

Donald Trump's shocking success

DARKER IMPLICATIONS: After the lies and hate spewed, what sort of candidates does this open the door to in future elections?

JUST days ago I was in Ohio. I was talking to Republicans, and this was the refrain I kept hearing: Donald Trump is throwing this election away. He has no real campaign here. No get-out-the-votes operation. No ground game. Nothing that signifies or befits a truly serious presidential candidate.

These Republicans thought that he'd win the state — barely. But, they didn't think that he could snatch victories in some of the other places that he did on Tuesday, or draw so close to Hillary Clinton elsewhere, or to compete so tightly in the election overall, an election they deemed to be done, over, finished.

She had the best experts that money could buy, the most sophisticated data operation that the smartest wonks could put together, and the dutiful troops who went door to door, handing out "Stronger Together" literature and pleading her case.

He had his hair and his ego.

And yet, as this column went to bed around midnight, the race was too close to call, and the only clear conclusion was that the Electoral College landslide that more than a few pollsters and pundits had expected for Clinton didn't happen.

On Election Day, Trump did what he had throughout his surreal campaign: exploded the traditional assumptions, upended the usual expectations and forced us to look afresh at the accepted truisms and hoary clichés of our political life.

There are important lessons to learn and crucial questions to ask.

Democrats are where Republicans were when Trump romped to their party's nomination, which they were convinced for so long he could never get. They need to look seriously at the way they do business and how they arrived at this surprising, humbling destination.

Are the unglamorous, tedious approaches to rounding up votes as powerful as the booming voice of a celebrity with hours of free television time and millions of rapt Twitter followers? Does accurate polling lag behind the nature of contemporary American life?

NST

10/11/16

ms -14 -15

Clinton struggled more than had been predicted in the so-called Rust Belt... in yet another illustration of **how disaffected white men without college degrees had become and how left out of a new economy and a new age they felt.**



**FRANK
BRUNI**



And, are you being remotely realistic — or entirely reckless — to try to sell a candidate who personifies the status quo to an electorate that's clearly hungry for some kind of shock to the system?

There was an arrogance and foolishness to lining up behind Clinton as soon as so many Democratic leaders did, and to putting all their chips on her.

She was an awkward fit for the circumstances of 2016, in the same way that Jeb Bush was.

She was a flawed candidate unable to make an easy connection with voters. She was forever surrounded by messes: some of her own making, some blown out of proportion by the media, all of them exhausting to voters who had lived through a quarter-century of political melodrama with her.

She never found a pithy, pointed message. One Ohio resident noted to me that while Clinton's campaign workers showed up at his doorstep several times a week, they dropped off pamphlets dense with the rationale for her candidacy, the policies she'd espouse, the promises she was making.

You had to make a commitment to reading it, and you couldn't reduce to one sentence, or even two, what the overarching message and meaning of her candidacy were.

It's insane that a pledge to "make America great again" works better, because the vow is so starry-eyed and pat. But it's concise. Digestible. It takes emotion into account. Democrats in general and Clinton in

particular aren't always good at that.

Clinton struggled more than had been predicted in the so-called Rust Belt — states like Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania — in yet another illustration of how disaffected white men without college degrees had become and how left out of a new economy and a new age they felt.

Their anger was the story of the primaries, the fuel not just for Trump's campaign but for Bernie Sanders's as well. And it manifested itself as well in the general election. Both parties are going to have to reckon with it.

And they should. If this were all that Trump had shown us, we'd owe him our thanks.

But, there are darker implications here, too. After all the lies he told, all the fantasy he indulged in, all the hate he spewed and all the divisions he sharpened, Trump was rewarded with tens of millions of votes. What sort of candidates does this open the door to in the 2018 congressional races? And the 2020 presidential race?

After what we've been through, I can't bear to think about the contests and conflagrations to come.

But we need to, quickly and thoroughly.

Trump began as something of a joke, proceeded to become an anomaly and ended up as the shrillest of alarms. It rang loud on Election Day. We had better listen to it.

The writer is a New York Times columnist



Trump's pledge to 'make America great again' is insane, but it worked because it's concise and takes emotion into account. AFP pic