[**Brand Trump**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1604449/brand-trump)

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A BADLY divided America stands at the crossroads of many challenges. President Joe Biden’s inspiring speech at the inauguration won’t be able to fix it. Speeches alone do not heal nations howsoever soaring the words, sincere the sense of purpose or earnest the appeal for unity.

You cannot unify without mending the divisions. As the 22-year-old poet Amanda Gorman reminded Americans at the inauguration “Being American is more than a pride we inherit, it’s the past we step into and how we repair it.”

There are too many issues, old and new — race relations, economic grievances, class and cultural wars, clash of ideology and lingering wounds of the civil war. The country is split along inflammatory issues of identity and culture. This is what Biden called an “uncivil war”. Democracy too had become a casualty of this war. The solution had become a problem.

Conviction won’t solve America’s problems.

Democracy now was simply a struggle for political power. And its companion, capitalism, was also failing people. The 2008 financial crisis caused by the Wall Street’s moral failure had taken away Americans’ homes to foreclosures. The opiate crisis had devastated lives and livelihoods especially in the rural areas and small towns, exposing the greed of Big Pharma.

The lower classes felt victimised and excluded at the hands of forces they did not understand. In times like this, when Wall Street was only helping the top one per cent, and foreign countries and foreigners were taking away your factories and jobs, and since 9/11 threatening personal security as well, we saw the rise of economic anxiety and xenophobia, especially Muslim phobia.

And many whites, especially those without a college degree, working class, old, retirees or those living in rural areas — the majority of them traditionally Republican — had felt threatened by a black and Democrat as president. That caused a severe backlash inciting white supremacy and a fierce crusade for conservative social values.

The political parties instead of listening to people had been busy fighting wars abroad, and at home pleasing the immigrants, minority groups, the elite and the globalists. While Republicans and Democrats, each tied to its base and pushed further to the right and to the left, by ideology and special interests, vied for political power the people felt marginalised. Each party would pander only to its base while the other would oppose it causing a gridlock. The Republicans’ role was particularly egregious. The net result — growing alienation between the people and politicians.

People did not count much in this democracy anymore. With the help of the media, lobbying and money you could win elections. With big money had come big influence. As money and politics began chasing each other, it gave a new opportunity and role to the 24/7 cable television to be a broker between special interests, politics and the public. And then came the internet and the social media and a whole new world along with it. It became so easy to play on people’s emotions and organise them around enclaves, to fight.

All this was happening long before Trump. A specialist in branding he founded a new brand of politics — the politics of grievance. Truth had begun to die long before him. He just removed all the guardrails. The marketing ‘genius’ that he was, he exploited this new echo system of information well. He shamelessly collated grievances of different segments, building a coalition of supporters to whose ignorance and biases he catered successfully with false narratives.

With his charisma and lies, he fostered a special bond with his supporters. He appropriated their opinions as his own creating an illusion that he spoke for them. He delivered at least one thing that gave him both credibility and credentials as a leader — the economy. The rest of his policies including foreign policy were all for politics and personal interest. Biden alluded to it as “lying for profit and power”.

Trump kept the nation divided. This way at least half the country would be with him as he became their ‘spiritual’ head and defender against the other half painted by him as the enemy. Divisiveness was good politics.

America is still a great country. But it has many problems. If any leader could fix them, it is Biden. But the system will only support him in making small changes. He might be able to bring normalcy and decency but that will not be enough for America’s renewal. What is needed is a revolutionary change. That won’t happen.

If Trump was the only problem his conviction might help. But conviction is unlikely anyway and politically unwise as it may make martyr out of Trump, set a bad precedent by trying a former President, and prove divisive.

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