
Two nations, red & blue

BY RICHARD FLORIDA ARTHUR GOLDWAG
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS Sunday, July 9, 2017, 5:00 AM



An urban island (ANTHONY DELMUNDO/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

Does the looming special counsel investigation into potential collusion between Donald Trump's campaign and the Kremlin presage a less-than-four-year incumbency for this President? One can always hope. Certainly, resignation, impeachment or a 25th Amendment solution seem much more likely today than they did a year ago, when the very idea of a Trump presidency strained credulity.

But when it comes to the biggest problems we face as a nation, the sad fact is that it doesn't really matter whether Trump completes his term or Vice President Mike Pence takes his place. While we'd be well rid of the contempt for the rule of law, authoritarianism and self-dealing that Trump and his family have brought to Washington, the anger, alienation, divisiveness and profound skepticism about the government and the press that he rode to power would not go away.

The terrible but necessary fact to absorb is that the threats to our political, social, and economic future are far deeper and more systemic than Trump and Trumpism, which are merely their most visible symptoms. The permanence of our divides and the way they paralyze our nation from moving forward are what we really need to worry about.

What we are dealing with here is nothing less than the fundamental political and geographical contradiction of American capitalism. The rise of the globalized knowledge economy has led to the collapse of the old blue-collar middle class, and a vast disparity between the wages of knowledge, professional and creative workers and the larger precariat of low-paid service workers who labor in food prep, administrative and clerical occupations, and other industries.

It has also divided us geographically, concentrating tremendous wealth and economic advantage in a small group of winner-take-all cities like New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, knowledge hubs like Boston, Seattle, and Washington, D.C., a few energy centers like Houston, and a smattering of college towns, as well as London, Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Paris, and a few other superstar cities around the world.

But their success has left countless other places to fall further and further behind.

This geographic inequality registers itself powerfully in our politics. The winning places of the knowledge economy stand behind the Democrats, while the losing places are solidly Republican. That divide is deeply entrenched and as unpassable as the most beautiful border wall that Trump could ever imagine.

We have become two nations, built on fundamentally different economies, based in fundamentally different places and geographies, and organized around fundamentally different cultures and ideologies.



Small town, big power (JEFFERSON SIEGEL/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

The Democrats are the party of both advantaged knowledge workers and ethnic minorities. Like Obama before her, Hillary Clinton won knowledge-based metros by wide margins - just as Trump, like Romney before him, won metros where the blue-collar white working class predominates. Overall, Clinton took 55% of the vote in metros with more than one million people. Even in otherwise red Texas, Clinton won Houston's Harris County, San Antonio's Bexar County, and Dallas County by wide margins. Those big, blue Clinton metros are the engines that drive the U.S. economy, accounting for an outsized share of America's economic output.

Trump won just about everywhere else. As evidenced by the electoral map he reportedly likes to show visitors to the Oval Office, Trump and the Republicans control much more territory than the Democrats do - the lower 48 states are a vast sea of red, with just a few blue islands on the east and west coasts, dotted around the Great Lakes region, and in the west around Denver.

Trump won nearly five times as many counties as Hillary Clinton did and more than two-thirds of America's metropolitan areas. He took more than 60% of the vote in rural places.

But most of that red-shaded territory is sparsely peopled. And his margins in the three states that put him over the top in the Electoral College were razor thin - he won them by less than 100,000 votes out of a total of 136 million-plus cast, finishing with 3 million fewer votes than Clinton.

Red places and blue places have something important in common, and it's not just strong opinions about Trump: They see the stakes in every election as existential. Red America believes that our nation is in a steep decline, losing not only its economic footing but its cultural moorings, and that its restoration must turn on a return to church and so-called family values, the right to bear arms, more manufacturing and less environmental protections, more aggressive promotion of American economic interests, and less immigration.

Blue America believes that a better future lies in even more expansive protections for the rights of women, gays, immigrants and minorities; stricter gun control; more environmental protections; global trade; and greater public investments in health and child care, housing, transit, high-speed rail, sustainable energy, public schools, universities, and science.

Trump voters, most of them denizens of struggling smaller cities, distressed suburbs, disconnected exurbs, and sagging rural areas, rightly believe that wealthy urban elites - exemplified by "the media" - look down on them, and they wrongly believe that immigrants and minorities are stealing their jobs and living large on the entitlements that their tax dollars pay for.



A center of education (CHARLES KRUPA/AP)

That's not true - most red states receive far more money from the federal government on a per capita basis than blue states do. But it doesn't matter. The competing ideologies of the two Americas have hardened into something akin to separate religions. And no, the irony shouldn't be lost on us that the New York-born Donald Trump has come to represent and speak for an America he hardly knows.

Those deep-seated animosities are a recipe for political gridlock in Washington; cooperation and compromise are unheard of. As we are witnessing with Obamacare, when one side accomplishes something transformative, the other side moves heaven and earth to repeal it as soon as it returns to power. No wonder trust and confidence in the federal government has reached all-time lows.

The long-term repercussions of this polarization reach far beyond our politics and culture; they threaten to derail our economy. Trump-mandated restrictions on immigration and visas are already redirecting the global engineering and scientific talent that powered innovation and economic growth in Silicon Valley and other American tech hubs for decades to other, more-welcoming countries.

Cutbacks in funding for scientific research will hit hard at our universities, further-stifling innovation in technology and medicine. Trump's assault on Obamacare and Medicaid will immiserate the least-advantaged in the very places that voted for him.

Dependent on privatization as it is, Trump's \$1 trillion infrastructure plan is a mirage. If it ever does get through Congress, it will create more tax shelters for billionaires and corporations while cutting real spending on desperately needed roads, bridges, tunnels, airports and transit.

Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord is turning America into a pariah nation, out of step with modern values, undercutting the United States' soft power and its ability to lead globally.

Clearly, Trump's presidency is making things much worse. But we should stop fooling ourselves that he - or Barack Obama or George W. Bush - is the cause of our divide.



Different priorities

Post-Trump, it is hard to imagine that either party can produce a leader who could reunite our hopelessly split nation. As deep as the gulf between the two political parties has become, both are deeply Balkanized themselves. Trump's voters were a captious mix of suburban and exurban professionals who would have been more comfortable voting for Jeb Bush, Evangelical culture warriors, alt-right racists, frustrated white blue-collar workers, and the wealthy 1 percenters that he promised to bring to heel, but who have been the biggest beneficiaries of his administration by far.

If the GOP used to be the party of open borders and free trade, it has become in large part a restoration movement of angry white men who are looking to roll back the gains in civil rights, women's rights and gay rights that our society has achieved after so much struggle.

The Democrats have demography and sheer numbers on their side, but the electoral map is biased against them and they too are deeply divided, between the socially liberal creative professionals who live in the inner-ring suburbs and reviving downtowns of the big metros, and the minorities and recent immigrants who live in their less-advantaged peripheries.

If those big metros are engines of wealth creation, they are also great engines of inequality. The bigger and richer they are, the more economically unequal. If Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders weren't as far apart on policy as some Republicans are, the tensions arising from inequality and gentrification, not to mention identity politics, have prevented the Democrats from developing the kind of agenda for government investment in infrastructure, job creation, and social services that would cement a coalition between its well-paid knowledge workers and low-paid service workers, allowing them to form a stable majority.

Can you think of a single nationally prominent Democrat who could unify his or her own party in this way, never mind build bridges to more moderate Republicans and Independents? Can you name any Republican who could satisfy the competing demands of his or her own constituencies, never mind a whole nation, moving the party beyond its reflexive disdain for government while making amends to the groups that it has spent the last decade demonizing?

Whatever happens to Donald Trump, the anger on both sides will continue to metastasize. For the foreseeable future, we can expect to endure the equivalent of a gut-wrenching electoral civil war every four years, fraying our social fabric until it is beyond repair.

Our great national nightmare may just be beginning.

Florida is the director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management and author of "The New Urban Crisis. Goldwag's books include "The New Hate: A History of Fear and Loathing on the Populist Right."

12 Tips to Put Your Insomnia to Bed

RM Healthy

These 3-Row Vehicles Are the Most Affordable of 2015

Kelley Blue Book

Find The Cheapest Car Insurance Today!

sponsored ads

30 Common Foods That Can Be Dangerous For Seniors

GoldenYearsJournal

10 Most Intelligent Animals In The World

The-Best-Top.xyz

Small Changes on Resumes Can Get You Hired - Seek Help Today

Sponsored Resume Ads

Based On The Book: How Game Of Throne's Characters Should Look

Frank151

22 Scariest Abandoned Places On Earth

Top Viral Photos

Farmer Got More Than He Bargained For When He Dug Up This

Skip and Giggle