

# IN TRUMP TIME



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# IN TRUMP TIME

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A JOURNAL OF AMERICA'S PLAGUE YEAR

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the Office of Trade and Manufacturing policy*

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To “a helluva broad,” Evelyn Littlejohn.  
May she rest in peace.

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**Trump Time** *phrasal noun, idiom*  
/trʌmp/ /taɪm/

1. To implement a government policy or action as quickly as possible

*Example: A vaccine to fight the deadly virus from Communist China was developed in Trump Time.*

2. The age of the presidency of Donald Trump

*Example: America's economy was unusually strong during Trump Time.*

It's the day before the New Hampshire primary, and the Boss is up in the Granite State trolling the Democrats. The West Wing feels a bit to me like the ballroom on the *Titanic* as the coronavirus spreads. There's no question in my mind that this is going to hit hard. It's going to go on for a long time. It will be an existential threat both to the country and to the administration if it's not handled properly.

—*Peter Navarro, journal entry,*  
*February 10, 2020*

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PROLOGUE

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*A RASHOMON ELECTION*

*It's human to lie. Most of the time we can't even be honest  
with ourselves.*

—AKIRA KUROSAWA, *RASHOMON*

Conventional media wisdom has it that Donald Trump lost the 2020 presidential election because of two simple mistakes. When bad luck and trouble hit America in the form of a deadly virus from Communist China, he failed to manage the pandemic properly. This put a low, hard ceiling on the president's approval rating.

The media also claimed America's first Twitter president made a daily habit of alienating just about everybody outside his core deplorables base. So, in a political climate where Americans were already way over their emotional pandemic edge, it was sayonara to suburban soccer moms, adios to Hispanics, and bye-bye birdcage to anyone with their own personal pronouns.

Yet, this kind of CNN, paint-by-the-Never-Trump-numbers quickly falls apart when measured against the stunning closeness of a race that pre-election pollsters billed as a Biden landslide. It is precisely this photo-finish reality of the 2020 election that must lead us to examine a more complex set of reasons that might account for the outcome.

Of those who might conduct such an inquiry, I can modestly lay claim to a unique vantage point within the White House and often within the Oval Office itself. From these twin perches, I was able to see some things better than most and other things that might otherwise never have seen the light of day.

It is also true that you can literally count on three fingers the number of senior White House advisors who were with the president for the entire journey—from the winning 2016 campaign all the way to the end. On those three fingers are illegal immigration czar Stephen Miller, tweetmeister Dan Scavino, and yours truly—assistant to the president and director of the White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy.

That I survived five long and tumultuous years at the president's side is, in and of itself, an unlikely outcome. The dead-pool on Peter Navarro when I first entered the White House was that I was an ivory tower rube unschooled in the ways of the Washington swamp who would last less than a month and be the first to go. Yet somehow, despite a surfeit of powerful enemies, I outlasted all who were out to get me.

In seeking a more textured view of history, my promise to you is this: I will hold nothing back and speak only the truth as I have seen it, at times as an active participant, at times simply as an observer.

In support of this promise I will rely heavily on a *pour mémoire* journal that I began keeping early in the administration on a daily basis. As a key witness to what I knew would be one of the most important historical periods of our time, I wanted to get that history exactly right. And the deeper I got into the fight, I also wanted accountability.

History—and the American people—deserve no less. So, as that great tower of a man I used to call the Boss might say, “Let’s go!”