An indictment of the system

This past week, the nation was hit by a shock wave. Donald Trump, the former host of NBC’s "The Apprentice," was elected president of the United States. People are wondering, "how could this be?" This is a man who openly used race-baiting rhetoric, endorsed xenophobic policies, insulted disabled reporters and performed so many more ridiculous acts. I probably could not fit them into this piece. So how could this guy have possibly won?

While scrolling through feeds online, I see people saying that Trump won because of the racists, xenophobes and bigots who came out in unprecedented unity due to Trump’s deplorable sentiments. Now, I have seen the resulting empowerment of racists across the country during and after the election. It is a tragedy, and it needs to be addressed. However, this is not why Trump won.

The "Trumpian" Revolution was not a direct response to the first African-American president, the instability of the Middle East, the rejection of the first female president or a byproduct of third party voting. It was a revolt against the establishment — a socioeconomic and current media condition that has ignored the needs of people for years.

This election was decided by the states of Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin. What makes these states important to the outcome? Their demographics. The people of the Rust Belt are the ones of America’s industrial past. Since the 1980’s, there has been a shift in U.S. manufacturing, and these people were left behind. The 1980’s ushered in neoliberalism — an economic doctrine that believes in market solutions, privatization and economic freedom. This led to free trade deals and other policies that disproportionately benefit the wealthiest Americans.

After 30 years of neoliberalism, we have people getting left behind. People work more hours and make less money. The costs for utilities and healthcare have increased. People are struggling to make ends meet. They want change.

In 2008, Barack Obama came forward as a beacon of hope. He promised change, and it energized people. People saw him as a new Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR), making the government work for the people, not against. But what did we get? We got some financial reform, the stabilization of a crashing economy, healthcare reform and new jobs. However, financial reform was a softer form of regulations from decades before. The new jobs are not great paying jobs. Healthcare reform has gotten more people covered, but people are still feeling the pain of healthcare costs. Some progress has been made, but we need more.

The Democratic Party had the chance to continue this progress. From the Green Mountain state, Bernie Sanders rose up as a voice for progress. He talked about economic inequality, lack of opportunity, absurd education costs and student debt and other issues that are very important to working people.
Instead of going with him, the Democratic Party went with Hillary Clinton, the epitome of establishment politics. She is obviously highly qualified and has the proper experience. But she is a reminder of the policies that have left working people behind. Regardless of her current beliefs, she has more political baggage than anyone else from either party who sought the presidency. People’s opinion of Clinton was not going to be changed.

How did the Democratic Party not see this coming? The primary showed it. Bernie Sanders had virtually zero national name recognition and was able to close a huge polling deficit. He packed some of the largest arenas in the country and fundraised as well as the Clinton political machine through small donations. It was evident that the passion was on Sanders’s side. One moment in particular showed Clinton’s weakness and Sanders’s strength — the Michigan Primary. Clinton was ahead in some polls by 30 points. To everyone in the media, it was clear she was going to win. But what happened? Sanders beat her.

This should have showed the media the seriousness of his candidacy. But instead they wrote him off, just like they wrote off Trump. The media refused to take Trump and Sanders seriously. Both were described as extremist outsiders who had no chance. However, Trump made it through the Republican primary without much challenge while Bernie was stopped through a party infrastructure that was designed to stop insurgent candidates.

The media and politicians should have seen this coming. The country is sick of the establishment. Voters were thirsty for change, and the Democratic Party did not offer it. The media needs to start listening to the people of America. All of the political talk this election occurred in an echo chamber. If the pundits and politicians could step out of their ivory towers, they would have seen this coming.

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