

The Delray Democrat

Covering the Post-Presidency of Donald Trump¹

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Donald Trump broke the mold for how a president should behave. Will he also break the mold for how a *former* president should behave? – that is, as someone who is rarely seen or heard and almost never critical of his or her successor. The media has the power to prevent that from happening, and it's only fair to demand that they exercise that power.

After all, the media bears some responsibility for the carnage that Trump left in his wake – their craven and clueless coverage of his initial campaign helped to elect him. They were both fascinated and repelled by the clownish candidate, and they welcomed (some even bragged about) the increased advertising income that came in his wake.

It was easy to give him the free air time because no one in the media really believed he would be elected. In fact, when Keith Ellison suggested on “This Week George Stephanopoulos” that Trump could win the Republican nomination, *The New York Times*'s Maggie Haberman burst out laughing, joined by the host.

The media soon learned that a reality TV star can be just as effective a messenger as a grade B movie actor, especially when he's given free advertising. Once reality bit the media in the face on November 8, 2016, they began doing a better job covering Trump, exposing and calling out his lies, his racism, his instability, and his utter incompetence. And they played a part in saving our democracy in November. *The New York Times*, with its teams of investigative reporters and White House coverage by Peter Baker, led the charge.

Now that Trump is out of office, temptation returns. The media must resist. Trump remains a threat if he is given a platform from which to spew his assaults on objective reality. Of all the horrors he visited on the world, that is his most monstrous legacy. It was a joke when Groucho asked, “who ya gonna believe, me or your lyin' eyes”? It's a tragedy that tens of millions of people believe Trump every time.

Our democracy teeters when 70 million people believe that Trump won an election in a landslide that he actually lost in a landslide. It teeters when they believe the uncorroborated claims of Trump and the grifters and clowns who are still willing to work for him, rejecting the findings of over 60 courts and slews of state officials, many of them Republican.

The media arguably had to report on what Trump said and did when still president, and, going forward, they should cover his criminal prosecutions. Other than that, they have no obligation to help him break the mold of how former presidents behave.

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