Book Review

Too Much and Never Enough: How my Family Created the World’s most Dangerous Man by Mary L Trump, SIMON & SCHUSTER, London-New York-Sydney-Toronto-New Delhi, 2020, 206pp.,

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More than two dozen books have been written about Donald Trump and his presidency since he assumed office on January 20\(^{th}\) 2017 as the 45\(^{th}\) President of the United States of America. A couple of these publications are by former appointees who in many instances either gave account of their stewardship or pointed attention to the perpetual turmoil and uncertainty in the administration. Perhaps the most riveting and scathing book is the one by Mary L Trump, a niece of President Donald Trump. The book titled “Too Much and Never Enough: How my family created the world’s most dangerous man” is the subject of this review. Before his foray into the Republican Party primaries in 2015 and his eventual surprised emergence as President, Donald Trump was widely known as that real estate business man and reality television show host. But who is Donald Trump? Perhaps no one is better placed to give a detailed portrait of the man who will later become the most powerful man on earth than a close family member. Why will a niece write a scathing tell-it-all book about her uncle? Is she motivated by patriotism, a desire to get even with the president or material consideration? We shall return to this question.

In terms of the structure and methodology of the book, the fourteen-chapter book consist of four parts with the first part providing a background history of the Trump clan starting with the patriarch, Friedrich Trump. The second part dealt with the early family life of Donald Trump. The third part discussed his adult life and foray into the family business. While the fourth part discussed the impact of his politics and his mishandling of various national assignments. The author relied on conversations she had with some family members which she secretly recorded and her memory as an insider who grew up in the Trump family to give a front roll account of the family dynamics that produced Donald Trump. The reliance on memory and secretly recorded conversations with no one else to

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corroborate some of the claims is a major weakness of the book. The credibility of her account is however undergird by her professional qualification as a clinical psychologist.

Mary L. Trump studied English Literature at Tufts University, earn a master’s degree in English literature at Columbia University and Holds a PhD in clinical psychology from the Derner Institute of Advance Psychological Studies at Adelphi University.

Friedrich Trump the patriarch of the family was born in Germany, he left for the United States in 1885 when he turned eighteen according to the author in order to avoid ‘mandatory military service’. He returned to Germany in 1901 and married Elizabeth Christ and settled permanently in New York in 1905. Friedrich Trump died suddenly of the Spanish flu and left behind a wife and three children. Frederick his first son while still in high school took interest and was intrigued by the real estate business, with the help and encouragement of Elizabeth his widowed mother set up a real estate business. He later married Maryanne Macleod a recently arrived immigrant from Scotland and they had five children namely Maryanne, Frederick, Elizabeth, Donald and Robert in that order. The author revealed in this background chapter how from a little beginning Frederick Trump, the first-generation son of a German immigrant built a real estate business that was associated with providing mass housing needs for middle class resident in New York.

Donald Trump grew up in a home with an absentee and distant father who was preoccupied with growing his real estate business rather than involved in the lives and wellbeing of his children. At this period according to the author, his mother was in and out of hospital managing complications arising from child birth. The author further stated that “Donald suffered deprivation that would scar him for life”. In order to cope, he began to develop “powerful but primitive defenses” that include “hostility to others, bully, disrespect and aggressiveness”. These traits he manifest at home and in school earning him an expulsion from Kew-Forest, a school in which his elder siblings attended and his father was a member of the school board. On recommendation, his father enrolled him in New York Military Academy as a way to rein in his recalcitrant behaviours. In 1966 Donald Trump transferred from Fordham College to the University of Pennsylvania, Wharton School of Business after enlisting the help of his friend Joe Shapiro to take his SAT entrance test for him. The author demonstrated how Donald Trump was raised in a family where there was lack of empathy and emotional connection, this vacuum she argues is responsible for how disinterested the president is in the lives and wellbeing of
Americans who depend on him to show leadership and empathy with the surge and scourge of the corona virus.

Upon graduation from University, Donald by this time had become his father’s favourite child took up a prominent position in Trump organisation with his father increasingly indulging every of his whim. Donald secured his father’s attention in a way nobody else did in the family and was exposed to the ins and outs of the real estate business. Three years after he joined the business, his father promoted him to the position of President of Trump Management while he remained CEO. At this point it became obvious that Donald was the heir apparent even though he had two elder sisters and a brother who died in 1981 at the age of 42, leaving behind two children, including the author of the book under review.

The author recorded how in 1973 at age 27, Donald and his father were sued by the Department of Justice Civil Right Division for violating the 1968 Fair Housing Act. It was a housing discrimination suit in which the Trump organisation was accused of refusing to rent apartment to non-white. The case was eventually settled out of court. Racial profiling with Donald Trump did not start with his presidency. Frederick Trump Sr. mental decline became obvious and he died in 1999 after coming down with Alzheimer, a situation Donald attempted to exploit by adding a codicil to his father’s will. A scheme he hatched that would have made him the sole beneficiary of his father’s estate. Their mother Maryanne Trump also died in year 2000 and thereafter the four remaining children decided to sell the entire Trump estate and that became a subject of litigation. Mary Trump the author of the book under review and her brother Fredrick 111 found out after their grandfather died that their late father’s line had been erased from the will as if the oldest son of Frederick Trump Sr. never existed. The case was eventually settled out of court and a semblance of unity retuned to the family.

According to the author, when Trump announced his bid for the presidency in June 2015, none of his siblings took him serious and none of them were around him on the campaign trail. In one of the author’s discussion with Maryanne, Donald Trump eldest sister around that period, she referred to her younger brother as a “clown” who has had “five bankruptcies”. Donald Trump did become president and ascended the White House. In the White House, Trump violated presidential etiquette, while Twitter became his virtual office and from there he latched out at his opponents especially the media houses that attempt to scrutinise and hold him accountable. In nearly four years, the administration
has witnessed a record turnover of Presidential aides. There have been four National Security Advisers, four Chief of Staff, two Secretary of State, two Attorney General and almost a dozen press secretaries, all indicating a dysfunctional Presidency.

Writing from the perspective of a trained clinical psychologist, the author argued that Donald Trump met all the criteria for a “narcissistic personality disorder”, he also meet the criteria for “dependent personality disorder”, the hallmark of which include an inability to make decision or take responsibility. A condition she traced to his “malignantly dysfunctional family”.

According to the author “from his childhood to his early forays into the New York real estate world until today, Donald aberrant behaviour has been consistently normalized by others”. First he was enabled by his father who gave him preferential treatment and then the media in New York portrayed him as a business tycoon and self-made deal-maker culminating with him as host of the Television reality show- the Apprentice. The banks were also sold the Trump gambit as they opened their vault for an unlimited line of credit to fund his numerous fantasies culminating in bankruptcies. Today he is being enabled by the Republican Party, its media affiliates and the white evangelical movement. This is despite the fact that Trump never had strong roots in the Republican Party nor is he a practicing Christian. As the elder sister Maryanne is quoted to have said, “… The only time Donald went to church was when the cameras were there”.

In terms of legacy and his place in history, Trump can point to a record of fulfilment of right-wing campaign promises such as tax reforms, travel ban from selected countries and the relocation of the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Part of his legacy will also be his coziness with authoritarian leaders like Kim Jong-Un of North Korea and Vladimir Putin of Russia often to the dismay of traditional US allies. While his defeat in the 2020 presidential election represent a repudiation of his leadership style, Trump has changed the character of global politics by flagrantly flouting all moral rules of presidential conduct and inspiring right-wing populism in all parts of the world. For instance, the populist president of South America’s largest democracy, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil now refers to himself as the “Trump of the Tropics”. In Africa, the Trump effect is likely to bolster the ranks of leaders with authoritarian mindset who hide under the veneer of democracy to perpetrate anti-democratic practices.

Breaking the cycle and diminishing the ranks of populist leaders like Donald Trump in the future will entail ensuring mainstream political parties do not lend their platforms to extremist and demagogues. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt argued in their seminal
work “How Democracies Die” that the filtering and gatekeeping role of mainstream political parties is very important in keeping extremist away from accessing political power (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

To return to the question why will a niece write a scathing tell-it-all book about her uncle? Is she motivated by patriotism, a desire to get even with her uncle or material consideration? Mary L Trump, answered the question in the book. According to her, she considered speaking out publicly about her uncle earlier, but because of the background of the lawsuit she and her brother had instituted years back she concluded that if she spoke publicly about her uncle, she will be “painted as a disgruntled, disinherited niece looking to cash in or settle a score”. However, having watched President Donald Trump bungled every national challenge, from the handling of race relations to the covid-19 pandemic, she decided it was time to speak up and make sure he was not afforded reelection. An objective that have been accomplished with the election of Joe Biden. Like part of the title of the book imply- Too Much and Never Enough; President Trump seem not to have had enough of the White House and the Presidency as he dispute the outcome of the 2020 election.

Reference