Dignity (Or Lack Thereof) in the 2016 United States Presidential Election: How It Impacts the Dignity of the Nation

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The political landscape of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election is rife with insults, distrust, and lack of civility from members of both parties towards both candidates. Here, I examine how this treatment affects the dignity of the Office of the U.S. President. The two major party candidates, Republican Donald J. Trump and Democrat Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, are constantly the subject of criticism, ridicule, and even accusations of unforgivable and criminal behavior. With just a few clicks, any American can buy their very own “Hillary for Prison” shirt that showcases Clinton behind bars or a “Dump Trump” shirt that features Trump sneering at a toilet.2,3 While this behavior is completely legal and a form of freedom of speech, should Americans be concerned about how the social norm of incivility towards politicians is impacting our society? Should Americans show greater respect towards their candidates out of respect for the dignity of the office the candidates are pursuing, the Office of the President of the United States? To examine this, I will explore the origins of the concept of the “dignity of an office,” how the media and political communities influence the perception of our candidates, and the impact that the lack of incivility has on Americans themselves.

THE DIGNITY OF AN OFFICE

The American Founding Fathers had many European influences in creating America’s fledgling democracy and imbuing it with dignity. John Adams, in a letter in 1776, was concerned with the subtleties of demonstrating the honor and dignity of a state independent of a monarch, writing, “But must not all commissions run in the name of a king? Why may they not as well run thus, ‘The colony of to A. B. greeting,’ &c., and be tested by the governor? Why may not writs, instead of running in the name of the king, run thus, ‘The colony of to the sheriff,’ &c., and be tested by the chief justice? Why may not indictments conclude, ‘against the peace of the colony and the dignity of the same?’ Adams describes a concept of dignity that is possessed by a king, which can rightly be transferred to a state represented by the officials governing it.

This European concept of the dignity of a monarch that existed at the time of America’s founding stems from the usage of the Roman word, dignitas, from which the word dignity is derived. Dignitas was closely related to the Roman concept of honor, and Roman leaders had a different measure of dignitas based on their rank as a senator, emperor, or other position. Similarly, dignity in the context of Medieval Europe was highly dependent on one’s social class or rank. Nobles, such as Dukes, Earls, and Barons, all had hierarchical measures of dignity allotted to them, all of which were below the higher dignity of the monarch, whose dignity carried the authority of the kingdom with it. This dignity was associated with increased privileges, as well as responsibilities, required to maintain that honor and dignity. For knights, these responsibilities came in the form of chivalry, where knights obeyed specific rules for conflict that preserved the honor and dignity of a state independent of a monarch, whose dignity carried the authority of the kingdom with it. This dignity was associated with increased privileges, as well as responsibilities, required to maintain that honor and dignity. For knights, these responsibilities came in the form of chivalry, where knights obeyed specific rules for conflict that preserved the dignity of other knights and gave deference to those who were afforded greater dignity than themselves.

Modern philosophers and ethicists, while working with a much more egalitarian view of dignity, nevertheless sometimes acknowledge a ranking scheme within their definition. Plants, for example, if acknowledged to have dignity, have less dignity than do animals, and animals
The political landscape of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election is rife with insults, distrust, and lack of civility from members of both parties towards both candidates. Here, I examine how this treatment affects the dignity of the Office of the U.S. President. I also examine how this shifts affects the U.S. as a whole and our pride in our government institutions and nation. I find that this lack of civility is rooted in the increased perception of a polarized electorate, which is stoked by the media and by politicians’ attacks on one another. The modern status quo of disparaging politicians has a strong connection to Americans’ faith in our government institutions, our national pride, unity, and possibly even our dignity as a nation.

"The verdict on freedom is out. Half of the world is looking at us," Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy told an audience at International Bar Association Conference this September. "They’re watching. They’re waiting. And what do they see? They see a civil discourse that’s hostile, fractious. Not based on neutral principle, tolerant discussion."

To find an example of this fractious dialogue, one needs to look no further than the 2016 Presidential Election. The two major party candidates, Republican Donald J. Trump and Democrat Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, are constantly the subject of criticism, ridicule, and even accusations of unforgivable and criminal behavior. With just a few clicks, any American can buy their very own "Hillary for Prison" shirt that showcases Clinton behind bars or a "Dump Trump" shirt that features Trump sneering at a toilet. While this behavior is completely legal and a form of freedom of speech, should Americans be concerned about how the social norm of incivility towards politicians is impacting our society? Should Americans show greater respect towards their candidates out of respect for the dignity of the office the candidates are pursuing, the Office of the President of the United States? To examine this, I will explore the origins of the concept of the “dignity of an office,” how the media and political communities influence the perception of our candidates, and the impact that the lack of incivility has on Americans themselves.

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have less dignity than humans. Humans, within their rank, are all granted equal dignity due to their status as humans.1 Yet, as soon as one declares that all humans are equal in dignity, a conclusion that is applauded by organizations as prestigious as the United Nations, exceptions immediately leap to mind.2 Shouldn’t criminals have less dignity than law abiding citizens? Don’t our leaders deserve greater dignity than the rest of elected officials? Nagging questions such as these are tied tightly to our historical association of dignity with the rank, or value, of an individual. In addition to these concerns, Adams’s discernment that the dignity and authority that was historically conferred upon a monarch or noble more rightly belongs to the state itself, as opposed to the individual, is particularly illuminating. While individuals holding or aspiring to hold elected offices have no more dignity than any other member of society, they do serve as a symbol and representative of a governing body that possesses great dignity, value, and authority. The dignity of the state is represented through the dignity of those who hold or aspire to hold elected offices. Thus, exercising this balance when participating in the political landscape, however, proves to be a challenge for modern America.

ROLE OF THE CANDIDATES

Perhaps sometimes the greatest barrier to showing dignity to an office is the candidates running for it themselves. Trump and Clinton are part of a long tradition of candidates who try to win voters by demonizing their opponent. Policy discussions between the two presidential candidates often take a backseat to perpetual mudslinging. In the second presidential debate, Trump went after Clinton, saying, “If I win, I am going to instruct the attorney general to go after your number one contributor, whoever that may be. It’s a disgrace.” Clinton retorted, “Because you’d be in jail.” At a similar level of severity, in the third presidential debate after Trump mentioned that Russian President Vladimir Putin had no respect for Clinton, Clinton responded, “Well, that’s because he’d rather have a puppet as president of the United States.” Trump insisted, “No puppet. No puppet… you’re the puppet!”

Millions of Americans watched these exchanges. The first presidential debate, in speech, both increased the most watched American presidential debate of all time, with 84 million viewers on traditional TV networks alone, greater than one-quarter of the population of the United States.11-12 While the subsequent debates attracted a smaller audience, Americans were able to hear directly from the candidates what they thought about their opponent, and that kind of behavior can be difficult not to interpret. It is easy for Americans to hear directly and行为 towards political candidates based on how the candidates treat each other.

ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Yet, candidates would not be stoking this hostile rhetoric if it did not achieve results. For example, during the Republican Primary, Trump achieved widespread name recognition by attracting significantly more media coverage than any other candidate.13 One way he did this was by frequently covering outrageous topics, including unfounded rumors about the other candidates from the very beginning, that the media couldn’t resist to cover. Trump wrote in his book, Crippled America, that “I learned a long time ago that if you’re not afraid to be outspoken, the media will always back you up. So you’ve got to open your mouth and come on their shows. If you do things a little differently, if you say outrageous things and fight back, they love you. Although I am the least positive, Trump’s coarseness towards his opponents gave him a strategical advantage that was a factor in winning him the Republican Primary. One can hardly mention the political discourse in the United States without acknowledging the media’s role. With news outlets increasingly shifting towards digital platforms, competition between media outlets for viewers’ attention often encourages journalists to go after more entertaining news stories. Pitching politics as a black-and-white competition between two opposing sides is an oversimplified but catchy trope that earns clicks. As a result, the media tends to play up political polarization in American politics. According to a Pew Center Poll reports that the perception of polarization in America is high – in 2015, 79% of Americans felt that the country was more divided than it had been in the past.14 To see if this polarization is a direct result of the media, a recent study examined media content and found that an article that portrays a polarized political scene as opposed to a moderate one. The polarized media was shown to increase perception of polarization in readers, while at the same time prompting readers to moderate their own positions.15 Yet, whether the perception of a polarized electorate moderates voters’ opinions in turn, the study concludes, “Americans find that exposure to partisan media strengthens partisan identity and increases animosity for the other side.” Whether America is truly more polarized than it was in the past, it is undeniable that the perception of increased polarization is strong and that the media is likely a contributing factor. This feeling of increased polarization makes it difficult for Americans to be satisfied with their government or to push policy makers to cooperate across party lines.

LAPSES IN DECORUM

What shocks many Americans about our current election cycle is how candidates are not moderated by the community to uphold standards of decorum and seem to have no limits as to what they can say about the other candidates. Perhaps this boundless incivility should not be surprising in the context of an election cycle; there have been countless other nasty elections in the history of our country, although most of the nastiest presidential elections were not in recent memory. In perhaps one of the nastiest presidential elections, Jackson and John Quincy Adams, Jackson was accused of adultery and murder and Adams of procuring prostitutes and misuse of public funds.16 Other examples may sound familiar to accusations made in the 2016 election. In the 1964 election between Lyndon B. Johnson and Barry Goldwater, Johnson insisted that Goldwater was too extreme for the presidency, and his election would lead to a nuclear war.17 Compare that to Clinton asking her voters to imagine Donald Trump holding the nuclear codes for the country.18 Or, perhaps consider the 1864 election between Grover Cleveland and James Blaine where a letter surfaced concerning Blaine’s shady dealings with the railroad. Blaine signed it with “burn this letter,”19 a reaction that to Clinton’s scandal concerning deleted emails.20 Yet, outside of election season, there seem to be checks to keep political decorum in line. In 2009, when Republican Congressman Joe Wilson yelled, “You lie!” at President Obama during a speech, both parties condemned the outburst, and Wilson apologized.21 Both the United States House of Representatives and Senate have strong rules prohibiting and increasing the penalties for such actions. Outfits for breaches of civil decorum while in office, the media interviews and other non-formal settings; in 2012 and increases animosity for the other side. Whether America is truly more polarized than it was in the past, it is undeniable that the perception of increased polarization is strong and that the media is likely a contributing factor. This feeling of increased polarization makes it difficult for Americans to be satisfied with their government or to push policy makers to cooperate across party lines.
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ROLE OF THE CANDIDATES

Perhaps sometimes the greatest barrier to showing dignity to an office is the candidates running for it themselves. Trump, as a leader, was a part of a long tradition of politicians who try to win by demonizing their opponent. Policy discussions between the two presidential candidates often take a backseat to perpetual mudslinging. In the second presidential debate, Trump went after Clinton, saying, “If I win, I am going to instruct my attorney general to go back into your situation,” referencing Clinton’s email scandal. Clinton responded, “It’s just awfully good that someone with the temperament of Donald Trump is not in charge of the law in our country.” Without skipping a beat, Trump retorted, “Because you’d be in jail.” At a similar level of severity, in the third presidential debate after Trump mentioned that Russian President Vladimir Putin had no respect for Clinton, Clinton responded, “Well, that’s because he’d rather have a puppet as president of the United States.” Trump insisted, “No puppet... you’re the puppet.”

Millions of Americans watched these exchanges. The first presidential debate, which drew the most watched American presidential debate of all time, with 84 million viewers on traditional TV networks alone, was expected to set a record for the United States. While the subsequent debates attracted a smaller audience, it is clear that Americans are able to hear directly from the candidates what they thought about their opponent, and that kind of behavior can be difficult not to interpret. It is easy for Americans to speak directly and behavior towards political candidates based on how the candidates treat each other.

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One can hardly mention the political discourse in the United States without acknowledging the media’s role. With news outlets increasingly shifting towards digital platforms, competition between media outlets for viewers’ attention often encourages journalists to go after more entertaining news stories. Pitching politics as a black-and-white competition between two opposing sides is an oversimplified but catchy trope that earns clicks. As a result, the media tends to play up political polarization in America, while in reality, the Center Poll reports that the perception of polarization in America is high - in 2015, 79% of Americans felt that the country was more divided than it had been in the past. To see if this polarization is a direct result of the media, a recent study examined media content and found an article that portrays a polarized political scene as opposed to a moderate one. The polarized media was shown to increase perception of polarization in readers, while at the same time prompting readers to moderate their own positions. Yet, outside of election season, there seem to be checks to keep political decorum in line. In 2009, when Republican Congressman Joe Wilson yelled, “You lie!” at President Barack Obama during a speech, both parties dealt with the railroad. Blaine signed it with “burn this letter.” This is likely what Clinton’s scandal concerning deleted emails. Yet, outside of election season, there seem to be checks to keep political decorum in line. In 2009, when Republican Congressman Joe Wilson yelled, “You lie!” at President Barack Obama during a speech, both parties
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Hills calls Trump’s tone “horrific.” Amazingly, based on complicit silence, here are things Hillary doesn’t find “horrific” on her own husband’s affairs: rape, abusing his power with young interns, humiliating and discrediting víctimas.27

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Here, even Trump argues that decorum is an important part of the presidency, although he may not show it as a candidate; one of Trump’s tweets this election season read, “CrookedHillary is nothing more than a Wall Street PUPPET!”28

The President of the United States is the most powerful person in the world. The president is the spokesperson for democracy and liberty. Isn’t it time we brought back the pomp and circumstance, and the sense of awe that we all once held? That is what I call the basket of deplorables. … The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic—hello—racist you are.

Pro-Trump chalking of their school that they organized a protest. Protesters said that those who wrote the campaign messages, attacked minority and marginalized communities at Emory, creating an environment in which many students no longer feel safe and welcome…. For some students, simply seeing the word ‘Trump’ plastered across campus brings to mind his many offensive quotes and hateful actions.29

Colleges and universities as a whole in the country have recently implemented diversity and social justice initiatives to increase inclusivity on their campuses, and for many, Trump’s rhetoric is an affront to the progress made by

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Hills calls Trump’s tone ‘horrific.’ Amazingly, based on the comment, things are far worse than she thought. In a recent statement made by Clinton being controlled by strings.29 Perhaps Trump is able to separate the role of a candidate and a President, and as President, Trump would be able to live up to the standard of decorum he put forward. However, his conduct and the conduct of other candidates towards him during the election may do irreparable damage to his reputation as a politician. Clinton had another opinion on Trump’s dignity. She told an interviewer this May, “When you have high-ranking Republican officials in Congress raising questions about their nominee, I don’t think it’s personal so much as rooted in their respect for the office, and their deep concern about what kind of leader he would be.”30 As discussed earlier, the treatment of candidates towards one another is easy for Americans to imitate. Do Americans as a whole have the ability to separate the role of a candidate and a sitting President in terms of how should we act towards them? Perhaps not. In 2005, after President George W. Bush was nearly a year into his second term, the website Democratic Underground posted a list of over 250 insulting nicknames for Bush.31 A similar list in 2015 boasted 360 derisive nicknames for Obama.32 It seems that Americans’ ability to respect a sitting president is highly contingent on their ability to respect incoming political candidates. As discussed earlier, in practice candidates don’t necessarily live up to the model of decorum expected, and to a certain extent, they exacerbate the disrespect perpetuated against themselves and their opponents, because civility is so easy to imitate. However, that does not mean that Americans should succumb to this standard. By looking at how the Office of the President and the nation, Americans are eating away at a lot of progress that our country has achieved.

**IMPACT ON THE UNITED STATES**

How does a country appear dignified? To follow our earlier discussion, the Office of the President is intent on being dependent on the value and authority associated with it, the dignity of a nation hinges on it upholding what it stands for and being appropriately equipped with the power to do so. If the United States wants to affirm itself as a land dedicated to preserving the “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness,” of its members as was written in our Declaration of Independence, then we need to examine how modern phenomena facilitate or interfere with that goal. One accusation that has been spread through a lot in the recent election is that incivility is threatening the rule of law that is central to American values.

According to legal scholar Rachel Kleinfeld Belton, the rule of law that is central to American values.

Of these, point three, that incivility is causing the degradation of law and order in America, is the most referenced. In the second presidential debate, Clinton voiced her opinion about Trump being complicit in her opponent behavior towards a political candidate and a sitting President in terms of how we should act towards them? Perhaps not. In 2005, after President George W. Bush was nearly a year into his second term, the website Democratic Underground posted a list of over 250 insulting nicknames for Bush.31 A similar list in 2015 boasted 360 derisive nicknames for Obama.32 It seems that Americans’ ability to respect a sitting president is highly contingent on their ability to respect incoming political candidates. As discussed earlier, in practice candidates don’t necessarily live up to the model of decorum expected, and to a certain extent, they exacerbate the disrespect perpetuated against themselves and their opponents, because civility is so easy to imitate. However, that does not mean that Americans should succumb to this standard. By looking at how the Office of the President and the nation, Americans are eating away at a lot of progress that our country has achieved.

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THE FUTURE OF U.S. NATIONAL DIGNITY

The 2016 Presidential Election concluded with a stunning win for Donald Trump, who won 306 Electoral votes over Hillary Clinton’s 232. As of mid-December 2016, Clinton held the popular vote by about 1.3 million votes, but Trump’s win in several Democratic strongholds, such as Florida and Pennsylvania, secured him the presidency.

This result is surprising from a data analytics perspective, where many major vote predictors, predicted a Clinton win in the 70-99% range.4 Data analysts have suggested that phenomena such as response bias, where people who support a candidate are more likely to be Trump supporters, and the so-called “Shy Trumpers,” people who decided to vote for Trump but would not admit this to pollsters due to societal pressures to vote for Clinton, were contributors to this unexpected victory.

“Donald Trump is going to be our president,” Clinton told the nation in her concession speech. “We owe him an open mind and the chance to lead.”5 With the election over, both Trump and Clinton have made statements that are a far cry from statements made during the campaign. In his victory speech, Trump said “I congratulated Hillary Clinton, I congratulated her and her family on a very, very hard fought campaign. I mean, she fought very hard. Hillary has worked very long and very hard for many years and has given this country a major debt of gratitude for her service to our country.”6 Similarly, when meeting with President Obama, Trump said, “I really like him, we got along well, I think he’s going to be a good president.” We talk. He likes the country. We wants to do right by the country and for the country.7

Words such as these are encouraging to some who watched the preceding election with concern over the candidates’ and the two parties’ treatment towards one another. Also in his acceptance speech, Trump addressed this division:

Instead of healing and finding a new national unity following an election, our partisan society merely flip-flops which group will be more satisfied with the government than the other. This year’s election is an indicator that this system is damaging to America’s trust that for both parties satisfaction has gone down over the last fifty years. Only in 2001, after the tragedy of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, was there a momentary surge of trust from both parties. It is disheartening that it takes a tragedy in order for America to unite. The negativity promoted by opposing parties against an incumbent president of the other party keeps the percentage of Americans who “trust the federal government to do what is right” is markedly higher among constituents during years when the party they favor holds office of the presidency. To a certain extent, this effect is wholly to be expected. When candidates that are aligned to a constituents’ values are in office, then it is reasonable for them to have more faith in the federal government to do what is right. However, the fact that trust in government varies so markedly based on party affiliation speaks to the polarization present in America. The negativity promoted by opposing parties against an incumbent president of the other party keeps satisfaction low even after the president has been elected. A Gallup poll released in the summer of 2016 reports that 52% of Americans are “extremely proud” to be Americans, the lowest that statistic has been in the last sixteen years.5

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These campaigns. In such a sensitive climate, the election opens old wounds.

Activists have moved university administrations to take action on these concerns. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign cited a Pro-Trump chalk-in on their campus as one of its reasons for increasing its required diversity course requirements from one course to two courses in “non-western culture” or “U.S. minority culture.” 44 Such requirements upset other students who feel that universal liberal values are being imposed on their students, using political correctness as a means of censorship. 45-46

Vandalism threats and violence at Trump rallies have made large media headlines and include events such as a nineteen-year-old man grabbing a police officer’s gun with plans to shoot Trump supporters outside a rally, and a sixty-nine-year-old woman being punched in the face by an angry Trump supporter. 47

At Portland State University, liberal students crashed the formation meeting of a Pro-Trump student group. Vandalism threats were made against Pro-Trump students, and a fight nearly broke out. Trump supporters claim that they called university security but received no response. 48

This wide-reaching incivility in schools and universities is a microcosm of the larger problem concerning national incivility in political discourse. Some have even been tempted to link the election to an increased rate of crime and violence in the country. This claim is difficult to prove due to all of the different factors that contribute to crime and the lag in national statistics concerning crime, which are typically only released on an annual basis. Murders in the U.S. have been steadily declining over the last decade or so, although 2015 saw a small uptick of murders by 17% compared to 2014. 49 Trump’s win was a historic low in the murder rate. 50 One cannot really say whether there is a statistical claim to support or deny claims that the election is impacting crime rates.

Another concern is violence at political rallies. Incidents of violence at Trump rallies have made large media headlines and include events such as a nineteen-year-old man grabbing a police officer’s gun with plans to shoot the candidate, Trump supporters pepper-spraying protesters outside a rally, and a sixty-nine-year-old woman being punched in the face by an angry Trump supporter. 47

Leading up to a rally at the University of Illinois in Chicago in March, crowds grew so big and so intertwined with Trump supporters and anti-Trump protesters that the campaign decided to cancel the rally. They issued a statement:

Mr. Trump just arrived in Chicago, and after meeting with law enforcement, has determined that for the safety of all of the tens of thousands of people that have gathered in and around the arena, tonight’s rally will be postponed to another date. Thank you very much for your attendance and please go in peace.

Several scrabbles broke out in the aftermath. 48 Trump would later blame Clinton for violence at his rallies after a video surfaced of Scott Foval, a member of the non-profit progressive group Americans United for Change, describing the behavior of Trump rally goers. 49 Whether the violence at political rallies this election season was spontaneous or was exacerbated by political supporters on the other side of the aisle, it is certainly egregious that political discourse has stooped to such a low. In a country that values free speech and assembly, threats and violence make that value further from reality and may undermine our nation’s very dignity.

NATIONAL PRIDE

One of the indicators of whether America is living up what it stands for and is perceived as dignified is reflected in the level of national pride in the country. A Gallup poll released in the summer of 2016 reports that 52% of Americans are “extremely proud” to be Americans, the lowest that statistic has been in the last sixteen years. 51 Polls show that often satisfaction with the nation is linked with trust in government, although trust in government varies by group. 52 A telling indicator is that government satisfaction goes beyond the 2016 election, but it has an intimate relationship with national satisfaction and pride. In a Gallup poll conducted in the summer of 2016, 11% of Americans cited “disatisfaction with the government” as the greatest problem facing America “in general,” (12-18%) ranked higher among Americans’ concerns. 52 This dissatisfaction might also be linked to excessive partisanship. A telling figure from the Pew Research Center titled “Trust in Government by Party,” shows that Americans’ trust in the federal government

Instead of hearing and finding a new national unity following an election, our partisan society merely flip-flops which group will be more satisfied with the government than the other. 53 That is, the political party in control of the presidency. 54 The 2016 Presidential Election concluded with a stunning victory for Donald Trump, who won 306 Electoral votes over Hillary Clinton’s 232. As of December 2016, Clinton held the popular vote by about 1.3 million votes, but Trump’s win in several Democratic strongholds, such as Florida and Pennsylvania, secured him the presidency.

This result is surprising from a data analytics perspective, where many major vote predictors, predicted a Clinton win in the 70-99% range. 55 Data analysts have suggested that phenomena such as response bias, where people who pollsters were difficult to reach were more likely to be Trump supporters, and the so-called “Shy Trumpers,” people who decided to vote for Trump but would not admit to pollsters due to societal pressures to vote for Clinton, were contributors to this unexpected victory. 56

“Donald Trump is going to be our president,” Clinton told the nation in her concession speech. “We owe him an open mind and the chance to lead.” 57 With the election over, both Trump and Clinton have made statements that are a far cry from statements made during the campaign. In his victory speech, Trump said “I really like him, we have really good chemistry together. I’ve got to congratulate her and her family on a very, very hard-fought campaign. I mean, she fought very hard. Hillary has worked very long and very very hard, she has earned her a major debt of gratitude for her service to our country.” 54 Similarly, when meeting with President Obama, Trump said “I really like him, we have very great chemistry together. We talk. He loves the country. He wants to do right by the country and for the country.” 55

Words such as these are encouraging to some who watched the preceding election with concern over the candidates and the two parties’ treatment towards one another. Also in his acceptance speech, Trump addressed this division.
Now it is time for America to bind the wounds of division, have to get together. To all Republicans and Democrats and Independents across this nation, I say it is time for us to come together as one united people. It is time. I pledge to every citizen of our land that I will be President for all of Americans, and this is so important to me.58

Yet, just because the former candidates have changed their tone doesn’t mean America has. Protests broke out in several cities, particularly in areas where Clinton won by a large margin. Many of the protesters were high school or college students. At one California high school, 1,500 students, half the student body, walked out of class in protest the day after the election. Other protesters in New York gathered around Trump Tower and shouted, “Not my President!” In Portland, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston, protesters blocked traffic, and in Oakland, California, protesters smashed windows at five business, and some burned flags. Many of the protesters were angry and in shock over the election of a candidate they saw as representing bigotry and discrimination.59

What exactly do these protesters believe was at stake in the election? The inflammatory and extreme rhetoric espoused during the election may have convinced some Americans that the future of America’s diversity and inclusivity itself was riding on this election, when that is clearly not the case. Demonizing their opponent, a tactic used by common Americans and candidates alike during the course of the election, makes the healing and transition process to a new president that much more painful and frustrating for those who voted for the losing side. How can the losing side accept a president-elect whom their party has constantly stripped of dignity in the eyes of the public throughout the past year?

While this author has optimism that America will be able to reconcile itself with and accept a Trump presidency, that healing will take time and is difficult to achieve. An election seems to strip a candidate’s dignity down to a base level, making it the job of the candidate to rebuild that dignity of him or herself and by extension the office they hold throughout the course of their term. Perhaps that is one of the most difficult tasks politicians are entrusted with – to help Americans recapture their respect for the dignity of an office after the bedlam of an election has eaten away at it.

The rampant polarization in America has made it extremely difficult for this dignity and respect to be preserved in the course of an election, and to be realistic, the respect that is stolen during an election can only ever be partially restored. To preserve the dignity of the United States and its presidential office, Americans and their news networks must learn how to respect (although certainly not agree with) all of their presidential candidates during the course of an election cycle and must demand of their candidates that they do the same towards one another.

Doing so will help to quell one of the major sources of division within our nation and give whichever candidate is elected a strong foundation upon which to help the nation further heal and show a dignified face to the rest of the world.

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Domenica Massamby

This drawing was an exploration of the relationship of space and time through the figure. It was completed in Professor Lucy Gans’ figure drawing class, ART 015. Drawing can be a voyeuristic endeavor that usually places the artist in a passive role. In this project, I intended to subvert the role of model and the “artist” by transforming both into the subject of the drawing. The piece is ultimately reflective of the movement of the artist to create new frames, and the slow gradual changes of the model over time who poses as if time itself has frozen.

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