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*TRUMP: BREVE HISTORIA DE UNA
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In 1987, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*—a volume attributed to both Donald J. Trump and Tony Schwartz—was published. At the rare crossroads between financial self-help, autobiography, and bombastic self-propaganda, the book promised to offer readers the keys towards professional success in business. Though several disputes concerning authorship clouded its later reception, the volume should be credited for its accuracy in recording what would prove to stand as one of the defining traits of the future fifty-fifth president of the U.S., namely, his relentless and, at times, predatory ambition. In the book, Trump (allegedly?) claimed as follows: “I like thinking big. I always have. To me it’s very simple: if you’re going to be thinking anyway, you might as well think big. Most people think small, because most people are afraid of success, afraid of making decisions, afraid of winning. And that gives people like me great advantage” (33). Regardless of the sympathy one may nourish for the former president, it is hard to deny that “thinking big” has been a staple of his life and career. Admittedly, it is an entirely different matter to assess whether such thinking has involved a sensible concern with the welfare of people other than himself or whether it has led him to succeed in his efforts to make America great “again” (whatever this slogan is supposed to mean). *Trump: Breve historia de una presidencia singular*, a volume published in Editorial Comares as part of its “Comares Historia” series, provides such an assessment with a well-written, thoroughly documented, and comprehensive grasp of the legacy of the late president of the U.S.

The book displays the results of an extensive collation work, complemented with interviews conducted with figures of the stature of President Obama, nine Nobel prizes in Economics, and several prominent names from the world of American journalism and politics. This material is used as the foundation for a volume nurtured on the extensive experience and knowledge of Francisco Rodríguez Jiménez (Full Professor, Universidad de Extremadura), Carmelo Mesa Lago (Distinguished Professor, Pittsburg University), and Pablo Pardo (Correspondent in the U.S., *El Mundo*). This collaboration is fitting, considering the terms in which each of them has engaged American politics, economics, diplomacy, and culture in their careers. With a series of highly influential publications on the relationship between Spain, Latin America, and the U.S., Rodríguez Jiménez has long been a staple in the field of American Studies in Spain. Likewise, Mesa Lago, the reputed economist and political analyst, remains a key figure on both sides of the Atlantic for his comparative studies on Latin and Anglo-American economies and his lucid (and vehement) contributions to ward off the threats posed by totalitarianism to individual and collective welfare. Lastly, Pardo has been involved in the coverage of Trump's presidency since its inception back in 2015 and has served as one of the foremost critics of his administration in the Spanish-speaking press. Through the combination of their respective experiences with and assessments of the president of the U.S., their book analyzes the nature and effects of Donald J. Trump's administration on both domestic and international grounds, while also unravelling the ways in which his particular persona determined his rise to power and, by extension, his "singular" presidency.

This analysis carefully unfolds in the course of six chapters. The volume begins with an introductory reflection of the terms framing Trump's arrival in office—a feat which, in context, seemed hard to explain to most political analysts, commentators, and polls. Through a detailed sketch of his complex public persona, the authors insist on the multicausal rationale leading to the rise of Trumpism, a phenomenon based on the president's propagandistic articulation of a public image that asserted his role as a "redeemer" and "defender" of an allegedly disenfranchised rural, uneducated, and white America, whom he appealed through the use of new social media, and whom he activated against a political elite from which he claimed to be removed. In a climate of economic instability and increasing racial tensions, according to the authors, Trump managed to wield a powerful populist

rhetoric that enticed many yet only brought the U.S. closer to what, quoting Fareed Zakaria, they refer to as an “illiberal democracy” (12).¹²

Chapters 2 and 3 take on the discussion by providing a panoramic view of Donald J. Trump’s life prior to his presidency. Perhaps the most biographical section in the book, these chapters trace the story of the president and his family back to the arrival in America of his paternal grandparents—ironically, two immigrants (from Scotland and Germany). Though verging on gossip at times, the chapters brim over with major pieces of information, ranging from Trump’s constant pursuit of fame and validation, which led him to feature on *Playboy* (1990) and build a full TV show around his persona, *The Apprentice* (2004), to his complex relationship with his father, presented as a neglectful, competitive, and power-hungry figure with (alleged) ties to the KKK. The picture the text outlines, if one may indulge in a literary reference, is that of a figure very much à la Gatsby (though with fewer redeeming qualities), namely, a New-York social upstart turned socialite, endowed with a narcissistic urge nourished by context and nurture.³ In general terms, the strengths of this section lie in the subtlety framing the authors’ implicit argument that there is much in Trump’s upbringing and early career that would seem to explain his peculiar take on governance in later years. Prior to the presidency, the volume expounds, Trump endeavored to elaborate a very particular self-image founded on well-trodden clichés of masculinity, sexual potency, and financial gain, which aimed to equate the Trump brand to success, in business, in life, and in bed—incidentally, an image that is not too far removed from the one President Theodore Roosevelt liked to cultivate as well. It is this image that, well before 2015, and thanks to his connections with the world of wrestling, the entertainment industry, American tabloids, and reality TV, managed to “enter millions of American homes” (58).

¹ The original volume is written in Spanish. All references to the book included in this review have been translated into English by the author.

² This populist rhetoric and its contribution to the triumph of Trumpism in the U.S. was also analyzed by Michael Kazin (2016), who, like the authors of the volume, called out the president’s self-serving appeal to the distress and concerns of working-class Americans despite being personally as well as politically an “unlikely populist” (17).

³ It goes without saying that such a distinctive personality has invited a plethora of psychoanalytic studies. Though the volume this review addresses does not go as far as to provide such an analysis, for illustration, see Douglas Kellner (2018), who elaborates on Erich Fromm’s ideas in a thought-provoking paper that sheds light on “why Donald Trump is so chaotic, dangerous, and destructive, and how risky it was to even contemplate Trump being President of the United States in these dangerous times” (79).

Rather than limiting themselves to a mere description, however, these sections provide enough evidence to problematize this image, elaborating on the president's professional malpractice and casting doubt on the reality behind his purported financial success. This effort to separate the wheat from the chaff is carried on to the final three chapters, which center more thoroughly on Trump the president as they examine his administration in closer detail. Each chapter is devoted to a largely contentious area of the forty-fifth president's time at the White House: international relations and diplomacy (Chapter 4), U.S. economy (Chapter 5), and social policies (Chapter 6). The note struck in these chapters is that, notwithstanding Trump's self-serving assessments, his administration only served to weaken the U.S., inside and out. Though claiming to stand as the patron of rural, working-class Americans, the economic and fiscal policies Trump introduced are claimed to have failed to address the needs of his electorate, benefitting large companies and the wealthy instead. "Trump's rhetoric," as the authors contend, "was explosive; however, his political economics were continuist" (127). An area where Trump presumably did break with tradition, in contrast, was his handling of international affairs. Here, in addition to assuming an isolationist, if not hostile, approach with his allies, the president is claimed to have contributed to escalate tensions between the U.S. and its enemies, all the while introducing a series of antimigratory policies that were deeply detrimental to thousands of families. These policies, besides besmearing the U.S.' international image, are said to have been made worse by his mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis, which led to the unnecessary loss of countless lives—a situation only mirrored in President Reagan's earlier failure to address the AIDS pandemic, and intimately bound to a rise in the rates of inequality separating American citizens on grounds of race and class. In sum, hence, despite his purported goal to make America great "again," for the authors, the legacy of Trump's presidency is ultimately one of division and confrontation, as was made evident in the (now) infamous assault on the U.S. Capitol that closed this "singular" administration.⁴

As of the time of writing, the forty-fifth president of the U.S. is running a campaign for re-election, which seems to be going smoothly, while, at the same time, facing the impending possibility of conviction.

⁴ Julian Zelizer (2022) reaches a similar conclusion as he writes that, "[b]y the time his four years were over, an ending that Trump never accepted and insisted to his supporters was a fraudulent outcome, the United States was torn apart" (26).

A man of contradictions and scandal if ever there was one, Trump remains still one of the most influential figures to assess in order to understand contemporary America and our current global context. *Trump: Breve historia de una presidencia singular* serves as a good introduction to tackle this task. Even though the volume includes multiple spelling mistakes throughout its pages, overall, the reading is smooth and engaging, and its central arguments are presented in well-documented, persuasive, and unbiased terms. Arguably, the authors' antipathy not so much for the president but for the consequences of his policies and the hardship of his words shines all through the volume. This is still balanced with a deliberate, and successful effort to avoid articulating a monolithic portrayal of the president that blames him alone for all the various problems the U.S. is currently facing. The central thesis of the book is that Trump is not the origin but, rather, the embodiment of a *zeitgeist*—an idea that connects with Chris Hedges' claim that "Trump is the symptom. He is not the disease" (qtd. in Orán Llarena 2018, 248). Loaded with textual evidence from a wide variety of sources, including periodicals, Twitter (now "X") posts, and academic books, alongside an extensive collection of photographic material, the volume will be of interest for both specialized and popular Spanish-speaking readers concerned with the course to which U.S. and international politics have been drifting of late. It just remains to be seen whether the book will continue to serve as a standalone volume or whether, in light of recent events, it will stand as the first of a two-part story. Only time will tell.

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