

## Insights on Trump from a Pathbreaking New Book

Paul H. Elovitz—Clio's Psyche  
Interview with Michael Maccoby and Ken Fuschman

Editors of *Psychoanalytic and Historical Perspectives on the Leadership of Donald Trump  
Narcissism and Marketing in an Age of Anxiety and Distrust* (Routledge, 2020)

*Our impulsive, narcissistic, and quite unpresidential commander-in-chief has in the last three years managed to gain control of the Republican party and achieve major gains for conservatives while antagonizing an incredible number of Americans including most intellectuals, Democrats, and a significant number of those appointees he hired, fired, forced to resign, or who quit. Over three years into his presidency it is especially important to gain a better understanding as to what motivates the man and some additional ideas as to how he relates to his followers. Internationally-known psychoanalytic cultural anthropologist and organizational consultant Michael Maccoby (MM) together with International Psychohistorical Association (IPA) president Ken Fuchsman (KAF), an interdisciplinary American historian, present the work of 12 authors in 14 chapters to help us better fathom the personality, style of leadership, and the prospects of our 45<sup>th</sup> president. I (PHE), a presidential psychohistorian and editor of this journal, interviewed them over the Internet early this year.*

*Keywords: Donald Trump, marketing, narcissism, psychoanalysis, style-of-leadership*

**PHE:** What prompted you to co-edit *Psychoanalytic and Historical Perspectives on the Leadership of Donald Trump Narcissism and Marketing in an Age of Anxiety and Distrust* (Routledge, 2020)?

**MM:** I accepted Ken Fuchsman's invitation to co-edit this book because I believe Donald Trump's personality and behavior needs to be understood in a cultural context and that I could contribute to this understanding. Many mental health professionals have been misdiagnosing Trump as suffering from a narcissistic personality disorder. While Trump exhibits narcissistic behavior, he is not suffering; narcissism is only one part of his complex personality. Also, Ken and I worked well together. We brought complementary viewpoints to the book and learned from each other.

**PHE:** Briefly tell me about your chapters and how they will help us understand our president. I am especially interested in your insights in your chapter, "Trump's Marketing in an Era of Anxiety."

**MM:** Leadership is a relationship with followers in a particular context. People voted for Trump for different reasons. In Chapter One, I describe how Trump exploited the anxiety of people left behind in a rapidly changing culture. Instead of addressing the real causes of their anxiety, he blames immigrants, elites, and globalization; and he promises to renew their self-esteem by returning to an idealized time. A major element in Trump's success has been his ability to adapt

to a knowledge-information culture, a media world where information is constantly created to serve interests and truth is lost in the process. In Chapter 12, I write that Erich Fromm's description of the marketing personality whose self-worth and identity depend on how he is evaluated by significant others fits Trump. Fromm writes, "His prestige, status, success, the fact that he is known to others as being a certain person are a substitute for a genuine feeling of identity. This makes him utterly dependent on the way others look at him and forces him to keep up the role in which he had once been successful" (*Man for Himself: An Inquiry Into The Psychology of Ethics*, 1947, 73). Fromm wrote that the marketing orientation also determines a way of thinking, "of grasping things quickly so as to be able to manipulate them successfully... For manipulative purposes, all that is necessary to know is the surface feature of things, the superficial" (73).

**PHE:** As a well-respected psychoanalytic scholar of the pros and cons of narcissistic leaders, how does President Trump fit into this categorization?

**MM:** In his book *Think Like a Billionaire* (2004), Trump writes that my description of a productive narcissist fits him. It doesn't. Trump has some narcissistic traits including large amounts of aggressive energy and a weak superego, so he lacks internalized rules to keep his ego in check. He is combative, defensive, and grandiose. He makes up stories and facts. He feels no guilt about lying. He can also be seductive, using people and discarding them when they are no longer useful to him.

Productive narcissists like Steve Jobs and Jeff Bezos partner with others to change the world with new products that have improved the way we live. Subordinates who suffered their demands and insults were rewarded for their devotion. These leaders combined narcissism with a productive-exacting drive to realize their visions. Unlike Trump, they didn't con people like those enrolled in Trump University or defraud lenders with a series of bankruptcies. Unlike Trump, they didn't demand that their subordinates constantly praise them. They sought competent collaborators, not flattering toadies. Trump's narcissism is partly a defense against his marketing needs for constant affirmation. He told Anthony Scaramucci, "I'm a total act" (Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig, *A Very Stable Genius, Donald Trump's Testing of America*, 2020, 192). This grandiose act served him well on the TV show *The Apprentice* (2004-2017) and as Elizabeth Lunbeck suggests in Chapter 3, it appeals to his base. Rather than showing his marketing vulnerability, it presents an image of invulnerability.

**PHE:** Are you saying that Trump is a sociopath?

**MM:** Trump expresses some sociopathic traits such as manipulation and conning, extreme lying, and lack of remorse, shame, or guilt, but this diagnostic category does not fully describe Trump's personality and his strengths.

**PHE:** What do you see as the appeal of the President, who has maintained a very strong group of supporters who typically give him a 39% approval rating (however, starting with the impeachment trial his approval is at 49%) and who once said, "I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot someone and I wouldn't lose any voters?"

**MM:** Trump's base identifies with him and his narcissism. No one pushes him around, and no insult goes unanswered. He fights back. He is not cautious or fearful of offending a critic or any of America's enemies. So far, Trump has gotten away with breaking the rules, adding to an im-

age of infallibility. For many of these followers, the relationship is transference. Trump is like a powerful father figure who protects and allows his followers to express all their prejudices.

**PHE:** How necessary for Donald J. Trump is it to have rallies at which he is treated like a rock star and how do you think he would react if his supporters turn sullen or against him in the face of missteps or the inevitable disillusionment over time with a leader?

**MM:** Trump needs the adulation, the affirmation of his worth. He evaluates himself and others in terms of their success and their rating according to significant others. It's hard to predict his reaction if he loses this affirmation. Trump has been resilient in the face of his bankruptcies. It would depend on how he lost the adulation. If he is defeated in the election, he could remain the leader of his angry base, continuing to criticize liberals and supporting like-minded politicians. He could have a program on Fox News. He would still have his buildings and golf courses.

**PHE:** What are your speculations as to the likelihood that he will be reelected?

**MM:** Trump benefits from a booming economy, successful deals with Mexico and Canada (Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, CUSMA) and China. He also has a strong base to build on. On the negative side, he has lied about health care and has supported policies that favor the rich and widen the income gap. His policies have weakened environmental protection and threatened women's rights. I believe a moderate Democrat like Michael Bloomberg, Amy Klobuchar, or Joe Biden would beat Trump. But if the Democrats nominate Bernie Sanders, I think Trump will be able to scare people enough with visions of class war and big government socialism to win a second term.

**PHE:** Ken, why should readers choose to read this study rather than numerous other books on Trump?

**KAF:** Three things distinguish our book from other Trump volumes. First, narcissism and gaslighting in American culture are prominent themes when discussing Trump. We have contributions from renowned experts in these areas. Second, essays in this collection place Trump's rise in historical perspective in ways I have not seen anywhere else. Third, it is psychohistory.

Co-editor Michael Maccoby has published a number of books and articles on narcissistic leaders. He is even quoted on the subject in one of Trump's ghostwritten volumes. Like Maccoby, psychoanalyst Otto Kernberg is one of the world's foremost authorities on narcissism. Harvard historian Elizabeth Lunbeck is author of *The Americanization of Narcissism* (2014). These experts present a different understanding of Trump's narcissism than expressed by many mental health professionals who only see it as psychopathology. Maccoby shows how it is related to Trump's marketing personality. Kernberg and Lunbeck show how it connects with Trump's followers. This analysis is not found elsewhere

**PHE:** What about gaslighting?

**KAF:** Gaslighting is a term regularly used to describe Trump's activities. Yale psychoanalyst Robin Stern has written *The Gaslight Effect: How to Spot and Survive the Hidden Manipulation Others Use to Control Your Life* (2007). The book has been much recognized, including Dr. Stern appearing on the *Today* show. She shows how the phenomenon manifests itself within personal

relationships and has now graduated to the political world. Dr. Judith Logue then explains the varied ways Donald Trump gaslights the American public.

**PHE:** What about psychohistory?

**KAF:** Historical, political, cultural, and psychohistorical analysis are present in a number of essays in the book. Attorney and Professor Michael Signer writes on the four characteristics of being a demagogue and how being renegades and inflammatory becomes a major part of their appeal. In a similar vein, Paul, is your paper on Trump as a disruptor. You write about how his need for both adoration and combativeness has characterized Donald Trump since childhood, and show how wherever Trump appears disorder, confusion, and destabilization are always on the horizon. Rutgers sociologist Charles Heckscher begins with the extremely disruptive social strains of the last 50 years and shows how Trump exploits recent populism to destroy the new economic institutions that have developed. Psychoanalyst David Lotto places the Trump phenomenon within the context of American exceptionalism. Some claim Donald Trump is a fascist. Professor Paul Gottfried, who has published books on the history of fascism, delineates what fascism is and how Trump's actions do not fit into this historical phenomenon. Both Heckscher and Gottfried see Trump as leading a populist reaction to progressive cultural changes that have left them behind.

**PHE:** What was your original conception of this Trump book?

**KAF:** The book initially owes its origins to two things. The first is a paper I presented on the 2016 election at a Psychohistory Forum meeting on November 5, 2016, where you also presented. You have had a tradition of holding Forums on upcoming presidential elections for decades. The second origin is the spring 2017 International Psychohistorical Association Conference. A sub-theme of that event was the Trump phenomenon, and a number of the papers in the book originated there. Between speakers, award-winning filmmaker Molly Castelloe said this could be a book. Much later she told me she half-meant this as a joke, but I did not perceive that, and we worked on expanding it into a book. I noticed that both Michael Maccoby and Otto Kernberg would be speaking on Trump-related issues at the November 2017 Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis. Between Molly and I, we were able to get both of them to contribute to our work. After Molly decided to pursue film projects, I asked Dr. Maccoby to be co-editor. It is through his initiatives that we eventually recruited works from Charles Heckscher and Michael Signer, plus Maccoby's original perspectives make major contributions to this book.

**PHE:** What is your conclusion in your chapter "Is Donald Trump Competent and Fit to be President?" I am also especially interested in reading the book to find out what you discovered in your chapter "What in Our Politics, History, Economy, and Culture Enabled Trump's Rise."

**KAF:** These two chapters were originally one, and are based on my paper for that November 2016 Psychohistory Forum meeting. Michael Maccoby and his friend Dan Morgan, formerly of the *Washington Post*, suggested that my paper be broken up and placed in two separate sections of the book. The main focus of the original piece was to understand what in American history, politics, and culture enabled Trump's political rise. Part of the wonder of his ascendancy is that it came despite or because of his lack of experience, competency, and his habitual factual

misstatements. In this first piece, I document what has now become a regular journalistic feature, the false or misleading statements Donald Trump makes. In his first 928 days as Commander in Chief, he averaged almost 13 incorrect statements a day. Consistency is not Trump's forte. I delineate a number of his many reversals. If Trump cannot make up his own mind, how can he make America great again? The President is often the pot who calls the kettle black. In his attacks on others, he habitually criticizes others for what he does or has done himself.

In my second article, I search for what in our past and cultural traditions contributed to Trump's political success. The U.S. has extraordinarily long campaigns, which feature slogans and personality over issues. Then there is the Electoral College, which enables candidates who receive fewer votes than another to be elected President. Our campaigns feature political rallies that resemble revival meetings. A ritual of these rallies is that outsider candidates condemn those in power and promise political redemption once elected. Trump himself is a master of commanding media attention. No president in modern history has so dominated public attention as has Trump. Many people rocket to the top and then fade from the public eye. Not Trump. He continues to fascinate the electorate. I also describe other features of our history and politics that helped Trump's candidacy.

**PHE:** Thanks, Michael and Ken, for your informative and valuable insights. Let's hope your book has the influence, reviews in major journals, and sales that it warrants.