

HOW THE DEMOCRATS LOST THEIR WAY

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Life in Normalville

Normalville PA. Yes, there really is a town named Normalville, in Pennsylvania about 60 miles south of Pittsburgh with a zip code of 15469. It was founded in 1843.

If there were a way to illustrate the beginning, middle, and end of this election cycle in four powerful moments, I'd start here with the faces of the men and women working on the construction of the Keystone pipeline, and the owners of the small businesses who supported them, that I witnessed days after President Joe Biden terminated their livelihoods.

These are people who work with their hands in the harshest of weather conditions digging trenches, cleaning feeder pipes, laying concrete, ensuring the proper fittings on the connecting pipes, and loading and unloading heavy materials by hand. That's not including the faces of the people who run the motels, diners, machine shops, and barber shops and the mechanics who make sure they are fed, housed, cleaned, and able to get home when the job is done.

The next image in my coverage of these first two years of the Biden administration captured the true beginning of his descent away from the public. It happened while I was driving past the town square in *Independence, Missouri*, and saw 13 empty chairs sitting in a semicircle at the base of the lowered American flag in front of the Old Jackson County Courthouse, with each chair bearing the name of one of the 13 soldiers lost in Afghanistan during Biden's bug-out from that country.

Old Jackson County Courthouse in Independence, Missouri

It was in the days and weeks after Aug. 26, 2021, when the nation lost those service members during Biden's botched withdrawal, that the media and the Democrat Party as a whole failed to understand the mark that moment had on the American psyche.

It was a shift away from the party in power and the president, whose credibility since then has never stopped slipping away.

Almost exactly one year later, at Philadelphia's Independence Hall on Sept. 1, 2022, Biden gave a very dark speech, with two Marines flanked on either side of him, about how half of this country is racist, extremist, and wants to upend democracy as we know it.

That speech was a turning point against the Democrats, negating any advantage they hoped to gain in response to the Supreme Court's anti-abortion *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision.

In between, I've covered families struggling to make ends meet to pay for gas for their cars, maintain their farms, keep their businesses open as costs crush their profits, or find anyone willing to work for them.

I've watched parents distraught and ultimately bullied by education-union members for their concerns about their children's curriculum or books in the library; I've seen them struggle along with their children as they try to catch up in school or listened to them talk about their college-age children who are adrift and without purpose.

What is about to happen today November 8 2022 never needed to happen to the Democratic Party. Oh, yes, they would have lost a few seats, maybe, but if they had stuck to their promise to be a party of unity and compromise and brought the political temperature down, they would have enjoyed some semblance of a chance to hold a majority together.

Instead, they spent their time, day in and day out, constantly saying you or your family members, neighbors, co-workers, employees, or employer who voted for Donald Trump once or twice is an ultra-, mega-, extremist-MAGA insurrectionist fascist out to strip your rights and votes away.

And they wonder why people have turned on them!

The final image of this election happened last week when someone snapped an iPhone photo of Michael McGuire, who just got off of work at the local coal mine and rushed to Rupp Arena at the University of Kentucky so he could watch an event with his son.

Michael McGuire covered in soot after a shift in the mines. He rushed to be with his son, Easton

McGuire was covered in dirt from work. He said afterward he hadn't had time to shower after his shift. It was a moment that moved Kentucky men's basketball coach John Calipari to say in a press conference after he was sent the photo that it hit him "right between the eyes."

Calipari said, "My family's American dream started in a Clarksburg, West Virginia, coal mine, so this picture hits home."

It was a moment that hit home for a lot of voters — middle-of-the-road folks — who may have never worked with their hands a day in their lives but know their parents and grandparents did and respect what that work ethic did for the betterment of their family's legacy.

In that photo, they see themselves or who they'd think they'd be had they been in that same situation as McGuire, and they would have done it with as much pride as he did.

The Democrat Party and the cultural curators in this country that run our institutions, academia, national media, corporations, Hollywood, and our sports entities have forgotten that these people vote — no matter how much pressure you place on them, no matter how much you look down on them or call them names or believe you know better than them or think they should just deal with high prices or accept dangerous crime in their communities.

They feel much more connected to the values and work ethic of the McGuires in this world than the Hollywood actors sent out in droves to bring the votes home for the Democrat Party.

The Democrats need a much better message to appeal to voters the next time a big election is held — one that is aspirational, nondivisive, and truly inclusive.

That wasn't their message this year.

*Salena Zito is the author of **The Great Revolt: Inside the Populist Coalition Reshaping American Politics**.*

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