

TRUMP'S BLACKLIST: HIS FASCISM, LEGAL FUCK-UPS, AND BUSINESS FAILURES

On October 20, Peter Baker wrote a rare comprehensive story on Trump's alleged and convicted crimes.

His businesses went bankrupt repeatedly and multiple others failed. He was taken to court for stiffing his vendors, stiffing his bankers and even stiffing his own family. He avoided the draft during the Vietnam War and avoided paying any income taxes for years. He was forced to shell out tens of millions of dollars to students who accused him of scamming them, found liable for wide-scale business fraud and had his real estate firm convicted in criminal court of tax crimes.

He has boasted of grabbing women by their private parts, been reported to have cheated on all three of his wives and been accused of sexual misconduct by more than two dozen women, including one whose account was validated by a jury that found him liable for sexual abuse after a civil trial.

He is the only president in American history impeached twice for high crimes and misdemeanors, the only president ever indicted on criminal charges and the only president to be convicted of a felony (34, in fact). He used the authority of his office to punish his adversaries and tried to hold onto power on the basis of a brazen lie.

Mr. Trump beat some of the investigations and lawsuits against him and some proved unfounded, but the sheer

volume is remarkable.

The story was remarkable especially by Baker's terms – he has a history of pulling his punches with Presidents.

When Baker wrote a piece on Trump's picks of Matt Gaetz, Pete Hegseth, and Tulsi Gabbard less than a month later, Baker dropped the focus on how meritorious were the investigations into Trump – instead letting Steve Bannon claim, without correction, that the “Deep State” set out to break Trump.

If confirmed, Mr. Gaetz, Mr. Hegseth and Ms. Gabbard would constitute the lead shock troops in Mr. Trump's self-declared war on what he calls the “deep state.” All three have echoed his conviction that government is seeded with career public servants who actively thwarted his priorities while he was in office and targeted him after he left. None of them has the kind of experience relevant to these jobs comparable to predecessors of either party, but they can all be expected to take “a blowtorch” to the status quo, to use Stephen K. Bannon's term for Mr. Gaetz.

“You tried to destroy Trump; you tried to imprison Trump; you tried to break Trump,” Mr. Bannon, a onetime White House strategist for Mr. Trump, said on his podcast on Wednesday after Mr. Gaetz's nomination was announced. “He's not breakable. You couldn't destroy him. And now he has turned on you.”

To be sure, it's *common* for journalists, including Baker, to let Trump air his claims of grievance without correction. It was just striking to see Baker do so so soon after writing that rare comprehensive review of Trump's alleged and convicted crimes.

In between those two stories, CJR reports, an

attorney for Trump wrote a letter to the NYT threatening a \$10B lawsuit for the Baker story and three others.

The letter, addressed to lawyers at the New York Times and Penguin Random House, arrived a week before the election. Attached was a discursive ten-page legal threat from an attorney for Donald Trump that demanded \$10 billion in damages over “false and defamatory statements” contained in articles by Peter Baker, Michael S. Schmidt, Susanne Craig, and Russ Buettner.

It singles out two stories coauthored by Buettner and Craig that related to their book on Trump and his financial dealings, *Lucky Loser: How Donald Trump Squandered His Father’s Fortune and Created the Illusion of Success*, released on September 17. It also highlighted an October 20 story headlined “For Trump, a Lifetime of Scandals Heads Toward a Moment of Judgment” by Baker and an October 22 piece by Schmidt, “As Election Nears, Kelly Warns Trump Would Rule Like a Dictator.”

“There was a time, long ago, when the New York Times was considered the ‘newspaper of record,’” the letter, a copy of which was reviewed by CJR, reads. “Those halcyon days have passed.” It accuses the Times of being “a full-throated mouthpiece of the Democratic Party” that employs “industrial-scale libel against political opponents.”

The other stories include Mike Schmidt’s interview – backed by recordings!! – of John Kelly, in which Trump’s former Chief of Staff warned that he would rule as a fascist. It’s not clear about which stories from Russ Buettner and Susanne Craig Trump complained (CJR did not include the letter or NYT’s response). But they

teamed up to write a damaging piece about how The Apprentice gave Trump the false appearance of success; they've got more dated work in which they showed how Trump made little from the inheritance he got from his father.

Whichever Buettner/Craig stories they are, now is probably a good time either to get a copy of their book, Lucky Loser, yourself, or to create demand for it at your local public library!

Unlike the frivolous complaints against CBS (for editing a transcript of Kamala Harris' 60 Minutes interview less extensively than Fox edited the transcript of Trump's women's town hall) or WaPo (for reporting positively on Harris), Trump does not appear to have followed up on his threat to sue the NYT. Those other lawsuits, I suspect, were part of an effort to claim the election was unfair, in the same way Trump has wailed that he lost the 2020 election because voters were not permitted to look at Hunter Biden's dick pics before the election.

But the letter to NYT appears, so far, to be no more than a warning shot: that he will come after them if they do accurate reporting describing that Trump is not the guy he sold himself as.

That's telling, though. Trump has telegraphed that he believes accurate reporting debunking his con is dangerous enough he would be willing to take on the NYT about it.

Crazy, I know. But what if simply reporting the truth about Trump's con is what he most fears? And that is where he'll focus his authoritarian gaze first.