

# For Once, I'm Grateful for Trump

By Bret Stephens

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For the first time since Donald Trump entered the political fray, I find myself grateful that he's in it. I'm reluctant to admit it and astonished to say it, especially since the president mocked Christine Blasey Ford in his ugly and gratuitous way at a rally on Tuesday. Perhaps it's worth unpacking this admission for those who might be equally astonished to read it.

I'm grateful because Trump has not backed down in the face of the slipperiness, hypocrisy and dangerous standard-setting deployed by opponents of Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court. I'm grateful because ferocious and even crass obstinacy has its uses in life, and

never more so than in the face of sly moral bullying. I'm grateful because he's a big fat hammer fending off a razor-sharp dagger.

A few moments have crystallized my view over the past few days.

The first moment was a remark by a friend. "*I'd rather be accused of murder,*" he said, "*than of sexual assault.*" I feel the same way. One can think of excuses for killing a man; none for assaulting a woman. But if that's true, so is this: Falsely accusing a person of sexual assault is nearly as despicable as sexual assault itself. It inflicts psychic, familial, reputational and professional harms that can last a lifetime. This is nothing to sneer at.

The second moment, connected to the first: "Boo hoo hoo. Brett Kavanaugh is not a victim." That's the title of a column in the Los Angeles Times, which suggests that the possibility of Kavanaugh's innocence is "infinitesimal." Yet false allegations of rape, while relatively rare, are at least five times as common as false accusations of other types of crime, according to academic literature.

Since when did the possibility of innocence become, for today's liberals, something to wave off with an archly unfeeling "boo hoo"?

A third moment, connected to the second: Listening to Cory Booker explain on Tuesday that "ultimately" it doesn't matter if Kavanaugh is "guilty or innocent," because "enough questions" had been raised that it was time to "move on to another candidate."

This is a rhetorical sleight of hand in three acts: Elide the one question that really matters; raise a secondary set of "questions" that are wholly the result of the question you've decided to ignore; call for "another candidate" because it will push confirmation hearings past the midterms, which was the Democratic objective long before most anyone had ever heard of Blasey's allegation.

Fourth moment: Watching Julie Swetnick, the woman who accused Kavanaugh of attending parties decades earlier where women were gang raped, change key details of her story in an interview with NBC News.

Swetnick's claims border on the preposterous. They are wholly uncorroborated. But that didn't keep Kavanaugh's opponents, in politics and the press, from seizing them as evidence of corroboration with Blasey's allegation, which is not preposterous but is also largely uncorroborated, and with the allegation of Kavanaugh's Yale classmate Deborah Ramirez — uncorroborated again.

Uncorroborated plus uncorroborated plus largely uncorroborated is not the accumulation of questions, much less of evidence. It is the duplication of hearsay.

Fifth moment: Reading about a 1985 bar fight at Yale — a story that involved Kavanaugh throwing ice, resulted in no charges against him, and should never have been reported. Or reading a 1983 handwritten letter by Kavanaugh, in which he says of his gang of friends that "we're loud, obnoxious drunks with prolific pukers among us" — adolescent boasting now being treated as if it is a crucial piece of incriminating evidence. Or

hearing from Yale classmates who claim to have seen Kavanaugh drunk, which somehow is supposed to show that he's a demonstrable perjurer and possible sex offender.

Will a full-bore investigation of adolescent behavior now become a standard part of the "job interview" for all senior office holders? I'm for it — provided we can start with *your* adolescent behavior, as it relates to *your* next job.

Sixth moment: Listening to Richard Blumenthal lecture Kavanaugh on the legal concept of *falsus in omnibus* — false in one thing, false in everything — when the senator from Connecticut lied shamelessly for years about his military service. And then feeling grateful to Trump for having the simple nerve to point out the naked hypocrisy.

Seventh moment: Listening to Dianne Feinstein denounce Kavanaugh for failing to reflect an "impartial temperament or the fairness and even-handedness one would see in a judge." This lecture would have gone down more easily if Feinstein hadn't gamed the process for her own partisan purposes, and at huge personal cost to Kavanaugh and Blasey alike.

Eighth moment: Being quizzed in recent days about my teenage years at a New England boarding school — the subtext being that I must know something about elite prep schools and the mentality of the boys who attend them.

I do. It was at boarding school where I first formed lasting friendships with kids of different races and economic backgrounds, and where liberal-leaning teachers showed us how to think critically, keep an open mind, and value tolerance and respect. I have no idea if Georgetown Prep was anything like that, but the facile stereotype of "white privilege" that keeps cropping up in discussions of Kavanaugh's background is yet another ugly tactic in the battle to defeat him.

We will learn soon enough what, if anything, the F.B.I. has gleaned from its investigation of Kavanaugh. If the Bureau finds persuasive evidence of Blasey's charge, the judge will have to step down and answer for it. Until then, I'll admit to feeling grateful that, in Trump, at least one big bully was willing to stand up to others.