

# A time for truth and reconciliation

Trump's return to the White House augurs the 'apokálypsis' of the ancien regime's secrets

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The writer is a technology entrepreneur and investor. In 2016, President Barack Obama told his staff that Donald Trump's election victory was "not the apocalypse". By any definition, he was correct. But understood in the original sense of the Greek word apokálypsis, meaning "unveiling", Obama could not give the same reassurance in 2025. Trump's return to the White House augurs the apokálypsis of the ancien regime's secrets. The new administration's revelations need not justify vengeance — reconstruction can go hand in hand with reconciliation. But for reconciliation to take place, there must first be truth. The apokálypsis is the most peaceful means of resolving the old guard's war on the internet, a war the internet won. My friend and colleague Eric Weinstein calls the pre-internet custodians of secrets the Distributed Idea Suppression Complex (DISC) — the media organisations, bureaucracies, universities and government-funded NGOs that traditionally delimited public conversation. In hindsight, the internet had already begun our liberation from the DISC prison upon the prison death of financier and child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein in 2019. Almost half of Americans polled that year mistrusted the official story that he died by suicide, suggesting that DISC had lost total control of the narrative. It may be too early to answer the internet's questions about the late Mr Epstein. But one cannot say the same of the assassination of John F Kennedy. Sixty-five per cent of Americans still doubt that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. Like an outlandishly postmodern detective story, we have waited 61 years for a denouement while the suspects — Fidel Castro, 1960s mafiosi, the CIA's Allen Dulles — gradually die. The thousands of classified government files on Oswald may or may not be red herrings, but opening them up for public inspection will give America some closure. We cannot wait six decades, however, to end the lockdown on a free discussion about Covid-19. In subpoenaed emails from Anthony Fauci's senior adviser David Morens, we learnt that National Institutes of Health apparatchiks hid their correspondence from Freedom of Information Act scrutiny. "Nothing," wrote Boccaccio in his medieval plague epic *The Decameron*, "is so indecent that it cannot be said to another person if the proper words are used to convey it." In that spirit, Morens and former chief US medical adviser Fauci will have the chance to share some indecent facts about our own recent plague. Did they suspect that Covid spawned from US taxpayer-funded research, or an adjacent Chinese military programme? Why did we fund the work of EcoHealth Alliance, which sent researchers into remote Chinese caves to extract novel coronaviruses? Is "gain of function" research a byword for a bioweapons programme? And how did our government stop the spread of such questions on social media? Our First Amendment frames the rules of engagement for domestic fights over free speech, but the global reach of the internet tempts its adversaries into a global war. Can we believe that a Brazilian judge banned X without American backing, in a tragicomic perversion of the Monroe Doctrine? Were we complicit in Australia's recent legislation requiring age verification for social media users, the beginning of the end of internet anonymity? Did we muster up even two minutes' criticism of the UK, which has arrested hundreds of people a year for online speech triggering, among other things, "annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety"? We may expect no better from Orwellian dictatorships in East Asia and Eurasia, but we must support a free internet in Oceania. Darker questions

still emerge in these dusky final weeks of our interregnum. Venture capitalist Marc Andreessen recently suggested on Joe Rogan's podcast that the Biden administration debanked crypto entrepreneurs. How closely does our financial system resemble a social credit system? Were an IRS contractor's illegal leaks of Trump's tax records anomalous, or should Americans assume their right to financial privacy hinges on their politics? And can one speak of a right to privacy at all when Congress conserves Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, under which the FBI conducts tens of thousands of warrantless searches of Americans' communications? South Africa confronted its apartheid history with a formal commission, but answering the questions above with piecemeal declassifications would befit both Trump's chaotic style and our internet world, which processes and propagates short packets of information. The first Trump administration shied away from declassifications because it still believed in the rightwing deep state of an Oliver Stone movie. This belief has faded. Our ancien regime, like the aristocracy of pre-revolutionary France, thought the party would never end. 2016 shook their historicist faith in the arc of the moral universe but by 2020 they hoped to write Trump off as an aberration. In retrospect, 2020 was the aberration, the rearguard action of a struggling regime and its struldbrugg ruler. There will be no reactionary restoration of the pre-internet past. The future demands fresh and strange ideas. New ideas might have saved the old regime, which barely acknowledged, let alone answered, our deepest questions — the causes of the 50-year slowdown in scientific and technological progress in the US, the racket of crescendoing real estate prices, and the explosion of public debt. Perhaps an exceptional country could have continued to ignore such questions, but as Trump understood in 2016, America is not an exceptional country. It is no longer even a great one. Identity politics endlessly relitigates ancient history. The study of recent history, to which the Trump administration is now called, is more treacherous — and more important. The apokálypsis cannot resolve our fights over 1619, but it can resolve our fights over Covid-19; it will not adjudicate the sins of our first rulers, but the sins of those who govern us today. The internet will not allow us to forget those sins — but with the truth, it will not prevent us from forgiving.