

## 2016: E.J. Dionne, *Washington Post*, Brookings Institution

I can't think of anyone I'd rather be introducing here, at this moment in American history, as the recipient of Trinity College's seventh Moses Berkman Memorial Journalism Award.

For nearly a quarter century, E.J. has been our foremost voice of reason, decency, and civility in a national political discourse that has increasingly abandoned all of the above. American historians like to claim that for sheer ugliness nothing in presidential politics has ever equaled the election of 1800, when Thomas Jefferson defeated John Adams amid charges of atheism, monarchic ambition, and wholesale corruption. Well, I think the campaign we've just been through has 1800 beaten hands down.

E.J. – Eugene Joseph, in case you want to know – is a native New Englander: born in Boston, raised in Fall River, and educated in Rhode Island at Portsmouth Priory (now, Portsmouth Abbey School). He graduated from Harvard College *summa cum laude*, won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford, where he eventually procured his D.Phil.

His first and enduring love was journalism, however, and after Oxford he went to work for the *New York Times*, reporting on state and local government, national politics, and from around the world – including from the Vatican. In 1990 he moved to the *Washington Post*, and three years later began the syndicated column that has ever since been his stock in trade. Devotees of national public radio depend on his Friday colloquy with *New York Times* columnist David Brooks to wrap up the week's news. Twenty years ago he also became a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and since 2003 he's been teaching at Georgetown.

He is a man of the center left, upholding the liberal tradition through thick and thin. And not only the secular liberal tradition. There's also a liberal Catholic tradition that E.J. has upheld through thin and now, in the papacy of Francis, thick. I trust that's some consolation to him at present.

His six books, all on the American political situation, betray from time to time some wishful thinking. In 1996, for example, he wrote *They Only Look Dead: Why Progressives Will Dominate the Next Political Era*. His latest, published this year, is *Why the Right Went Wrong: Conservatism From Goldwater to the Tea Party and Beyond*. Beyond turns out to be Donald F. Trump, God save us.

Before I turn the mic over, I'd like to recall a column that the 21-year-old E.J. wrote for the *Harvard Crimson* the month he graduated, looking back from 1973 at the idea of a "student-worker alliance" that had figured heavily in the rhetoric of the student left in the heyday of the anti-Vietnam war movement. In one paragraph, he remarks on the emergence of "elitism" as a term of opprobrium:

One of the most remarkable aspects of this change in perception is that conservatives--who above all others should be defending the elites and the idea of elitism--began leveling charges of elitism at their opponents.

And then there is:

It is clear, of course, that black demands for political and economic equality are justified; most public opinion polls show white workers agree that measures should be taken to secure these rights. The way these issues developed, however, served to estrange the white working class from the movement for equality. White workers rebelled because they felt they were being forced to pay an inequitable share of the costs of equality.

This is a reminder of how much of our contemporary politics were shaped in the crucible of what we call “the Sixties.” And it’s an indication of how long E.J. has been pondering the very issues that divide us at this moment. That’s precisely why we need to pay close attention to how he answers the question he’s posed for his lecture: “After 2016: Can a Divided Country Heal Itself?”