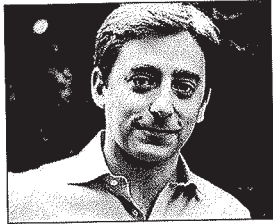


# Greenwich author looks at evolution of GOP in his hometown



Evan Osnos

Contributed photo

By Robert Marchant

GREENWICH — When political commentators and journalists look to explain the rise of Donald Trump to the White House, and ponder whether he can repeat that achievement in November, the explanation often centers on what voters are talking about in small-town diners in the upper Midwest.

But to Evan Osnos, a journalist

and author who previously reported from Asia, the story about Trump's rise to power is very much about a story about his old hometown of Greenwich.

His 10,000-word article in the May 11 issue of *The New Yorker*, where he is a staff writer, reads like a political detective story, with a colorful cast of characters, each stepping up to advance the plot or provide some insight into the lives of the ultra-rich while

leading Trump toward his journey to the Oval Office. Osnos spent over a year researching and writing the piece — “How Greenwich Republicans Learned to Love Trump” — spotlighting many of Greenwich's leading political figures as well as some of its better-known financial wrongdoers and rogues.

It was also a personal journey for Osnos, who considers himself a “proud son of Greenwich,” and

his research will be incorporated into a book-length project on which the Washington-based journalist is working.

“I came at this with a basic question: How did Donald Trump win the Republican primary in Greenwich?” Osnos said in a recent phone interview from his home in Washington, D.C.

“That was intriguing to me, and I wanted to understand how it

See Osnos on A13

## OSNOS

From page A1

happened.”

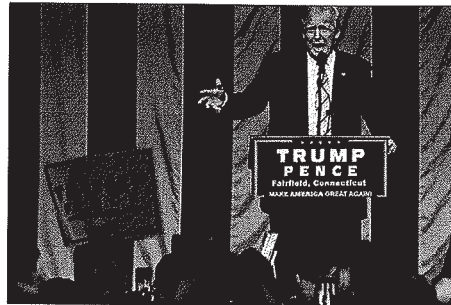
Osnos recalls the older strain of Greenwich's elected leaders, starting with Prescott Bush, the father and grandfather of two U.S. presidents, whose sense of public duty and obligation he details. Bush, who served in Greenwich town government before becoming a U.S. senator, was associated with other Northeast “establishment” Republicans such as Nelson Rockefeller, a New York state governor and vice president, and Lowell Weicker, the former Connecticut governor and U.S. senator.

Prescott Bush, who lived in the same backcountry neighborhood off Round Hill Road where Osnos grew up, was a believer “in the duty of government to help people who did not enjoy his considerable advantages,” he writes.

In 2016, Osnos writes, the older style of Republicans who dominated the social and political scene in Greenwich and other fashionable suburban towns of Fairfield County, took a hit.

Candidates of the more moderate wing of the Republican Party, the ones who might have felt kinship with the kind of benevolent paternalism that Bush modeled, fell to Trump in the Republican primary. Twenty out of the 23 municipalities in Fairfield County went for Trump in that Republican contest. (Hillary Clinton won the town of Greenwich and the state of Connecticut in the general election).

“It struck me less as a sheer fact about Trump himself, than a reflection of broader changes in our politics and economics. As a son of Greenwich, I wanted to understand what that meant,” Osnos said. “I grew up with some sense of what ‘Greenwich Republican’ meant. I associated it very strongly with the Bush family legacy. But I came to realize there was much more complexity and change contained within that, and we needed to try to understand and describe



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Donald Trump speaks at a Trump campaign rally at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield in 2016.

bearer of the Republican Party.”

The article ties together a wide-ranging matrix of political and economic currents. Osnos tells the story of how Allie Hanley — “a devout Christian with a keen interest in politics” living in Greenwich — got Ronald Reagan to trade in his usual brown necktie for a more refined blue one to make campaign appearances. He describes how the old stone walls of Greenwich were replaced with 9-foot behemoths around vast estates in the booming 2000s. He revisits the recent college-admissions cheating scandal that snared a Greenwich lawyer.

The article takes an especially detailed look at the changing nature of wealth and elite tastes in Greenwich and places like it, and what Osnos calls the “private-jetification” of the American aristocracy.” He recalls how a class of Connecticut millionaires that he and his friends knew as young people, the kind who “drive the station wagon and dress like gardeners on the weekends,” appear to be a vanishing breed.

Those changing societal values in the nation's executive class, he says, have also been accompanied by a distinct political shift.

As Osnos writes in the article “The story of Trump's rise is often told as a hostile takeover. In truth, it is something closer to a joint venture, in which members of America's elite accepted the terms of Trumpism as the price of power.”

Osnos reports at length

political circles. Hanley, who ran his family's oil and brick business, worked with Roger Stone, Trump's political adviser, to build support for Reagan in the Northeast in 1980.

“They adopted an approach that uncannily prefigured Trump's electoral strategy: They built a coalition of conservative elites and the white working class,” the *New Yorker* journalist writes.

Osnos uncovers a number of anecdotes and reminiscences about the use and acquisition of wealth and power in southern Connecticut in his article, and how they have transformed the political landscape across the country.

Scott McClain, a professor of political science at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, said the article captured a trend that went far beyond Greenwich.

“The story he's telling about Greenwich is the story of all the people we could classify as the establishment Republicans, or moderate Republicans, all over the country. They've come to accommodate themselves to Trump,” McClain said. “It's a story that's not just happening in Fairfield County; it's happening in wealthy, highly educated regions all over the country.”

Figuring prominently in the article is Jim Campbell, who was chairman of the

Republican Town Committee in 2016 and an early Trump supporter. Campbell said he believed Osnos' focus on the ultra-wealthy supporters of Trump was misplaced, missing what he called a larger base of the president's support.

“The Trump tax cuts, and the Trump economic record, have been a pro-working class, pro-middle-class economic program. He doubled the standard deduction. For teachers, working professionals, they're taking advantage of that. And he's fought to bring jobs home to the United States. He's the pro-jobs president,” said Campbell.

Osnos will incorporate the Greenwich article into a book-length examination of the disruptions of the current era. He says his goal as a journalist is to “render people in three dimensions, and to try to understand something in as much detail as possible.”

A married father of two young children, Osnos was a co-editor of the high school newspaper and once interned at Greenwich Time, the town newspaper. During his career in China and the Middle East, he has become accustomed to looking at the lives of the powerful and the powerless, and the ways the two remain apart.

Looking at his old hometown, Osnos ends his examination of the Greenwich power elite on a somewhat rueful note, reflecting on the ways that financial power emanating from Round Hill Road in backcountry Greenwich have shaped our current political environment.

“The governing class in places like Greenwich, he suggests, could rethink its obligations about civic responsibility. As he writes, “We — or they, depending on where you stand — receded behind gracious walls.”

rmarchant@

22