

## A Treatise on the Trump Presidency Presidential Rhetoric—Words Matter

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### Abstract

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The Donald Trump presidency was an anomaly; fundamentally an experiment to see if leadership resembling a corporate model would be more effective and productive than a model based on statesmanship, political experience, diplomacy, and democracy. The model failed, showing that the authoritarian and autocratic practices of private corporations do not work in a democracy where leaders are elected by citizens.

This paper examines Trump's communication style; written and speech, lack of critical thinking skills, response to COVID-19, ego and value issues, other shortcomings, and what is needed to be an effective President of the United States.

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This paper is for the American people—Democrats, Republicans, Independents, President Joe Biden's base, Vice President Kamala Harris's base, Former President Donald Trump's base, and for the base of anyone who ran for Congress in 2020. I've also written this paper with the hope that it would be of interest to the media, and to help American citizens better understand what has occurred in the 2020 presidential election, and why Joe Biden won.

Some of what I've written has not been previously talked about and not reported.

### The Upsides Of The Trump Presidency

#### Anyone Can Become President in America

I'll begin by noting that there are a couple of things very positive about Trump having being elected president in 2016. The first is that many of us have heard as children that in America, anyone can become president. And, indeed we learned with the Trump presidency, that it is true. That's one upside.

#### An Experiment

The second upside is that the American people are typically entrepreneurial. They like to experiment, take chances, and try new things. They were brave and creative enough to perform an experiment in electing Trump president in 2016. He was definitely an anomaly as a candidate; inexperienced in public service and diplomacy. However, experiments do not always work out. Some fail, but when we fail we go back to something different or what previously succeeded. We move on.

### The Downsides of the Trump Presidency

#### Sound Bite Thinking

While there were a couple of upsides, the downsides of Trump's presidency were many. More specifically, let's start out with what I call *sound bite thinking*. This is what Twitter is with its character-count limitation, and the media bought into or was lured into *Twitter communication*, Trump's preferred medium for his rhetoric. Prior to Trump, we never heard of politicians using social media nearly exclusively, and particularly Twitter with its limited character-count, to convey messages on topics of extreme importance.

In my opinion, the biggest mistake the media made in dealing with Trump was communicating with him on his *playing field*, Twitter. This is the only place where he seems to have gained success with his *base*, other than at his rallies. Now, with COVID-19, rallies were no longer a viable option, though Trump continued to hold them when he could.

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Perhaps Trump's *base* was composed largely of a constituency that responds to *sound bite* communication and identifies with it, though I am sure there are exceptions. The media and Trump's opponents would have done best to stop responding to Trump's *tweets*; to not even acknowledge them but to completely ignore them, because when he *tweets*, he is looking for a response. When he receives one he wins. Congressman Eric Swalwell made this point during an interview on June 28, 2020, when he told MSNBC's Kasie Hunt, *When Trump tweets, he wins!*(1)

Instead, when it comes to important issues, it is more effective to communicate with the public in thoughtful, respectful, and compassionate dialogue, not in sound bites.(I also recommend that during interviews reporters stop asking *why* questions, because responses to *why* questions typically cannot be verified. Responses to *who, what, where, when* questions can be verified, but not *why* questions.)

Consider what Trump's visibility would have been if, from day one, the media did not respond at all to or acknowledge his *tweets*. He'd stop *tweeting* because they'd not be responded to and serve no useful purpose. His visibility would be nearly non-existent. He'd likely not resort to more expansive written communication because he seems to have difficulty writing a coherent paragraph, let alone an essay. He does not appear to be concerned with proper grammar and spelling, and seems to have difficulty putting together a critical thought. It is likely that when Trump reads a statement it is written for him.

My recommendation to President Biden is that he should send one *tweet* to the entire nation. It should be: *This is the last tweet that you will receive from me on important issues! This is because a meaningful, thoughtful, respectful, critical, philosophical, and visionary thought cannot be composed in the sound bite of a tweet.*

### **A Failed Experiment**

Interestingly, Trump probably did not realize that he was an experiment being examined like any other laboratory specimen, sort of a Petri dish experiment, Trump under a microscope or in a test tube. He likely does not have the intellect to have realized this; he is not trained in the social sciences. However, the nation's social scientists, e.g., psychologists, psychiatrists, and communication specialists are. They were likely sitting back, observing and, perhaps, taking notes. Books, articles, and dissertations will likely be written on this in the years to come. Hence, Trump's election to president was a failed experiment. Why was it a failure? Consider the time spent on issues that would not have been of a concern with any of the other candidate hopefuls in 2016, Democrat or Republican: sex scandals, business interests conflicts, nepotism, collusion with Russia, walls, insults of well-meaning people (just because you don't agree with another person, does not warrant insulting them), lack of tax disclosures, indicted and ultimately convicted colleagues (My mother used to say, *you are who you hangout with.*), a government shutdown, impeachment, and much more. Taking these issues *off the table*, consider the amount of time in The White House, before and during the 2020 campaign, that could have been given to more meaningful and productive matters, e.g., containing the coronavirus in an effective way.

On June 4, 2020, Four-Star Retired US Marine Corp. General, John Allen, suggested that the Trump presidency could be the end of the *American experiment*. However, Trump's failure to prevail to winning a second term resulted in the end of the *Trump experiment*.

### **Ineffective Speeches**

Trump seems incapable of making an effective unifying speech, except to his base that is not the majority of voters. Trump resorted to reading scripts likely prepared by others. This was most evident in what previously were his nearly daily coronavirus briefings in the earlier phases of COVID-19, as compared to many other elected officials on all levels of government, as well as medical experts such as Dr. Anthony Fauci, knowledgeable and articulate speakers that did not need notes to read from. Many spoke spontaneously from his heart about the coronavirus in a way that identified with the American people in all walks of life. They did not look down at prepared notes as Trump did. Trump does not have effective spontaneous public speaking abilities, so important in a president.

### **The Need For A Critical Thinker**

#### **What Must a President of the United States Be?**

If my recollection is correct, Trump has never uttered an original intellectual thought, a philosophical statement, or a long-term positive vision based on truth and facts *for all* to enthusiastically support. These are things that presidents and world leaders are supposed to do in motivating, unifying, and informing the populace. *For all* are the operative words here. Yes, a president must have the practical experience to deal with day-to-day issues of employment, the economy, safety and national security. However, these alone are not enough, and not good enough, to be presidential.

A President of the United States must also be a sage, a humanist and humanitarian, an optimistic voice for all—a statesman—and a model of honesty, a critical thinker, and a role model for all citizens, regardless of political party, and particularly for children. And in a world community, a president and her or his nation must be a welcoming and compassionate member of the world community. Trump was none of these.

To be successful, a President must identify with and be identifiable to the populace. However, a President of the United States must also be able to think intellectually. Trump is not intellectual. He'd probably agree. The antithesis of intellectual is non-academic, non-scholarly, lowbrow, uncultured, unpolished, untaught, non-mental, and more. These are the polite antonyms for intellectual. A non-intellectual often touts being smart, thinking that only her or his values and personal insights are right, and anyone who does not agree, is wrong. This seems characteristic of Trump's thinking.

In sum, Trump, was not the statesman or a person of compassion or character expected of a president. Take away his money and what's left? Not a statesman, sage, philosopher, educator, or visionary, all of which are important in a president. And, interestingly, personal wealth in the form of money is not a required attribute of a president. In fact, great wealth by itself detracts from being able to identify with or relate to the average American. For example, Trump hoped that he could demonstrate his success by what he believed would again become a healthy and growing economy. He often cited the stock market as an example. However, a person living from paycheck-to-paycheck or on unemployment insurance could care less about the stock market and likely has no investments in it. The growth of the stock market benefits the *haves*, not the *have-nots*.

### **Trump Has a Frail Ego and was an *Easy Read***

Trump often kept repeating himself at the end of sentences. This is a sign of insecurity. Mostly, Trump, for example, kept repeating during his first impeachment hearings: *I'm innocent, no collusion, I'm right!* (always *me, my, and I*). When someone is innocent and telling the truth, they need only say it once, and then let any investigation play itself out. During his numerous early *coronavirus briefings*, day-after-day, Trump kept repeating himself, not only on his prepared written notes, but also in his responses to questions and also when he moved off of the topic of the coronavirus and into what he called his accomplishments, again, focusing on *I* and *me*.

Trump's ego is frail and defensive, always blaming others for mishaps, never taking responsibility, and only wanting credit and praise, sometimes for what others have done. This is often a *red flag*, a telltale sign that something else is the truth. Trump never came to realize that once becoming President, there is no need to demonize and place blame on administrations that came before, as he often did. This too is another sign of insecurity. On July 1, 2020, Myrtle Beach Mayor, Brenda Bethune, pointed out in an interview, *Placing blame does not resolve issues.*(2) I add that the focus of a president needs to be an upward spiral of improvement, not a downward spiral of defamation and blame.

### **Values**

The President of the United States must understand the values of all, and respect that people have values developed early in life. Values do not change quickly, and sometimes never change. However, an effective president would know how to channel multiple values, Democratic or Republican values, in a unified, positive way, not in a divisive way. To be effective and uniting, as opposed to being polarizing, a president must envision her or himself in the *shoes* of everyone, regardless of gender, age, race, religion political preference, sexual orientation, occupation, wealth (or lack thereof), and so on.

On July 4, 2020, on CNN's Fredericka Winfield's show, Former GOP Communication Director on Capitol Hill, Tara Seymayer, faulted Trump for not attempting to find *commonground* among Democrats and Republicans, and expressed being *infuriated* by Trump *stoking fear* into those with whom he did not agree, or did not agree with him. Seymayer, a Republican, pointed out that Trump was using a Republican *dying message*.(3) I add that we are the United States of America, not the *Divisive States of America*.

Seymayer went onto say that Trump supporting a *Confederate heritage* runs counter to what America is. She pointed out that on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, we had lots of things to be proud of and, she said, *Trump is not one of them*.

### **A Few More Examples Of Trump's Shortcomings**

#### **Partial Closing of the Government**

In Trump's partial closure of the government, for example, he punished the American public—his base, other constituents, government employees, contractors to the government, those providing services to the closed departments, and the American public relying on services of the closed departments.

Trump's closure of part of the government was the opposite of his responsibility as president. I'm sure that Trump knew where his next meal was coming from during the closure, but many Americans that he impacted did not.

### Tax Reductions

In Trump's tax reductions, he created the illusion that he was giving the middleclass more money per paycheck, only for American citizens to learn that their end-of-year tax refunds would be reduced. Corporations and the rich benefited from his tax cuts, but not the middleclass, or the majority of his base. Again, Trump is an easy read, and many saw through his deceptive statements.

### The Wall

*The Wall* on the southern border is the antithesis of the American spirit and our nation's history of world compassion for the persecuted, the needy, the welcoming of humans desiring to improve their lives. Trump advocated the assumption that most people wanting to come to the United States had bad/evil intentions and was not honorable. It punished all for the sake of deterring the few. It represented a distrust of American ingenuity to develop a more effective way of monitoring and filtering out those with dishonorable intentions, while recognizing and welcoming those worthy of immigration and eventual citizenship.

### Racism

Shamefully, Trump confirmed he is a racist by rejecting renaming military bases that are named after Confederate military leaders, and the removal of Confederate statues, instead of saying, *what a good idea to show respect and honor to our African American citizens*. This is congruent with Trump's practices many years ago when discriminating against Black Americans in housing to support his father's practices. *The apple does not fall far from the tree*. Attitudes are not easily changed.

In the documentary, *Hope and Fury: MLK, The Movement and The Media*, televised on July 5, 2020, Former President Lyndon Johnson's 1965 speech to Congress on voting rights set an example of constructive thinking that should have projected what the nation's thinking on race would be today.(4) Instead, Trump's presidential rhetoric on attempting to validate the Confederate flag and racist figures, took the nation back to some of its darkest days. If Trump were President during the George Wallace era, he'd likely side with Wallace on keeping schools segregated. This is something for all voters to have thought about. Remember Trump's stand, with his father, on segregating housing in New York City. Additionally, Trump's reprimand of sports figures for peacefully protesting police violence against African American's via the symbol of *Take a Knee* likely comes from his deep-rooted racism.

### COVID-19

On the coronavirus matter, Trump not taking any responsibility for our nation's late response to the coronavirus and for some of his misleading statements about the coronavirus, defined Trump's personality: naivety, lack of leadership skills, and arrogance. He should have considered the words of President Harry Truman who said: *The buck stops here*, and New York's Governor Andrew Cuomo who took full responsibility for New York's response to the coronavirus.

During his July 3, 2020 address at Mount Rushmore, Trump hardly mentioned the pandemic or sympathy for those infected, or for the families of those who died from the virus.(5) However, he spent an enormous amount of time accusing Democrats of being fascists, instead of recognizing and respecting that diversity of opinions should be respected, and the President's job is to help establish common ground in the pursuit of unity, i.e., being united. In psychology this latter point is known as *projection*, when a person accuses another for having her or his personality characteristic.

When Trump did talk about COVID-19 in his periodic press conferences, he kept repeating himself—sometimes day after day—reading the same prepared notes—how wonderful the progress was in the United States, how *he* has done so much to reduce deaths, how the US was far ahead of all other nations in containing or reducing the virus and deaths from it, etc. One of his favorite expressions was, *we're rounding the curve*, or *we're rounding the corner*, when facts showed the opposite was true.

Listening to Trump's repeated statements reminded me of the movie, *Groundhog Day*, when every day, day-after-day, was the same. Trump kept reading prepared scripts that said basically the same thing day-after-day after-day.

Then, the public was further misled by the likes of the US Rep. from Texas, Louie Gohmert, who made one of the most misleading statements in trying to support Trump. Gohmert said that wearing a mask caused his COVID-19 virus because the mask could *trap* the virus for human ingesting.(6) This was as misleading to the American public as Trump suggesting that ingesting disinfectants could possibly kill the virus. Gohmert's statement was dangerous because it could have discouraged the American public from wearing masks. Trump's statement was dangerous because it could have encouraged the American public to practice life-threatening procedures.

Unqualified politicians should not be rendering medical opinions. Only licensed and qualified medical doctors should. Trump should not have been conducting press briefings on COVID-19. Only experienced physicians should have. Trump was *out of his league* in talking about medical issues. These sessions should have been conducted by medical authorities knowledgeable-enough to not have to read from a prepared script.

Finally on COVID-19, Trump spent his time on weekends golfing when thousands of Americans were becoming infected and losing their lives. Did he have no conscience, sense of responsibility or leadership, or sense of guilt? It seems that, as President, he should have spent his waking moments working on plans and strategies for dealing with the pandemic as opposed to enjoying himself on the golf course. Did he have any empathy for the victims and their families?

It appears that Trump's *bottom line* on COVID-19 was his transparently naive statement, *It is what it is*. This was a naive statement, meaning that nothing more could have been done. It was Trump's admission of defeat, when so many medical authorities had been saying that so much more could be done.

### **The Rule of Law**

Trump's commuting the sentences of Roger Stone, Paul Manafort, and the commuting and pardoning of many others, determined by independent judges and juries, is contrary to *The Rule of Law*, i.e., the importance of *law and order* that Trump regularly touted. Even Trump's own Attorney General, William Barr, disagreed with Trump's decision on the Roger Stone matter.

This raises a question for Trump's base:

*If you or a loved-one of yours were convicted for the crimes, or similar crimes, committed by Roger Stone (seven felonies including perjury), Paul Manafort, and others, would Trump commute your sentence or your loved-one's sentence with everything else being equal other than Trump being your personal friend?*

If their answer is *no*, would they have agreed that a president commuting one's sentence based on a personal friendship, is an abuse of presidential power? If their answer is *yes*, does a person who abused presidential power deserve to continue being President of the United States, or of any country for that matter?

### **The Press**

Trump demonized the press as *the enemy of the people*. Instead, he should have heeded the words of Thomas Jefferson who he praised during his 4<sup>th</sup> of July Mount Rushmore speech. Like most public servants, Jefferson was not perfect. However, he had a vision of what democracy is when he said: If given the choice of living in a nation with a government but no newspapers, e.g., press, or a nation with newspapers, e.g., press, but no government, he would select the latter.(7) Specifically:

Jefferson wrote from Paris to Edward Carrington, whom Jefferson sent as a delegate to the Continental Congress from 1786 to 1788, on the importance of a free press to keep government in check. He concluded that if he had to choose between *a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter*. (See: <https://oll.libertyfund.org/quotes/302>)

### **John Lewis**

Couldn't Trump have said (tweeted) more than 22 words about the passing of John Lewis, a great and passionate patriot? Did Lewis do nothing of value that Trump could have acknowledged? Trump said many times that he, *Trump*, is the least racist and least prejudiced person in the nation, and *has done more for African Americans than anyone else*. If he really believed this, he would have had praise for Lewis and would have attended and spoke at his memorial praising all that John Lewis did to fight for the rights and freedom of African Americans. Trump was the only living President who did not attend.

### **A "Hoax"**

It appears that Trump called many things that he did not like a *hoax*. Not liking something does not necessarily qualify it as a hoax.

### **The President of the United States Is Not the Boss**

## The President of the United States is Not the Boss—But the Ultimate Servant

Trump never came to realize that he was not the *boss*; he was the *servant*. He was the ultimate public servant, meaning that as president he reported to the public, the citizens of the United States, not the other way around. His responsibility was to Congress and career government workers, governors, and mayors to make sure that they had the resources needed to do their jobs effectively. This is what effective elected public-officials and leaders do. The job of a President of the United States is not to dictate, but to heed the advice of experienced government specialists and other experts, and to abide by the wishes of the majority of the public who elected officials represent.

I'm reminded of an interview many years ago of David Ogilvy, founder and president of one of the most successful advertising agencies in the world, Ogilvy & Mather. He was asked: *How did you build such a successful organization?* His response was: *I surrounded myself with good people, experienced and talented, and I got out of the way.*(8)

Trump made unilateral decisions and appointed inexperienced members of his family into key governmental positions. This is not the work of a president of a democracy. It is nepotism and what is expected of a dictator. It may work as an owner of a private company where *the boss* can act as a dictator, firing people at will for any reason, but not in a government based on a democracy where the *reverse pyramid* must be operational. The *reverse pyramid* means that the president reports to the people regardless of their views, not the other way around. In a democracy, different points of view are respected: different principles, philosophies, propositions, ideas, beliefs, and so on. Statesmen practice the *reverse pyramid*, the opposite of those who are purely politicians with their self-interests as their priority. Statesmen are unifiers. A President of the United States must be a unifier of the branches of government and of the people, not a divider.

### Name-Calling and Stereotyping

#### Insulting and Mocking Those with Different Ideas

Trump would have been wise to stop the juvenile behavior of name-calling. He would have been wise to stop taking to insults and mocking those who do not agree with him or with whom he does not agree. Any experienced psychologist, psychiatrist, or communication specialist knows that this is a telltale sign of insecurity. Further, such professionals also know that name-calling and mocking are often a reflection of what Trump thought of other people and stereotyping them. For example, every time Trump insulted Mike Bloomberg by calling him *mini-Mike*, due to Mike Bloomberg's natural stature, he was insulting every person, men and women, who are short in stature; Dr. Fauci and Dr. Hahn (of the FDA) included, who appears to be about the same height as Mike Bloomberg. This is the same discrimination as insulting people because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and so on. For those less than Trump's height that voted for him, they voted for someone who discriminated against them and saw them as being inferior. Is this what the American people wanted in a president? I think not, and this should have been told directly to the American public, and particularly to Trump's base, in ads and in other communication.

When Trump mocked Elizabeth Warren by calling her *Pocahontas*, he was mocking every one of our nation's Native Americans. They should have been informed of this. Even conservative columnist George Will condemned Trump for his juvenile name-calling and lack of civility in doing so.(9)(See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhLJpmZH9QE&feature=youtu.be>)

#### Name-Calling MUST Stop!

When Trump mocked or insulted Joe Biden by calling him *sleepy Joe* or some other derogatory name, Trump should have considered how he would feel if he was given a mocking name. For example, I do not believe that Trump would have liked it if he was called *Tweety Bird* (from Warner Bros. animated cartoon character), reflecting Trump's preferred mode of communication, or *dufus*, or *coward* for calling those he did not like insulting names behind their backs and not to their face. It is telling that as soon as Joe Biden was elected President, the designation of *sleepy Joe* disappeared from Trump's mocking.

#### Perhaps Bernie Sanders Was Right

Bernie Sanders appears to have been the seer of the nation for all citizens, middleclass and the less privileged, including those of Trump's base needing healthcare. For all those who live from paycheck to paycheck, and in light of COVID-19, Bernie Sanders' approach looks good because we are living in a *new reality* that is not likely to change soon, if at all. For example, it took Rome 1000 years to rebuild from the Dark Ages. There is no telling how long it will take to recover from the present pandemic.

Think of how better off the middleclass and less financially well-off people would be with:

- No-cost health insurance
- No student loan debt
- No tuition to attend public colleges and universities

President Joe Biden can become the leader to get these done!

### **Voting**

Trump wanting to have minimized-voting by restricting mail-in ballots is against the basic principles of democracy. In my opinion, our leaders, regardless of party, should want as many people to vote as possible. Our leaders should want to work to make this privilege of democracy as easy as possible, not as difficult as possible. Someday we will probably all be voting via the Internet. That's progress. You can slow down technology and progress, but history shows that you cannot stop it. Eventually it breaks through. Similar to *the wall* that punishes well-meaning people because of a relatively few violators, limiting voting by mail punishes well-meaning voters based on the unfounded premise that there are many violators.

### **Voting – Particularly 18- 21-Year-Olds**

There needs to be an aggressive, ongoing national movement for our younger population, 18- to 21-year-olds and beyond, to VOTE in future elections. There is a systemic air among our nation's *leadership* that invites the social actions and reactions that we had experienced, e.g., peaceful demonstrations. The insurrection of January 6, 2021 was an anomaly. There must be more of a sense of empathy and humanity from The White House on down to encourage youth voting. Change at the top will begin to make this happen. Encouraging young people to vote will make them feel recognized and valued citizens. Turning out to vote could be the *ultimate demonstration* having the maximum positive impact in future elections.

### **The Overriding Need**

#### **The Nation Does Not Need a Cheerleader—It Needs a Leader!**

Trump called himself the *nation's cheerleader*. However, considering the serious issues of the day, the nation does not need a cheerleader. It needs a leader. Cheerleaders do not win games, but leaders do. In a press conference on June 30, 2020, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden agreed. He said: *We don't need a cheerleader. We need a president!*(10)

### **The Leadership of the Free World Has Been Lost**

Until Trump, the United States was considered the leader of the free world, but has now lost that status.

- A nation cannot be the leader of the free world if it negates world programs, for example, to address global warming, disarmament, health, and so on.
- A nation cannot be the leader of the free world if it punishes organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), instead of helping to improve them.
- A nation cannot be the leader of the free world if it denies people of other nations, facing a life of misery and fear, from embracing the freedoms that the United States offers.
- A nation cannot be the leader of the free world if it builds *walls* blocking access as opposed to *bridges* inviting access.

### **A President of the United States, the leader of the free world, must be a *mensch!***

- A person of integrity and honor.
- A decent responsible person with admirable characteristics.
- A decent, upright, mature, and responsible person.
- A person to admire and emulate; someone of noble character.
- A person with nothing less than character and dignity.
- A person who practices morally correct behavior or thinking.
- A person who is kind and considerate.

A president must bring people together; be a healer, not separate them. Instead of attacking past administrations, a wise president would ask: *How can I get both sides on one side?* Perhaps we need a new book, *The Art of the Heal*. Perhaps President Biden will someday write one.

### **In Closing**

**January 6, 2021**

While a tome can be written about January 6, 2021 and events leading up to it, I will compress my assessment with the notion that the greater the authority figure is who utters words, the greater is the impact of those words. Those who understand rhetoric and communication know this, and Trump was forewarned many times during his presidency that *words count*. However, similar to so many other instances, he did not heed the words of those who knew better, but created and propagated his own reality. Trump could have prevented the January 6, 2021 insurrection instead of encouraging it. I am reminded of the words of Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, who said, *If you repeat a lie often enough, it becomes accepted as truth.*(11)

### **We Are the World**

Trump should have heeded the purpose of the song: *We Are the World*, sung by popular artists in the 1980s originally created as a fundraiser to bring money to feed people of the world facing famine and hunger. The song was meant for the unfortunate and homeless people in Africa. *We are the World* means that every living person makes up the world. It is the responsibility of the *leader of the free world* to support the world, not isolate and punish the world community.

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### **Endnotes**

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