

# OPINION

## JD Vance Is the GOP’s Obama



**UNRULY REPUBLIC**  
*By Barton Swaim*

“Now in 1984—just to date myself a little bit, don’t hate me, one month before I was born—The Wall Street Journal, the voice of big business in the United States of America, proposed, and I quote, ‘a five-word constitutional amendment: There shall be open borders.’ ” So remarked Vice President JD Vance last week in his hometown, Middletown, Ohio. “Now, they weren’t joking, they weren’t being tongue in cheek,” he continued, “because if you look at what they tried to do over the next 40 years, they told you back then exactly what they were trying to do.”

What he thinks “they” were trying to do, as you can probably guess, was replace American workers with low-wage foreigners. You would think that the proposal of a five-word constitutional amendment would recommend itself as a bit of a provocation, but Mr. Vance, whose strengths don’t include a sense of humor, plainly doesn’t care about the argument advanced by that 1984 editorial, which concerned Cold War-era immigration policy.

Anyway he, or the aide feeding him hokey about the Journal as “the voice of big business,” wouldn’t know or care that among the newspaper’s most famous editorials is one from 1979 headlined “Down With Big Business.” The curious may wish to con-

sult an update, “Down With Big Business, Again,” published in 2021.

Mr. Vance’s propensity to caricature arguments with which he disagrees puts me in mind of Barack Obama. In his first address to Congress, in 2009, the 44th president said: “I reject the view that says our problems will simply take care of themselves, that says government has no role in laying the foundation for our common prosperity.” Over the next eight years Mr. Obama constantly rejected beliefs nobody held—“I reject the idea that we need to ask people to choose between their jobs and their safety,” he said in 2011.

Ideological differences aside, the personas and careers of Messrs. Vance and Obama bear weird similarities. Both had tough upbringings marked by an absent father, intermittently absent mother and reliable grandparents. Both took an improbable journey, largely on the strength of smarts and industry, from broken home to the Ivy League—Mr. Obama to Columbia and, after a stint as a community organizer, to Harvard Law; Mr. Vance to Yale Law. Neither spent much time practicing law; Mr. Obama soon moved on to academia, Mr. Vance to venture capital.

Both wrote a powerful rags-to-riches memoir (“Dreams From My Father,” “Hillbilly Elegy”) and followed it with a pretentious, straw-man-laden campaign book (“The Audacity of Hope,” “Communion”). Both served briefly in the U.S. Senate before catapulting to ex-

ecutive power, though Mr. Vance has yet to shed the “vice” in his job title.

I would have thought it all the stuff of parlor-game happenstance, but events of this summer tempt me to regard the two men as expressions of a type. I refer of course to Mr. Vance’s conviction that he, by the force of his personality, could turn Iran’s bloodthirsty, mendacious revolutionaries into practical men, ready to negotiate in good faith. In June, pursuing what became

**He and the former president have much in common. And both disdain Republicans.**

the short-lived memorandum of understanding, the vice president repeatedly described his and his colleagues’ efforts to bring reason to the U.S.-Iran relationship as though the idea were original. “For 47 years, this country has been a thorn in our side,” Mr. Vance said to Jake Tapper in June. “The coolest thing about the progress we’ve made over the last few weeks is that you see people within the Iranian system—senior leadership, even IRGC officials—say, ‘You know what? We may have some animosity, we may have some mistrust, but we recognize the way we’ve done business with the United States for the last 47 years is a mistake. Let’s try something else.’ ”

It’s true that President Trump has said similar things, though only a fool would take those statements as sincere.

Mr. Vance spoke his lines with conviction.

Mr. Vance likes to tout his youth (“don’t hate me”), but he was old enough to follow the news in the 2010s as Mr. Obama attempted to turn U.S. policy away from Israel and draw Iran into the community of peaceable nations. Mr. Obama, too, liked to contrast his practical and interest-based approach to that of his ideology-driven predecessors.

With few exceptions, though, Mr. Obama limited his scoldings to members and administrations of the other party. At the core of Mr. Vance’s message is the repudiation of views allegedly held by both parties, especially his own. In Brewer, Maine, this week, the vice president described that bipartisan “consensus” again, though the caricature has a conspicuously Republican shape to it. What places like Brewer “really needed, they told us”—no prizes for guessing who “they” were—“was just to juice the short-term profits of a few big corporations, that we needed to open that border and prioritize foreign workers over our own citizens. They would cheer on the corporate raiders as they slashed headcount and shifted all those businesses either to foreign countries or brought in illegal aliens to employ.”

Leave the policy argument, if you can call it that, to one side. The lines reveal a man so contemptuous of views different from his own that he can’t be bothered to understand them. Now ponder a future GOP headed by such a person. Mr. Obama at least respected the party he led.

**BOOKSHELF** | By Adrian Woolfson

## Dietary Guidelines

**Fed Up**

By Daniel E. Lieberman  
*Knopf, 416 pages, \$35*

Daniel E. Lieberman has studied the diets of indigenous cultures worldwide, from the Hadza, a hunter-gatherer people in Tanzania, to Maasai herders in Kenya and the Tarahumara Native Americans of northern Mexico. In “Fed Up,” he takes us on a provocative journey in pursuit of the definitive art of eating and humankind’s optimal menu.

Marshaling an encyclopedic body of evolutionary and anthropological evidence, Mr. Lieberman, a paleoanthropologist at Harvard University, aims to dispel the monolithic thinking that dominates our approach to diet. The problem of what we should eat is, he argues, “far too complex to be solved by a single Big Idea.”

The fallibility of dietary advice is evident in the variability of regimens, fads and crazes that have been promulgated over the years. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued in 1762 that consumers of meat were “more ferocious than other men,” while Lord Byron, in 1819, characterized humans as carnivores who, “like the shark or tiger,” must have their prey. The 16th-century Italian nobleman Alvise Cornaro believed his corpulence could be ameliorated by caloric restriction, while Alexandre Dumas, in “Le Grand Dictionnaire de Cuisine” (1873), cites hot chocolate as a tonic and restorative remedy.

The problem most contemporary diets address is obesity. As Mr. Lieberman candidly observes, modern humans are unusually fat creatures. Two-thirds of Americans are overweight, with a level of body fat exceeding that of Arctic seals. Obesity, Mr. Lieberman explains, does not increase the number of fat cells. Instead, each cell expands, resembling an “overstuffed suitcase.” This produces chronic inflammation in “every nook and cranny of the body” and increases the risk of diseases such as Alzheimer’s and cancer.

The Venus figurines crafted in Stone Age Europe depict women with enormous bellies. But this rotundness was likely aspirational, the author argues. Obesity is a modern phenomenon and vanishingly rare among hunter-gatherers. For most of human existence, we have lived in the shadow of starvation: Our bodies evolved to stockpile energy. While we may wish to lose weight, we should not expect assistance from our biology.

Mr. Lieberman examines a number of popular diet programs that advance a big idea to address obesity. Loren Cordain, an exercise physiologist, found commercial success with “The Paleo Diet” in 2002. His book claimed that its menu of animal proteins and unprocessed vegetables recapitulates the diet of our Stone Age ancestors. But the notion that there was a unitary Paleolithic diet, Mr. Lieberman informs us, is a “naturalist fallacy.” In fact, the diets of different groups of hunter-gatherers varied widely. Human beings have, throughout history, opportunistically eaten almost any edible thing that they could get their hands on.

The author has related critiques for advocates of the raw-food movement, who maintain that the chemical transformations induced by cooking destroy vital nutrients. “If raw food is best,” he asks, then “why is cooking practiced and enjoyed by just about everyone on the planet?” As for the so-called Mediterranean diet—which uses the cuisines of countries such as Greece and Italy as exemplars of healthy eating—it too indulges in some mythmaking. There never was a single Mediterranean diet: Parts of more than 20 countries border that sea. Nor are foods eaten there today consistent with those consumed in the past. Tomatoes, for example, first arrived in Italy in the 16th century and were not incorporated into the canon of that country’s cuisine until more than two centuries later.



## Nix on Nixon: How to Defeat the DSA

By Karl Rove

The rise of the Democratic Socialists of America is a political gift for Republicans. If GOP House candidates want to take advantage of it, here’s a version of a simple speech to consider. I’ve written it for a candidate in Florida, where state Rep. Angie Nixon, a DSA member, is the Democratic U.S. Senate nominee. It forces Democrats into an uncomfortable choice: Side with DSA’s extreme views or break with the group and upset its energized and increasingly influential supporters. The speech would go something like this:

Florida voters face a big question in the midterm election: How do you feel about a statewide ticket led by a member of the Democratic Socialists of America? It should scare the hell out of you. Because the DSA’s agenda is more radically leftist than any we’ve seen in our lifetime. And the DSA is increasing its influence in the Democratic Party.

How bad could it be? Let’s start with this: The DSA platform wants an America where “you don’t pay a mortgage or have a landlord.” Sounds nice, until you get to the details. In DSA world, government will

“build new, publicly-owned social housing.”

Some will remember those big, ugly apartment blocks in the Soviet Union. That’s DSA leaders’ vision, whether they admit it or not. Unless they say otherwise, you should assume Angie Nixon and my Democratic opponent support it.

The DSA agenda says government must treat “food, education, energy, medicine and transportation” as “common goods and utilities” and that democracy requires “public

**Republicans should press their opponents to endorse or disavow socialist proposals.**

ownership of the largest corporations and essential industries.” Again, you should assume Ms. Nixon and my Democrat opponent are on board with the DSA unless they deny it.

Here are some questions: Since food would be a “common good,” would farmers work for the government? What about large Florida companies? Will government take over your local Publix store?

The home builder Lennar? How about Ryder Trucks and CSX railroad? Miami is headquarters for the Carnival, Norwegian and Royal Caribbean cruise lines. Does Ms. Nixon want government to take them over? Does my opponent? If they won’t say no, assume they do. Let me get really serious: Do we want federal bureaucrats to be in charge of Mickey Mouse and Disney World?

The DSA blames America’s problems on “private ownership and profit.” It claims our free-enterprise system is “making us desperate and miserable.” Unless they say otherwise, you should assume Ms. Nixon and my Democratic opponent agree with those sentiments. I promise you I don’t.

The free-enterprise system has shortcomings. That’s why I’m a reform conservative. But our free-enterprise system made America the most prosperous, creative, open and compassionate country in the world. It’s why people want to come here.

There are many more things the DSA demands that Floridians should be concerned about. A 32-hour workweek but with a 40-hour paycheck. What small business could cope with that? “Phase out the

use of fossil fuels.” “Fully abolishing the police and prison system.” “Abolish ICE” and “legalize migration”—that is, open borders. The DSA would “defund the Department of War” and “close overseas military bases.”

The DSA was silent at best following Hamas’s Oct. 7 attack and obsessively accuses Israel of “genocide.” The DSA platform calls for letting immigrants vote before they naturalize, making the District of Columbia a state, abolishing the Senate and Electoral College, having taxpayer dollars fund campaigns, and having congressmen elect the president and the Supreme Court.

I’ll ask again: Do Angie Nixon and my opponent in this House race agree with the DSA program? If not, say so—emphatically and forcefully, loud enough so DSA supporters hear. But if Ms. Nixon and my opponent refuse to disavow DSA’s agenda or remain silent, then we Republicans should attack and attack again. Make them squirm as voters turn against them.

*Mr. Rove was senior adviser and deputy chief of staff for President George W. Bush and is author of “The Triumph of William McKinley” (Simon & Schuster, 2015).*

## Americans Who Find Killing Acceptable

By Adrian Norman

The latest Emerson poll reveals a problem that isn’t about politics. Nearly 1 in 6 voters call the assassination of a healthcare executive on a public sidewalk “acceptable.”

Brian Thompson, CEO of UnitedHealthcare, was shot and killed on Dec. 4, 2024, while walking into a Manhattan hotel for a company investors’ meeting. Five days later, police arrested 26-year-old Luigi Mangione, who this month confessed to the shooting and pleaded guilty on federal stalking charges.

The Emerson poll, published on Aug. 20, asked if Mr. Mangione’s actions were “acceptable or unacceptable, and 16.7% of respondents said his were either “completely acceptable” or “somewhat acceptable.” This isn’t a fluke reading. It’s the same finding as the firm’s December 2024 poll.

After 20 months, a public trial and national news coverage, that number has held steady. Public opinion had every opportunity to self-correct

and hasn’t. It means that Americans’ tolerance for political violence is becoming hardwired into the public consciousness.

The violence isn’t limited to one type of victim, and it isn’t confined to opinion polls. Federal prosecutors argued in an August 2025 court filing that the killing of Mr. Thompson helped inspire the mass shooting at the National Football League headquarters a month prior.

“Simply put, [Mr. Mangione] hoped to normalize the use of violence to achieve ideological or political objectives,” prosecutors wrote. “Since the murder, certain quarters of the public—who openly identify as acolytes of the defendant—have increasingly begun to view violence as an acceptable, or even necessary, substitute for reasoned political disagreement.”

That argument was part of a death-penalty case a judge later threw out entirely, ruling in January that the underlying charges didn’t meet the legal bar for a capital crime. But the tolerance for political killing survived.

Then came Charlie Kirk, head of the conservative group Turning Point USA. He was shot dead at Utah Valley University less than a year after Mr. Thompson’s assassination. A CloudResearch poll taken within 24 hours found 12% of American adults called his killing justified. This figure

**One in 6 voters tell pollsters they’re OK with assassination.**

rose to 22% among those under 30.

A corporate executive and a movement conservative killed roughly a year apart, and in both cases a significant share of the public was willing to call the killings acceptable rather than criminal.

This is signal, not noise. A study published this year in Public Opinion Quarterly, by researchers at the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, found that the “folk hero” narrative that built up around Mr. Mangione measurably increased

Democratic respondents’ stated support for partisan violence. Researchers found that highly publicized killings framed as morally justified don’t simply reflect existing attitudes, they shift them. Two data points on a poll are one thing. A documented causal pathway from one act of violence to greater tolerance for the next is another.

Most of the coverage of the Emerson poll has been focused on the 8-point Democratic edge in the coming midterm elections or the president’s underwater approval numbers. Those change by the week. The one that isn’t moving is nearly 1 in 6 voters calling assassination acceptable.

This isn’t just a mood, it’s a floor. The topline data doesn’t break down the finding by age or party, so drawing conclusions about who is driving this would be guessing. But what isn’t a guess is that the floor now exists.

*Mr. Norman is a writer and communications strategist who is a member of the National Center for Public Policy Research’s Project 21.*

**Early humans weren’t rigid about their sources of sustenance. Their flexibility offers a lesson about modern diet regimes.**

Relying on such speculative and grandiose maxims—supported by a sparse and often inconsistent scientific literature—to inform what we eat is, Mr. Lieberman writes, like “playing a game of dice.” His prudent approach is to avoid a single grand plan and embrace a multifaceted strategy that borrows pertinent insights from a variety of approaches. This, he contends, is more aligned with the foraging behavior of our ancestors, who were flexible and sought the best of what was available. Dietary wisdom, it appears, resides in a holistic, personalized perspective rather than in rules.

For Mr. Lieberman, a welcome alternative to single-minded diets can be found by looking at regions sometimes called Blue Zones, which are associated with exceptional longevity. One such location, the city of Loma Linda, Calif., has a large population of Seventh-day Adventists, who are principally vegetarian, abstain from alcohol and tobacco, have close-knit social networks and exercise regularly. No one dietary principle seems likely to account for their collective better health.

The greatest contemporary challenge, Mr. Lieberman argues, lies in addressing an industrial food system that has evolved over centuries. Large-scale manufacturing has become essential to feeding the world’s population, and processes such as fermentation can transform inedible and poisonous plants into dietary staples. But this industry has also introduced ultraprocessed foods, which now make up a hefty portion of the 21st-century American diet. These products are loaded with sugar, fat and chemical additives. Many are devoid of fiber and natural nutrients. They activate what Mr. Lieberman refers to as “primal cravings,” stimulating the brain’s reward centers and contributing to addiction and overconsumption.

Mr. Lieberman identifies ultraprocessed foods as the principal drivers of what he calls the “obesity pandemic” and avoiding them should be central to our dietary strategy. They damage our health, he asserts, because they have the hallmarks of an evolutionary mismatch—our bodies are not adapted to their long-term effects.

We are left with the realization that eating well and living well are inextricably connected. Eating healthily does not require the adoption of rigid diets that undermine the joy of eating and provoke their own anxiety. But we can eat less, drink more water, exercise, avoid excessive sugar and enjoy the “glorious diversity of foods” without becoming “wanton hedonists.” Quoting the Greek philosopher Epicurus, Mr. Lieberman encourages us to “be moderate to taste the joys of life in abundance.”

*Mr. Woolfson is the author of “On the Future of Species: Authoring Life by Means of Artificial Biological Intelligence.”*