

# George Will on Donald Trump: Not a Pretty Picture

A summary of commentary 1990-2025

Compiled by A. R. Clark 2025

George Will's commentaries on TV and in print have generally followed traditional 20th Century Republican themes. He is regarded as erudite and generally fair but with a twist of eastern elitism. He has, however, rejected Donald Trump as a so-called conservative and called Trump out over issues of bigotry and self-aggrandizement.

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## Perspectives

Query # 1: Summarize the economic and political perspectives of columnist George Will from 1990 to 2010.

### Response

George Will's economic and political commentary from 1990–2010 reflects a broadly “libertarian conservative” outlook: strong belief in limited government, deregulated markets, and constitutional constraints on state power, combined with cultural traditionalism and skepticism toward expansive welfare and regulatory programs.[1][2] Over these two decades he grew more critical of both parties’ embrace of big government, faulting Republicans and Democrats alike for fiscal excess, entitlement expansion, and what he viewed as constitutional drift.[1][2]

### Core economic views

Will consistently defended market capitalism, arguing that postwar economic stability and long expansions showed the superiority of deregulated markets and modest macroeconomic “fine-tuning” over activist management.[1] He saw the U.S. economy as highly resilient even after shocks like the tech bust and terrorism, and he favored low taxes and deregulation as the best environment for growth.[3][2] At the same time, he warned that entitlement-driven federal spending—especially the welfare state and later Medicare expansions—would crowd out other priorities and make ambitious new government initiatives fiscally impossible.[1]

## Welfare state and social policy

Will portrayed the 20th-century welfare state as liberalism's "great achievement" but also as the main obstacle to further egalitarian policy, because its open-ended commitments dominated the federal budget.[1] He increasingly emphasized behavioral and cultural explanations for persistent poverty, arguing that the central impediment for many poor Americans was not material scarcity but "deeply rooted behaviors" and deficits in "inner resources," and therefore doubting the efficacy of traditional transfer programs.[1] This perspective aligned him with conservative critiques of Great Society-style social engineering and with calls for more personal responsibility in anti-poverty policy.[1][2]

## Constitutionalism and limits on government

Politically, Will framed conservatism as a project to "conserve" the American founding's architecture of limited government, separation of powers, federalism, and natural rights.[4][5] He argued that progressivism and modern liberalism had weakened Madisonian constraints and enlarged the presidency and administrative state beyond constitutional design.[4][6] During this period he supported a robust, even "activist," judiciary—not to advance progressive causes but to strike down legislative and executive overreach and to defend individual liberty against expansive federal power.[4]

## Partisan alignments and criticisms

Although widely identified with Republican politics, Will's commentary from the 1990s through the Bush and early Obama years increasingly criticized both parties when they departed from limited-government principles.[2][7] He defended Senate supermajority rules such as the filibuster in the early 1990s as a protection for minority rights and a check on hasty majoritarian legislation, especially on large Democratic economic packages.[8] By the 2000s he was also sharply critical of Republican-backed expansions like the Medicare prescription drug benefit and later of both Bush and Obama fiscal stimulus measures, which he saw as statist departures from free-market discipline.[2][7]

## Overall sensibility, 1990–2010

Across these decades Will's columns blended economic libertarianism with cultural and constitutional conservatism, often describing government as too large, too centralized, and too eager to reshape society.[1][6] He treated commercial society under limited government as a school of civic virtue, arguing that everyday market interactions foster habits and character that politics should respect rather than attempt to redesign.[9] By 2010 he was articulating a mature "Madisonian" conservatism: skeptical of state-led social change, wary of empire-building abroad, and convinced that the central task of politics is to restrain government in order to leave space for spontaneous social and economic order.[4][10]

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## **Society vs Economics**

Query #2: How did Will's stance on social issues differ from his economic views during these years?

### **Response**

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## Trump Candidacy

Query # 3: Did George Will ever comment on the prospect of a Donald Trump presidency prior to 2015?

Response

There is no evidence that George Will specifically discussed the “prospect” of a Donald Trump presidency before Trump’s 2015 campaign; his published, high-profile criticisms of Trump begin in the early 2010s, not the 1990–2010 window.[1][2] Before 2015 Trump was occasionally mentioned in political media as a celebrity flirtatious candidate, but available records show Will’s pointed judgments of Trump—as a BLOVIATING

IGNORAMUS whose association would damage Republican candidates—date from 2012, when Trump was promoting birther claims against Barack Obama rather than running a serious presidential campaign himself.[1][2] (Emphasis ours.)

### Timing of Will's Trump commentary

Evidence from network and print coverage places Will's first widely noted comments about Trump around 2011–2012, in reaction to Trump's role in the Obama “birther” controversy and his visibility around the 2012 Republican race.[1][3] In a 2012 ABC “This Week” appearance that has been widely cited, Will attacked Trump's credibility and warned Republicans against associating with him, but this was framed as advice about Romney's campaign optics rather than a forecast of a Trump presidency.[2][4]

### Absence of pre-2011 presidential forecasts

Searchable archives and secondary discussions of Will's career focus on his critiques of Trump \*after\* Trump emerged as a national political figure—first as a birther spokesman, then as a 2016 candidate and president.[5][6][7] Those sources do not report any earlier columns or TV segments in which Will seriously analyzed or predicted a Trump presidential bid during the 1990s or 2000s, suggesting that if he mentioned Trump at all in that period, it was not in the context of a plausible presidential future.[8][9]

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## **Emergence, Campaign & Presidency**

Query # 4: How did Will's view of Trump change after 2015?

George Will's view of Donald Trump hardened after 2015 from sharp skepticism to open, sustained opposition, treating Trump as a threat to both conservatism and constitutional norms rather than merely a distasteful celebrity politician.[1][2] Over time he came to argue that Trump's presidency would leave “lasting damage” on American political culture that could not simply be reversed by a change of administrations.[3][4]

2015–2016: From critic to “Never Trump”

In the 2016 primary season Will argued in print that if Trump were nominated, conservatives should work to keep him out of the White House, even if that meant a



Hillary Clinton victory and a Republican rebuilding in opposition.[1][5] By June 2016 he announced that he had left the Republican Party, changing his registration to unaffiliated and urging other conservatives to ensure that Trump lost, calling Trump a “counterfeit Republican” and “no conservative.”[2][6]

During the Trump presidency

Once Trump took office, Will framed him less as an ideological problem and more as a civic one, emphasizing Trump’s character, rhetoric, and contempt for norms rather than particular tax or regulatory policies.[4][7] In interviews and columns he argued that Trump’s style—constant lying, name-calling, and coarsening of discourse—would inflict “more lasting damage” on the country than Nixon’s Watergate crimes because it normalized previously unthinkable behavior from a president.[3][4]

Broader reassessment of conservatism

Trump’s rise also pushed Will to sharpen his own account of conservatism as a Madisonian, constitutional “sensibility” distinct from Trumpist populism.[4][8] He described the post-2016 Republican Party as drifting toward a “cult” of personality and argued that true conservatives should prioritize defense of institutions, separation of powers, and fiscal responsibility over partisan loyalty to Trump.[9][10]

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Sources derived in part from research using Perplexity.ai.