

## **Disrupting America - How we went from “Change You Can Believe In” to “Make America Great Again” and where we go from here.**

*Karen Finney, Thursdays 4:15-5:45pm*

While the 2016 campaign and the Trump presidency have up-ended “so called conventional wisdom”, the disrupter-in-chief is just one part of a broader landscape of change in America. Our study group will examine this period of disruption in America and the people and social, cultural, political and technological forces that are re-shaping our country. We’ll also look at the ways people are adapting, inventing, resisting and creating movements in the context of our culture, our politics and our future.

### **Week 1: 9/21 - From “What Happened” to “What’s Happening Now”**

The election of President Obama was historic, but did it set up a political disruption that in part paved the way for the Trump presidency? A number of post-election analyses indicate that fear of an increasingly diverse America, and degree of racial animus were the greatest indicators of support for Trump. These issues literally trumped economic concerns in 2016 more than in 2008 or 2012. The Trump victory also disrupted a key progressive political goal. This was supposed to be the election where the “Obama Coalition” or “New American Electorate” — the coalition of African American, Latino, Young voters and unmarried women who turned out in record numbers in 2008 and 2012 — would reliably reunite for a third time to help deliver a democratic victory.

In this first session we will discuss some of these basic political assumptions, and my own experiences and insights from within and in the aftermath of the 2016 campaign.

### **Week 2: 9/28 - Disrupting democracy: Interference by the Russian Government, hacking the Democratic National Committee and protecting the right to vote. A conversation with Donna Brazille.**

Almost a year later and dramatic revelations about the unprecedented Russian government interference in the 2016 presidential election keep coming. Multiple investigations are looking at a range of issues including: hacking the Democratic National Committee’s emails, potential inappropriate contacts between Trump campaign officials and Kremlin emissaries, whether hacking efforts potentially

also compromised election data in 21 states, to the latest reports which reveal that beyond bots and fake news, Russian linked groups used Facebook and potentially other platforms to stir hate, anger and use misinformation as part of an intricate plot to undermine our democracy and sow political unrest. Beyond the implications for cyber-security and a new front in cyber warfare, what are the implications for America's democratic process?

For this discussion we'll be joined by 2017 Shorenstein Fellow, Veteran Democratic political strategist, syndicated columnist, TV commentator, former presidential campaign manager, Vice Chair of Voter Registration and Participation at the Democratic National Committee, and former interim National Chair of the Democratic National Committee - Donna Brazille.

### **Week 3: 10/5 - Disrupting America's role in the world**

How has America's role in the world and relationships with our allies as well as our adversaries changed over the last eight months and just who is really driving our foreign policy? From Venezuela to Germany to North Korea to Afghanistan we'll also discuss some of the social and cultural forces that are having a disruptive impact in different parts of the world and what that means for America.

### **Week 4: 10/12 - Disrupting the disruption: How to combat the weaponization of news, facts and information**

Until the 2016 election technology and social media platforms had been seen as a mostly positive disruption for democracy and the way campaigns are run by empowering increasingly diverse voices, better enabling voter contact and grassroots organizing, micro-targeting of messages, fundraising, etc; platforms like Facebook and Twitter make it easier for candidates to circumvent mainstream media and access their supporters' trusted networks of potential voters and supporters. These networks are invaluable to expanding and solidifying support because while our trust in institutions, is low, our trust in the information we get from neighbors and friends remains high. New technology and algorithms essentially "weaponized" fake news in customizable echo-chambers micro-targeted to reinforce a user's political bias. Thereby creating a new channel for campaign messages isolated from mainstream or independent media. While initially resistant, the tone and proliferation of fake news in an environment with no real gatekeepers or standards of authenticity has forced media companies to find ways to disrupt the disruption. We'll discuss cutting edge research examining the

intersection between journalism and social media, the “misinformation ecosystem” and tools being created to check facts and the validity of news sources as well as how media organizations like BuzzFeed are helping separate fact from fiction, and how companies like Facebook and Twitter are addressing their role in spreading misinformation.

### **Week 5: 10/19 - Will women be the disrupters in 2018?**

While many assumed Hillary Clinton’s 2016 loss would discourage women from running for office it seems to have had the opposite effect, so will they be a political force in 2018 as voters, activists and candidates? From the overwhelming turnout at womens’ marches around the country the day after the inauguration to ongoing activism and a record number of women are running for office in 2018 women are energized and engaged. We’ll discuss the impact women are already having on local and national politics and the challenges women candidates will face running for office in 2018, just two years after a woman received more votes than any other U.S. candidate for president with the exception of Barack Obama in 2008.

### **Week 6: 10/26 - Are the Democratic and Republican Parties still relevant?**

Both the Democratic and Republican parties are in turmoil, a growing number of democrats, independents and republicans say the party institution is irrelevant. Just four years ago a post-election autopsy suggested the GOP needed to be more inclusive to women and minorities in order to survive given the country’s demographic changes, a plan Donald Trump completely disrupted. Increasingly groups outside of the political parties are spending big dollars to impact elections in a way that can over shadow the parties themselves. And was the impact of the Third Party vote in states like Wisconsin and Michigan the most important cautionary tale for the Democrats? Exit polling has shown that in those key states, despite agreeing with Hillary Clinton on the issues, the number of people — particularly millennials of color — who expressed their anger by voting third party or not voting could have made the difference in electing Clinton. Can the democratic party change and adapt to a new paradigm for engaging with the new activist organizations that are forming in response to Trump in order to build a diverse winning coalition?

### **Week 7: 11/2 - A look at who is leading the charge from Moment to Movement.**

As we think about our country's future we'll look at and talk about the increased level of activism and engagement we've seen since Trump's election. How are people learning not only from the Moral Monday Movement and even the Tea Party, but also improving their tactics and strategies? How are newly established groups like Indivisible, the Million Woman March, Harvard's own Resistance School, Run for Something, and the Civic Engagement Fund coming together to engage people, not only to make their voices heard, but more importantly to build real political power? And how are established groups like MoveOn, NARAL, Planned Parenthood and Color of Change ensuring that their organizations remain relevant? Will they be able to leverage grassroots political power into electoral power in 2018 and beyond?

### **Week 8: 11/9 - Case Study: Activism in Action**

Bringing this back to the lessons of history we'll also examine this period of post Obama disruption through the lens of what Reverend William Barber of the Moral Monday Movement calls a "Third Reconstruction" similar to the moral challenges and disruption America faced after the Civil War and during the Civil Rights movement. Led by Reverend Barber, North Carolinians built a diverse coalition of organizations that effectively disrupted the conservative backlash to President Obama's win in 2008. Does the Moral Monday Movement offer the best model to ensure the activism we've seen since Trump's election is able to sustain and grow from moment to movement?

### **Week 9: 11/16 - The disrupted presidency and the media: what's it like to cover the Trump White House in a post-truth era of the first twitter presidency?**

We'll examine the challenges journalists and news organizations face day-today in not only sorting out fact from spin, but then making decisions about what and how to cover the Trump White House. We've never had a president and WH staff so willfully providing incorrect and misleading answers, even when confronted with facts. On one occasion the President, White House Press Secretary and a Cabinet Secretary traveling in a foreign country each gave dramatically different answers to the same question; leaving reporters to determine which was the "correct" answer.