leader of the most powerful country in the world and thought of as the leader of the free world. This has made many people nervous now that Trump is the president, but how powerful is the US President?

The President faces many hurdles when trying to pass laws, the main one being Congress. Congress is made up of two chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate, and to pass legislation it needs to pass both houses. At the current time the Republican party does have control of both chambers which has enabled Trump to pass more bills than his past three predecessors in his first 100 days. However, even when the president controls both houses it can be difficult to pass important legislation - Trump's attempt to repeal Obamacare, a major campaign promise, was defeated by Republicans, his own party, in the Senate in 2017.

However, the President can sign an executive order which is a Presidential power that bypasses Congress to achieve key political policies and President Trump has used 77 executive orders already. However, executive



orders can be challenged - the federal courts have heard three challenges so far to the controversial ban on entry to citizens from certain (mainly Muslim) countries, and prevented the policy from going ahead. This shows one of the great limitations on presidential power in the American political system.

However, Trump currently has the opportunity to nominate a second Supreme Court judge which would create

a conservative majority on the bench. This would make it less likely that his policies would be stopped by the courts, and lead to a significant increase in his power.

Furthermore, this could all change soon due to the upcoming midterm elections in November. If the Republicans maintain or increase their control of both chambers of Congress it could make the President even more powerful. However, if the Republican party loses seats, especially in the Senate, it will be incredibly hard for Trump to pass legislation, as happened in 2014 when the Democrats lost the Senate which made it virtually impossible for Obama to pass legislation, causing him to rely on executive orders to achieve key policy goals. In addition, if the Democrats take the Senate Trump may not get his Supreme Court nomination confirmed, making it more likely the Court will strike down some of his policies in the future.

The power of the US president is not fixed, and in the next couple of months Trump could become much more powerful, much weaker, or a bit of both!





# Travels in Trump's America

By Ms C Dignon

People asked me why I wanted to cycle across the USA. Mostly I responded lazily, borrowing George Mallory's response about Everest, 'because it's there'. The truth is I have always been drawn to the positive aspects of American history, politics and literature - from the huddled masses seeking reinvention in Ellis Island to the pioneers of the Oregon Trail. Happily, after 6,400 mostly rural and scenic miles my 'This is America' only very rarely revealed the sinister aspects conveyed by Childish Gambino earlier this year. But nowhere worth going is perfect and part of America's enduring fascination is its conflicts and contradictions. Here are just a few topics that gave me pause for thought, and some of the pictures I took.

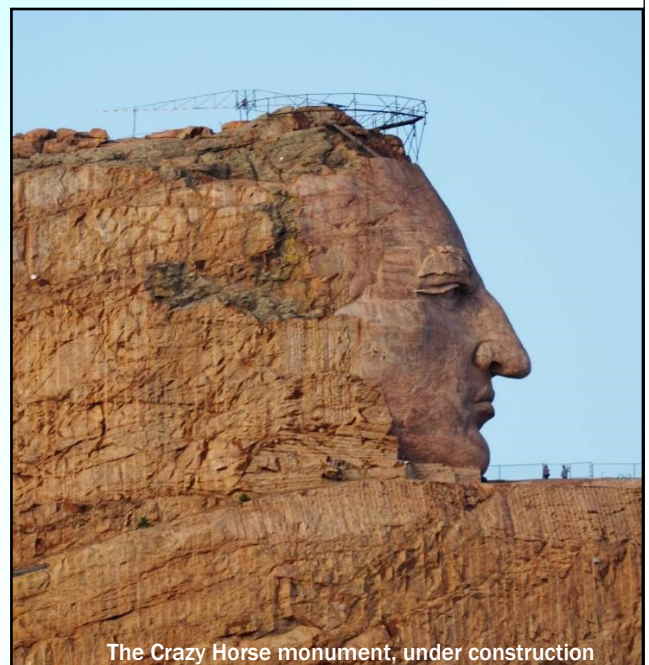


## Guns

'So are you carrying a gun for protection?' was one of the most frequently asked questions on my journey. The 2<sup>nd</sup> constitutional amendment right to 'bear arms' is an enduring politically divisive and emotionally charged issue. Republicans are twice as likely as Democrats to own a gun and reject gun regulation. In the wake of the shootings in Florida some cry 'arm the teachers' while others after the Las Vegas massacre bemoan the laxity of gun regulation, describing the Nevada gun culture as being akin to the wild west. The rights and wrongs of gun ownership aside, it the glorification of gun culture that is most striking. Bumper stickers and posters with casual calls to arms are sold in shops or decorate the walls of bars and restaurants. I saw a poster for a raffle '1<sup>st</sup> prize A Big Gun' '2<sup>nd</sup> prize a Less Big Gun'.

## Native Americans

Mt Rushmore's presidents - Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt - painstakingly carved into the Black Hills of South Dakota, were one of the most awe-inducing sights of my trip. Yet such an audacious patriotic symbol sits uncomfortably in an area that is held sacred by Native Americans. Historical ramifications of the Europeans' 'manifest destiny' to subdue the west still reverberate today. The Sioux, the dominant tribe of the region, still refuse to accept compensatory payment for the gold rich Black Hills lands that were taken from them in 1877. To accept the money is to accept the land was once for sale. The nearby Crazy Horse (a famous native American leader) monument and education centre (still under construction) provide a much needed counter-balance in this controversial region. Traveling through Pine Ridge and, later, Wind River in Wyoming hinted at the often desolate life on an Indian reservation where employment prospects are low and alcohol and opiate abuse is high.

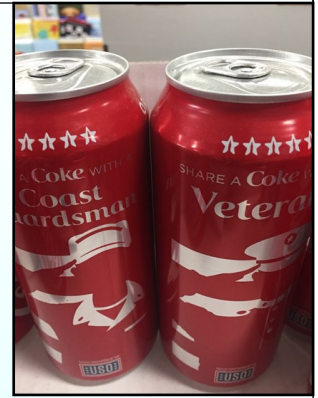


The Crazy Horse monument, under construction



**Veterans**

The first time someone asked me if anyone in my family had ever 'served' I didn't quite appreciate the full extent of reverence now displayed, at least outwardly, towards army veterans. A very different scenario from the latter years of the Vietnam conflict. Honouring veterans seems to be one issue that transcends the political divide, evidenced recently by the reaction to the death of Senator John McCain, a former POW in the 'Hanoi Hilton'. Remembrance Day on 11 November has been renamed Veterans Day and is a national public holiday. I cycled US 101 in Oregon, renamed the 'Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans Memorial Highway', passed hand written signs in gardens 'thanking soldiers for their service', sat on stars and stripes veteran benches and noticed I was drinking a Coke from their army campaign range.



**Trump**

I met many people who were unashamedly pro-Trump – and they didn't seem to be suffering from buyer's regret either. Despite the impeachment-worthy allegations and calamities that have characterised his administration to date, good and kind people, predominantly in the rural west and mid-west, still have his back. I was told 'I thank God for our President each and every day'. However, others went to great lengths to tell me of their shame and frustration. I got a real sense that the vitriolic election campaign and subsequent election of Trump has had a significant impact on grassroots activism. I met people involved in support centres for undocumented immigrants and campaigners striving to safeguard Utah's Bears Ears national monument. And one woman who simply cried 'I just want to tear his hair off'!



**God**

Polls amongst young people might suggest the contrary, but God has not gone out of fashion in the USA. Race and gender (despite Hillary's loss) are no longer barriers to the presidency but atheism definitely is. From Mormons to Lutherans to Mennonites, obvious manifestations of faith characterised my trip. I wasn't sure if it was ecumenical or competitive when I would pass seven 'come hither' signs at the entrance to a town. Billboards spread messages of heaven and hell as did the cyclist I met who had been 'riding for Jesus' for three years. I stumbled across a summer bible camp for teenagers while looking for water in Eastern Oregon, and was the test run for newly inducted Latterday Saints missionaries in Utah. However, despite widespread religious conservatism, there are increasing signs of social liberalism not least in recent state legislation to legalise marijuana.



# The rise of American socialism

By Josh Newby

If you've been paying any attention to recent political developments in America, you will have noticed that the Democratic Party is undergoing a political civil war. A fight for its very soul, that began with the 2016 Presidential Primary candidate, Independent Vermont Senator, Bernie Sanders. The surge in support for Sanders' campaign was unprecedented and for the first time in decades the American people were exposed to a truly left-wing Democrat.

There is a common misconception in the U.K. that the Democratic Party is comparable to Labour, and the Republican Party is identical to the Conservatives. However, most of the Democrats in the Congress would comfortably side with UK Conservatives on almost all policies, as leading Democrats such as Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer are predominantly neo-liberal. Whilst the Republicans seem to drift outside of the UK political spectrum entirely to the point where there are no parties in the UK that can match their authoritarian policies.

The lack of any mainstream left-wing politics within America is why the current wave of progressive populism within the Democratic Party is so revolutionary. Bernie Sanders presented an extremely popular manifesto in 2016 and a Vox poll showed 73% of the public supporting raising taxes on the wealthy, 66% supporting raising taxes on corporations, 55% supporting universal health care,

and 59% supporting free college. Though Sanders lost the Presidential nomination, the fact that an unknown Senator from Vermont with no national name recognition managed to gain 43.1% of the popular vote, and to come within striking distance of defeating Hillary Clinton, is extraordinary.

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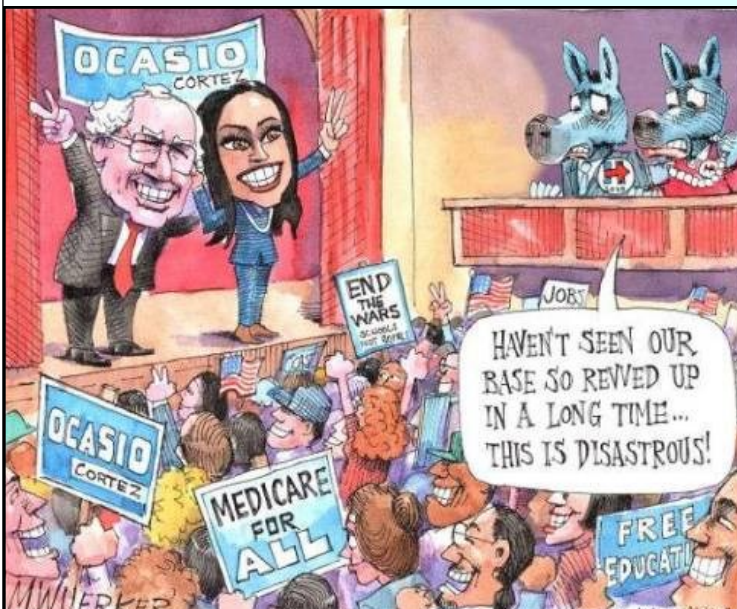
Support for Sanders' policies has only grown as a larger number of US 2018 midterm election primaries have been won by progressive candidates. In the 14th District of New York, most of the Democratic establishment such as Chuck Sumner and Nancy Pelosi supported 10-term incumbent Joseph Crowley. More progressive groups, such as Our Revolution and Justice Democrats supported Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's progressive campaign, based on Sanders' manifesto. In a surprise win, Cortez won the



primary with 57% of the vote, dethroning Joseph Crowley, the 4th top Democrat in the House and the supposed heir to Nancy Pelosi's position as House Minority Leader. Cortez's victory is monumental as it represents a seismic shift away from Democratic establishment towards a new wave of social democratic, progressive politics.

Crowley's defeat is also a signal to Democratic progressives throughout the country that incumbents with large corporate donations can be defeated. Cortez raised an approximate sum of \$300,000 throughout her campaign, 70% of which were small dollar donations below \$200; compared to Crowley's campaign, which raised \$3 million, 72% of which came from large individual donations and corporate Super-Pacs. The odds facing Cortez in terms of campaign financing were 10:1, demonstrating the astronomical significance of this victory for Democratic progressives across America.

The battle for the soul of the Democratic Party has only begun and it will be a struggle for the 'Bernie-wing' of the party to unseat the numerous incumbent Democratic establishment candidates. However, the Democratic progressive movement is resonating with key swing voters, which could give the Democrats the edge and lead to a majority in the House and Senate in 2020. Perhaps, there may even be a social democratic president within the next decade. One conclusion that all Democrats seem to have a consensus on, is that whatever Bernie Sanders unleashed in 2016 onto mainstream Democratic politics, cannot be put back into the bottle.





# Kavanaugh confirmation will create conservative Court

By Oliver Bevan

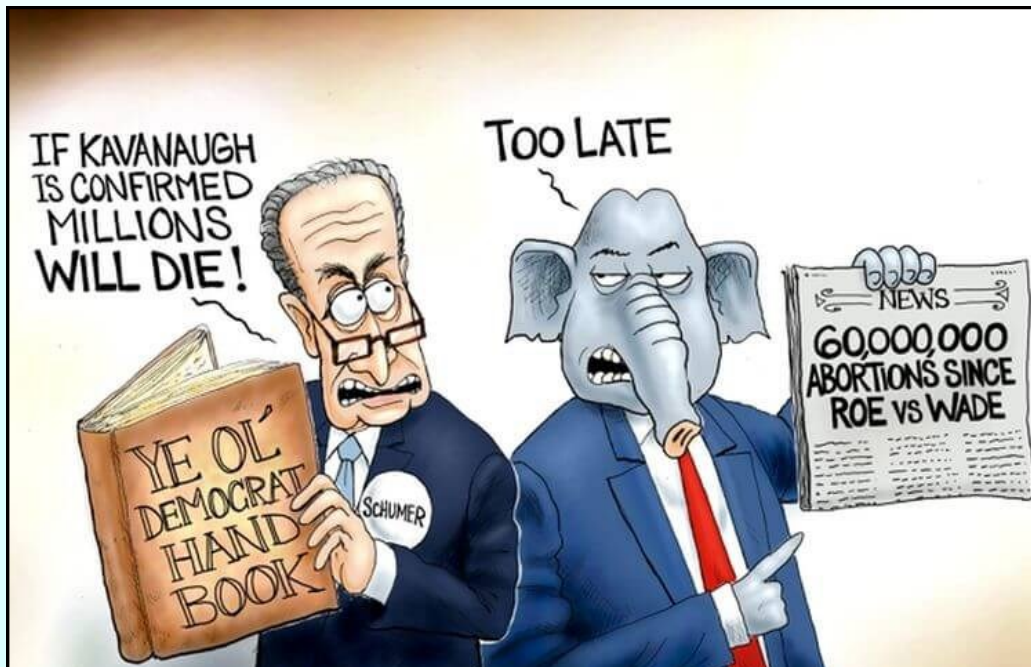
In the United States of America, the Supreme Court holds significant power and can make pivotal decisions which affect all its population. Supreme Court appointments are a job for life so picking the right justice is an important task. Following the retirement of Anthony Kennedy, Trump has nominated a conservative justice, Brett Kavanaugh, to replace him. Kennedy was generally the swing vote between the two parties. However, if this nomination is adhered to, the conservatives will hold a 5-4 majority which could result in huge changes.

One of the main changes that could occur is the reversal of women's right to abortion. This was made legal by the 1973 case Roe vs Wade which found states criminalising abortion to be unconstitutional. However, with a conservative majority, many believe that these rights could be stripped if a case was brought to the court.

***'One of the main changes that could occur is the reversal of women's right to abortion'***

Furthermore, it is said that one of the reasons Trump showed intent to appoint Kavanaugh was due to his views on presidential power. Kavanaugh believes in limited checks on presidential power so it is unlikely that this conservative majority court would provide much of a check on Trump.

Although this nomination once looked set in stone there have been some recent complications which could stop Kavanaugh from being appointed. Trump wanted him appointed as soon as possible as with the mid terms looming, a Republican majority in the Senate could be lost which would make it difficult to appoint a judge with similar views to president Trump. However, Kavanaugh has been thrown into a legal battle defending himself from sexual assault allegations from the 1980s. If



the accusations are thought to be credible Kavanaugh will certainly not be appointed although Trump has stood firmly by the side of his nominee stating that he 'does not deserve this'.

In conclusion, although the conformation of Kavanaugh once looked like a definite occurrence, with the mid terms nearing

and a Senate hearing to get through, Kavanaugh's path to becoming a Supreme Court justice has certainly been delayed at best. Although the impact that the appointment of a conservative judge might have is unknown, it is not unlikely that major changes could be made in America that could last for decades to come.



# Corporate Profits or Black Lives

By Lorenzo Sinclair

Having unveiled Colin Kaepernick as the face of their latest ad campaign Nike have seemingly aligned themselves with the liberal cause in the USA, and this has resulted in a huge backlash.

Colin Kaepernick has become a leading member of the renewed black civil rights movement in the US, which has seen a huge resurgence over the last decade, due to the number of killings of unarmed black men at the hands of the police. Killings such as those of Trayvon Martin, 17, Michael Brown, 18 and Eric Garner, 43, saw the formation of an international activist movement known as Black Lives Matter.

***‘Black Lives Matter is an organisation seeking to highlight and protest the disproportionate killing of black people at the hands of the police’***

From a Liberal perspective, Black Lives Matter is an organisation seeking to highlight and protest the disproportionate killing of black people at the hands of the police, and wrongs perpetrated by an unfair justice system.

Conservative America, however, see Black Lives Matter as a racist, divisive movement, with some commentators such as Tomi Lahren attempting to draw comparisons between Black Lives Matter and the Ku Klux Klan.


Kaepernick originally stirred up controversy in the States by choosing to kneel at the start of NFL games, whilst the national anthem is sung and the flag is flown. Kaepernick, upon the advice of a US Military veteran, chose to kneel during such ceremonies as it was considered more respectful than sitting down during the national anthem. Other athletes have chosen to do so as well, protesting racism, oppression of people of color in the United States, and to not show pride in the flag of a country that oppresses people of color.



Kaepernick and other players received a considerable backlash from Conservative America. Newsreaders from networks such as Fox have stated, in paraphrased terms, that Kaepernick should ‘shut up and play ball’. It is interesting to note that despite vehemently arguing for freedom of speech, when those who do not advocate the values of Conservative America use this constitutional right, they are often told to be silent and be grateful to the nation that affords them these rights that, paradoxically, they should not use.

Conservative America sees athletes kneeling whilst the national anthem is playing to be incredibly disrespectful to members of the armed forces of the United States who they claim give up their lives in order to protect the freedoms and opportunities that US citizens are afforded today. There is a commonly used argument that black athletes protesting the oppression of black people in the US is nonsensical, given that these athletes often make millions of dollars in the very nation that they criticise for being unfair and unjust. Thus, these athletes are heavily lambasted for their actions.

Believe in something.  
Even if it means sacrificing everything.

 Just do it.

# Matter?

***'Nike's motivations for putting out such an ad campaign must be questioned, especially given that for a number of previous election cycles, the majority of political donations from Nike went to Republican candidates'***

In unveiling Colin Kaepernick as the face of their new ad campaign, it appears that Nike has come out in direct support of his actions. These recent developments have caused a number of Conservative Americans to announce that they are boycotting the Nike brand due to their political affiliations, whilst others have opted to burn and otherwise destroy their (already purchased) Nike merchandise in open defiance of Nike's social messages.

Unfortunately for these people, their boycott seems to have had little if any effect on Nike's revenue stream; after releasing their ad campaign, Nike's sales numbers increased by 31%. Thus, Nike's motivations for putting out such an ad campaign must be questioned, especially given that for a number of previous election cycles, the majority of political donations from Nike went to Republican candidates.

Whilst Nike has been known to put out socially progressive advertisements with themes such as women in sports and equality, it seems that their motivation may be financial rather than political; companies that are politically aware and progressive can benefit massively from their political positions in this day and age. This poses the question; is Nike actually a progressive brand, or is this ad campaign, like many other Nike ad campaigns in recent times, an elaborate cash grab, designed to improve Nike's reputation whilst distracting more socially conscious consumers from other issues surrounding the Nike brand, such as sweatshop use across the Asian continent?

In any case, Nike appears more socially aware, Colin Kaepernick is still well-paid and Conservative America is still in uproar.

# Prestige or Prejudice?

By Emmeline Fakatou

The U.S. government has backed a lawsuit challenging Harvard University's admissions process as biased against Asian-Americans, as the case attacking affirmative action in higher education moves closer to a trial.

The Justice Department has contended that Harvard has contravened the law by using a subjective personal rating system and are unable to defend its use of race as a factor in admissions decisions when promoting diversity. In a court brief filed August 30th, the Justice Department stated, 'Harvard acknowledges that it voluntarily uses race as a factor in deciding whether to offer certain young adults admission to, and the substantial educational benefits of, its elite institution. But Harvard has failed to carry its demanding burden to show that its use of race does not inflict unlawful racial discrimination on Asian Americans.'

Students for Fair Admissions said Harvard preferred white, black and Hispanic applicants, with some being less qualified than Asian-American ones. It said Harvard has frequently ranked Asian-American applicants lowest on personal traits such as likeability. The Ivy-league University has persistently denied this, saying admission rates for Asian-Americans had grown. Asian-Americans currently make up 22.2% of students admitted to Harvard, with African-Americans constituting 14.6%, Hispanic or Latino 11.6%, Native

American or Pacific Islander 2.5%, and a category of all others, mainly white students, just under 50%.

***'Harvard acknowledges that it voluntarily uses race as a factor in deciding whether to offer certain young adults admission to, and the substantial educational benefits of, its elite institution'.***

The US Department of Justice filed a statement of interest in the case backing the SFFA. It argued that a trial is necessary as Harvard has failed to show that it does not discriminate against Asian-Americans. It has also accused the prestigious university of not seriously considering race-neutral ways to achieve a diverse student body. Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in a statement 'No American should be denied admission to school because of their race'.

The Supreme Court has called such attempts to 'racially balance' the makeup of a student body 'patently unconstitutional' and the statement of interest filed by the justice department opposed Harvard's request to dismiss the lawsuit before trial. The case could have far-reaching implications for the policy of affirmative action.



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## How Trump is leading America in 280 characters or less

By Imogen Davidson

Social media, once the home of funny cat videos and family updates, now the home of world news and politics.

When you think of the president creating policy you think of pages of writing, groups of advisors, and long hard debates; you don't think of man, on his phone, alone. 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, Donald Trump, has taken his presidency to twitter, using the platform to promote his ideas and make official political statements. Since the beginning of his presidency in January 2017 Trump has sent out 2,568 tweets to his 54.3 million followers ranging from a claim stating his 'IQ is one the highest' to banning transgender people from the army.

Trump uses his twitter profile like a personal diary, letting his unfiltered thoughts dictate the government of the free world. In the space of 24 hours Trump has attacked author Woodward about his unreleased book, claiming the 'quotes were made up', and has also given his opinion about the release of Nike's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary campaign. There has never been a president who inflicted so many of his personal thoughts on the general public.

Not only has Trump hijacked the POTUS twitter feed to give the world an insight

into his everyday thoughts and doings, he has also conducted world politics with other powerful leaders from the comfort of his sofa, or bed, or bathroom, or wherever the president feels it is most suitable to threaten nuclear war from inside the Whitehouse.

'To Iranian President Rouhani: NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE. WE ARE NO LONGER A COUNTRY THAT WILL STAND FOR YOUR DEMENTED WORDS OF VIOLENCE & DEATH. BE CAUTIOUS!'

Because nothing says strong leader like the caps lock button.

