

The unsung virtues of the one-term presidency

A legacy can be secured in four years, says political historian **Matthew Dallek**

In his speech in Philadelphia on Sept. 1 warning of the threat to democracy posed by “MAGA Republicans,” President Biden reminded Americans that he ran for president “because I believed we were in a battle” for the “soul of this nation.” His themes included a strong reprise of the speech he made announcing his candidacy three years ago, when he named this same battle and linked it to President Donald Trump’s “fine-people-on-both-sides” remarks about the 2017 racist march in Charlottesville. “In that moment, I knew the threat to this nation was unlike any I had ever seen in my lifetime,” Biden said then.

He clearly sees the soul-of-the-nation battle as defining his presidency — and seems to suggest that it is his to win. Biden is on a mission, his remarks imply, and he is rising to the occasion, meeting the central crisis of this era.

In Philadelphia, he also appeared to signal his intent to seek a second term in order to finish this foundational fight. But the speech served a dual purpose: It left open the door to a reelection bid by setting the themes of a possible future campaign, but it was also a legacy statement should he decide to walk away.

For many decades, the default choice of an incumbent president has been to go for a second term. It’s less clear-cut for Biden, who faces drags on his chances that include the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan, the stubborn persistence of inflation, a pandemic that refuses to go away and the actuarial tables: At 79, he is the nation’s oldest chief executive —

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Tackling cancer while battling the insurance system

Annabelle Gurwitch on her struggles with costly policies

When you take up residency in Cancerland, as I did when I was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer in 2020, you regularly hear yourself described as “battling” cancer. With my one-pill-a-day biomarker-directed therapy, I prefer to say that I’m “tackling” cancer. But if I am at war, it’s with an insurance system that works more like an extortion scheme.

In mid-January 2022, my phone rang early in the morning. This is my recollection of that call.

“Hi, this is Unintelligible Name from Sav-On.”

“Who? I don’t use Sav-On pharmacy.”

“We’re not Sav-On pharmacy, we’re SaveOn-SP, specialty pharmacy.” SaveOn is pronounced exactly the same as Sav-On, just to be more confusing.

“I just changed insurers,” I said, “and I’ve been in close contact with my new plan. They contract with Express Scripts, who’ve assigned Accredo as my specialty pharmacy.”

“Yes, and we’re your specialty pharmacy’s specialty pharmacy. If you don’t sign up through us you’ll be charged the full amount of your co-pay of \$4,500 every month for your

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How not to handle the coming flood of climate refugees

Book review by **J. R. McNeill**

Gaia Vince’s “Nomad Century: How Climate Migration Will Reshape Our World” is written for all the right reasons. But it comes to the wrong conclusions. Vince, a British journalist, argues in this compact book that climate change in coming decades will make broad swaths of the globe uninhabitable, and therefore humankind must change its ways.

First, Vince urges that without delay we must decarbonize energy production and shift from fossil fuels to solar, wind, geothermal, tidal and nuclear power, while electrifying transport, heating and every energy-intensive activity.

So far, so unremarkable, even if many would dissent from her enthusiasm for nuclear power.

Her remaining recommendations are, to put it mildly, less routine. An international authority must oversee the orderly migration of hundreds of millions or billions (different parts of the book give different numbers) of

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The ‘American Dream’? ‘America First’ eclipses it.

A durable code in our politics, writes humanities professor **Sarah Churchwell**, emphasizes the limits of unity and inclusion.

One sign that Donald Trump may be losing his grip on the political movement he galvanized is that an answer seems to be emerging to the often-asked question of what Trumpism without Trump would look like. International media outlets, including the Financial Times and the Guardian, have recently described the next stages of Trumpism as “America First,” while senior figures from Trump’s administration, including Larry Kudlow, Rick Perry and Kellyanne Conway, have set up the America First Policy Institute, a think tank promising to define post-Trump Republican policy. Charlie Kirk’s Turning Point USA online academy was aimed at parents who wanted an “America-first education” for their children, while former Trump aide Stephen Miller has founded America First Legal, which is fighting the Biden administration primarily over immigration policy.

The Los Angeles Times considered the flip side: “Can ‘America First’ exist without Trump?” a headline wondered. The answer is yes, it can, and has for a long time. “America First” is paradoxically both one of the oldest and most durable codes in American politics and one of the most overlooked. Perhaps we forget it for a reason.

Phrases like the “American Dream” and the “melting pot” are commonly used today to describe ideas about American identity and inclusivity, but it’s “America First” that has been more close-

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