

Donald Trump Doesn't Understand Community Colleges

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President Donald Trump delivers remarks on his infrastructure initiative in Richfield, Ohio. Yuri Gripas / Reuters

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During a speech on Thursday, President Trump revealed a striking ignorance of one of the pillars of his country's educational system. In the course of promoting his infrastructure plan, he, a bit perplexingly, dismissed the country's community colleges, suggesting he doesn't know what purpose they serve. "We do not know what a 'community college' means," he told the crowd in an Ohio training facility for construction apprentices, moments after expressing nostalgia for the vocational schools that flourished when he was growing up—schools that offered hands-on training in fields such as welding and cosmetology.

He seemed to have a better grasp on these latter schools, analogizing them to the apprenticeship programs he was promoting in his effort to create 400,000 high-paying infrastructure jobs. The implication, as he brushed aside one form of higher education and lauded another, was that he'd like to resuscitate short-term training opportunities and phase out community colleges in the name of workforce development.

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One of Trump's stated goals is to ensure that every American knows “the dignity of work, the pride of a paycheck, and the satisfaction of a job well done”—but he seems to be unaware of the vital role that community colleges play in realizing that vision. As Jeffrey Selinger wrote in *The Atlantic* earlier this year, the fastest-growing jobs in the United States require candidates to have training and education beyond high school, and community colleges, which typically offer associate's degrees, will be key to filling those openings.

Community colleges are not just a substantial part of the future of American education—they are also a substantial part of its present. More than 40 percent of the country's undergraduates are currently enrolled in community colleges, according to the College Board, the higher-education research firm and test administrator. Preliminary federal data suggest that roughly 9 million undergraduates were enrolled in community colleges in the 2015-2016 school year. And with their low tuition (typically costing less than what federal Pell grants provide) and practice of letting in all applicants, community colleges serve as a pathway to the middle class for low-income and first-generation students. Further, one in three community-college students transfers to a bachelor's-granting institution within six years.

Enrolling in a community college certainly doesn't guarantee a steady, well paid job. As my colleague Ann Hulbert has pointed out, too many community-college students never earn a degree. But that's largely because two-year institutions serve a disproportionate percentage of students whose life circumstances—many have families to support and are working full-time jobs to pay their bills—make completing a degree particularly difficult. (Community colleges are acutely aware of this challenge and have implemented programs to better support such students; many are even evolving from learning and training institutions into holistic support systems, establishing food pantries on campus and offering subsidized daycare.)

On Thursday, Trump said the vocational schools of yore “were not called community colleges, because I don’t know what that means.” The president was right that there’s a difference between vocational schools and community colleges: Historically, the former were offered at the secondary level and seen as an alternative to a college degree, designed to prepare students for careers in industries like manufacturing. The latter took a broader approach, giving students skills that might apply across industries. Indeed, the term *community college* is unambiguous. As one administrator of a community college in Oregon told my colleague James Fallows back in 2015, “When we say we are a ‘community college,’ we really mean that we are for and of this community.” Replacing community colleges with vocational schools would mean doing away with institutions that have given millions of Americans the practical skills, liberal-arts background, and diploma that are considered prerequisites for a growing number of jobs—and shepherded millions of others to four-year institutions.

What’s more, Trump’s insinuation that the aims of vocational training and community colleges are mutually exclusive signals a misinterpretation of the latter’s role in today’s workforce-development initiatives; community colleges also help keep local and regional economic engines running. Community colleges were established after World War II to churn out qualified workers—a duty they’ve continued to fulfill. As Selingo noted, “Some 34 percent of the roughly \$114 billion the federal government spends annually on workforce development and education goes to higher education, with much of it flowing to two-year colleges.”

And even though the term *vocational education* isn’t used today as often as it was in the 20th century, that doesn’t mean that community colleges have crowded out such training opportunities. In fact, they’ve seen a resurgence in recent years. The difference is primarily semantic: Nowadays, such training is typically described as “career and technical education”—the result of a rebranding effort aimed in part to counter vocational schools’ (somewhat earned) reputation for tracking disadvantaged Americans into low-wage jobs.

The incorrect assumption that Trump made in his speech on Thursday was that community colleges and vocational schools haven’t been able to and can’t exist alongside each other—a misunderstanding that further underappreciates an already underappreciated component of American education.



Yuri Gripas / Reuters

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- The Americanization of an Ancient Faith

The 2,000-year-old Coptic Church is trying something new: spreading its message across the United States—and the rest of the world.

One day in the fall of 2010, Father Anthony Messeh, then a priest at the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Fairfax, Virginia, sat down with a list of names. There were 30 individuals—all American converts with no Egyptian heritage—who had been baptized at the church since his arrival in 2001. Of the group, only eight were still active members.

“That just broke my heart,” Messeh told me one afternoon last summer. “If one or two people had left, then maybe I could say it was something wrong with them. But if 22 out of 30 had left, that meant it’s something wrong with me.”

One American couple who’d left the congregation told him that while the church felt like a family, it didn’t feel like *their* family. St. Mark’s, like many of the over 250 Coptic churches in the United States, is overwhelmingly comprised of Copts raised in Egypt or born to

Egyptian parents. Of the nearly 6,000 members of the church, most still converse comfortably in Arabic, and the services retain Egyptian cultural norms: Men and women tend to sit separately, people move around freely during prayers, and Egyptian food is often served.

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- Unpacking the Fictional Japan of *Isle of Dogs*

Wes Anderson's film uses elements of the country's language and culture to create a fraught sense of unfamiliarity.

One of the best sequences in Wes Anderson's new stop-motion film *Isle of Dogs* is of a sushi chef preparing a boxed lunch. In a bird's-eye shot, we see the chef's hands pin a still-living fish, chop off its head and tail, set it to the side in a shallow bowl, and fillet the carcass. A wriggling octopus leg is held deftly, cut into neat rectangles, and pressed onto handfuls of vinegar rice. The chef dots vivid-green wasabi on each slice of octopus, arranging the sushi carefully in a lacquered bento box. This beautifully executed sequence is identical to the process so many sushi *shokunin* undertake, as they stand behind counters performing for hungry audiences. It is also the only scene in *Isle of Dogs* that needs to be set in Japan.

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Darren Braun

- The Case Against High-School Sports

The United States routinely spends more tax dollars per high-school athlete than per high-school math student—unlike most countries worldwide. And we wonder why we lag in international education rankings?

Every year, thousands of teenagers move to the United States from all over the world, for all kinds of reasons. They observe everything in their new country with fresh eyes, including basic features of American life that most of us never stop to consider.

One element of our education system consistently surprises them: “Sports are a big deal here,” says Jenny, who moved to America from South Korea with her family in 2011. Shawnee High, her public school in southern New Jersey, fields teams in 18 sports over the course of the school year, including golf and bowling. Its campus has lush grass fields, six tennis courts, and an athletic Hall of Fame. “They have days when teams dress up in Hawaiian clothes or pajamas just because—‘We’re the soccer team!’,” Jenny says. (To protect the privacy of Jenny and other students in this story, only their first names are used.)

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Marcio Jose Sanchez / AP

- How Home-State Pronunciations Can Shape Elections

As an expression of “in-group” identity in American politics, how politicians say a state’s name can be powerfully symbolic.

Woe to the politician who, while campaigning in a particular state, pronounces the state’s name differently from the local denizens.

The latest casualty of this phonetic parochialism is Matt Rosendale, currently the frontrunner among Montana Republicans seeking to oppose the incumbent Jon Tester in this year’s U.S. Senate race. Democrats have already set their sights on Rosendale by issuing an online ad that plays up the fact that he moved to Montana from Maryland some fifteen years ago. His accent, the ad suggests, is proof that Rosendale—dubbed “Maryland Matt” by the Democrats—is an interloper who doesn’t share “Montana values.”

While Rosendale’s accent is indeed distinctly non-Montanan, the ad focuses on his pronunciation of one word in particular: “Montana.” As befits someone of Rosendale’s background from Maryland’s Eastern Shore, there’s something peculiar about how he pronounces the vowel in the second syllable of “Montana.” (More on that in a bit.)

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Beawiharta Beawiharta / Reuters

- The Diet That Might Cure Depression

Several studies show that healthy eating is connected with better mood.

At the turn of the 20th century, prominent physicians who were trying to understand where mental illness comes from seized on a new theory: autointoxication. Intestinal microbes, these doctors suggested, are actually dangerous to their human hosts. They have a way of inducing “fatigue, melancholia, and the neuroses,” as a historical article in the journal *Gut Pathogens* recounts.

“The control of man’s diet is readily accomplished, but mastery over his intestinal bacterial flora is not,” wrote a doctor named Bond Stow in the *Medical Record Journal of Medicine and Surgery* in 1914. “The innumerable examples of autointoxication that one sees in his daily walks in life is proof thereof ... malaise, total lack of ambition so that every effort in life is a burden, mental depression often bordering upon melancholia.”

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Javier Jaén

- The Last Temptation

How evangelicals, once culturally confident, became an anxious minority seeking political protection from the least traditionally religious president in living memory

One of the most extraordinary things about our current politics—really, one of the most extraordinary developments of recent political history—is the loyal adherence of religious conservatives to Donald Trump. The president won four-fifths of the votes of white evangelical Christians. This was a higher level of support than either Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush, an outspoken evangelical himself, ever received.

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Trump's background and beliefs could hardly be more incompatible with traditional Christian models of life and leadership. Trump's past political stances (he once supported the right to partial-birth abortion), his character (he has bragged about sexually assaulting women), and even his language (he introduced the words *pussy* and *shithole* into presidential discourse) would more naturally lead religious conservatives toward exorcism than alliance. This is a man who has cruelly publicized his infidelities, made disturbing sexual comments about his elder daughter, and boasted about the size of his penis on the debate stage. His lawyer reportedly arranged a \$130,000 payment to a porn star to dissuade her from disclosing an alleged affair. Yet religious conservatives who once blanched at PG-13 public standards now yawn at such NC-17 maneuvers. We are a long way from *The Book of Virtues*.

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Jose Cabezas / Reuters

- Immigrants Give America a Foreign-Policy Advantage

History proves they can help the U.S. keep other countries in check.

It has often been thought that the composition of the American public, consisting as it does of immigrants from so many lands, is a vulnerability in foreign policy—that, for example, German immigrants would harbor affinities for their land of origin and become disloyal during the world wars. The argument was taken to a shameful extreme with the internment of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor. What has received less attention is the extent to which America's immigrant fabric can be a foreign-policy advantage, even a threat to other countries. That is what British Prime Minister Palmerston feared, and what President Lincoln stoked, to forestall British recognition of the Confederacy during the Civil War. The result was an important inhibition on Great Britain, then the most powerful state of the international order.

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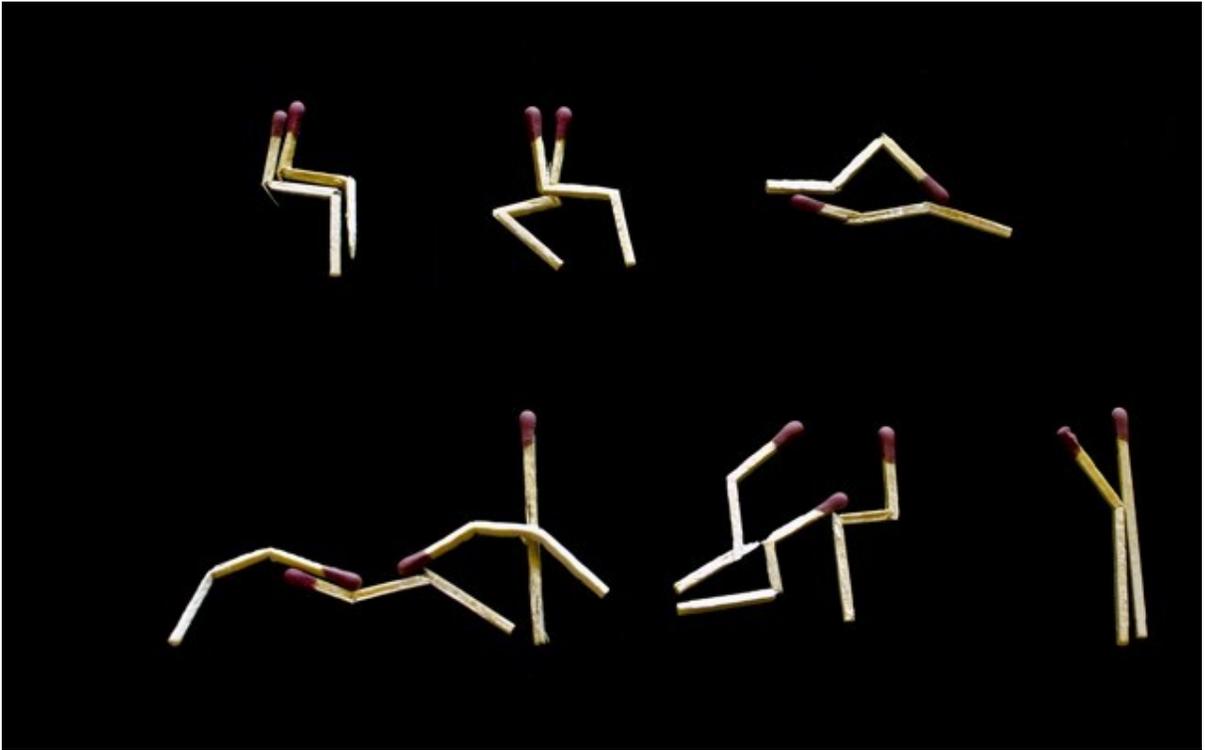
- Chicago's Awful Divide

Americans are flocking to big cities to find good jobs—opportunities that remain disproportionately out of reach for the poorest residents already living there.

CHICAGO—Americans hear a lot these days about the country's urban-rural divide. Rural counties are poorer; urban ones richer. Rural areas are losing jobs; urban ones are gaining them. People with a college education are leaving rural areas. They're moving to urban places.

Behind this divergence lies a straightforward story: The twin forces of globalization and technological change are enriching a handful of big urban areas, while resources are drained from the heartland, leaving it often devoid of opportunity and prosperity. But this neat division, rural versus urban, erases another part of the story of America's changing economy: the pressure that those twin forces are exerting within cities, pulling some people up to the very top while pushing others to an unforgiving bottom. In some prosperous cities, such as Chicago, where the number of wealthy census tracts has grown fourfold since 1970, people at the bottom are struggling as much as they always have, if not more—illustrating that it's not just the white rural poor who are being left behind in today's economy. The disconnect is why Andrew Diamond, the author of *Chicago on the Make*, has called Chicago "a combination of Manhattan smashed against Detroit."

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