

**Make  
America**

**AMERICA**

**Again**

The Stand the Democratic Party Must Take,  
the Story They Need to Tell,  
and the Leadership They Have to Find.

**A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS**

MICHELLE DEEN

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## INTRODUCTION

Whether the powers that be like to admit it or not, the Democratic Party is in need of a major “come-to-Jesus” moment, the kind of soul-searching that brings a sharp clarity of purpose and depth of meaning one would find on their deathbed. Here, there’s no room for denial; there’s no room for blame; there’s no room for excuses. There’s only room for a good hard look at the dire state in which they find themselves, and who they are at the core—what they care about, what they stand for, and what they are made of.

While Democrats can breathe a momentary sigh of relief now that the midterms have given them control of the House of Representatives (along with a slew of other hopeful signs), they’re not home free. The 2018 election was a tremendous referendum on President Trump, as it should have been. But as we learned all too well in 2016, simply campaigning against Trump is not good enough.

In truth, *there’s a host of fundamental problems that* have diminished the Democratic Party’s power and appeal over the last several decades, *making the election of Donald Trump even possible*. These problems need to be uncovered and resolved in order to fortify the Democratic Party and create a sound context for solidly winning elections in both the short and long term. Those problems and that strategy are presented here.

The writing was on the wall in big, bold letters years and years before the Trump smack down of the Democratic Party; but alas, party leaders ignored signs of trouble. Most recently during Obama's two terms as president, the Democratic Party *lost 900* state legislature seats, 13 governorships, 69 House seats and 13 Senate seats. While it's not unusual for the party that controls the White House to lose power in the states, it is significant that the number of state legislatures controlled by Democrats dropped to 31%, *the lowest percentage for the party since the turn of the 20th century*. And the 15 Governor's offices that were held by Democrats during this time, was the party's lowest number since 1920. *Something* was going very wrong.

Yet in the face of these ominous facts, Democratic Party operatives continued whistling along with the same faulty operating system—consisting of out-of-touch politicians whose perspectives were as fresh as moldy bread. Then the unthinkable happened: Hillary Clinton lost the 2016 presidential election to the least qualified and most questionable candidate ever, Donald J. Trump. Suddenly, Democrats woke up to a reality with a bitter bite, a reality that has put our nation in an epic crisis—a crisis of identity, of values, of governance, and perhaps more.

There have been many times in recent history that Democrats have been found scratching their heads from the loser's circle, wondering what happened. Through those losses, valuable lessons have been written about, pontificated on and embraced by the party—conceptually. Strangely, strategists have consistently failed to turn these insights into action, seeming to prefer being dumbfounded by every loss that “could-a, should-a, would-a” been won. Like the clients I saw in my counseling practice suffering through a divorce, until they: 1) admitted what happened and why; 2) took responsibility for their part in it; and 3) made the necessary changes that reflection brings, they would more than likely find themselves once again in the same disastrous circumstances, claiming disbelief.

The current crisis could be a crucial turning point for the Democratic Party if important lessons are finally learned and implemented. *The question becomes...what will the party do? Will they go on, business as*

*usual with their heads in the sand, wrestling deep in the dirt where their only determination is to fight Republicans and resist Trump?*

*Or, will Democrats take advantage of this wake up call and get the kind of useful perspective, definition of mission, and refinement of strategy they need to rise above the dysfunction in Washington and their own party to actually make a difference in the lives of Americans?*

If they can do this, they will win the support of the American people who are fed up with “politics as usual.” It’s that simple.

But getting there is not quite as simple. It will take empathic attunement, creative genius, party unity, and moral brawn. Specifically, this means:

- 1) Getting back in touch with the needs of all Americans, especially those in the middle of the country
- 2) Engaging Americans in the fight *for* American values and *against* the rampant betrayal of our democracy
- 3) Bridging the divides strategically created by the Republican Party’s culture war narratives
- 4) Unifying the progressive and center-left wings of the party into a coherent, strong, unbeatable force
- 5) Electing and appointing party leaders who have the character and moral conviction to “do the right thing” by governing in alignment with American values, especially the moral where withal to put the common good over the financial influence of Beltway power brokers and the moneyed class.

The purpose of this paper is to yank heads out of the sand, to understand the unthinkable result of Trump’s victory in ways yet unseen, and to put this knowledge to use by moving beyond the usual tropes, rhetoric, and errors in thinking/behaving that have caused the Democratic Party to lose their populist appeal and political power over the decades.

Here you will find a not-so-gentle reminder of what must be done—now—by summarizing key lessons learned from past campaigns

(Section I), and using this knowledge to develop a prescription for victory. (Section II)

As we analyze the winning strategies used by the right, we'll see how Republicans have cleverly manipulated not just reality, but the electorate itself. Yet, I'll show how *the same winning strategies can be used ethically and applied with integrity by simply speaking the truth in smart and creative ways*. There's no need to dupe anyone when "right" in the form of American values rooted in moral principles is on your side.

The key is to communicate these values, principles, and mission in a way that moves voters to care, have hope, and to fight for what's right.

In the throes of the political upheaval and moral mess of an administration we find ourselves in today, rallying voters shouldn't be difficult. Once citizens fully understand the ways in which the Republican Party has been trampling on American values while exploiting the majority of citizens in the process, this ought to be as easy as igniting dry chaparral in the California wilderness. There's nothing like a burning sense of injustice to spark the kind of outrage that fuels political and cultural change. That story, in great and sordid detail, is told here.

This narrative also provides a framework to keep the Democratic Party on message and on point in face of the erratic and outrageous behavior coming from the Trump White House. Along with Trump's reckless disregard of norms, laws and ethics, one thing is absolutely certain: Between now and November 2020, Trump will continue his culture war provocations to create divisiveness and rally his base—that's all he's got. And the Democrats' tendency to chase down every disgraceful action, and then indignantly claim foul (all they've got), will do nothing to strengthen the party or move our country forward.

However, with the narrative and strategy proposed here, the more Trump does Trump, the stronger the Democratic Party can become. He and the Republican Party will be gifting Democrats with a showcase for their mission, with example after example that can be used

to reinforce their message and drive it home.

Rather than getting hopelessly sucked into Trump's drama and deception, Democrats need to be anchored in a higher mission than fighting Trump, and focused on pursuing an exalted vision of America. Only by shifting attention away from the Trump circus and back to the Democratic Party narrative, can headway be made in rallying voters around an uplifting, productive and worthy cause—one that is defined by the Democratic Party not the circus ringmaster, Donald J. Trump.

If the Democratic Party adopts the mission described in these pages with moral conviction, tells the *true* story about Republican tactics and ideology, and heeds the following five-point strategy, they could be a potent force for getting our country back on track. There's no stopping a party that truly embodies the values that make America, America. I hope this appeal finds traction. The future of our democracy depends on it.

***“... one thing is absolutely certain: Between now and November 2020, Trump will continue his culture war provocations to create divisiveness and rally his base—that’s all he’s got. And the Democrats’ tendency to chase down every disgraceful action, and then indignantly claim foul (all they’ve got), will do nothing to strengthen the party or move our country forward.”***



## SECTION I: LESSONS FROM THE PAST

*The Republican Party has out-foxed, out-manuevered, and out-campaigned the Democratic Party over the last several decades, leading to dominance on the Hill. What are their strategies, why have they been so effective, and most importantly, how does this inform a winning formula for the Democratic Party?*

### **Lesson #1: Emotions Drive Campaigns—Not Logic, Policies or Even Ideals**

*Effective campaigns engage voters on an emotional level, something the Republican Party has mastered and Democrats must learn.*

In the early 2000's, advances in brain neuroscience brought greater understanding to the intricacies of political persuasion and effective campaigning. As psychologist Drew Westen elaborates in his book, *The Political Brain*, emotions are the high-octane fuel that drives successful campaigns—not logic, policies or lofty ideals bereft of a moving “why should we care” factor.

In order to survive, the human brain is wired to prioritize information that affects us on a visceral level, primed to tune in to emotional information registering danger or desire, which is *then* processed through higher centers of the brain, bringing reason to bear. These discoveries have shown that human beings are not rationally driven, but driven by emotion and only tempered by reason—in the best of circumstances.

Common sense tells us as much, if we think about it. We're drawn to eaves drop on emotional interactions over mundane conversa-

tions next to us in the coffee shop. We remember the highs and lows in our lives much more than neutral events. Feeling—the pursuit of pleasure/comfort and the avoidance of displeasure/discomfort, pain and suffering—is what motivates action. And the things and people that mean the most to us mean the most because of the feelings attached.

Emotional content is king, hands down. It commands our attention, sears information and experiences into memory, invokes action and reaction, and creates personal meaning on the deepest of levels. As Abraham Lincoln intuitively understood about gaining constituent support: “In order to win a man to your cause, you must first reach his heart, the great high road to his reason.”

The failure to understand this basic principle has been a major downfall of the Democratic Party. The party as a whole has approached campaigning in an intellectual fashion, armed with a laundry list of do-good policies supported by data, charts and rational objections about Republicans, certain that anyone who understands the facts will vote for their candidate. Yet as Westen points out, any political campaign that has “getting the vote” as its aim is akin to putting the cart before the horse—it’s not going to get you very far.

He argues that the first aim of any political campaign must be *engaging the electorate emotionally*, engendering interest by invoking feelings such as enthusiasm, desire, hope, and even fear, anger, or outrage. And when a campaign can rouse passionate positive feelings for their candidate/cause and negative feelings against the opposition, the stage is set for victory. This is done through moving narratives (not dry facts or righteous statements) something Republicans have mastered with great artistry.

This was the genius of G.W. Bush’s chief strategist, “Turd Blossom” Karl Rove. Turds became blossoms by his artful exploitation of voters’ emotions. He was gifted at manipulating reality with carefully contrived stories that at once turned Bush’s weaknesses into strengths and his opponent’s strengths into weaknesses, creating affinity for Bush and the Republican Party’s objectives along with

dislike or even animosity towards his opponents and the Democratic Party as a whole.

How did Rove accomplish this? Through provocative stories laden with moral undertones that defined character and spoke to values. Not only did Rove understand the importance of evoking positive and negative emotions in political persuasion. He also knew how to achieve the greatest effect by tapping into the *juiciest sources of emotion*—those related to dearly held beliefs that form the essence of one’s identity—*one’s values*. This brings us to the second lesson...

## **Lesson #2: Successful Campaigns Speak to Voters’ Values**

*In order to passionately engage voters, candidates must speak to voters’ values, creating emotional resonance, identification with, and affinity for the candidate and their cause.*

Beyond the tricks of gerrymandering, the success of Republican political campaigns can largely be attributed to their ability to appeal to voters’ values, enabling them to scoop up middle-of-the-road voters by the truckload. Values are the pipeline, a direct channel into hearts and minds, mining that which is most meaningful and significant. When a candidate speaks on the level of values, they can generate emotional resonance in voters, which is key for building support. It conveys a compatible worldview based on our most cherished beliefs (what’s important to us and why), which is intimately related to our identity.

When others feel the way we feel, and see life the way we see life, we identify with them and forge an immediate sense of affiliation and affinity. And the opposite is true. Dislike, distrust and hostility readily take hold when differences in dearly held values are exposed. Here lies the reason politics is such a volatile topic. It’s also why politics brings about hostile partisan tribalism, an us/not us frame creating a defensive, if not aggressive, posture to protect from outside “enemy” forces. Of course, it doesn’t have to be this way, but it takes wisdom, grace and concerted effort (something we have lost as a culture) to rise above this primal human tendency.

Base instincts aside, it makes sense that people will vote for candidates with whom they resonate. After all, voters elect representatives, people who most closely represent their cares, concerns and most importantly, their values, which are the core of a person's identity. In order for voters to be able to identify with a candidate, that candidate has to first know their values—*what drives them and why*—and then communicate them loudly and proudly. Otherwise, candidates are toast.

Many political analysts concluded that Senator John Kerry's candidacy was crippled from the outset due to his failure to resonate with voters on the level of values. Unlike Bush who came off as a "bro" quick with a quip, Kerry was stiff and stilted, more comfortable in his head than playfully relating to constituents. His less than magnetic charisma coupled with his highly intellectual approach was a handicap from the start. But when Karl Rove and Co. got through with him, he was burnt toast.

Through the stories they crafted, Republican strategists emphasized Kerry's un-relatability while making Bush the buddy in a bar. Capitalizing on a candid photo of Kerry kite surfing off the island of Nantucket, they painted him as a highbrow, East Coast elite who engaged in privileged leisure activities, completely outside the realm anybody in Middle America could relate to. Meanwhile, Bush was portrayed as a cowboy on the ranch with whom you could shoot the bull over a beer. Because of this slick communication of implied shared values, the average American could identify with Bush as "one of them," while Kerry was dead in the tony waters of Nantucket.

Of course, none of this should matter when choosing the President of the United States; but again, voters are not driven by logic. Rove knew how to burrow into these irrational motivations, miking them for all their worth. By establishing Bush as likeable and relatable, and Kerry as unlikeable and not relatable from the outset, Rove then took advantage of the psychological phenomenon known as "cognitive dissonance."

Cognitive dissonance is the experience of psychic stress when facts

and information clash with established perceptions and beliefs. In order to avoid this discomfort, people subconsciously look for reasons to support their previously held notions. So, if voters “like you” they look for reasons to like you. If they don’t like you, they look for reasons not to like you. Rove made sure that heartland America didn’t like/resonate with Kerry from the get-go, and the cards were stacked in Bush’s favor.

Next came the onslaught of television ads challenging Kerry’s patriotism. Kerry, a bona fide war hero, was attacked on manufactured moral grounds discrediting his honorable war record as a swift boat pilot in Vietnam. The ads suggested he was unfit for command because of his later involvement with the anti-war group, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, insinuating he was unpatriotic and untrustworthy, lacking integrity of character.

Bush, on the other hand, was positioned as a hardcore patriot and defender of our nation, (highly valued, as the fear from 9/11 lingered.) The great irony to all of this is that Bush was not only a privileged Ivy-leaguer too, but a shameless draft-dodger whose family connections allowed him to hide at home in the National Guard, far removed from the courage of combat. This Rovian sleight-of-hand (deflecting a candidate’s own weakness by projecting it onto the opponent, also Trump’s forte) knocked Kerry back on his heels into a defensive fighting position, never to recover. When there’s no resonance between candidate and constituency on the level of values, bullets using moral gunpowder are almost always lethal.

Hillary Clinton made the very same mistakes as Kerry—leading with her cerebral cortex, offering good reason after good reason why she was the candidate to elect, while failing to connect with voters on the level of values (beyond old guard feminists already in her camp.) Furthermore, from years in the crosshairs of partisan politics, she began her candidacy with a high unlikability/distrust factor, with people looking for ways to reinforce their pre-established feelings and beliefs.

They didn’t have to look very hard. Her moral authority was easily

challenged—Benghazi, email servers, big donor dealings, and a cozy relationship with Wall St., complete with extravagant speaking fees, etc. You name it; she was fighting it, caught in the trap of answering to damaging stories crafted by the opposition, instead of proclaiming her mission and putting forth her own narrative. In politics as in sports, only playing defense never scores you points or wins you games and elections...something Democrats have yet to learn.

Now imagine if Hillary, or any candidate, came out of the gate, speaking from a place of moral authority, expressing what she believes and why she does what she does. When “vote for me” instead becomes “vote for the cause,” the power of purpose takes over. When communicating the “why” is so principled, the tone automatically shifts from opposition to mission, from defense to offense.’’

from opposition to mission, from defense to offense. When the fight is based on and for a set of values, there is no repudiation. End of debate. You are either with the candidate, or you’re not.

The key here is to communicate your values in a way that *emotionally impacts* those you are trying to persuade—to reach a deeper level than facts, charts or policy proposals ever could. From here comes the fire of inspiration—to care, to vote, to fight for what’s right.

Trump understood all of this, and shrewdly played to it well. He claimed to be on a mission to “end politics as usual” by “draining the swamp” in D.C. He would then “Make America great again” by bringing economic justice and security to working class Americans. Vote for Trump, and the American Dream would be within every American’s reach.

Through his clearly defined, unyielding purpose focused on his supporter’s greatest grievances, and anchored in the values they held

dear, he created an unbreakable bond with them. In fact, he was so confident in the strength of this bond, he infamously proclaimed: “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose voters.”

Hyperbole aside, Trump was right. He knew he could do no wrong in his followers’ eyes because he connected with them on the deepest level—on the level of their values—and promised to solve their most pressing problems. They identified with him and his message, and were going to vote for him, no matter what. Trump was their man, despicable behavior aside.

And lastly, even in spite of his inconceivable number of moral and ethical transgressions on the campaign trail, he was rarely in a defensive position for more than a New York minute, switching to offense as quick as a snake striking its threat. He was so focused on his professed mission to change Washington that he spent no time trying to defend his worthiness of the office of the presidency—moral, practical or otherwise.

Bonding with voters on the level of values was the power of Bernie Sanders’ campaign as well. Bernie spoke to the heart from the heart. His whole being was in the game; his conviction was visceral—you could feel it. And his clear, resolute purpose to change a “rigged” political/economic system resonated with a large number of Americans, even millennials in spite of the generation gap gigabytes wide.

Bernie was trustworthy and believable, through and through. His message was genuine, not crafted from focus groups or pollsters strategically trying to reach this demographic or that. He was a man on a mission, as unpolished and authentic as they come. He was all Bernie, and he was all in. In fact, he cared about the cause of his campaign with such gusto, he made you feel and care right along with him.

Whether you agree with his politics or not, *this* is the kind of candidate America needs—*someone who can connect emotionally with voters because they are on a moral mission to “do right” by the America people—politics and money be damned.* It is this very quality that has also made

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Beto O'Rourke so appealing as candidates. Their authenticity is palpable in the thick of calcified incumbents whose stale, uninspired rhetoric and contrived messages don't ring true.

The best politicians attract us to them by who they are, what they believe, and the energy they radiate. They show the courage of their convictions to "fight for what's right," no matter what. They don't tiptoe through the landmines of a campaign, hoping to get to the other side a winner. Rather, they are an impassioned force for justice—a force you feel compelled to support any way you can.

Furthermore, candidates with an authentic mission don't simply throw the term "values" around, hoping the phrase will work magic, as Democrats often attempt. Instead, such candidates live, breathe, and fight for their values with all their might. In fact, their values become their might, directing and driving their campaign with unstoppable conviction. *This is the might the Democratic Party needs to find, a might described and a mission proposed in the following pages.*

### **Lesson #3: Moral Narratives Are Essential to Winning Elections**

*Every winning campaign needs to have a compelling "why"—an irresistibly persuasive story that creates appeal for the candidate/party/cause that at once strengthens their position while weakening the opposition.*

Human beings have a thirst for narrative. We're a storytelling and story-creating species, neurologically designed to process, organize and understand information and experiences through story. From prehistoric tales told on cave walls to myths passed down through the ages, from bedtime fables read to children to yarns spun over dining tables, stories feed our souls, and are the most powerful tool of communication we have.

Stories help us make sense of the world, weaving facts, concepts and feelings into a meaningful whole. Stories also bond us to each other by creating mutual understanding between audience and teller of



the story, or between audience and the characters in the story. As thoughts, feelings and situations are revealed through story, the audience steps into another's shoes and *feels* the humanity of another. This is precisely why parables are used in holy books. They engage, influence, and inspire benevolence by evoking emotion, in this case empathy for others, which is much more effective than the injunction: "That's bad. Don't sin. Be virtuous."

Likewise, the *Democratic Party needs a moral narrative to engage, influence and inspire voters to join the fight for a better America*. Their current attempts at messaging involve bland policy points and superficial slogans (bland and superficial because they are not made emotionally vivid through narrative) followed by lifeless facts and some form of the injunction: Republicans are wrong/corrupt/at fault/ineffective—vote Democrat. Without a compelling "why" embedded in a meaningful story that moves voters to care, you're just throwing mud at a wall, hoping it will stick.

People sometimes think of the use of narratives or "messaging" cynically, as a tool employed to manipulate voters. It certainly has been used this way, as I will show in great detail. However, if the story you tell voters is truthful, it's something else entirely. It's *relating your mission—the "why" that drives you—honestly and powerfully, and is absolutely indispensable to a persuasive campaign*.

This type of persuasion is campaigning with heart not propaganda—big difference. In fact, if you don't have a heartfelt mission that you can effectively convey through narrative, you have no business running for office because *the odds of engaging voters, who are not already with you, are against you*.

Democrats have yet to figure this out. Resisting Trump with all their vigor, is fine and just, but it's not good enough. As Ruth Marcus of the *Washington Post* noted: ["The real fight is not against Trump; it is for America." This is the story that must be persuasively told. What, exactly, is the Democratic Party fighting for?](#)

Knowing what you are fighting for, not just against, is true political leadership—just as true leadership of any kind is visionary not re-

actionary, inspiring not demonizing, and unifying not polarizing.

The Democratic Party has certainly been showing plenty of emotion lately, but this is not campaigning with heart or leadership. Expressing fire and fury over this horrifying incident and that, this sorry fact and that, this crude comment and that, doesn't persuade. Nor does vigorously complaining about Republican policies and tactics.

***“Knowing what you are fighting for, not just against, is true political leadership—just as true leadership of any kind is visionary not reactionary, inspiring not demonizing, and unifying not polarizing.”***

Even the way Democrats talk about American values isn't persuasive. Declaring that American values are being trampled upon and we need to fight for them is a start, but doesn't go far enough. These are merely impassioned statements. You can't simply inject your feelings, beliefs and attitudes into others via indignation. It's like a parent lecturing a teen—you might as well be talking to a tree.

Aggrieved speeches and emotional rants are only reaching the people who already see what you see, and feel the way you feel. Granted, you are stirring folks up. But you are preaching to the choir and annoying the hell out of everyone else—those who have not already tuned you out, anyway. This is *not* persuasion. Telling a story that evokes emotion is persuasion. And in order to evoke emotion, stories need all the elements of a good narrative—plot (or in the case of political campaigns, the argument to be made), characters (protagonists and antagonists), conflict, and resolution (or solutions proposed.)

Storytelling persuades by involving the listener on a journey of understanding. Through narrative, you're showing, relating, and sharing rather than telling, railing, and declaring. Just as parables allow for people to arrive at their own conclusions of right and wrong, by generating a feeling for the lesson being conveyed, moral narratives

in political persuasion allow voters to meaningfully understand the heart of the problem, the conflicts involved, and the challenges ahead, so they can arrive at their own feelings, their own beliefs, their own hope, their own outrage—from the inside out.

Stories are the best way to communicate anything, especially controversial or difficult topics. Stories penetrate defenses by engaging the heart not just the mind. Stories inspire by bringing lessons and messages to life. And via empathic connection, stories create a feeling for “what’s right,” why it matters, and ultimately who the audience feels aligned with/wants to vote for. For all of these reasons, narrative is absolutely crucial to effective campaigning.

Also, having a moral narrative is essential for a winning campaign because it puts the one telling the story in the driver’s seat. By crafting an impassioned case for

your party, your candidate, and your cause while simultaneously creating fierce objection to the opposition, you are able to *take control of the direction of a campaign*.

If you aren’t the one telling the narrative, you’ll be defensively responding to stories coming from the other side, hoping upon hope you’re not “swift-boated” (now an actual verb) like John Kerry was in 2004.

For the last four decades, *Democrats have been doing just this—*

*running defense with no moral narrative of their own, only answering to the antagonistic role in which they’ve been cast.* Let’s take a look at the ingenious ways Republicans have put this strategy to use, telling a coherent (although misrepresentative) moral narrative that effectively captured the hearts and minds of American voters, and pitted many in Middle America against the Democratic Party.

***“...moral narratives in political persuasion allow voters to meaningfully understand the heart of the problem, the conflicts involved, and the challenges ahead, so they can arrive at their own feelings, their own beliefs, their own hope, their own outrage—from the inside out.”***

Using the very same marketing techniques as Madison Avenue, Republican strategists tap into a desire or concoct a need through emotional channels (i.e., longing, insecurity, anger, fear, etc.), and then claim to meet that need. This becomes the party's story, brand, identity...and propaganda. Next, they sell their brand with slogans and symbols that associate their "product" (party/candidate/platform) with the essence of their story in as few words as possible.

The Moral Majority. Pro-family. Pro-life. Compassionate Conservatives. Family values. Any way these sound bites are sliced, the Republican Party has cornered the market on American's most precious concerns (religion, children, family) and in doing so, built a brand identity that's been hard to beat—a party that is moral, benevolent, and has the best interests of America and your children, at heart.

In particular, "family values" has been the most compelling and enduring slogan, particularly instrumental from the Reagan era through the G.W. Bush years. This emotionally laden phrase was embedded in a larger culture war narrative that painted Republicans as righteous heroes protecting our children and country from amoral liberals.

According to this story, Democrats and their "liberal agenda" (i.e., women's rights, gay rights, the teaching of evolution in schools, science-based sex education, stem cell research, etc.) were trampling on American values (deceptively equated with fundamentalist biblical values), damaging traditional families, and if not stopped, would destroy our country and Western civilization itself. If you care about your children, their moral upbringing, and the culture they're immersed in, vote Republican.

During the 2004 election, gay marriage was the highly charged wedge issue that drove this point home, dispatching "values voters" to the polls in droves. From rural gun-owners to suburban soccer moms, parents of our nation's children were joined together by that which they most valued—the welfare of their children and the moral tone of the culture in which they were raising them. It was a brilliant divide-and-conquer war strategy designed to set the "secular, amor-

al, anti-American” elites on the coasts against the wholesome values of America’s heartland.

As Thomas Frank explains in his book, *What’s the Matter With Kansas*, hot button cultural issues have cleverly influenced the average American to vote Republican even though it’s against their economic interests. The culture war narrative and the contentious social issues associated with it became an ingenious diversion from other political realities, accounting for the self-defeating shift to the Republican Party by middle and working class Americans, once soundly Democratic. By claiming they would protect America from enemy liberal forces, Republicans successfully duped Americans into voting Republican, currying favor for a party disloyal to their economic needs.

Ironically, even the ethically unhinged Donald J. Trump employed an effective moral narrative in his upset victory over Hillary Clinton. Trump, like the culture warriors before him, honed in on an “us vs. them” tactic, shrewdly drawing divisions among Americans. However, he came up with his own, different divide-and-conquer war strategy that managed to passionately engage and rally supporters against contrived enemies.

Unlike the culture warriors before him, he astutely avoided the usual wedge issues (anything involving morals, religion, and family values), which would only highlight his own massive moral shortcomings. Instead, he capitalized on his brand as an (supposedly) astute, no-nonsense businessman. He then zeroed in on one of the greatest fears facing many Americans today—economic insecurity and the loss of the American Dream—and made righting this wrong the mission of his campaign.

He positioned himself as a populist superhero that was going to “make America great again” by fighting the slew of villains that he had written into his script—crooked and inept politicians, blood-sucking immigrants and dangerous refugees—all out to harm American citizens and their interests.

And like G.W. Bush before him, he fanned fears while putting forth

an authoritarian moral tone of righteous aggression against any and all that dared to harm America. This time, however, it was between those struggling economically and the rest, including Democrats and their politically correct brand of “identity politics” construed as concern for everyone except white Middle America and their economic troubles.

It’s critical to note that it is *not* any given slogan, in and of itself, that brings potency to a campaign, but the *moral story* to which it’s attached. Hillary had her own “stronger together” slogan, but it went nowhere because it meant nothing without a greater narrative to ground it. Let’s take a look at the Democratic Party’s anemic effort to appeal to voters’ values as put forth in their official 2016 platform:

“Democrats believe that cooperation is better than conflict, unity is better than division, empowerment is better than resentment, and bridges are better than walls. It’s a simple but powerful idea: We are stronger together.”

Essentially, blah, blah, blah.

Even though this slogan is absolutely correct—we *are* stronger together—it was a feeble and futile attempt to connect with voters on the level of values. A list of value statements doesn’t cut it. With no storyline, “stronger together” was merely empty platitude that didn’t do what it needed to do—captivate voters emotionally while reversing the divisive effects of culture war narratives coming from the right. Helping people become stronger together is, in fact, the hallmark of a great leader and the tactical task of an effective campaign, but simply stating this fact inspires nothing and unites no one.

*How does a party inspire a movement that unites citizens to become stronger to-*

***“With no storyline, “stronger together” was merely empty platitude that didn’t do what it needed to do—captivate voters emotionally while reversing the divisive effects of culture war narratives coming from the right.”***

*gether? Through a narrative that emotionally involves voters by communicating:*

- 1) the core problem we face as a nation;
- 2 the conflict/competing motives at hand, complete with protagonists and antagonists;
- 3) how these circumstances impact voters as American citizens/ why they should care; and
- 4) what the candidate/party is going to do to solve the problem and right the wrongs.

But alas, the Clinton campaign had no meaningful narrative—a clearly articulated moral purpose that attracted voters with *why* they should vote for Hillary—as if “not Trump” was good enough. Obviously, it wasn’t.

Hillary didn’t inspire voters to fight right alongside her because it wasn’t clear what she was fighting *for*. Bernie, on the other hand, was on the right track by fighting with moral conviction for the economic survival of Middle America and against what he called the “billionaire class” —the 1% who wield an inordinate amount of power in D.C. and reap unfair advantages from our broken political and economic systems. His campaign had a strong start on a story with populist appeal that spoke to the needs of Americans while attacking Republican ideology and policies.

What was missing for Sanders, however, was a *coherent* narrative that:

- 1) discredits the Republican story of moral and patriotic superiority, while telling the story that puts the Democratic Party squarely in this role;
- 2 incorporates American values and a frame of capitalism (which is part and parcel of America, like it or not) acknowledging its good, while condemning the dysfunctional aspects that must be managed politically; and
- 3) has the backing of a party embracing and embodying the narra-

tive wholeheartedly, making the fight for American values and the American people their moral mission.

When this is done, you have a winning formula.

The Democratic Party is at a crossroads with tension between the progressive left, who want dramatic change from the ground up, and centrists who want to massage the system and coax incremental change that many believe is more-of-the-same, non-change. But until the party becomes unified, they will be in a hopelessly weakened position. They have to fight together (not against each other), and for something (not just against Republicans), and for a greater purpose than simply winning elections.

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To state the obvious (which seems to have eluded Democrats), *the party needs to come together around a common cause and a clear understanding of what animates their cause.* If the Democratic Party can unite around shared values, authentically claim their mission, and tell the story of the real fight we face as a nation, they could harness the unrest rampant in America today and generate a passionate rallying cry that would appeal to a broad spectrum of voters.

Yet, two years after Clinton’s loss, party leaders have *still* shown little understanding of what’s vital for a winning campaign. This past August, the Democratic Party began “road-testing” their 2018 mid-term campaign message. During an interview on the subject (*The Dworkin Report*, 8/12/2018), House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi was asked: “What is the Democratic Party for?” She proudly declared, “We’re for the people.” When pressed to explain what that meant, she launched into policies that would give Americans a bet-



ter deal, peppered with clever sound bites about cleaning up corruption in the GOP—all sounding very inauthentic, and tactical.

Once again, the Democratic Party presented another bland, superficial slogan with no moral narrative to breathe fire into it. In other words, what in the hell does “For the People” actually mean, and why should anyone care?

Without the horsepower of a compelling moral story conveying their mission, driving a campaign, and inspiring voters with a *meaningful*, purpose-driven cause, Democrats are hopelessly handicapped in their political appeal and influence. This handicap was recognized well over a decade ago by some of the most prominent politicians of the time who declared the need for a moral narrative, unfortunately to no avail...

***“Without the horsepower of a compelling moral story conveying their mission, driving a campaign, and inspiring voters with a meaningful, purpose-driven cause, Democrats are hopelessly handicapped in their political appeal and influence.”***

*“Progressives have a strong moral belief system—we need to find better ways to articulate that.”*

- Robert Greenwald, progressive activist and award-winning documentary filmmaker

*“Democrats are desperately weak on message. The values are there but they haven’t been developed into a coherent story and strong initiatives...” “...We have to get off defense and move to offense.”*

- Wes Boyd, co-founder of Moveon.org

*“They (Democrats) have to find a language that assures voters, religious or not, that their political positions are driven by deeply held moral values. There are moral absolutes and progressives should not be afraid of proclaiming them.”*

- Paul Waldman, political columnist and author of *Being Right Is Not Enough: What Progressives Must Learn from Conservative Success*

*“We need to start talking about our own moral vision for America...”*

- George Lakoff, cognitive scientist/political strategist and author of *Don't Think of An Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*

*“You don't win on their turf (their narrative); you win by redefining it...”*

- Naomi Klein, best-selling author and progressive activist

*“The political failures of the progressive movement are not the result of the lack of moral values, as the Republicans are so fond of claiming. They reflect instead the gap between our values and the way we speak about them...”*

- Lakshmi Chaudry, political reporter, co-author/editor *Start Making Sense: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*

There was urgency then, and yet the need for a moral narrative is even more urgent now. Beyond remedying a handicap, ***today a moral narrative has the potential to:***

- 1) re-anchor our nation in its founding principles;
- 2) mobilize Americans who are in crisis and ready to fight “the good fight” for America and her values, creating an unstoppable progressive populist movement (vs. the current authoritarian populist movement); and
- 3) unify a fractured party with a collective mission fueled by shared values and mutual conviction, creating powerful synergy.

Also, there's no better time for the Democratic Party to stake claim to moral principles and American values, while exposing the Republican Party's bogus story of moral and patriotic superiority. We have in our midst a morally challenged, ethically compromised, constitutionally ignorant, and diplomatically inept president in the White House with Republican leaders showing no moral backbone in the

face of it all. The proverbial iron is hotter than ever to strike with a moral narrative that sears a *real* understanding of what patriotism and moral values in American politics and civic life ought to look like—in word, in manner, and in deed.

***“The proverbial iron is hotter than ever to strike with a moral narrative that sears a real understanding of what patriotism and moral values in American politics and civic life ought to look like—in word, in manner, and in deed.”***

It’s clear that Americans are outraged by the breakdown of moral values in our political system. However, they need a frame to make sense of it, a way to resolve it, and a party to go to bat for them. Democratic Party, that’s you. It’s time to show the pluck and passion and purpose that America deserves from its leaders, using the force of goodwill to get our country on track.

*The question becomes: Does the Democratic Party have the will, the spirit, and the integrity needed to turn our country around?* If so, they will be American heroes. If not, they will be committing political suicide. Why? Because Americans are *done* with politics as usual. Case in point: the Kamikaze-like rebellion against the status quo with the jaw-dropping election of Donald J. Trump. Enough said.

## SECTION II: APPLYING THE LESSONS LEARNED— A PRESCRIPTION FOR VICTORY

*Here I show how the Democratic Party can apply the strategies described above, yet ethically and with integrity, to successfully engage voters in the “right fight.” The objectives are twofold. First, to reverse the damage done by “culture war” narratives painting Democrats as amoral elites out-of-touch with heartland America. Secondly, to unite Americans in the fight for the common good, and against the self-serving forces turning our democracy into a plutocracy.*

### **The Task At Hand—Unite and Conquer**

Knowing that a unified America is a strong America, **the Republican Party has schemed to divide citizens into contentious cultural tribes** (left/right, red/blue, coastal elites/heartland America, urban/rural, whites/non-whites, religious/secular, professional class/working class, immigrants/“real Americans,” etc.) **to undermine the power of a cohesive majority** so that an elite minority could be served—at the expense of the common good.

It’s been a form of mental/emotional gerrymandering that, along with geographic gerrymandering, has stripped our republic of fair and just representation. Instead of a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, America has become a government of the powerful, by the powerful, and for the powerful.

It’s been a devious “divided we fall” strategy with grievous results.

Any politician or party that attempts to subvert majority power with divide and conquer tactics is, straight up, in betrayal of American values. Yet, the Democratic Party has never called the Republican Party out on this breach of our democracy. Trump, G.W. Bush, and many other allegedly über-patriotic Republicans of recent decades have masterfully employed this unethical, anti-American scheme to great effect—but will no longer if Democrats see it, understand it, and are inflamed enough to do something about it.

*The only antidote to the Republican Party's polarizing culture war narrative is to rewrite the narrative, pointing to the real conflict we face as a nation and recasting the roles of protagonists and antagonists in the process. This counter-narrative will redraw the lines of alliance and unite Americans in the "right fight"—not against each other, but together against the abuse of power in our current mess of a democracy.*

In order to do this, The Democratic Party must expose the Republican Party's abject betrayal of American values; and galvanize Americans to reclaim the power that rightfully belongs to them.

Only by uniting Americans can the Democratic Party put an end to Republicans' divide and conquer machinations once and for all. When united we stand, justice for all *will be* met.

The narrative laid out here is just this—a “unite and conquer” path—and its aim couldn't be any more American or just. Organized rebellion has always been a fundamental principle of our democracy and the greatest expression of American values we have. In fact, it was the radical repudiation of unjust power that prompted the creation of our nation, beginning with the Boston Tea Party and ending with the American Revolution. Principled action driven by American values was elemental in the 1700's, and is still so today. But it will take a strong, cohesive party to unify the populace around the mission to recoup our democracy and make America, America again.

In order to unify Americans, the Democratic Party will have to first *align* with the majority of Americans. Accordingly, the party has to be tuned into the thoughts, feelings and needs of those they're hoping to serve, as well as be clear on their own principles, values, and

positions, and why they hold them. *When each half of this equation is relatable to the other, a unifying bond can be formed, translating into successful candidacies.*

We'll use a recently published report, "[The Vanishing Center of American Democracy](#)" that analyzes the results of an opinion poll—the *2016 Survey of American Political Culture*—to provide valuable insights into the electorate. This survey, commissioned by the University of Virginia's Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture is based on 1,904 telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of American adults. By revealing the attitudes, concerns and cultural/political values of American citizens, this survey serves as a finger on the pulse of America during the run up to the 2016 election, detecting constituents' greatest concerns and the divisions in America that led to the unimaginable victory of Donald Trump.

The first statistic worth noting is that the number of *self-identified Independents has risen to a high of 42% of the electorate* (from 31%, 20 years ago) signifying a *lack of connection many voters feel with either party*. We saw this manifested in the remarkably strong support of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump who were not established in either party prior to their run. In fact, they both ran on *populist messages railing against the establishment*—Sanders with a progressive populist message and Trump with a regressive, authoritarian populist message. It was this very anti-establishment outrage and desperation for change that ultimately gave Trump his victory.

Instead of expending energy fighting Republicans, casting critical judgment on Trump supporters, or getting their panties in a twist over every offensive action coming from Donald Trump, the Democratic Party would be wise to *figure out how to engage the 42% of Independents looking for sensible solutions, and the roughly 40% of eligible voters who don't bother to vote because they've given up on American politics*. They'd also be smart to truly make sense of the Trump victory, to really "get" what was driving both Sanders and Trump supporters in order to better understand them, and ultimately serve them.

This does not mean compromising the party's values. Rather, it means:

- 1) recognizing and addressing the concerns of citizens, or in marketing parlance, their "pain points;"
- 2) finding the common ground with voters in terms of party values and goals; and
- 3) building a rousing case/narrative that conveys the Democratic Party's mission while uncovering the Republican Party's dishonorable quest to usurp democracy.

We'll do all of this here, exploring five key strategy points that, if incorporated, will give the Democratic Party the foundation they need to regain political relevance and potency.

### **The Five-Point Plan For Party Success**

**The following 5-point Strategy is coming soon. Please sign up here to be notified when its released.**

1. Becoming the Party of the People Once Again
2. Handling the Problem of "Identity Politics"
3. A Moral Narrative that Inspires, Unites and Brings It Home
4. Unifying the Party
5. Leading with Moral Brawn

Sign up [here](#) to receive notification when book is released.