

The Worst Sort of “Bully” Pulpit

Letter to the editor, [Brunswick Beacon](#), 04.11.24

President Theodore Roosevelt referred to the office of the presidency as a “bully pulpit.” By this, he meant a powerful platform that he could use to advance his personal and national agenda. President Donald Trump, America’s former Bully in Chief, used the presidency as a platform to enrich himself and punish his enemies.

Bullying, it turns out, was the key ingredient in Trump’s “Art of the Deal.” Determined to get his way in any transaction – interpersonal, financial, or governmental – Trump and his loyal supporters were willing to use the threat of violence to ensure that they got their way. As long as the threat of violence “worked,” there was no need for actual violence.

As kids in school, we could see these tactics in the schoolyard. Most of us didn’t suffer an actual beating. Instead, the bully made us an offer we dared not refuse: give me your lunch money, and I won’t beat you up. It didn’t require physical violence to keep us compliant; it just required fear.

Bullying was not the sole province of kids. We soon encountered bullies in the workplace and in our social circles, people who worked the system to “win” and to keep others in line. Trump made all that seem like child’s play as he turned the White House into Bullying Central. Seeking “dirt” on Joe and Hunter Biden, he even bullied Ukraine’s president Zelenskyy who was desperately seeking military assistance. “First,” Trump taunted, “you have to do me a favor.”

Under Trump’s reign (even out of office) millions of Americans - women, people of color, LGBTQ folks, immigrants, political enemies, journalists - live in fear of the violence that he’s threatening. We know how this ends, so let’s do America and the world a favor. Put this bully out to pasture in November.

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