

IN THE WAKE OF TRUMP'S THIRD ELECTORAL FAILURE, NYTIMES BOASTS OF HIRING A THIRD TRUMP- WHISPERER

His sanction-worthy misrepresentations of the Igor Danchenko indictment notwithstanding, Jonathan Swan is a good reporter. Indeed, his move to the NYT, which frees him to write like a human being rather than a McKinsey consultant (AKA Axios style), will likely be a significant improvement on his coverage of DC politics.

But it is downright insane that, at a time the GOP and Fox News are at least making noise about ditching Trump, the NYT pitched this hire – and their own political reporting – in terms of Trump.

Our insightful, authoritative and addictive coverage of the election this year drove home an essential truth: The Times's political team is simply the best in the business.

Take our coverage of Republicans and Donald J. Trump.

We have Maggie Haberman, the dominant reporter of the Trump era, whose prolific, revealing and exclusive coverage has become indispensable to millions of readers. We have Michael Bender, whom Maggie admired as her "fierce competitor" from his days at The Wall Street Journal, and who has delivered exclusives on everything from the former president's plans to buy Greenland to examinations of how Trumpism remade the Republican party.

And today we are thrilled to tell you that Jonathan Swan, a gifted, dogged and high-impact reporter, will be joining The Times. Jonathan, a national political reporter at Axios, is one of the biggest news breakers and best-sourced reporters in Washington.

Even if you have never met Jonathan, you know his stories. He first reported that Trump would recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, that the U.S. would pull out of the Paris climate deal, that Steve Bannon would be fired and that Paul Ryan would retire from Congress.

Or perhaps you watched his riveting interview with then-President Trump in 2020, which won Jonathan an Emmy (and made his facial expressions famous.) Ben Smith, the former media columnist for The Times, wrote at the time that it was "perhaps the best interview of Mr. Trump's term."

Jonathan's nine-part written series on the final days of the Trump administration won broad acclaim, and the podcast on which it was based rose to No. 1 on the Apple charts. [my emphasis]

Again, I think the Swan hire is a net good for reporting – but aside from the degree to which Swan is an improvement over Jonathan Martin, who just moved to become Politico's Politics Bureau Chief – that has nothing to do with the NYT.

Particularly accompanied as it is by Maggie's multiple efforts to suggest Trump is still The One, the pitch of Swan as a Trump-whisperer – rather than simply as a very good reporter of right wing politics – this announcement commits to keeping Trump (as a politician, rather than, for example, a criminal suspect, something none of these three are very good at reporting) the center of attention.

And it comes in a piece that boasts of election reporting it calls, “insightful, authoritative and addictive,” but which had some rather spectacular failures – particularly with the Fetterman debate and a correct Kansas poll they downplay. While in August NYT acknowledged that a Red Wave might not come, their review of why it didn’t still seems to misunderstand what it means to vote to save democracy. If you wanted to understand the election, the NYT was generally unhelpful, and that’s before you consider its focus on horse race coverage rather than policy.

They think they did good a job, or at least are telling themselves they did!

Why would you boast that your political reporting is “addictive,” anyway? unless you’re proud of the way Trump used Maggie’s work to flood the zone with press clippings that had the effect of obscuring larger crimes.

The NYT’s pitch of a good reporter in terms of Trump comes as other outlets have made hires based on their shitty news judgment that there would be a Republican wave the outlet would want access into. Most famously, as early as March, CBS hired Mick Mulvaney in anticipation of a non-existent Red Wave still 8 months in the future.

[A] top network executive seemed to lay the groundwork for the decision in a staff meeting earlier this month, when he said the network needed to hire more Republicans to prepare for a “likely” Democratic midterm wipeout.

“If you look at some of the people that we’ve been hiring on a contributor basis, being able to make sure that we are getting access to both sides of the aisle is a priority because we know the Republicans are going to take over, most likely, in the midterms,” CBS News’s co-president Neeraj Khemlani told the staff of the network’s morning show, according

to a recording of his comments obtained by The Washington Post. "A lot of the people that we're bringing in are helping us in terms of access to that side of the equation."

The thing is, these shitty expectations for a Republican landslide may distort coverage going forward, because multiple news outlets paid big money to invest in access to people who lost, most of all into a guy who lost fairly spectacularly three times now.

As they did in 2020, voters gave democracy another lifeline. They voted, affirmatively, for democracy. But it's not clear the press view protecting democracy, as opposed to protecting access, with anywhere near the same urgency.

Update: Just as I published this piece, I saw this NYT column, which not only continues to make everything about Donald Trump, fails to account for how narrow margins in both houses change this calculus (particularly with regards to its facile claim that, "party leaders are asked to declare their allegiances to Mr. Trump or other potential rivals"), and has this incredible paragraph:

First there was Mr. Trump's proposed Muslim ban, and then the attacks on a federal judge's Mexican ancestry, the "Access Hollywood" revelations late in the 2016 campaign, his public declaration that he trusted Vladimir Putin more than he did American intelligence agencies. More recently, Mr. Trump has waged a two-year misinformation campaign, claiming his 2020 defeat was "rigged." His supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol in a violent attempt to disrupted the peaceful transfer of power. He now faces investigations into efforts to overturn the election results in Georgia, into his company's finances and into his handling of classified documents.

It gets the chronology of the first sentence wrong. It calls Trump's lies about 2020 "misinformation," not "disinformation." It claims he tried to "disrupted" the peaceful transfer of power and not prevent it. It suggests any investigation into an attempt to *overturn* the election is limited to Georgia. The description of the stolen document investigation as one into "handling" of classified documents misstates the crime, but it par for the course in legacy media coverage of that investigation. (And it has a typeset – with the missing space after the period – and a tense error that suggests it was not edited, even ignoring the lack of Oxford comma.)

Trump no doubt wants to keep himself as the center of attention. He no doubt will demand loyalty oaths from people willing to bet he'll succeed. But if he does succeed – with whatever catastrophic effect on the country – it will be significantly because of editorial decisions the NYT made.