

A Brief Treatise
on the Perspective
and Ministrations of
the Artist and
His Account of the Years
of Discontent Under
the Tyranny of the
Wretched and Most Uncivil
Donald J. Trump

The operating principle that seems to work best is to go to the landscape that frightens you the most and take pictures until you're not scared anymore.

–Robert Adams

*I wanted to say something beautiful
How we turn garbage into gold
How we made a swamp fertile land
How we turned a curse, into a blessing.*

–Abiodun Oyewole

When crimes begin to pile up, they become invisible.

–Bertolt Brecht

I grew up in a soccer-obsessed house in London. Such was my father's love of the game that, during the season, he would take me to matches almost every week. Like my dad, I loved the game, but I was also transfixed by the crowd, by the people (and my father was one of them) who seemed to tap into a vast reservoir of rage in order to hurl abuse at the men on the pitch. There was a special kind of venom for one particular figure – in those days always dressed in black – who was hated by everyone in the stadium. The referee, I quickly learned, was doomed, and I would wait with great anticipation for a decision that would draw cries of outrage and prompt one of my favorite chants: "Who's the wanker in the black?"

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A soccer referee has three primary tools to control the game: a whistle and two colored cards – yellow and red. Showing a player a yellow card (also known as a "caution") is intended as a warning. A second yellow card in the same game draws a red and thus dismissal from the field. Particularly egregious breaches of the rules can draw a "straight red," immediate ejection from the game. Over the course of a season, the cards shown to each player accumulate, and when specific thresholds are reached, a ban of several games is enforced.

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In 2001, I had a run-in with an unscrupulous art dealer that caught me by surprise. Feeling aggrieved with no real means to rectify the wrong, I made a drawing of a yellow card and a red card, mounted together on a gray piece of paper, a humorous talisman through which I sought to exercise a silent – and completely ineffective – retribution. I have moved studios several times since then, and it is always one of the first things I pin up as I organize a new space.

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On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump announced that he would run for the Republican presidential nomination. With music from *The Phantom of the Opera* blaring, he descended an escalator in Trump Tower, surveyed a crowd described in news reports as two dozen, and proclaimed, "Wow. Woah. That is some group of people. Thousands!" He then proceeded to deviate from the statement his staff had distributed earlier to the press, saying instead: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us [sic]. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they're rapists. And some, I assume are good people."

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Ubu Roi by Alfred Jarry was first performed in Paris at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre on December 10, 1896. The antihero Père Ubu leads a revolution against the King of Poland, and takes the throne. Père Ubu is obese, dishonest, ignorant, bombastic, rapacious, sadistic, vindictive, cowardly, and vain. His speech is contemptuous, vulgar, and repetitive. Such is his greed and stupidity, that immediately after taking power, he ignores the pleas of his advisors and plunders the nation; executes the nobles and steals their property; decrees that the judiciary shall subsist on the fines they levy and the lands of those they put to death; does away with the bankers and heavily taxes the peasants. His dishonesty is so great that he is abandoned by his followers, defeated by the Russians, and forced to flee to France. The first performance ended in a riot, and the play was subsequently banned from the stage. Jarry then reconceived it as a puppet show.

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One of the wonderful idiosyncrasies of the British electoral system is that anyone who can muster a quite small financial deposit can run in a general election. One of my favorite stories is of the man who legally changed his name to Margaret Thatcher and ran against the then prime minister in the same constituency. I'm not sure if this really happened, or if I've imagined it, but I believe that standing up to, questioning, and subverting the authority of those in power is a civic duty. At the age of eighteen, I walked to my local polling place in London and voted for a person whose name I don't remember, but who listed himself simply as "Poet." Sadly, his vote tally didn't trouble the party candidates (I don't think he reached double figures), but, in retrospect, my nascent, intuitive sense that the vast majority of politicians – their words, actions, and agendas – require close scrutiny, has been borne out by countless scandals, acts of corruption, and abuses of power.

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On the morning of September 20, 2016, 57th Street in Manhattan was empty of both traffic and pedestrians. When I asked why, a policeman told me, "The president is coming." Minutes later the roar of motorcycles preceded the arrival of the presidential limousine and there, just a few feet away from me, behind a tinted window, was President Obama. He looked smaller in real life than he had on television. I thought I could see the loneliness, the weight of his office on his face. I wondered if he had entertained the notion that his legacy might be undone by a man with a pathological hatred for him. I have rarely had a good reason to respect anyone in a position of authority, much less to have any affection for them; but at that moment, I was startled to find myself deeply moved.

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By the late summer of 2016, I had a feeling that Trump would beat Hillary Clinton. (I had closely followed the Brexit vote which rewarded xenophobia and mendacity, so it seemed quite possible – even if many thought it unlikely – that he could win.) I obsessively checked the polling aggregates on Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight website, and while the numbers favored Hillary, Silver was far from confident. If I remember correctly, he was criticized for suggesting that Trump had even a small chance of victory. In October, the Chicago Cubs overcame a three-games-to-one deficit to snap a 108-year drought and

win the World Series. This was, it seemed, a portent of a Trump victory, one that Nate Silver also sensed. He tweeted, "Reminder: Cubs will win the World Series and, in exchange, President Trump will be elected 8 days later."

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My wife Lisa and I were in London on November 8, 2016. My father (a lifelong Tory who was incredulous that a man such as Trump could get anywhere near a presidential election) was convinced Hillary would win in a landslide. My gut said otherwise. Around 4:00 a.m., sleeping poorly, I awoke when my phone buzzed with a text from my daughter Mira, who was watching the returns in Seattle: "This is getting scary!" Shortly after that, I heard my father walk down the hall. He confirmed, to his utter amazement, what we'd already seen glowing in the dark on our phones. One of the English tabloid newspapers summed it up with its Cockney-rhyming slang headline: "No, it wasn't a dream folks . . . THE WORLD REALLY IS DONALD-DUCKED."

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John Cage's *Lecture on the Weather* was installed at London's Frith Street Gallery from September to December 2016. The piece was commissioned in 1975 by the Canadian Broadcasting Company for the bicentennial of the United States. In his preface, Cage describes his ultimately futile search for an anthology of American aspirational thought which he could subject to chance operations. Instead, he turned to Thoreau, whose chance-selected words from *Walden*, the *Journal*, and *Civil Disobedience* make up the text of the piece. On the morning of November 9, the preface, indeed the whole work, felt as if it was written for us on this very day (as is often the case with Cage). It drove home the fact that, aside from the obvious dangers, Trump's election represented a huge step backward. The radical thinking of Thoreau (and Cage himself) only made Trump's inadequacies – particularly, his lack of imagination – more apparent. If Americans wanted a leader who would shake things up, break through the Washington gridlock, and open doors to new, exciting, previously unimagined or unachievable possibilities, Trump was not that person. Of such deficiencies, Cage writes:

Our leaders are concerned with the energy crisis. They assure us they will find new sources of oil. Not only will earth's

reservoir of fossil fuels soon be exhausted: their continued use continues the ruin of the environment. Our leaders promise they will solve the unemployment problem: they will give everyone a job. It would be more in the spirit of Yankee ingenuity, more American, to find a way to get all the work done that needs to be done without anyone's lifting a finger. Our leaders are concerned with inflation and insufficient cash. Money, however, is credit, and credit is confidence. We have lost confidence in one another. We could regain it tomorrow by simply changing our minds.

Later in the preface, Cage, quoting Martin Luther King Jr., reminds us of the obligation to resist:

As I thought further, I came to see that what we were really doing was withdrawing our cooperation from an evil system, rather than merely withdrawing our economic support from the bus company. The bus company being an external expression of the system, would naturally suffer, but the basic aim was to refuse to cooperate with evil.

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There were pundits who predicted that Trump would adjust to the presidency, who believed that the rhetoric of the campaign would dissolve as the solemnity of the office became a reality. It was obvious to many of us, however, that Trump would make the presidency adjust to him. This was a man who launched his political career by falsely claiming (and relentlessly reiterating) that Barack Obama was not born in the U.S. and thus was ineligible to serve as president. This was a man who had taken out several full-page newspaper adverts calling for the execution of five young Black and Latino boys who had been falsely accused of a brutal rape in Central Park. (Despite the ultimate exoneration of these men, all of whom served long prison sentences, Trump has never apologized for his actions and to this day refuses to say the five were wrongly charged and convicted.) This was a man who boasted about assaulting women, who spoke in openly racist terms about immigrants and Muslims, who mocked a disabled reporter, who claimed he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue and not lose a single vote. This was a man who lied unashamedly and, when caught in a lie, indignantly repeated it over and over again. To the horror, disbelief, and embarrassment of

millions of Americans and people around the world, this was the man who, despite receiving three million votes less than his opponent, was elected the 45th president of the United States.

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Perhaps the most enduring of Jewish legends is that of the golem, an artificial man fashioned out of clay by mystics possessing great magical power. There are many different versions of the story but the pertinent one is that the golem eventually turns on his maker, wreaking havoc, terrifying the people, and attacking the synagogue he was created to defend. Benjamin Kerstein writes, "In a culture that revered learning and wisdom, the golem is stupid and incapable of reason. In a culture defined by the rigorous discipline of religious law, the golem is unruly, savage, and incapable of self-control. . . . So contrary is the golem to the ideals of Jewish tradition that in Jewish circles his name eventually became an insult. To refer to someone as a 'golem' is, essentially, to call him an idiot and a fool."

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The Resistance took shape on January 19, 2017, the day before Trump was inaugurated. It was and has remained a grassroots movement – with no central command – that has taken numerous forms. On January 21, the first full day of Trump's presidency, millions of people gathered in Washington, DC and other cities all over the world for the Women's March to register their dismay and convey their concerns about the threat that Trump represented to human, civil, and reproductive rights. Republicans have speciously claimed that their refusal to accept the result of the 2020 election is a mirror to the Resistance. In fact, there is no comparison. The Resistance did not dispute Trump's electoral victory; rather, it was established in opposition to his ideas, his policies, his toxic rhetoric. The Resistance was rooted in the belief that Trump posed an existential threat to both the United States and the planet, that he would stymie progress on innumerable issues, and relinquish the position of the United States (whatever its shortcomings) as a counterbalance to totalitarian regimes in Russia, China, and other countries.

Time has proven this to be correct. In ways both predicted and unexpected, Donald Trump has left the country (and the world) weaker, more divided, and broken. On January 6, 2020, thousands of Trump's supporters, some of them armed and encouraged by the

president, stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to prevent congressional certification of Joe Biden's election victory. As a result, five people died, and more than 140 were injured. In February 2021, Trump continued to insist that his supporters posed "zero threat" to lawmakers, and that law enforcement was "persecuting" the rioters, while "nothing happens" to those who protested against systemic racism and police violence.

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I like to think of myself as a reasonable, generous person, one who has compassion, empathy, and respect for others, but Donald Trump is a person I disdain. I find his attack on the Exonerated Five (previously known as the Central Park Five), his cowardice, his lies, his narcissism, his demeaning treatment of women, his deep hatred of the other, unforgivable. Walking the streets of London on November 9, 2016, in the afterglow of Cage's *Lecture on the Weather*, I resolved I would not allow his racism, his misogyny, his dishonesty, his assault on common decency, to be normalized or go unrecorded. This project, assigning Trump's words and actions colored cards in the fashion of a soccer referee, was conceived on that gray London afternoon.

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These books intend to provide a catalog (as comprehensive as possible) of Trump's aberrant, reprehensible presidency. I have awarded cards for numerous types of transgressions. A partial list includes lies; personal attacks; vilifying immigrants, women, and opponents; destruction of governmental structures and processes; sabotaging the electoral process; undermining the justice system; reversing LGBTQ rights; threatening longstanding alliances and breaking treaties; coddling dictators; giving credibility to extreme right wing, neo-Nazi, and white supremacist groups; elevating conspiracy theories and denigrating facts; weakening the country's healthcare system; refusing to tackle the nation's ongoing epidemic of deadly gun violence; denying the reality of climate change and pursuing policies that have further poisoned the environment; attacking the press; abdicating responsibility for addressing the coronavirus pandemic; and undisguised, unashamed grift.

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I began with the idea of assigning yellow and red cards for each of Trump's transgressions but it quickly became apparent – as he took office – that these would be insufficient, so I added magenta. In spring 2020, as Trump spectacularly botched the nation's response to the coronavirus pandemic, I added purple, and later that year, when he refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power should he be defeated in the election, I introduced a crimson card. In order of seriousness then: yellow, red, magenta, purple, crimson. Additional categories include orange cards for each time Trump visited a golf club, pink for those who played with him (sycophants), dark blue for those who left the administration (whether they resigned or were fired), lime green for each instance of a person within Trump's inner circle who contracted the coronavirus, and teal to honor acts of resistance against Trump and his administration.

Unlike soccer referees who have a clearly delineated, written rule book to guide them (and cards that result in consequences for a player and a team), my refereeing has been largely intuitive and, as I will address later, futile. In general, yellow cards are assigned to words or actions that are blatantly aberrant but not immediately destructive. For example, Trump has falsely claimed (almost three hundred times) that the tax cuts passed in 2017 are the largest in U.S. history. Such distortions are not atypical in American politics, but the frequency with which Trump has repeated the lie (despite countless fact checks) warrants a recurring yellow card. Other examples include personal attacks on opponents, rivals, former government officials and advisors, government agencies, and even, in the latter part of his presidency, Fox News and former Republican enablers, both of whom Trump has derided as insufficiently loyal. The reader will find that as Trump's presidency progresses, there are fewer and fewer yellow cards; as the intensity, frequency, and seriousness of the transgressions increase, a greater number of red, magenta, purple, and crimson cards are issued.

Red cards include decisively more egregious transgressions, such as Trump's downplaying of the brutal assassination of the *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi and his defense of the Saudi regime that perpetrated the murder; the appointment of unqualified people to high-ranking positions (Ben Carson, Housing; Betsy DeVos, Education; and Ivanka Trump, Office of Economic Initiatives, are three notable examples); obvious violations of the foreign emoluments clause; wielding the presidential power of the pardon in self-serving ways; refusing to release his tax returns; and persistent attacks on the press.

It is important to note that in any category there are some inconsistencies based on the specifics of each situation. For example, Trump has relentlessly attacked and undermined the media, frequently referring to both reporters and news organizations as the "Enemy of the People," while constantly corroding the consensus and the very notion of objective facts. The majority of attacks of this nature earn him a red card, but on August 4, 2018, he said, "The Fake News hates me saying that they are the Enemy of the People only because they know it's TRUE. I am providing a great service by explaining this to the American People. They purposely create division and distrust. They can also cause War! They are dangerous and sick!" Because I deemed the escalation of his rhetoric – and his insistence that the media was responsible for the very things he himself is guilty of – a more serious offense than before, I awarded this statement a magenta card.

The presence of magenta cards should not be taken as an indication that a red card is somehow not particularly serious. All of the cards, regardless of color, are evidence that Trump's presidency has, in countless ways, brought the office and the nation to previously unimagined lows. Examples of offenses that consistently earn magenta cards include policies that diminish civil rights; attacks on immigrants to the U.S. and people of color; the separation of migrant children from their parents at the border and subsequent false claims that he inherited this policy from the Obama administration; sympathizing with neo-Nazis and white supremacist groups; rollbacks of environmental regulations and denial of climate change; working to abolish the Affordable Care Act while consistently claiming he would protect people with preexisting conditions; falsely alleging that President Obama spied on his campaign; cozying up to dictators; and refusing to take any steps to lower the number of mass shootings in the U.S. Many of the magenta cards are wielded when it is clear his words and/or actions will have a direct and detrimental effect on someone's life.

The beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 highlighted Trump's failings as both a human being and a leader. On January 22, he said he was not worried about a pandemic and that "we have it totally under control. It's one person coming in from China and we have it under control." Two months later, on March 17, with the virus rampant in the U.S. and around the world, he claimed, "I've always known this is a real ... pandemic. I felt it was a pandemic long before it was called a pandemic."

Trump has consistently bragged that he and his administration have done "one of the great jobs" in dealing with the pandemic, yet the facts say otherwise. Despite his repeated claims to the

contrary, the number of cases and deaths quickly increased, and the U.S. became the world's epicenter for the virus, registering by far the highest number of both cases and deaths of any country by most measurements. That Trump privately confided, in February 2020, to the journalist, Bob Woodward, that he knew the disease was more deadly than people thought, makes his failure all the more unpardonable. His utter lack of empathy, his refusal to listen to his medical advisers, his insistence that he knew better than anyone how to deal with the situation, his habitual lie that increased testing was responsible for the rise in cases, and his persistent false claim that the nation was "rounding the corner" warranted the addition of a new level of card: purple. In September, Trump was asked about the staggering death toll associated with the virus. He replied, "It is what it is." These books take their title from that callous dismissal.

The reader will find that, once introduced, purple cards are awarded for transgressions beyond those related to the pandemic. These include unashamed racist attacks on perceived opponents; falsely characterizing people peacefully protesting the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis policeman as violent; using tear gas to disperse protesters from Lafayette Square in Washington, DC so that he (accompanied by the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, and others) could pose for a photograph outside St. Johns Church holding a Bible; and paving the way to challenge an electoral defeat by undermining public confidence in the general election. In short, these offenses are such that any single one of them might, in another time, have destroyed a person's presidency.

On September 23, 2020, Trump was asked if he would commit to a peaceful transfer of power. He responded, "Well, we're gonna have to see what happens. You know that. I've been complaining very strongly about the ballots. And the ballots are a disaster." While Trump had hinted in 2016 that, should he lose, he might not accept the results of the election, he was now a sitting president, and his obvious willingness to so flagrantly attack the democratic process represented a new order of magnitude, one that required an additional level of card: crimson. Crimson cards have been awarded for the most extreme offenses, among them, an escalation of xenophobic and racist rhetoric (during a presidential debate, when asked to condemn white supremacy, Trump said, infamously, "Proud Boys, stand back and stand by"); persistent attempts to undermine confidence in the election; and, after the election, Trump's relentless claims – despite not having any evidence and losing almost ninety court cases – that the election was a "fraud" and "rigged" against him.

There were times, however, when even crimson has felt insufficient. What color card does one give a president who sets out to destroy the very foundation of American democracy, in order to avoid what he considers a personal humiliation?

While Barack Obama was president, Trump mercilessly attacked him for playing golf, frequently lying that Obama played more often than PGA tour professionals. During the 2016 campaign, he said that were he to become president, he may never get to see his properties again because "I'm going to be working for you. I'm not going to have time to go play golf." Unsurprisingly, fifteen days after taking office, Trump made his first visit to one of his golf clubs. He visited one of his golf clubs almost as many times in four years (319) as President Obama played golf in eight years (333 times). The White House never officially confirmed that Trump played golf on a given day, or who his partners were, but according to the website trumpgolfgolfcount.com, the estimated taxpayer cost of Trump's golf outings was \$144,000,000. Orange cards are awarded for every visit to a golf club; these are almost exclusively properties he owns and are often combined with stays at his other resorts, thus some portion of this taxpayer-funded expense goes directly into his coffers. As noted above, pink cards are given to anyone who is confirmed to have played golf with him.

I believe that Trump should never have been able to form an administration. To be perfectly clear: I mean that not a single person should have agreed to work for or with him. I understand that many will view this as both unreasonable and unrealistic, but it is the prerogative of the artist, his job even, to entertain the unimaginable. Others have defended Trump appointees on the grounds that they may have accepted their positions with the belief that they could prevent Trump's worst instincts from causing a catastrophe, but I find such excuses unacceptable. This was a man who had displayed that he was unfit for the presidency in every way. Anybody who agreed to work in his administration is, in my view, culpable, even if that person later stood up to Trump (Fiona Hill, former senior director for European and Russian affairs on the National Security Council, is an example). Dark blue cards, also known as "fuck you as you go," are awarded to those who resign or are fired from the administration, or, in some cases, the national Republican apparatus.

It never occurred to me that that I would have to devise a card to mark instances where White House employees, members of the administration, as well as Trump's family and friends, tested positive for the coronavirus. But as I have described above, Trump's abdication of leadership and open hostility to science led to numerous people in

his orbit being infected, and at least one dying (Herman Cain who attended a rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma in June 2020). A lime green card is awarded to each such reported occurrence.

Just as I was, and remain, dismayed by Trump's enablers, I have also been heartened and moved by the number of people who have spoken out, protested, and refused to accept the deviant nature of Trump's presidency. Teal cards are awarded, to cite just a few examples, for acts of resistance such as large protests against Trump and his policies; career officials (such as Gregory Starr and Lydia Muniz) who resigned from their posts rather than work for Trump; journalists who have sustained unprecedented attacks while simply doing their job; judges who have ruled against Trump's malignant policies and specious claims, such as his attempts to overturn the 2020 election; bodega owners in New York City who briefly closed their stores to protest Trump's Muslim ban; athletes from championship-winning teams who refused to visit the White House; and the few Republican politicians, such as Mitt Romney and the Georgia secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, who have taken public stands against Trump. There were, I am sure, countless additional examples of such acts of resistance that didn't make the news or of which I was unaware, and, therefore, are not included here.

While I have endeavored to accurately and precisely record the vast swath and range of Trump's transgressions since he became president, there have simply been too many for me to be able to register them all. There are, inevitably, things I have missed. There are also cards for things that would be anodyne for any other president, but which, coming from Trump, are so hypocritical or self-serving that they warrant a card. Examples of these include insincere, formulaic pronouncements (which often sound as if another person has composed them) for occasions such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day; taking credit for a rising stock market while refusing any responsibility for downturns; boasting about his understanding of intelligence briefings (which, by many accounts, he didn't read); and claiming to have received awards (for instance, Man of the Year in Michigan) that don't exist.

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As in a soccer game, there will inevitably be disagreements about decisions I have made. In certain cases, some may think I have been too lenient; in others, too harsh. For instance, some people, horrified by the nature of Trump's presidency, have remarked that all of Trump's

actions should receive the harshest possible sanction. On the other side (and admittedly, I have had far fewer in-depth conversations with people who support Trump), the entire project has been seen as little more than a misguided vendetta. One Trump supporter – with whom I corresponded in order to solicit his assessment of my refereeing – responded to my caveat, "I imagine you will disagree with many, perhaps all, of the cards I've given," by saying that my sentence "reeks of smug. If the project turns out to be as patronizing as that sentence, I'll throw it in the trash."

There will also be cards that, I am sure, people will argue shouldn't have been given at all. As an example, friends have questioned my assessment that Trump's demands for Senate Republicans to do away with the filibuster was worthy of a number of red cards because they agree that the filibuster should be abolished. Whatever one's beliefs about the filibuster, I awarded the cards because Trump wanted to change the system simply to satisfy his own short-term goals, with no respect for the institution or the long-term consequences such a rule change would have. Perhaps I am wrong about this, but all of the cards in this project were given in the heat of the moment; I worked on the premise that I would make decisions and then live with them.

Over the course of four years, I have sometimes chosen to award a card for each iteration of a repeated offense. Trump's recurrent lie (mentioned above) that the 2017 tax cuts were the largest in U.S. history has triggered a yellow card each time he reprises it. Other of his frequently repeated lies – for example, that he inherited a thoroughly depleted military, and numerous similar examples, do not draw a card for each utterance because I felt that one example, carried all the way through, was sufficient to convey both his pathology and his method. More serious offenses, however, such as his onslaught of false claims about the 2020 election, repeated over and over again, sometimes in the same day, have resulted in a crimson card for each instance. Some will disagree, and say that each instance of every lie should be counted (as has been the strategy for the *Washington Post* Fact Checker) while others will argue that lies of this nature are common to most politicians and therefore shouldn't be included at all. While I have certainly weighed factors such as these, I have, in the end, trusted my instinct.

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I am an artist, not a journalist, and I do not have delusions about the impact of a piece such as this. I began this work entirely for myself, as I did not want to normalize Trump's behavior by accepting it or forgetting any of it. Trump relies on the assumption that either we will be so turned off by his actions that we will look away, or that the rapid accumulation of his offenses will have a blurring effect: one thing bleeds into another to an extent that it is almost impossible to keep track, to remember, to sustain our outrage. At the outset, I felt determined that whatever the nature of the provocations, whatever their frequency or degree, I would be watching, paying attention, writing things down, assigning cards. I approached this as a test of my stamina. Quitting, or even taking a day off, averting my gaze at all, would have represented surrender and defeat.

I was also attracted to the absurdity of dispensing colored cards in the fashion of a referee when, no matter how many I awarded, they would have absolutely no effect; indeed, the recipient would likely never know, nor care about their existence. I signed up to be a referee – as did many others – for a game that everyone is watching, but for which the rules, when applied, seem to have no effect. From just about any vantage point, this piece is an exercise in futility, and the futility made the effort all the more worthwhile. After all, what better way to counter a man for whom money is the only measure of worth than to make a durational artwork that is broad in its reach, large in scale, and, crucially, utterly useless. Were Trump's presidency actually a soccer game, the 9928 cards he has received would certainly earn a lifetime ban (or longer). Instead, he received over seventy-four million votes in the 2020 election. Nevertheless, I feel exactly the same now as I did when I began: the gravest danger with autocrats is to allow their crimes to disappear. This is a record, one among many, all of them essential as a bulwark against forgetting.

But differently from many of those other records, this is also a work of art. The primary factor in my decision to assign colored cards (as opposed to just writing things down) was the hope that in addition to creating a comprehensive catalog of Trump's transgressions, I could transform his malevolence, his toxicity, into something beautiful, a work that, in its formal coherence, would counter the chaos and ugliness of his time in office. I wanted to translate the story of Trump's presidency into a visual text, one that could be read in a different way. The nature of beauty is beyond what I can usefully address here, but it was this goal that enabled me to keep going, to enter, every day, a space that quickly began to feel like a sewer. Whenever I wanted a day of respite, I fortified my resolve not to succumb, not to

allow the unabating pace of Trump's lies, attacks, ineptitudes, errors of judgement, craven self-dealing – in short, the grotesque nature of his presidency – to wear me down. My belief in the transformative, alchemical power of art served as a survival mechanism.

The sequence of the cards and text is entirely set by the order in which things came to my attention (thus, the dates assigned to events in the text may differ slightly from when they actually occurred). I have resisted the urge to compose and trusted instead what I have called (in a variation on a John Cage term), Trump-determined operations. I took delight in, was even fueled by, what I see as a wonderful irony: the composition of this work (the way it both looks and reads) has been created, unbeknownst to Donald Trump, by his words and actions.

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While my process evolved over the four years Trump was in office, in many ways, it remained the same. Several times throughout the course of the day I checked in with a variety of media: the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, Politifact, Govtrack, Politico, the *Washington Post* (whose primary fact checker, Glenn Kessler, has created an extraordinary and invaluable catalog of all of Trump's false statements since taking office). Daniel Dale at CNN has also been an indefatigable check on Trump's lies as has Linda Qiu of the *New York Times*. I also cross-referenced with multiple other sources including conservative bastions such as the *Daily Mail Online*, Breitbart, and the websites of television networks, including Fox, One America News Network, and Newsmax. I have relied on Susan Glasser's writings in the *New Yorker* and those of her colleagues, Masha Gessen, Jelani Cobb, and Amy Davidson Sorkin. Aaron Rugar at Vox (particularly his Twitter feed) has also been invaluable, as has, in other ways, Donald Trump's logorrhea: whether on his Twitter feed (which I checked daily), giving speeches, or speaking to the press, Trump's own utterances have been the ultimate incriminatory evidence on which this work is based.

In addition to making the cards, I have kept textual notations of the transgressions for which each card is assigned. This makes up the second half of each volume (and its own separate volume for 2020). I have endeavored to keep the language as neutral as possible, allowing Trump's words and deeds to accumulate and speak for themselves, while providing some context if necessary.

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Trump's middle name is John, and it occurred to me that England has only once had a king by that name. He ruled from 1199 until his death in 1216. In the story of Robin Hood, John is the archetypal villain: greedy, dishonest, self-dealing, indifferent to the suffering of the people. He is widely seen as a terrible king, both by historians of his own era and those considering his reign from afar. In addition to maneuvering to take the throne while his brother King Richard I was engaged in the Third Crusade, he displayed what the historian Ralph Turner has called "distasteful, even dangerous personality traits," which included spite, pettiness, and cruelty. Another historian, John Gillingham, has characterized John as "one of the worst kings ever to rule England." The end of John's reign brought an uprising of barons who opposed his fiscal policies. The rebellion resulted in the creation and signing of the Magna Carta, which was followed by a civil war.

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Donald Trump likes to talk about patriotism but really he conflates this with fealty to him. People who support him are patriots while those who oppose him "hate America." He attacks athletes who choose to protest against systemic racism by kneeling during the playing of the national anthem. Similarly, he rages against, and has demanded a one-year prison sentence, for anyone who burns the American flag as an act of dissent. The American writer and farmer Wendell Berry has pointed to the hypocrisy and illogic of this stance: "There is no sense and no sanity in objecting to the desecration of the American flag when we tolerate, encourage, and as daily business promote the desecration of the country for which it stands." (I imagine that Berry would be equally unimpressed by Trump's ostentatious, but meaningless, capitalization of words such as "Country.")

Trump's presidency, as reflected in these volumes, is a case study in the desecration of the things the American flag is intended to symbolize. This is ultimately the subject of these books: a president who stood before the nation claiming he would put an end to "American carnage" while, in fact, creating it. America is, by any marker, less well off in 2020 than in 2016. It is poorer, sicker, more divided. The journalist Carl Bernstein has described the U.S. in the Trump era as being embroiled in a "cold civil war." In the wake of Trump's electoral defeat, there are those who are advocating and, in some cases – such as the foiled 2020 plot to kidnap the governor of Michigan, the 2021 siege of the U.S. Capitol building – taking active steps to elevate the philosophical and political conflict into something much more dangerous.

On November 7, 2020, the U.S. presidential election was called for Joe Biden. Despite the pandemic, in an echo of the first Women's March, people surged onto the streets across the nation and the world, and danced with joy. This was not, it must be pointed out, because they deeply loved Joe Biden, but because Biden was not Trump, and the aspiring dictator had been given his marching orders. It is appropriate, I think, to close this introduction with the words of Raymond Santana, one of the Exonerated Five, who spoke for millions of people. Writing on Instagram that day, accompanied by an iconic photograph of Muhammad Ali taunting the fallen Sonny Liston, Santana said:

You held the highest position in the land for 4 years and you did nothing but divide the country. You let racism surface and many lives were lost because you never stood on the side of justice. You spread lies and supported white supremacy. You mocked and made fun of the innocent. And because of your selfishness over 240,000 Americans lost their lives to a virus that could have been prevented. You could have saved them, but you didn't. You will go down as the worst president in history. We will never forget how you almost destroyed our country. How you disrespected our people and almost started a civil war. Well, now it's time. Your reign of terror is over. No more lies, no more bullshit. Now it's time for you to leave that office and disappear. It's time to let real people who care about this country now work on repairing and healing this country. You have set us back but through the strength and love of our people we will heal and we will come back better than ever. P.S. You thought that when you put out that \$85,000 page ad in the newspaper that we wouldn't survive. That we would be served with some kind of street justice, but guess what? We are still here. And we get to watch as you make your exit out of the White House. Sitting in the front row (getting my popcorn ready!).