

THE DARK SIDE OF RESILIENT LEADERS: VAMPIRE LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

While 'bad' leaders can include incompetent, occasionally self-indulgent, and lazy leaders, an important special category of leader has long been established in the literature for those whose egotism and ill-will toward others have corrupted 'good' leadership norms. Such behavior is generally called toxic. This essay further builds on that analysis by examining leaders who are not simply occasionally toxic, but whose whole agenda is to fan division, hatred, and malignant collective delusion. The article first examines good leadership using servant and resilient leadership theory. Then it provides examples of varying degrees of toxicity based on eight elements in which good leadership is perverted. Finally, the article looks at President Donald Trump as an example of ruthless rapaciousness and whose tenacity (resilience) enables him to maximize his toxicity over time – vampire leadership.

Keywords: toxic leadership, bad leadership, negative leadership, narcissistic leadership, demagogic leadership, egotistical leadership, hypnotic leadership, vampire leadership.

1. Introduction

In the leadership literature, the concept of resilience nearly always is in the top ten most desirable traits for leaders (Van Wart, 2014). The reason is obvious, because without perseverance or ‘stick-with-it-ness’, little of significant consequence is likely to get done, no matter how many other good traits a leader may have. Without resilience, given the challenges that confront leaders of nations or organizations, the prospects of long-term success are modest, and the possibility of failure is great.

Resilience has only been highlighted as a leadership style in-and-of-itself occasionally, until recently. However, the challenges of leading in a world that has become markedly more polarized, dealing with a worldwide pandemic, and moving very slowly to avert a climate catastrophe, have stressed the need for leaders who can not only assess problems and put forward solutions, but endure the painstakingly long time it may take to get things of value done.

Normally resilience is examined as an exclusively positive attribute. Indeed, unlike some other leadership attributes that are best to have in moderation (e.g., self-confidence and decisiveness), resilience is a characteristic in which we normally say more is better (Van Wart, 2014). However, upon closer examination, there are negative opposing versions of all the top leadership characteristics. That is, instead of leaders being self-confident, decisive, energetic, and ethical, they can be egotistic, rash, lazy, and self-serving. Resilience, too, can have its negative version when combined with other corrupted traits. Bad leadership that is also resilient is able to slither around the ethical imperatives that confront it, hypnotize people to oppose their own best interests, create problems that they themselves can then heroically fix, and so on.

This essay looks at how resilience can be disfigured in a corrupt context by bad leadership. Sadly, this type of leadership has become all-too-common in the current political world. When you add resilience to toxic leadership, you ‘supersize’ the problem and create vampire leadership.

2. Design of the article

The argument will begin with a brief review of resilient leadership. Other pieces in this paper will explore the literature on the positive aspects of resilience more deeply. To provide the type of positive context in which we normally assume resilient leadership will exist, we will use servant leadership theory as the ethically-focused framework. It provides a positive version of the other top ethical leadership traits. Then we will turn to leadership when it is occasionally self-serving, dysfunctional, and/or weak. This type of leadership we will label and discuss as toxic leadership. Such leaders have characteristics that we may consider bad, but they may be counterbalanced by some good characteristics, may use bad characteristics intermittently, or may not have the capacity to implement a wide-ranging bad agenda. Finally, we will discuss vampire leadership, in which the leader not only exhibits negative characteristics

most of the time, but when they have an unethical agenda, they want to implement and, due to their resilience, have a good chance at success.

The article will illustrate examples of positive and negative leadership exclusively with US presidents. Because of his extraordinary efforts to divide and conquer American society, Donald Trump is used as the most comprehensive example of vampire leadership.

It is important to note that the use of historical examples in a normative essay can be prone to exaggeration, superficiality, or caricature no matter whether they are positive or negative. Using out-of-context examples is illustrative, but can be merely glib as well. The authors have tried to be sensitive to these caveats, and also want to acknowledge that even very bad leaders can do some very good things occasionally, and vice versa. We do not mean to suggest that our positive and negative examples necessarily represent a president's overall character or legacy, with the possible exception of Donald Trump.

3. Resilient leadership

While different scholars and practitioners do not have a single list of the prime characteristics of resilient leadership, there is wide support for four major factors: preparedness, steadfastness, energy, and adaptability.

When people are prepared – both leaders and followers, they are much more capable of meeting, overcoming, and even potentially using serendipity when challenges occur. Good leaders ensure that governments and organizations are always ready for routine and predictable challenges as a fundamental principle of management – disruptions caused by market cycles, the need for technology updates, etc. Yet responsible leaders also plan for unusual or long-cycle challenges too, such as the recent pandemic, the likes of which the country had not seen for 101 years. While the U.S. government was not responsible for providing support before, during, and after catastrophes in the 19th and early 20th centuries because it was considered a state and local function, after World War II major federal support of catastrophes became expected. By 1979, Congress finally created the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to replace the ad hoc structures that had formerly existed at the federal level. Nonetheless, it was poorly organized and headed by political novices. In the George Herbert Walker Bush presidency (the first of the two Bush presidencies), federal response was extremely slow in the three major hurricane disasters and the Loma Prieto Earthquake in California. The public outcry was huge and played a small part in the loss of his next election. President Clinton (1993–2001), seeking better national preparedness, seized the opportunity to appoint the first professionally-trained emergency manager as the head of the agency, gave it more authority and a clearer structure, and elevated the agency to Cabinet rank. Not surprisingly, the agency did not receive significant criticism of its handling the 348 declared disasters during the

Clinton Administration (Witt, 1997). When FEMA was demoted under George W. Bush, and a political hack was again appointed as agency director, the agency experienced disastrous criticism in its mishandling of Hurricane Katrina (devastating New Orleans) which was responsible for 1,833 deaths. President Clinton was prepared, but neither his predecessor nor successor were.

Steadfastness is the ability to go the long distance with fortitude, and despite set-backs. People who are steadfast are often said to be able to ‘bounce back’ after challenges. Many people think of this as the most critical aspect of resilience. Many presidents could be used as examples, such as Abraham Lincoln or Ulysses S. Grant. The example that will be used here is George Washington (1789–1797), the first U.S. president, while Commander of the Army during the American Revolution. During the Revolution he was responsible for 17 major battles. Washington lost seven, had a draw in four, and won only six, most of which were more symbolic than important except for the morale boosting they inspired (Ellis, 2005). While a capable tactician, his troops were more poorly trained and supplied, and much more likely to decamp for home on a moment’s notice. Thus, his superb ability to retreat and his tenacity to ‘fight another day’ was as important as winning battles. By steadfastly keeping his army fighting and thus drawing the French into the war, Washington was able to surround the largest concentration of British troops at Yorktown, effectively ending major military conflicts until a peace treaty could be agreed to.

While success generally has the helping hand of some good fortune, crises do not. One important element of rising from the depths of set-backs or defeat is energy. The president who undoubtedly is most known for his energy was Theodore Roosevelt (1901–1909), often referred to as Teddy, or T.R. The most famous American naturalist of the day, John Burroughs, said: ‘He is doubtless the most vital man on the continent, if not on the planet, to-day. He is many-sided, and every side throbs with his tremendous life and energy.’ Although a sickly, pampered child, Teddy Roosevelt toughened up after losing his first wife and child by becoming a hard-working rancher in the West, and fighting in the Spanish American War and leading the Rough Riders. During his presidency, he not only created the basis for the largest park system in the world, but he personally inspected much of it. He took on enormous, very-powerful monopolies that were strangling innovation and broke them up. Finally, he jumped at the possibility of taking over the malaria-infested Panama Canal fiasco, later visiting it despite its high death toll at the time. His most memorable moment of irrepressible energy is when he was running for re-election in 1912 and was shot in the chest just as he was about to start speaking. He apologized to the crowd, said that he would have to shorten the speech, stanching the blood with his hand, but did not finish for 90 minutes when he was finally taken to the hospital (Goodwin, 2019).

Resilience is not just the ability to be ready for challenge, to persevere, and to do so with energy, resilience is the ability to adapt and evolve with necessary change. Teddy Roosevelt’s distant cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1933–1945), or FDR is a

good example of adaptability. Probably the most politically gifted president in American history, as demonstrated by his serving four terms, he had to completely reinvent himself after catching polio when he was 39 and becoming paralyzed from the waist down. Realizing that a dour, wheelchair-bound individual would not be a political success, he remolded his external personality to become a seemingly ever-buoyant individual, even while he practiced statecraft at a world-class level (Goodwin, 2019). Another example is his candid admission at the start of the Great Depression that he was not entirely sure what were the very best measures to take. ‘One thing is sure,’ he said. ‘We have to do something. We have to do the best we know how at the moment... If it doesn’t turn out right, we can modify it as we go along.’

4. Servant leadership

Servant leadership theory is based on both normative as well as pragmatic grounds. Normatively, servant leadership promotes a humanistic perspective about the interactions with, and for, followers. Pragmatically, it asserts that, on average, goals will more likely be reached, followers will be better developed, and a more humane environment will lead to better sustainability. Numerous attributes have been ascribed to servant leadership; here we identify only four: appreciation of others, empowerment of others, instilling trust, and building community (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Servant leadership theory, in the tradition of various compassionate religious teachings, asserts that the foundation of good leadership is the appreciation of others. This requires empathy, listening, kindness, and patience. While all the better-ranked presidents have been strong in this trait, probably no one has a finer long-term reputation than Jimmy Carter (1977–1981). Carter started his presidency by pardoning all the Vietnam War draft evaders when issuing Proclamation 4483. The Vietnam War (1955 to 1975) had deeply divided the country, and this initiated a national healing. During his presidency, Carter dealt with the Panama Canal issue, in which the U.S. owned an enormous 50-mile swath through the center of Panama. Sixty percent of the canal zone was returned in 1977, and the canal itself was set to be returned in 1996, which it was. Carter is also known as being ‘America’s best ex-president’ because of his humanitarian deeds through the Carter Center and Habitat for Humanity (Hargrove, 1999), as well as his efforts as a trusted international peace negotiator, for which he won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

Servant leaders do not seek to acquire power; they seek to empower others. Empowering others is not always easy, especially if one has a racist upbringing as did Harry Truman (1945–1953). During World War II, the U.S. was almost a completely segregated society. However, because a million Black Americans had served in the military and came home with some hope of better recognition of their service to country, civil relations in the country became tense after the war. Truman was shocked at the poor treatment of returning soldiers and decided to repudiate the

170-year-old doctrine of legal discrimination of the U.S. Armed Forces in 1948, over the great consternation of the American South, including his home state. After the successful integration (taking six years), the Supreme Court followed suit with its precedent-shattering 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* decision which desegregated public schools. Truman's executive action (done without Congressional approval) was the founding event for the civil rights movement in the U.S., which provided the first, wide-scale, successful example of integration (McCullough, 2003).

Servant leaders tend to instill trust across the vast array of their followers, not just those who find the temperament or policies of the leader most appealing. Recent popular presidents since World War II include Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama. However, it is only Eisenhower (1953–1961) whose approval rating never dipped below 55% and, more importantly, who had the lowest average disapproval rating of any modern president, despite leading the country during the challenging Korean War and dealing with two major recessions. Ironically, the World War II Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe, and afterwards Army Chief of Staff, President of Columbia University, and Supreme Commander of NATO, was invited to be the lead candidate by both parties. His calmness, hard work, lack of egotism, fairness, and his appropriate caution in hard-fought wars led him to a scandal-free record of public service and almost unanimous sense of trust by the American public (Ambrose, 2014).

Finally, servant leaders build community, paying special attention to society's neediest and most marginalized. Even more than Abraham Lincoln, who resisted strong measures regarding the abolition of slavery until the time was ripe, Lyndon Baines Johnson (1963–1969), also known as LBJ, sought out moments to further civil rights in America. During his presidency, he initiated many programs as a part of his 'Great Society' agenda. Basic medical insurance was created for the elderly (Medicare) and poor (Medicaid) – expensive programs, but ones that have an enormous impact on vulnerable populations. He enhanced the national system of welfare by creating programs of food stamps and pre-school education for the poor, and on-campus employment (work study) for students. His work in civil rights was massive, including the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 (prohibiting unequal voter registration requirements, racial segregation in public accommodations and schools, as well as employment discrimination), and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. While his legacy was much diminished by his failed escalation of the Vietnam War and support for the corrupt South Vietnam administration, there is little doubt that he was successful in creating a more inclusive American society at home (Goodwin, 2019). Table 1 summarizes the common understanding of good resilient leadership.

Table 1: Eight characteristics commonly associated with 'good' leadership

General Leadership Characteristic	Generally Acknowledged as Fundamental to Good Leadership	
	Resilient Leadership	Servant Leadership
Preparedness	Prepares for crises; finds opportunities in adversity	
Steadfastness	Bounces back from set-backs, defeats, and crises	
Energy	Sustains energy and health to do good	
Ability to adjust to change	Honest assessment of need for change; copes with change by bringing others along	
Attitude toward others (subordinates and followers)		Appreciation of others, listens well, expresses empathy
Power sharing (subordinates and followers)		Empowerment of others
Attitude of followers and non-followers toward leader		Instills trust
Leader attitude toward the group or community		Builds community through a pattern of stewardship

5. Toxic leadership as self-serving, dysfunctional, but not consistently despotic

Poor leadership can occur because of incompetence or neglect, but that is not the focus of this essay. Leadership becomes toxic when leaders allow their personal desires and ambitions to become over-weening, and when their egotism breeds a sense of disregard and even disrespect for others. Many leaders have toxic episodes, aspects, or leanings, but can be classified as only mildly toxic because, overall, they do more good than harm. They are occasionally foolish, frequently selfish, often arrogant, and/or sometimes lazy. However, some leaders are so toxic that their negative behaviors outweigh the good that they accomplish. Strongly toxic leaders often send followers fleeing because of the vitriol, harshness, and loss of energy that they cause. (However, toxic leaders do not have a conscious and comprehensive approach to corrupt their own community with division, hatred, and various forms of subjugation, which is our working – if somewhat artificial – distinction between toxic and vampire leadership.) In this section, we discuss examples from both episodic and strongly toxic leaders.

Toxic leaders tend to diminish organizational resilience or lessen their personal resilience by their dysfunctional behaviors. Preparedness requires taking in information and ideas from as many sources as possible and having realistic plans in place to advance a leader's responsibilities. A prime example of lack of preparedness was Andrew Johnson (1865–1869), the vice president at the time of Lincoln's assassination. Growing up as a poor Southerner, he was a racist, but his real passion was against the wealthy, slave-owning class as oppressing not only slaves who he did not

care about, but working-class Southerners, too. He was the only Southern senator not to resign and became the military governor of his home state for the North during the war. He was selected as Vice Presidential candidate with Lincoln in his bid for reelection, based on his espoused beliefs and Southern heritage, in order to provide a more balanced ticket. A month after the election, Lincoln was killed and Andrew Johnson became president. He followed Lincoln's plans for quick re-integration of the Southern states, but adamantly opposed any legislation providing legal rights or government assistance for the four million newly 'freedmen'. Heartened by this, Southern states rushed to meet the minimal requirements for re-admission to the Union, and simultaneously passed Black Codes that legally forced the freed slaves into a form of serfdom. Because of the outrage this caused in the North, he was unprepared when Congress overrode his many vetoes and then, ultimately, impeached him. He escaped conviction (and removal from office) by one vote, but had to watch as the radicalized North set up a military rule over the South that lasted nearly a decade. In turn, this caused severe bitterness in the Southern White community which gradually reinstated political and economic oppression. His lack of preparedness and willingness to compromise extended the war of ideologies that led to 75 years of subjugation of the Negro community in the South (Gordon-Reed, 2011).

If the heart of resilience is steadfastness in the face of adversity, then President Franklin Pierce (1853–1857) is an example, somewhat understandably given his personal challenges, of lack of it. He lost two of his three children before the election, and then immediately after his election but before assuming office, his family was in a train wreck. He and his wife survived relatively unhurt, only to see their last son decapitated. He and his wife became severely depressed, which Pierce coped with by becoming a working alcoholic. His lack of focus contributed to his inability to deal with the fallout from the disastrous decision to allow the expansion of slavery to western states seeking admission to the union (by overturning the Compromise of 1850). The poorly considered decision to allow local determination caused mini-civil wars in the West that presaged the upcoming national one. His ambivalence encouraged Southern unwillingness to compromise on the issue of slavery, a custom that was rapidly disappearing from, and ostracized by, the rest of the world. His most famous quote is one of pathos when he left office because it summarized his presidency so poignantly. In response to a bystander who asked what he was going to do next, he said, 'there is nothing left to do but get drunk'. Twelve year later, he died from cirrhosis of the liver due to alcoholism (Holt, 2010).

When exercising power, it is important for the leader to keep track of how and why initiatives are being implemented in their name. Because of the bustle that inevitably surrounds important leadership positions, it is easy for the details of leadership to evade leaders' direct purview if they lack energy. For our example, we use President Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) as a leader whose loss of energy caused his legacy to be extensively damaged. While liberal Americans in the 1980s were concerned about moderating the role of the U.S. in the world, the bulk of the country sided

with the President in maintaining an assertive international stance against Communism. Congress, however, had blocked any aid from any government source going to the right-wing rebel Nicaraguan group, the Contras, who were trying to overthrow a democratically elected, but communist-leaning government. In a complicated and entirely illegal operation run out of the White House under an ideologically-driven colonel by the name of Oliver North, arms were illicitly sold to Iran with the expectation that the sale proceeds would be sent to the Nicaraguan rebels. This transaction violated numerous U.S. laws. At the time of the planning, Reagan was 74, noticeably less active, and was probably already in the very early stages of Alzheimer's disease. Because Reagan had been an astute politician, it seems unlikely that he would have engaged in such a nefarious and ill-conceived plan had it not been for activist subordinates who overwhelmed his better judgment. Reagan ultimately apologized on national TV, bravely taking full responsibility, but nonetheless 11 indictments were eventually handed down against other individuals (Morris, 1999).

While good leaders adapt well to change and crises, poor leaders don't adapt well, and toxic leaders blame 'circumstances beyond their control' and others. Herbert Hoover (1929–1933) is an unusual example of both good and poor adaptation, as well as toxic blaming. Hoover was a wealthy engineer who then turned to philanthropy and politics. In World War I, Belgium was partially occupied by Germany in a stalled war that drove the population into famine. Hoover created the largest and most successful relief effort in American history without significant financial aid from the government, leading him to believe in the importance of private volunteerism, rather than direct government aid. Ever the egotist and director of action, Hoover rarely took the advice of others, even in relief operations. As President, Hoover was faced with what he initially thought was a financial panic, and then a large recession eight months into his administration. While private relief efforts were supported by his administration, the government continued to be more concerned about deficit reduction than addressing a growing economic and humanitarian crisis. By the end of his administration, he had begun using government resources much more liberally, but the scope of relief and financial intervention was far too modest to stop the deep economic damage from several decades of poorly managed growth. Had he listened to economists about the scope of the economic event that came to be known as the Great Depression, he could have moved much more quickly to address a downturn that was unparalleled in U.S. history. Hoover became a vocal and bitter critic of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, his successor, who continued all of his programs but expanded and supplemented them with a speed with which Hoover had formerly been known to have (Whyte, 2017).

In terms of concern for others, especially those whose fate the leader protects, both the positive and negative versions are illustrated by Andrew Jackson (1829–1837), a powerful two-term president. On the positive side, he was a strong advocate of the 'common man', as long as they were Caucasian. He advocated making government offices 'so plain and simple' that they could be done by the middle and lower classes,

rather than just the upper class as had been the custom up until his tenure in office. On the other hand, Andrew Jackson, whose image is on the twenty dollar bill today, was a harsh slaveholder who ensured the survival of the custom during his lifetime, and advocated for an extension of slave-owner rights to recover run-away slaves. He was renowned as an 'Indian fighter' before becoming president and, after assuming office, ensured the expulsion of the bulk of the Native American living east of the Mississippi, breaking all treaties prior to that. He certainly did not initiate the pattern of internal deportation and strict confinement of Native Americans, but he vastly expanded it and set a model of routine reduction or removal of Indian reservations if the land later became desirable to Whites, as it did in Oklahoma (Meacham, 2008).

Power sharing is very much dependent on one's perspective. Is the leader sharing power with the elite, the middle-class, one's countrymen, or humanity? As noted in previous vignettes, America in the 19th century had no interest in any power sharing with Blacks (nee Negroes), Native Americans (nee Indians), or Asians (nee Orientals). America tended to be a brash society bent on attaining its 'manifest destiny' of great size and wealth at almost any cost and with any rationale. James K. Polk (1845–1849) is an interesting example of a supremely successful president who the American public seems to have conveniently forgotten. His annexation of the Republic of Texas, his land acquisition after the contrived Mexican-American war, and his feisty negotiations with the British over the Oregon Territory expanded the U.S. by over a third. However, when one includes the break-away region of Texas by American settlers, Mexico lost over 50% of its landmass. While Mexican residents became putative citizens of the U.S. after the signing of the treaty ending the war, their status was marginalized over time, often with violence and endless legal disputes of land ownership, similar to Black rights of the same timeframe. The land-grab was much noted at the time of the Mexican-American war, but over time, the war was recast as a war of aggression against the U.S. by an egotistical Mexican president. However, the asymmetrical balance of power between the U.S. and Mexico did not increase Polk's reputation and legacy despite the massive scale of his expansionist accomplishments (Seigenthaler, 2003).

Leaders need the trust of their followers, but that means that they must occasionally accommodate or even bend to their will rather than solely following their own opinion. President John Tyler (1841–1845) was not such a man. He was perceived to be more interested in satisfying his ever-evolving personal inclinations. Born in a wealthy, slave-owning family, he was used to getting his own way. When he could not get along with the Democratic Party of the day, he joined the newly formed Whig party. Eventually he became their vice-presidential candidate to balance the party ticket. However, President Harrison died less than a month into his term in office and Tyler assumed the presidency. Tyler started vetoing his own party's legislation based on political differences of opinion, which had not been the custom until that time. Relatively quickly, his own party dubbed him 'His Accidency' and expelled him from the party despite the fact that he was a sitting president. They

also initiated the first attempt at impeachment of an American president, although it failed by being brought forth too quickly. As his term was coming to a close, he tried to rejoin the Democratic Party to win reelection. They declined, but Tyler was successful at sabotaging the party that put him in office, solidifying his reputation as a politician who was not to be trusted, and when remembered at all, known for his fickleness (May, 2008).

Good leaders build community, create a sense of shared fate, and provide inspiration while they are acting as stewards of the community or organization. John Adams (1797–1801) was an important, if sometimes quarrelsome, founding father through the American Revolution and afterward, brilliant at diplomatic negotiations in which his persistence provided enormous dividends to American interests. As Vice President to the popular George Washington, he complained about feeling underappreciated, a theme he returned to for the rest of his life. While his stubbornness served him well in war and diplomacy, it did not serve him well when he ascended to the presidency, even publicly squabbling with key members of his own party. Among a series of laws that he signed was a sedition act that made it illegal to criticize the president, stoking accusations of un-American monarchical beliefs. Adams himself was proud of his stubbornness: ‘Thanks to God that he gave me stubbornness when I know I am right’ (McCullough, 2002, p. 272). But even he later realized that during his presidency he often went too far: ‘I refused to suffer in silence. I sighed, sobbed, and groaned, and sometimes screeched and screamed. And I must confess to my shame and sorrow that I sometimes swore’ (Ellis, 2005, p. 57). Stubbornness was seen as one of his defining traits, a fact about which Adams made no apology. His inability to create a friendly environment within his own political faction, much less accommodate other political perspectives, led to the loss of his bid for reelection and the swift decline of his party (McCullough, 2002).

The degree of toxicity of these presidents can be debated, but would likely be along a range of veniality. While the personal pettiness and egotism of Adams, Hoover, and Tyler made them one-term presidents, they certainly did more to harm their political careers than the country. The weakness of the well-meaning Pierce in protecting Southern interests casts him as a type of tragic figure in the mode of Neville Chamberlain who foolishly appeased Hitler. Reagan’s single act of allowing himself to be drawn into a ridiculous international escapade must be weighed with his overall good intent and achievements. Polk’s aggressive militarism, not unique in the 19th century, enhanced the national interests, although it did so at the expense of a neighboring country. However, the level of toxicity exhibited by Andrew Jackson towards Native Americans and Andrew Johnson against the freed slaves makes them quite toxic in some ways, but nonetheless questionable as vampire leaders. Andrew Johnson damaged the country trying to overturn the results of the Civil War with the hasty restoration of the Southern states at the expense of the former slaves; however, he was marginalized after just two years in office so his political resilience was negligible. Andrew Jackson, perhaps the ablest presidential politician of the 19th century,

continued his firm grip on his party for the next three presidencies. His political and personal resilience were remarkable. However, despite his brutality toward Native Americans in the Indian Removal Act, he had a record of accomplishment dismantling the Second National Bank which had become corrupt, and in holding the North and South together by forcing the North to lower tariffs so hard on the South, and threatening to personally march an army to South Carolina if the state tried to secede.

Table 2 summarizes toxic leadership. Next, we turn to an example of a divisive President whose toxicity equals Andrew Johnson, and whose seeming resilience matches Andrew Jackson.

Table 2: Eight characteristics associated with toxic leadership

General Leadership Characteristic	Toxic Leadership as Self-centered and Weak Leadership
Preparedness	Inability to take the counsel of others, blind to their own weaknesses, willingness to take irresponsible risks
Perseverance	Doesn't bounce back but rather becomes dejected or even bitter
Energy	Becomes exhausted easily and pushes work on others
Ability to adjust to change	Takes credit for successful change and blames others for unsuccessful change
Attitude toward others (subordinates and followers)	Lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates
Power sharing (subordinates and followers)	Bullies other, intimidates
Attitude of followers and non-followers toward leader	A conviction by subordinates or those being led that the leader is motivated primarily by self-interest
Leader attitude toward the group or community	A personality or interpersonal technique that negatively affects organizational climate

6. Vampire leadership: rapacious and tenacious

Vampire leadership is not occasional toxicity; it is leadership with an overall agenda that is rapacious and tenacious. Historically, colonialism was a type of international vampire leadership, which sadly, created a model difficult to overcome for many of those countries when they became independent.

Vampire leadership continues to be far more likely to occur and be potent in any form of dictatorship. There are about fifty undisputed dictatorships in the world today. However, using the health, wealth, and happiness of regimes as a barometer, not all dictatorships in the world today are more wicked than good. For example, China has a one-party dictatorship, with its leader generally enjoying a long time at the helm of the country. Yet it is generally believed, despite the difficulty of getting high-quality data, that the Chinese central government enjoys a level of approval by its citizens vastly higher than the US government, if one excludes minority groups like the Uyghurs. On the other hand, the list of despotic dictators that leave the vast majority

of their people in poverty, often despite substantial natural resources, is long. Some of the most striking examples include Kim Jong-un of North Korea, Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, Bashar Al-Assad of Syria, and Teodoro Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea. Free and partially free societies today are much less likely to have vampire leaders as internal despots. Of course, one of the most famous vampire leaders of the modern era, Adolf Hitler, was duly elected in a ‘free’ society, transforming it into a dictatorship from within its own political system. The world seems increasingly ripe for this type of model. That is, winning elections through demagoguery and then refusing to allow peaceful transition once in power.

Former President Donald Trump’s (2017–2021) rise to power was unusual in its negativity and polarization of the country, only matched a few times in American history, such as the transitions of John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams to Andrew Jackson, and Andrew Jackson to Ulysses Grant. While intensely liked by his followers, Trump was by far the most intensely disliked American head-of-state since presidential polling began. Yet it is his political resilience to be able to shape the political landscape after his presidency that sets him apart; that post-presidential grip on power is rivaled only by Andrew Jackson. Here we provide eight examples of his sinister, toxic agenda – catapulting him into the realm of vampire leadership. We use the same eight categories as above but use the more ‘colorful’ terms frequently used in the press and academic journals which align with our characterization of vampire leadership.

6.1 Wiley and Machiavellian

Vampire leaders don’t need to be as prepared for crises and calamities as good leaders because there is always someone else to blame. For example, President Trump’s central reelection argument was that his tax cuts and economic agenda had supercharged the U.S. economy. His focus, early in 2020, was on the November election and on messaging the strength of the economy under his stewardship. When the outbreak of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 resulted in the loss of more than 20 million jobs and an unemployment rate not seen since the Great Depression (Soucheray, 2020), Trump blamed others and was ill prepared to lead the robust public health effort necessary to combat the pandemic. Trump initially blamed the Obama administration and state governors for shortages in coronavirus testing, stating ‘I don’t take responsibility at all’ (Oprysko, 2020; Yen, 2020). Later, he blamed states, public health officials, and the media for the perception of the crisis, arguing that the only reason the situation appeared so severe was that the U.S. was testing for COVID-19 more than other countries (Williams, 2020). Perhaps most concerning, Trump blamed China for the global pandemic, invoking the rhetoric and frame of the ‘China virus’ to avoid responsibility, without regard for the repercussions to millions of Asian Americans.

6.2 Defiant

Vampire leaders have a unique defense to instances of their defeat – simply deny or ignore it! Trump started this pattern the second day in office when his press secretary claimed that the inauguration crowd size was the largest in American history, when photos and other metrics showed it to be about one-third the size of his predecessors (Ford, 2017). For many of his fiascos he used his famous punchline in his rallies, ‘It’s a blip, not a catastrophe.’ His history-making example of defiance was after he was defeated in 2020 in an election that was not close. Trump’s obdurate refusal to accept the result of elections led to the insurrection of the Capitol on Jan 6, 2021, causing the death of five people (Evelyn, 2021) and the suicide of four police officers (Wolfe, 2021). Trump also largely shaped COVID-19 response initially. Trump ignored the pandemic in the beginning and defied the guidelines his own administration pursued because he was afraid of an economic downturn. Maintaining social distance along with wearing facial coverings were promoted by health experts as the most effective weapons against the spread of COVID-19, but Trump defied those practices repeatedly. In fact, numerous studies found that those who had faith in President Trump were much more likely to defy social distancing, and ultimately, die (e.g., Graham *et. al.*, 2020).

6.3 Blood sucking

Vampire leaders don’t get their energy from good health and the opportunity to do good. They get it from their manic nature, their sense of revenge, and the opportunity to relish in the failure of others. For example, President Trump revealed on October 2, 2020 that he and First Lady Melania Trump had tested positive for COVID-19 (Baker and Haberman, 2020) and he was admitted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center the same day. On October 4, Trump made an impulsive decision to leave quarantine and wave at his supporters from his motorcade as it drove around Bethesda, Maryland. As Dr. James Phillips, one of the attending physicians at Walter Reed observed about the blood-sucking behavior, ‘Every single person in the vehicle during that completely unnecessary presidential ‘drive-by’ just now has to be quarantined for 14 days. They might get sick. They may die. For political theater’ (Lawder, 2020). Trump also made a dramatic and choreographed return to the White House on October 6. He exited Marine One, walked to the staircase at the South Portico entrance, turned to face the cameras, performatively removed his mask despite being infected with the virus, and gave his well-known two thumbs up gesture (Neuman, 2020). Psychologist Mary Trump, Donald’s niece, explained the manic and vengeful behavior as an inability to admit to the weakness of being ill and a belief that illness is an ‘unacceptable’ sign of vulnerability (Ross, 2020). Most significantly, Trump’s fear of perceived weakness put millions of people at risk. Trump recorded and posted a video in which he downplayed the danger of the virus and discouraged vaccination, ‘Don’t be afraid of it. You’re going to beat it’ (Neuman, 2020). The coronavirus had

already killed more than 210,000 Americans (Neuman, 2020) and few, of course, have had access to the top-flight care and undivided attention that the President enjoyed.

6.4 Shapeshifting

Good leaders learn to cope with change by making honest assessments of the need for change and getting a critical mass of support. Vampire leaders make many mistakes in trying to achieve change in haste which they manage by lying about the facts and manipulating public opinion. While leaders should be able to adjust their strategy based on the changed circumstances and sometimes utilize ‘strategic ambiguity,’ vampire leaders use this strategy to lie and deceive constantly. For example, Trump’s lack of a coherent foreign policy allowed him to ‘shapeshift’ his Syria policy erratically (Brown, 2019). Trump claimed that he was taking the fight to ISIS and promised at the same time that he wanted to withdraw troops from Syria. Acting on Trump’s word, Erdogan deployed troops along his country’s border with Syria and took control of the territory that had been previously controlled by U.S. Military and their Kurdish allies who he betrayed. In fact, Trump employed a policy of shapeshifting in foreign policy throughout his presidency. He wanted to ‘bomb the shit out of ISIS’ and promised to keep the United States ‘out of the endless wars’ and yet it was actually his successor that took the painful step of withdrawing from Afghanistan. His relationship with Kim Jong-un bounced back-and-forth from a ‘bromance’ to a yelling match (Parry, 2020). Trump’s eerie defense of Vladimir Putin stunned European allies and Americans alike while turning a century of policy conflict with Russia its head without political gain, even when Putin subsidized a bounty on American soldiers (McFaul, 2020).

6.5 Narcissistic

A vampire leader’s relationship with others is not based on the humanity of followers but rather the super-heroic qualities and charisma they believe themselves to possess (Chatterjee and Hambrick, 2007). Trump’s narcissism is so extravagant that whole books have been devoted to the topic (Buser and Cruz, 2016; [Mary] Trump, 2020). A narcissistic individual has an inflated sense of self and is preoccupied with having that self-view continually reinforced. Trump has mentioned on numerous occasions that he was a ‘genius’ and knew more than anyone about almost everything. For example, after about a year in office he said: ‘I would give myself an A+’ on the TV show called Fox and Friends. Putting his narcissism on display is something that he thinks is important, as he quipped in 2018 at a rally in South Carolina: ‘Sometimes you have to toot your own horn because nobody else is going to do it.’ His grandiosity and narcissism, even though they came across as absurd and unappealing to most educated voters, were admired by his followers. In general, most Trump supporters were less secure about their identities and felt undervalued and vulnerable so they have found his grandiosity and narcissism appealing according to many experts (Kernberg, 2020; Yalch, 2021). Working class white males without college degrees constitute a major voting block for Trump, because they feel that America is slipping

away from them and believe that the ‘American’ dream is going to immigrants. Capitalizing on this vulnerability, Trump created a narrative laced with the grievances of his supporters, repeatedly saying that he was the only politician who could rescue them from their perils. Trump has used his political rallies to create an in-group mentality pitting his supporters against liberals, his enemies of the moment, and media establishments who he debases with crude language (Ott, 2017). He creates a malignant collective narcissism, which has been associated with voting for Trump in 2016 and 2020 elections (Golec de Zavala, Dyduch-Hazar and Lantos 2019; Marchlewska *et al.*, 2018; Cichocka and Cislak, 2020).

6.6 Avoids sunlight

Since the vampire leader’s belief in himself is so absolute, why would they want to share power? Vampire leaders protect themselves with selective secrecy and by hoarding power, even from immediate subordinates. For example, as a candidate for the presidency, Donald Trump asserted that he would hire the best and the brightest if elected. ‘I’m going to surround myself only with the best and most serious people ... we want top of the line professionals’, Trump told *The Washington Post* in August 2016 (Bump, 2016). The installation of accomplished subordinates would herald an administration defined by policy and legislative success. On June 17, 2016, Trump informed audiences at a rally in Woodlands, Texas, that the U.S. would even ‘start winning again’ under his leadership to such a degree that ‘people are gonna get sick of it’ (Shabad, 2016). Implicit in this braggadocio is an understanding that Trump, if elected, would entrust these highly effective team-members with crucial duties; his subordinates would make invaluable contributions to a gold-standard presidency. In fact, according to the Brookings Institution, Trump’s turnover of ‘decision-makers’ – about 60 members from the White House staff and the Executive Office of the President – was record-setting: higher than the five most recent presidents, double the previous leader in turnover, Ronald Reagan, and more than triple that of his immediate predecessor, Barack Obama (Tenpas, 2018). In blood-sucking fashion, Trump also frequently demonized his ex-team members in order to make himself look better. Trump took to Twitter, for instance, to insult his former senior White House advisor and ‘Apprentice’ contestant Omarosa Manigault Newman: ‘When you give a crazed, crying lowlife a break, and give her a job at the White House, I guess it just didn’t work out Good work by General Kelly for quickly firing that dog!’ (Calia, 2018). Trump thus increasingly hoarded power and resorted to secrecy, fostered a dysfunctional White House environment, and oversaw an organizational atmosphere filled with distrust (Woodward, 2018).

6.7 Hypnotic

Not surprisingly, the reactions of followers and nonfollowers is starkly different. Followers appreciate the egotism and brush aside bouts of delusion; while nonfollowers live in fear and loathing of a person that they think is diabolical and dangerous. Ralph Benko (2015) writes in *Forbes Magazine* that ‘hypnosis, like sushi, is moving

out of ‘fringe’ or ‘risky’ into ‘new’ and even ‘hot’. According to Benko, Trump utilized hypnosis by speaking directly to voters’ imagination. He argued in a 2015 article that mere hypnosis might not carry Trump to presidency, but hypnosis remains a potent force in political communication. Many observers are perplexed by the level and the extent of support Trump enjoys despite his documented lies, ignorance, and personal follies. Lisa Morgan, in her book ‘Comply with Me: Trump’s Hypnosis Toolkit Exposed’ (2020) argues that Trump aimed to achieve ‘unthinking compliance’ by creating ‘hypnotic confusion’ technique. This technique enabled him to sow suggestions in people’s unconscious mind. Charles Adams, creator of the cartoon Dilbert, saw a hypnotist in Donald Trump. Adams told Reason TV that behind Trump’s blustering bully, grandiose self-promoting rhetoric and cruel insults, he in fact utilized the techniques of hypnosis to communicate with his supporters. Adams says that Trump uses visual imagery, vagueness, and ‘linguistic kill shots’ and other techniques to captivate his followers (Monticello, 2016). Trump’s apparent hypnotic powers over his followers caused alarms among his non-followers. They feared that Trump could do great harm, not only by demonizing various segments of populations, but ultimately by undermining American democratic systems and values.

6.8 Creating other vampires

A major element necessary for the success of vampire leadership is the ability to stoke a sense of grievance and disdainful superiority among followers. Demagoguery might be the vampire-like attribute which best personifies President Trump’s toxic leadership. The group or community at question is the Republican Party and Trump has instituted a brutal litmus test: either support unconditionally his primacy and war against those he dubs ‘elites’ or do not — and thus become the enemy. This is starkly demonstrated by Trump’s false grievance that he did not actually lose the 2020 election since the election was stolen from him through massive voter fraud. The conspiracy theory has become the central organizing principle of the Republican Party: one either embraces Trump’s ‘big lie’ about election fraud or chooses to abandon Trump and thus the current party, remade in Trump’s vampiric style of grievance politics. As a result, the nation has seen the creation of a multitude of other vampires or vampire-like phenomena: a strong plurality of Republican voters who think it is at least somewhat important for Republicans to continue believing that Trump won the election (Schulman, 2021); prominent Republicans like Steve Scalise, House minority whip, who refuse to admit that President Biden actually won the election (Pengelly, 2021); sham recounts like the one conducted in Arizona, which both reinvigorate Trump’s lie and set the stage for overturning future elections if the results are unfavorable (Litt, 2021); and the creation of dozens of state laws that are ostensible responses to election impropriety, but in actuality are extensions of Trump’s big lie and for the purpose of voter suppression (Wilson, 2021). This may be Trump’s chief legacy: the creation of other vampires whose source for blood-sucking is an Orwellian assault on the truth. Table 3 summarizes vampire leadership.

Table 3: Eight characteristics of vampire leadership

General Leadership Characteristic	Vampire Leadership as Rapacious, Contagious, and Potent	Vampire-like Attributes
Preparedness	Revisionist and blames others; twists facts; seeks weaknesses in others	Wily and Machiavellian
Perseverance	Ignores or completely denies defeat	Defiant
Energy	Manic; revengeful and relishes in the failure of others	Blood sucking
Ability to adjust to change	Lying; distortion of facts	Shapeshifting
Attitude toward others (subordinates and followers)	Conviction that one is smarter and more talented than others; belief in one's own charisma	Narcissistic
Power sharing (subordinates and followers)	Secretive; hoards power	Avoids sunlight
Attitude of followers and non-followers toward leader	Followers mesmerized by leader messages no matter how crazy; non-followers horrified by being demonized	Hypnotic power over followers (fear by non-followers)
Leader attitude toward the group or community	Sense of grievance; group superiority; demagoguery	Creating other vampires

7. Conclusion

Bad leaders come in many different forms and blends. Poor leaders are a type of bad leader who can be generally incompetent, occasionally self-indulgent, or lazy. Bad leaders who are highly competent at wielding the power of leadership and who are resilient, however, tend to be far more dangerous to their victims or international civil society. Using American presidents as the pool from which to derive examples, five of the presidents were identified as having toxic and some elements of destructive egotism or self-indulgence (Pierce, Reagan, Hoover, Tyler, and John Adams). On the other hand, Andrew Johnson's suppression of the freedmen's rights after the Civil War went well beyond toxicity, but he failed to be politically resilient, other than barely escaping expulsion from office. Polk's annexation of over a third of Mexico was certainly a successful landgrab, but ultimately it was primarily territorial and he died at its conclusion. Andrew Jackson's feeling of antipathy toward 'Indians' and his enactment of laws to implement 'ethnic cleansing' of Native Americans east of the Mississippi River, is another example of virulent toxicity toward a specific group. However, Trump's toxicity has already far exceeded that of any American president in its history.

Trump's ability to repeat lies in a mesmerizing way to his followers has broken, and possibly shattered, traditional norms for U.S. presidents. His consistent and non-factual revisionism is now accepted and endorsed by the bulk of his party. Unfounded attacks on foes and dissenters within his own party have also become standard for a major portion of the American public. Not only has Trump created a personal cult that will clearly cast a shadow for at least a few election cycles (but potentially many

cycles), his numerous vampire clones seem to be doing well politically. There is little doubt that Trump has rattled U.S. democracy to its core with his fascistic statements, shocking attempts to overturn the democratic process, and the institutional damage to structures and norms he has caused. Sadly, the challenge to the U.S. democratic system is not currently abating.

Given Trump's chilling grip on his followers who perceive themselves as vulnerable to degrading social forces, it is unlikely that any silver bullet will be found in the near term. In fact, as Trump's story continues to unfold, it is already clear that his legacy of division, hatred, and cruelty will cast a spell on the U.S. for many years to come.

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