

What *is* the MAGA Cult of Trump?

The Cult Leader—Donald Trump is the undisputed leader of the cult of Trump. He keeps his enabling Republicans in the House and Senate in line through fear - do as he says or be primaried come next election and be deprived of office with all the attendant perks and power. He keeps his non-politician followers in line by fear-mongering (they'll turn your suburbs into a ghetto; they'll take away your guns).

Cult Members—The Republican Party has devolved into the MAGA party of Trump. It is a “big tent” party, comprised of four distinct groups: 1) enablers; 2) opportunists (wealthy White men and some evangelicals); 3) haters; and, 4) White people devoid of hope (disenfranchised and dispossessed). Three groups (haters, opportunist evangelicals, and White people devoid of hope) provide by far the greatest numbers of Trump’s cult and are often collectively referred to as ‘the base.’ And do not forget, it is a huge cult, numbered by the 74,223,319 brain-washed people who voted for him in the 2020 election.

Enablers—Cults cannot exist without enablers who open the path before them, provide unwavering, fawning support of the cult leader, and keep the followers in line. Enablers may not believe the lies and actions promoted by the cult leader, but they use their positions within the cult to maintain the cult and promote, enrich, and empower themselves and their cult leader.

Political enablers in the MAGA cult of Trump include Republican representatives (e.g., Gaetz, Greene, and Jordon), Senators (e.g., Rubio and Graham), governors (e.g., Noem), and advisors (e.g., Navarro). They recognized the strength of the bond between cult leaders and their followers (in this case Trump’s “base”) and needed their support (and votes) if they, the enablers, were to remain in office and retain all the privileges, power, and benefits of elected or appointed office. Their support/endorsement of Trump was embarrassingly fawning but absolutely required if they were to retain his stamp of approval for continued support of the voting base. Their voting support of Trump’s agenda (e.g., “build the wall”), consolidation of political and judicial power (approval of jurors at all levels up to and including the Supreme Court) and protection against constitutional limitations on executive power such as impeachment, conviction, and removal from office for crimes against America were the *quid pro quos* they provided Trump in exchange for power.

Political enablers are few in absolute numbers: there ~ 250 Republican representatives and senators at the federal level, and approximately 4,000 Republican representatives and senators at the state level. However, their influence is huge: these are the persons who formulate legislation and laws that advance the interests of the cult leader, his enablers, and 'the base' to the detriment of all other Americans, such as passing laws restricting access to voting by minorities (constricting "mail-in" votes), requiring identification of voters which discriminate against minority voters who may not have the requisite numbers/kinds of identification such as driver licenses, and 'gerrymandering' voting districts to constrict large blocks of minorities voters into single representative areas which means minorities will have disproportionately fewer representatives serving them in congress. And, most disturbingly, both times ex-President Trump was impeached there were enough "Republican" senators voting against conviction and he was not removed from office.

It should not be forgotten that Mitch McConnell stated that his primary driving force as leader of the Senate after President Obama was elected president was to do everything he could to make President Obama fail and be a one-term president as he (Obama) attempted to make life easier and better for Americans (e.g., passing the Affordable Care Act). That has been McConnell's chief mission with President Biden: to do everything he can to cause President Biden's plans for Americans, and those of Democratic representatives and senators to fail. His plan will then be to blame these failures on President Biden and the Democrats in an attempt to convince voters to vote Republican in 2024 and for likely presidential candidate Trump in 2024.

Probably the greatest threat to Democracy lies within the 14 and growing number of states which have passed laws making it harder for minorities to vote. It has been the Republican legislators in each of these states that have passed these laws, and made it easier to elect Republicans who, because they fear Trump and his White supremacist base, will make it possible for Trump to run again and continue his drive to become a dictator. The state-level Republican representatives and senators who enacted these laws (and others in states that will follow suit) must be removed from office by electing them out in the 2024 election. If we do not do this, voting laws will change, making it a near-certainty that the country will be run for and by White supremacists. If you want to save Democracy and your personal freedoms, you must vote these unpatriotic Republicans out of office in 2024.

Right-wing media enablers—These enablers intentionally spread the lies and conspiracy claims of Trump - witness Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, and Laura Ingraham of Fox News and radio talk show hosts including Michael Savage and recently-departed Rush Limbaugh. Their First Amendment rights preclude them and their lies from being shut down. However, like all commercial venues they require the money brought in by selling advertising to fund their hatred and lie-filled White supremacist programs.

Social media enablers—Most disappointingly, social media platforms Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram facilitated the spread Trump's repeated lies until they became accepted as fact by his followers. Social media platforms provided a devoid-of-fact-checking license for Trump to spread his lies and misinformation to members of his base. Four years of lying convinced his base that the election in 2020 was "rigged" because he lost; that the Ukrainian debacle wherein Trump tried to shake down the Ukrainian leader for dirt on Biden in exchange for release of held-up military equipment was a baseless 'witch-hunt'; that the COVID-19 virus was nothing to worry about, and that mask-wearing and social distancing were political statements against him rather than responsible steps citizens could take to protect each other.

Social media platforms that promoted Trump's lies became his major form of communication and cemented his grip on his base and nearly destroyed America in the process. Trump was partially correct when he called media the 'enemy of the people.' Imagine how the perspective of some Americans might have not been corrupted had Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram identified and banned Trump's lying and booted him in 2016 instead of their belated *mea culpas* in 2020-2021 when irreparable damage had already been done. These social media platforms were instrumental in, and largely to blame for, the nearly successful effort to destroy democracy in America.

Opportunists. All cults have opportunists. These are individuals who do not necessarily buy into the rhetoric of the cult leader but who voice their support of the leader and cult because of the political and financial advantages that accrue to them.

Opportunists: wealthy White men—A disappointing group is wealthy White men. These men are well-educated and did very well economically. I have known many, who include businessmen and physicians. When I asked them why they voted for Trump (and would again) the answer basically was that they liked his approach to the economy. When I asked them how they could vote for a man who constantly lies, and is obviously a racist and misogynist their reply was, "I hold my

nose and vote for him.” They either do not understand or care that their governing philosophy is *the ends justify the means* (the catch phrase of authoritarian figures), clearly an un-Democratic philosophy, or they accept Trump’s White supremacy, misogyny, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and promotion of conspiracy theories as trade-off for whatever benefits accrue to their economic welfare or peculiar vision of governing America. They are an influential if minor voting bloc. But their cash donations are a major funder of the MAGA cult of Trump

Opportunists: evangelicals. It is even more difficult and disappointing to equate evangelicals’ claim to be in agreement with the Christian gospel and teachings of Christ with their support of Trump. Three of Christ’s admonitions in the Gospel are diametrically opposed by Trump’s actions/inactions:

Matthew 25:42-45

For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, my brethren, ye did it not to me.

I challenge evangelicals to provide evidence that Trump helped anyone, ever, as in the examples above.

Mark 12:30-31

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: *Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.*

No one can argue that Trump has loved (treated) his neighbor as he would be treated. He has not. Think of all the people he has insulted. Think of the contractors he stiffed when his towers were being built. Regarding whether Trump loves God, consider the Gospel admonition below of Christ:

Matthew 6:24

No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon (riches).

Can anyone doubt which master Trump serves? Or who members of the MAGA cult of Trump support? One must ask of evangelicals, whom do they serve, God or Trump? They cannot serve the Lord and Trump and his MAGA cult – they need to make the choice of whom to support and vote for. By their wholesale support of Trump, it is evident that they have chosen Trump as master over God.

But they can still salvage their Christianity if they turn away from Trump and his MAGA cult of Republican enablers and haters and vote into office Democratic candidates who adhere to what used to be the Christian values of evangelicals. To do otherwise makes them Christians in name only (Cinos).

The Democratic Party and President Biden stand for all the tenets of Christianity, including helping the poor and disadvantaged, the needy, and the down-trodden – all groups the Republicans ignored under Trump and continue to ignore.

Evangelicals got the one thing they wanted from Trump - a Supreme Court packed with justices who overturned Roe v. Wade. They conveniently overlooked the lies, the racism, the misogyny, the hatred, the White supremacy, the homophobia, the Islamophobia, and the anti-Semitism while voting for him in 2016 and 2020. It should also be noted that White evangelicals are the only religious group that denies the existence of systemic racism.

Unfortunately, some evangelicals also fall into the hater category described below.

Cult Followers—Cult followers are those persons completely under the control of the cult leader to whom they pledge complete, unwavering allegiance. Followers may be loosely aligned into two groups: 1) White supremacist haters which include believers of conspiracy theories; and, 2) those feeling deprived of hope and cut off from society.

Cult Followers: the haters—Wiki defines a hate group as a social group that advocates and practices hatred, hostility, or violence towards members of a race or ethnicity, nation, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation or any other designated sector of society. According to the FBI, a hate group's "primary purpose is to promote animosity, hostility, and malice against persons

belonging to a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin which differs from that of the members of the organization.”

Prior to the rise of the MAGA cult of Trump, hate groups, including White supremacists, neo-Nazis, misogynists, racists, anti-Semites, Islamaphobes, homophobes, conspiracy theorists, and anti-Clintonites were large, non-affiliated mobs of people driven by hatred of others not like themselves. When Hillary Clinton collectively called them “deplorables” during the run-up to the 2016 election, they became united as a single group of maligned outsiders who Donald Trump exploited in his run for the presidency, promising them a voice and credibility (which he gave them in spades).

That promise Trump fulfilled, as evidenced by his recognition and elevation of groups such as QAnon, Proud Boys, and Oath Keepers, and by his conspicuous failure to denounce the actions of hate groups. Prior to the 2016 presidential election, individuals in unconnected hate groups, such as White supremacists, neo-Nazis, misogynists, racists, anti-Semites, Islamaphobes, and homophobes existed separately within the confines of their own groups. Today members of these groups form a large swath of Trump’s “base.” They listen only to him and totally reject science and truth. The terms “cognitive dissonance” and “motivated reasoning” perfectly describe the nature of their thought processes and explain their mindless acceptance of edicts pronounced by their cult leader Donald Trump.

Unfortunately, a portion of White evangelicals falls into the hater group. Gene Demby, in his November 18, 2020 NPR broadcast, *The White Elephants in the Room* believed that “... White evangelicals continue to support a candidate who has openly refused to call out White supremacist groups, who has said derogatory things around immigrants because the denial of systemic racism, criticizing protesters and what can only be called really racist rhetoric. And I think the answer to that is that it's actually part of the worldview that White evangelicals still hold. And so those kinds of appeals weren't repellant; they were part of the attraction of Trump to White evangelicals.” Demby went on to say, “Trump's appeal among evangelicals was the "Make America Great Again" mantra. I think most of the power of that slogan was in the last word: *again*. It was hearkening back to a 1950s America, where White Christians and particularly White Anglo-Saxon Protestants were more dominant in the society demographically and culturally... it was that backward pull that was the real attraction.”

When Trump the MAGA cult leader describes detractors in his deep state conspiracy world, hater groups embrace it as truth and act upon it. Witness their nearly successful coup attempt when they attacked and overwhelmed the Capitol police on January 6, 2021 when incited by their cult leader. Adherents to QAnon are tangible proof of the power and commitment of cult members to think and do as their cult leader directs. And, disturbingly, elect one of their members to Congress.

Cult Followers—The deprived of hope White people (the dispossessed – those deprived of land, property, or other possessions, and the disenfranchised – those deprived of some right, privilege, or immunity, or the unemployed). This is a large, amorphous group of people who have been economically crushed by the COVID-19 pandemic, globalism, shipping of jobs overseas, outsized competition from corporate farms, lack of support and recognition for services provided, failing industries (mining, energy), and being left behind economically (minimum wage earners). They include factory workers, especially those out of work, farmers who are losing their farms, military and enforcement forces, mom and pop groceries, restaurants, and small business aced out by the Walmarts and Amazons, and fast food chains, people working in the service/support industries (restaurants, hotels, entertainment), laborers, non-college educated people, especially those in depressed rural areas, and retirees on fixed and limited incomes.

These individuals did not cause their economic plight; rather they are victims of a sea change in the global economy and massive impact of COVID-19 on jobs. They had no champions standing up for them until Trump came along with his promise that, “I alone can fix it,” and his catch phrase of “Make America Great Again,” meaning turning the clock back to the 50s before the time of globalism, fast-food restaurants, on-line shopping and big box stores, computers, cellphones, the internet, social media, and interstate highways which stranded and isolated rural communities.

The mantra of the Trump administration – *Make America Great Again* – resonated with a large slice of Americans, especially the deprived of hope White people who yearned for a return to the “good old days.” Another appealing (to some) component of the Trump campaign was the claim that a businessman could shake things up, drain the swamp of elitist establishment politicians, bring in new ideas, and run the government as a business.

The reality of the slogan, *Make America Great Again*, as we came to see under the Trump administration, was a truncated version of a return to simpler, happier days. *Make America Great Again* has taken us back to racism, misogyny, bigotry, homophobia, anti-Semitism, White supremacy,

police brutality against persons of color, and, covertly, a return to plutocracy and redistribution of wealth and power to the richest among us.

Make America Great Again does not emphasize the positive elements of yesteryear when people saw it as their patriotic duty to serve in the armed forces. When they treated each other with kindness and respect. Where truth and civility were the norm and people trusted science. Where people made sacrifices for the common good, and put their faith in science rather than slogans. ***And by the way,*** the America of the 50s was great *only* for white Christian men. Minorities, including women, non-Caucasians, and non-Christians were suppressed, discriminated against, and relegated to second class citizenship. Do we really want to go back to that?