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For A More Just And Prosperous America

Michael Maccoby

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<http://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/more-just-and-prosperous-america>.

Copyright © 2018 by Michael Maccoby, Ph.D., 4825 Linnean Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008, USA. E-Mail: mm[at-symbol]maccoby.com. – Übersetzung aus dem Amerikanischen: Klaus Humann.

Our guest author today is Michael Maccoby, an expert in leadership. His most recent books are The Leaders We Need, And What Makes Us Follow and Strategic Intelligence. He is a member of the boards of the National Coalition on Health Care and the Albert Shanker Institute.

It can be argued that President Donald Trump's marketing skills accounted for a large part of his electoral success. He fashioned an ideology embracing right-wing values and a vision that connected with his supporters' anger, fear, resentment and hope. In contrast to Trump's message, which was weak on facts and policies but strong on emotional appeal, Hillary Clinton's was strong on facts and policies, but weak on vision and emotional appeal. Although she ended up with the larger popular vote, Clinton failed to connect with key voters in the Midwestern states that gave Trump his electoral college victory.

Recent polls report 31 percent of voters identify themselves as Democrats, 24 percent as Republicans, and 42 percent as Independents. By appealing to Independents as well as Democratic voters in this year's congressional election, Democrats might be able to take a large step toward bringing this country closer together. Given the recent negative messages of the Republican Party, Independents could be especially likely to vote for Democrats who offer an inspiring vision and compelling ideology based on the best of American values and who present their policies in a framework of progressive adaptation to a changing world, emphasizing human values as well as economic growth.

We are living in an age of anxiety, with fears that are political, social and individual. Americans are anxious about weapons of mass destruction, climate change, and terrorists. The transition from a relatively stable manufacturing economy to a rapidly changing culture based on an information and knowledge economy has widened the financial and power gap between those people able to adapt and those who remain rooted in a vanishing culture. Threats to livelihood and self-esteem have triggered anxiety in people left behind who have been losing industrial and retail jobs due to global competition and automation and fear they will never catch up.

Many of these people supported Trump because he seemed to be in touch with these feelings. He promised to bring back an idealized past, especially for the white working class. But he has worsened division in this country by blaming immigrants, foreigners and elites for problems



that are being caused by historic social and economic change. His rhetoric and policies have caused African Americans and Latinos, including high school students, to fear what he will do next. Studies report increasing numbers of college students also worry about their futures, about paying for their education, taking student loans and becoming saddled with debt.

People deal with fear in different ways. Some escape into drugs, entertainment, or compulsive work. Others submit to demagogues like Trump who promise to make things better for them. But this escapism just represses the fear and weakens people. Our fears can be overcome only by recognizing them and acting to eliminate their causes.

A positive alternative to Trump's vision cannot promise to overcome all fear, but it can be based on facing reality and activating Americans. In the midst of the Great Depression, FDR said "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" and he followed this up by supporting new initiatives to put people back to work. A Democratic vision based on principles of prosperity and justice for all Americans could activate many voters made more anxious by Trump.

Prosperity has been created by entrepreneurs, workers, and the social and physical infrastructure supported by a democratic society. Every American willing to work, study toward entering the workplace, or unable to work or study should share in the prosperity of this country, the richest nation on earth.

All Americans should be able to receive the health care and preventive services they need. The most effective and accepted government benefits, such as Social Security and Medicare, have been made available to all Americans who have contributed to these programs. This should also be the case for health care. When only some people benefit and others' taxes support benefits they do not share, resentment results. The exception is that most Americans have supported a safety net for their fellow Americans with no other means of support. Our prosperity has benefitted selectively from global trade. It would be a mistake to withdraw from it, but it is both just and socially responsible for government to support people whose jobs have disappeared in their efforts to learn the skills they need for employment.

It is also in the national interest to support entrepreneurs who are developing products and services that can improve the environment and the quality and cost of health care. We have some great health care organizations in this country, such as Mayo Clinic in Minnesota and Intermountain in Utah, that keep learning how to improve quality and cut costs. Other health care organizations should learn from them.

The increasing gap in income between workers and investors stokes resentment and causes vulnerability to populist demagogues. One reason this gap has widened is the weakness of unions. A major cause of this weakness is laws making it harder to organize and easier for management to resist organizing. Unions provide an organized countervailing power to capital that can result in a fairer, more balanced society. Demonstrations generally have a short life. Only strong organizations like the Tea Party, NRA, and unions have sustained political power. When the Egyptians demonstrated in 2011, many observers thought this would result in a more democratic society. I was skeptical and wrote in *The Washington Post* that only organized groups would be able to take advantage of change, and these were the army and Muslim Brotherhood, two groups that in fact fought for control of the government.



Besides their political clout, strong unions also empower members to negotiate a fair wage, something few individual workers are able to do by themselves. They increase members' dignity, because they have support to guarantee fair treatment by management.

I have worked with strong unions in the US, UK and Sweden that have cooperated with management to improve both productivity and the quality of working life. Gallup studies report that fewer than one-third of American employees are engaged by their work and that this lack of engagement costs companies billions of dollars. When I worked with the auto workers (UAW), communication workers (CWA), city workers (AFSCME) and bricklayers (BAC), managers learned that collaboration improves engagement, productivity and innovation.

A just America is based on democratic decision-making, the rule of law, and the civil rights of all Americans. Our democratic society requires an electorate that is educated about our system and laws and also about our country's history, including the struggles of African Americans, women, and people with different sexual orientations to gain respect and equal rights. This struggle has not ended.

To be successful, the Democratic Party will need to develop leaders who can explain these ideals and policies in a way that connects with the fears and hopes of the American people. What qualities do these leaders need? It's hard to tell whether would-be leaders will be effective before they try to connect with the voters. Few observers thought that Trump or Bernie Sanders would fire up masses of people with their populist appeals. We need leaders who inspire voters, not by mirroring their resentment, making impossible promises, and turning Americans against each other, but by stimulating productive activity as did FDR, bringing people with opposing views together as did George Washington, and fighting injustice as did Abraham Lincoln who also supported building railroads and colleges for technical training and research.

These leaders would have approved Angela Merkel's New Year call for empathy:

My wishes for the New Year is for us to become aware again of that which holds us together at heart; that we focus again on what we have in common; and for us to have more consideration for others. I mean consideration in the broadest sense: paying attention, truly listening and showing understanding for others.

Donald Trump won the presidency by feeding voters' resentment, making promises he could not keep, and dividing this country. We need leaders who transform fear into productive activity, bring us closer together, and spark hope by working to implement a vision of a more just and prosperous America.