



Political and
Geostrategic
OBSERVATORY
of the United States

THE TRUMP ERA HAS FOREVER CHANGED THE US

Lincoln Mitchell / Political analyst, essayist, lecturer at
Columbia University

February 2026



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lincoln Mitchell / Political analyst, essayist, lecturer at Columbia University

Lincoln Mitchell, based in New York City and San Francisco, is a political analyst and a writer who teaches at Columbia University. He has contributed to CNN Opinion, NBC News, the San Francisco Examiner, and other outlets. Lincoln has authored nine books covering topics from democratic development to urban politics to baseball.

PRESENTATION OF THE OBSERVATORY

Under the direction of **Romuald Sciora**, Associate Research Fellow at IRIS, the IRIS Political and Geostrategic Observatory of the United States aims to provide new insights into contemporary developments in the United States, particularly their impact on Franco-American cooperation, the European Union, and the wider world.

The Observatory is structured around several core activities: the publication of analyses, the co-publication of reference works, the production of video content, and the organization of events (conferences, roundtables, and symposiums) in France, the United States, and Canada.

Its main academic partners include **The Academy of Political Science**, founded by Columbia University in New York, the **Columbia-SIPA Urban and Social Policy Program**, and the **Raoul-Dandurand Chair in Strategic and Diplomatic Studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal**.

iris-france.org

 @InstitutIRIS

 @InstitutIRIS

 institut_iris

 IRIS

 IRIS - Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques

As the Trump regime continues to sink into fascism and corruption, it is increasingly evident that the US will be forever changed by this era. If the US emerges from the Trump years as a functioning and cohesive, just in the legal sense, country, something that cannot be easily assumed, it will look very different than it did before Trump announced his candidacy in June of 2015 and almost immediately became the dominant figure in American political life.

Those who continue to try to minimize the gravity of the current crisis or simply prefer not to look soberly into the abyss of America's political future may point to other times in American history, notably the Civil War or the political polarization, violence and instability of the late 1960s through the early 1970s, and say that if we survived that, we can survive this. That view cannot be ignored, but if we take it seriously, we must push back on the idea that the US simply survived those crises. A better frame would be to recognize that while those crises did not destroy the country, the root problems were never fully addressed or forgotten.

After the Civil War, African Americans were very briefly fully integrated into the political and economic life of the south. That stopped when reconstruction ended and the racial hierarchy, if not the chattel slavery, of the antebellum period was restored. Thus, the deep racial inequality that sprang from slavery continued for almost another century until the gains of the Civil Rights movement in the decades following World War II.

The late 1960s and early 1970s never led to conflict as stark as the Civil War, but they were very divisive and changed the country dramatically. Moreover, some of those divisions and arguments never truly concluded. Although the violence faded away, the Vietnam War ended and Nixon resigned, in some respects we are still fighting those political and cultural fights from half a century ago.

The social movements that led to greater racial equality and expansions of rights for women, people of color, LGBT people and others-and the backlashes to all those movements that soon followed-still drive much of our political life and political conflicts.

The 1960s -the concept not the actual ten year period- eventually ended sometime in the 1970s or in some corners of the country in the 1980s, but the divisions did not end with the decade. Accordingly, it is inaccurate to say that we put the divisions of that era behind us and moved on. A better way to understand what happened is that the divisions and arguments deepened and evolved slightly but remained fundamentally unchanged and unresolved.

All this is significant not just because it helps us understand the Civil War and the conflicts of the late 1960s better, but also because it helps us think through the challenges the US faces when we finally move past the height of the MAGA era. Based on what we know from the past, once Trump is no longer in office and the MAGA fervor cools a little, it is possible we can reform our politics and country enough for some to tell themselves the MAGA period and fascist threat is past. However, if that happens, the issues that excited the MAGA base will remain central to our political life, even if they are not quite as visible.

By the 2030s, the vulgarity, corruption, buffoonery, cult-like loyalty to Donald Trump and gratuitous cruelty of this regime may fade into history. As these most visible aspects of MAGA disappear many will choose to believe that the country has been reunified, but the core fascist political beliefs of the MAGA movement are unlikely to fade away so quickly.

The MAGA period like the Civil War and the divisions and instability of the late 1960s through the early 1970s, will change the country forever. It should be clear to everybody that more than a decade into the Trump era, there is no going back. The question this raises as we look to the future is whether moving beyond the worst and most shocking abuses of the period

and returning to a politics that swings between ineffective center-left administrations and fascist or fascist adjacent ones is what we should be working towards.

The answer to that question should be a resounding no, but accepting that requires a reckoning with the reality of the impact of the MAGA era and with the failures of our institutions and structures to stop it that is daunting for many in the political class.

Nonetheless, soundly defeating MAGA will require much more than a few inevitably narrow election victories for the Democratic Party. It will require an earnest rethinking not just of what American democracy can be, but of what the US is. It means accepting that the Constitution is no longer the core document that governs the US, so our political imaginations must not be bound by it. None of that will be easy, but if we don't do that, we will never put the MAGA period genuinely behind us.

Strategic expertise in complete independance



2 bis, rue Mercœur - 75011 PARIS / France

+ 33 (0) 1 53 27 60 60

contact@iris-france.org

iris-france.org



IRIS is one of the main French think tanks specialising in geopolitical and strategic issues. It is the only one to have the singularity of combining a research centre and a teaching centre delivering diplomas, via its IRIS Sup' school, a model that contributes to its national and international attractiveness. IRIS is organised around four areas of activity: research, publication, training and event organisation.