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Donald Trump Is Forging an America as Greedy, Deceitful and Cruel as Its President

With the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, he has remade the country in his own repugnant image.

By [Jacob Sugarman](#) / [AlterNet](#)

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Eleven months into his presidency, Donald Trump remains something of an enigma for a large subsection of the political press. Is he a white nationalist, as his affiliation with Breitbart CEO Steve Bannon and his refusal to condemn the marchers in Charlottesville might suggest? Could he be a [Western chauvinist](#), who believes Islam poses an existential threat to America's survival? Or is he just a plutocrat with a potty mouth and a golden toilet, a nominally more vulgar version of Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ)? What if he's all three at once?



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The recent passage of so-called tax reform, which could kick as many as [13 million people](#) off their health insurance and extinguish the last embers of America's middle class, raises yet another possibility: he's none of these things. While the president is indisputably a bigot, a misogynist and a predatory capitalist, one component of the GOP tax bill offers compelling evidence that his sole ideology is his own malignant narcissism, what David Roth at the Baffler calls the ["blank](#)

[sucking nullity of vanity and appetite."](#)

Trump has made no secret of his contempt for America's first black president, but the legacy he has worked hardest to dismantle might not be Barack Obama's but that of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As Heather Cox Richardson [argues in the Guardian](#), the Trump administration has launched an all-out assault on the New Deal, not just the welfare state it helped establish but the very idea that government can be used as a mechanism to improve people's material conditions. Ultimately, Trump's presidency represents the culmination of a right-wing movement that has been underway for nearly half a century.

"[Ronald Reagan, with his derision of the welfare queen](#) and his mantra that 'government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem', rode that racist anti-government cowboy image into the White House," Cox writes. "Trump is this conservative macho individualist exaggerated to caricature. He brags about how he knows better than anyone how to run a successful business, how to fight ISIS, how to find the 'best people' for office."

The Trump administration has rolled back [dozens of protections](#) for American workers (including an Obama-era rule that [entitles servers to their tip money](#)), but its crowning achievement is the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. In addition to repealing the individual mandate of the Affordable Care Act, which helps ensure the ACA remains solvent by requiring healthy Americans to obtain insurance, the GOP bill entrenches income inequality for at least a generation through the repeal of the estate tax. It creates permanent tax cuts for multinational corporations while those for lower-income earners expire after several years, and the nonpartisan [Joint Committee on Taxation](#) predicts it will add \$1 trillion to the national deficit. That might be easy enough to dismiss if the GOP weren't planning on using a manufactured budget crisis as a pretext to slash essential government programs like Medicare and Social Security, which was signed into law in 1965 as part of Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society.

It would be giving Trump more credit than he deserves to suggest the president played an integral part (or any part at all, for that matter) in

drafting the legislation. As the Beltway media reminds us ad nauseam, it has been Paul Ryan's dream to [gut Medicaid](#) since he was throwing keggers in college, an education he was able to pay for in part with the Social Security benefits he received upon the death of his father. [Vanity Fair reports](#) that less than a week removed from the passage of the Republican tax bill, the House Speaker is lustfully eyeing cuts to the social safety net.

But one of the defining features of the Trump administration is that its every act of governance assumes the basic character of the president himself, and the GOP tax bill is no exception. In addition to enriching the top tenth of the one percent at the expense of the middle class, the legislation explicitly rewards taxpayers who file as private entities rather than wage earners. [As Paul Krugman](#) and countless other policy analysts have [observed](#), this invites Americans to game the federal government, but only those who can afford to hire an accountant with the expertise to do so.

Trump [launched his real estate career](#) by extracting exorbitant sums of money from the state; [the New York Times estimates](#) that his deal for the Hyatt Regency alone has cost New York City as much as \$350 million since the mid-'70s. Only the scale of his con has changed over the ensuing decades. He may not have authored the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, just as he had [virtually no part](#) in writing his bestselling business book *The Art of the Deal*, but he has reshaped the country in his own image. Americans are not only encouraged but financially incentivized to be as greedy, deceitful and callous as the president of the United States. Trump's "blank sucking nullity" has swallowed the whole of the country. Welcome to the void.

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