**Populism, Polarization, Propaganda, and Paranoia: Donald Trump is the Rule, Not the Exception**

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**ABSTRACT:**

The rise of Donald Trump and “Trumpism” has been deconstructed, *ad nauseam*. Partisan elites, “Main Street,” political operatives, pundits and journalists, and academics have all weighed in, the popular consensus being that his politics, and the success thereof, are unprecedented. Tentative, but still broadly invoked, are several themes *cum* explanations: 1) conservative nationalist *populism*, 2) *propaganda* and/or fake news, 3) *paranoid* (or conspiratorial) *politics*, and 4) the intra- and inter-party *polarization* (of partisan elites and, increasingly, the public). While not inaccurate, this framework is problematic in its entirely ignoring political history; because, historically, the style and substance of Trumpism is more “rule” than “exception.” Far from anomaly, it is part and parcel of the American Experiment’s public philosophy, a dark underside that consistently rears its head in times of crisis and/or social change. These four *constants* – by their very nature as such – cannot be said to constitute, let alone to explain, *variations* in American politics. Yet, it is difficult to deny that the American social order is in an extraordinary situation. My contention is that this situation is representative of a profound structural shift taking place in political economy from ‘competitive capitalism’ to ‘monopoly capitalism.’ This framework not only provides a causal, as opposed to merely descriptive, explanation of Trumpism, it also reveals why these four *constants* should resurface at this particular historical moment. I conclude that liberal reformism is no solution to the social problems, and their underlying causes, to which Trumpism is a response. In fact, liberalism as an ideology *is* the underlying cause.As such, the solution is to critically examine the American experiment’s public philosophy and core values, and the resultant political-economic institutions.

## **Introduction**

President Donald Trump is not an anomaly. So why do many Americans, friend and foe alike, view him as the outsider exception to the political rule? His success, and the rise of “Trumpism” as a political ideology, have been deconstructed and explained, *ad nauseam*. Partisan elites, “Main Street,” political operatives, pundits and journalists, and academics have weighed in, and the popular consensus seems to be that his politics, especially their success, are unprecedented. While still preliminary, several themes *cum* explanations are commonly invoked: 1) authoritarian (white) nationalist *populism*[[1]](#footnote-1), 2) *propaganda* and/or fake news, 3) *paranoid* (or conspiratorial) *politics*, and 4) the intra- and inter-party *polarization* (of partisan elites and, increasingly, the public). These themes provide an accurate description of “what” Trumpism entails as an ideology, but a description is not an explanation. Nothing in the way of causal inference is provided to explain “how” Trumpism came to be, or “why” it resonates. As such, it is no coincidence that those who view said themes as explanations fail to realize that these socio-political developments are not all that novel, nor were they unpredictable.

Historically, the style and substance of Trumpism is more “rule” than “exception.” Far from anomaly, this is part and parcel of the American Experiment, a dark underside of its public philosophy that consistently rears its head in times of crisis or social change. As such, these four *constants* – by their very nature as constants – quite literally do not constitute any substantive or stylistic *variations* in American politics. Nor can they explain Trumpism. The authoritarian *populist* image he seeks to cultivate, the paranoid style of his incessant 140-character stream-of-consciousness outbursts, the divisive polarization his administration embodies in its executive directives, policy positions, and legislative output (all of which frequently spill over into cruel and unusual, a place where his rhetoric lives), and the political spectacle he performs as “reality” which consists of “news” that is effectively propagandaand “news” that is literally “fake news”: original sins, all. And if these sins truly do represent the dark side of the Experiment, then President Donald Trump is their living embodiment.The success of a plainly incoherent anti-campaign[[2]](#footnote-2), which perennially lapsed into the nonsensical, is unintelligible at first glance. That such an ethos still holds sway for a significant minority of the public today, even as the substance of his platform melts into air, seems equally incomprehensible.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, in historical context this is not only intelligible and comprehensible, on its own terms, it is perfectly logical.

This is not to deny the extraordinary, even surreal, *mise-en-scène* of the American social order at present. We must acknowledge that which actually *is* unprecedented: social media, data analytics, and all their accoutrement represent tectonic shifts in the 21st century political and social landscape; and, Russia’s interference in the electoral process, especially their alleged collusion with American citizens[[4]](#footnote-4), is more extraordinary still. These factors have gained considerable traction as an explanation for Trump’s success, but this connection is purely instrumental, having no connection to ideological character. Focusing here belies a naivety (or a willful ignorance?) about both American history and causal inference. Speaking to the former, if we strip away the novel veneer of election meddling, technology and social media to unearth the historical kernel out of which Trumpism was born, an all too familiar mode of politics is revealed, one as American as apple pie. Speaking to the latter, emphasizing those “unprecedented” developments – which is, to an extent, rooted simply in their being unprecedented – ignores the fundamentally necessary antecedent: a susceptible American body politic.

Such frameworks of explanation, blinded by novelty and blind to history, appear ascendant in academia and the media, and within (left) partisan circles. This is all the more troubling given that the resultant prognoses are equally untenable: the political left has moved too far leftward, the political right still further rightward, we must return to America’s past glory of exceptionalism, compromise, and incremental reform. The Democratic Party and scholars of the liberal left aim at a return to the compromise, centrist politics, and civility of post-War America or the founding period. The Republican Party and scholars of the liberal right aim at a return to the compromise, centrism, and social hierarchy of post-War America or the founding period. Paradoxically, yet unsurprisingly, both associate recovery with some abstract, un-substantive political equilibrium, in the freedom and neutrality of the market, in the American empire – that is, a future in the past. Still more contradictory, and even less surprising, is that little if any clear-eyed inquiry into the historical origins of today’s politics has been conducted by anyone anywhere on the establishment political spectrum. Content to project their particular flavor of liberalism upon the vacuous skeleton that is their philosophy of history, Left, Right, and Center are confident that their ideology is the flavor of the future. It will, and should, unfold accordingly. Only with a philosophy of history that understands (political, social, economic, etc.) reality as the simultaneous inevitability of both linear progress and the cyclical recurrence of equilibrium. While the prospect of reckoning with America’s past may be unsettling, it is a necessary evil. For Marcus Tullius Cicero’s thought was certainly true: “[n]ot to know what happened before you were born is to be a child forever.” We would do well to learn from his experience, not to mention that of the Roman republic.

Assuming the dominant assessments and proposed solutions are indeed inadequate, where can we find answers? My aim is to respond with an alternative theoretical framework of explanation. In doing so, I integrate American political development (APD), political economy, and social and political theory to critique and supplement the dominant understanding. First, the Trumpist ideology must be viewed as a hereditary disease. To diagnose the situation, I conduct a genealogical investigation into the above four *constants* – i.e. the dark underside of American politics – and detail the persistent parallels to today. Taken as symptoms of an underlying cause, I contend that these *constants* represent liberalism’s negative pole, which manifest when liberal ideology *qua* instrumental governance fails to stay apace of the society’s evolution and general upheaval ensues. Oftentimes, as is the case with the present social unrest, this occurs in the wake of historically impactful political-economic events or developments.

My contention is as follows. Trumpism is predicated on several *necessary* precursors: (1) historical-structural developments in political economy, which (literally and/or metaphorically) signify decisive social change and, frequently, (2)a crisis of liberalism’s ideology of centrist, instrumental governance, the inherent vice of which is a perennial incapacity to address the attendant ills of rapid social change, both of which generally manifest in (3) the four historical *constants* of America’s crisis politics. In combination, they produce sufficient social conditions that the American body politic might be susceptible to a digital propaganda campaign pandering to the Experiment’s dark side. In particular, the fact of Trumpism is predicated upon a profound structural political-economic shift from ‘competitive capitalism’ to ‘monopoly capitalism’ and the increasing ineffectiveness of liberalism – as a political ideology/mode of governance – to combat its negative effects on the middle- and working-class. My framework provides several advantages: a causal (as opposed to descriptive) explanation of Trumpism rooted in a deconstruction of liberal ideology’s commitment to centrist, instrumental, and ostensibly value-neutral governance; and an explanation of why these four *constants* should resurface at this particular historical moment, which is rooted in an analysis of political economy. Furthermore, it accounts for the Fourth Estate’s failures and the rise of social media and data analytics as political weapons, both of which appear relatively reasonable historical outcomes in the context of American political development. And finally, it expresses the true novelty of our times: all of these *constants*, precursors, developments, and novelties, the causes, the consequences, and causal mechanisms, all of it, finds expression in a single figure – President Donald John Trump.

## **The Dark Side : Populism, Paranoia, Propaganda, and Polarization**

What seems to be lacking in the analysis of Trump’s ideology and its resonance arises from a category mistake. That such politics are labelled “unprecedented” or “un-American” is not simply a mistake, it claiming a thing to be precisely its opposite. The 45th American President is nothing less than the living embodiment America’s dark side and its necessary precursors. The oft-applied aphorism that “history repeats itself” comes to mind. An apt paraphrasing of numerous literary and intellectual figures, one such voice echoes the loudest. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*[[5]](#footnote-5), Karl Marx suggested the following: “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Herein lies the true novelty – Mr. Trump is what happens when a particular personage embodies “fact,” “tragedy,” and “farce” all at once. He *is* the “tragedy” of the paranoia and uncertainty, economic anxiety, and disempowerment that defines America’s mass public today, their public institutions and economic structures having failed them. He *is* the “farce” of a country awash in the hollow platitudes offered by political elites, celebrities and entertainers, media personalities, and business people, a class of people who steadfastly and condescendingly polarize politics, feign unity, and re-direct blame toward whatever bogeyman is on offer. He *is* the “fact,” the living embodiment, of the capitalist Id, of a (neo-)liberal social order in which the corporate rich – by some wicked combination of unknowing naivety and unthinking instrumental rationality – worsen, coerce, and end multitudes of human lives. A “fact” that is a matter of course given economic structures that requires persons be treated as things, mere commodity-values within an equation for calculating how to best pursue the further accumulation of capital.

### **Populism**

The study of American political culture usually begins with democracy (and perhaps republicanism), but to understand Trumpism as an ideology, we must begin with populist politics and liberalism. More consideration must be given to “[democracy’s] limits, silences, and brutalities” and the “long history of discontent voiced and acted upon by members of the white majority itself.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Beginning with the Constitution itself (and the Founders fear of lower classes considered unfit to rule[[8]](#footnote-8)) and moving through the historical struggles of women, minority groups, and the impoverished, democracy has always been subject to severe restrictions. This limited democracy, which is integral to liberalism’s successes and failures, has served consistently to maintain the large “middling class” so vital to stabilizing society within ‘classical’ and ‘modern’ political thought. However, in periods of economic crises and social change, liberalism’s instrumental, carrot and stick, governance frequently fails to “deliver the goods.” This large middle world of the ordinary working man[[9]](#footnote-9), not destitute but far from privileged, became all too self-aware of their precarious position – and the gap between poverty and affluence, between opportunity and abundance. Populist politics was the response.

According to Michael Kazin, populism is “a form of discursive politics”, the core assumption of which is that “the principles of American democracy are fine but those in power are betraying them. The only solution is to mount an insurgency of the common people – whose precise identity is open for debate and change – to redeem the democratic promise.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Kazin identifies three different historical forms. The precise ideological make-up is flexible and both ends of the political spectrum have taken up the mantle at one time or another. Regardless of ideology, the philosophy has always been to blame a self-serving, undemocratic, and un-American elite, and not infrequently, to scapegoat a recently emigrated group of ‘non-white’ immigrants as well. The first form, *critique populism*, arises just prior to so-called ‘Jacksonian democracy’ **with the Workingman’s Party of New York** (Jacobin). Revolving around “the antagonism between the large majority of ‘producers’ and a tiny minority of elite ‘parasites.’”[[11]](#footnote-11) While attacking class inequality, they explicitly rejected the structural critique of political economy central to Marxist thought. Hostile to large, centralized institutions – government, corporations, unions, etc. – they romanticized local power, small farms, family, community, church, and voluntary associations, claiming to act on a patriotic duty to preserve American independence.[[12]](#footnote-12) The idolization of the Constitution as supporting such ideals thus imbues populism with a zealous, if conflicted, idealistic conservativism. While arising in the *critique* form, these principles maintain in all forms and up through today.

The second form, *movement populism*, arises in Gilded Age America as a primarily economic (though also religious, moralistic) critique. Small agrarians and skilled workers – largely protestant and often xenophobic – railed against the bankers and corporate owners “who favored tight money and high interest rates.”[[13]](#footnote-13) These polices made for scarce access to financing, where small producers and farmers favored greater monetary supply to spur investment and debt deflation. The true distinction of *movement populism* comes in its more coherent philosophy and electoral success – populists won numerous local, state, and federal elections from 1890-1908. Little immediate institutional change resulted, but the stage was set for Progressive Era politics. The third form, *oppositional discourse populism*, maintains an apparent commitment to the same principles, but performs a complete ideological about-turn. By the mid-20th century, business (and libertarianism, generally) had adopted the “discourse of small farmers and union workers to their own ends.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Such is the ideological promiscuity of populism, which, as America’s neo-liberal trn takes place, lapses into dishonesty. Once a “grassroots” politics, populism becomes an “astroturfing” politics – the process of disguising corporate interests and issues positons as arising from a genuine “grassroots” politics and discourse. The continuity in appearance, especially in the context of the American Dream myth, is at the core of the middling classes’ identification with Trump. Following the Tea Part, and the so-called “Alt-Right”, the Trump campaign employed precisely these age-old populist ideals to appeal to those Americans positioned, “self-consciously in the middle, perched insecurely between social extremes – [fearing they might] fall below.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

In response, both strategically and Ideologically, the Clinton campaign followed decades of liberal wisdom. Running to the political center, they courted independents and moderate Republicans who opposed a vulgar, chauvinistic, and “un-presidential” candidate. Rather than contest this faux-populism with support *for* substantive ideals, they ran a campaign *against* their “deplorable” opponents. They offered a fair-minded and sober “campaign againstbigotry” that emphasized a need for “love and kindness” in an already great America.[[16]](#footnote-16) Empirically, this strategy is confirmed in the content of their political advertising, 76% of which contained un-substantive character attacks and only 9% of which contained reference to jobs, social welfare, and/or the economy.[[17]](#footnote-17) The fact that the ‘economy’ and ‘jobs’ were among the most important issue(s), if not *the* most important, in the 2016 election[[18]](#footnote-18) – a lingering effect of the Great Recession – lends considerable weight to the hypothesis that economic anxiety significantly impacted vote choice. (Clinton ran to the right of Trump on economic issues.)[[19]](#footnote-19) Combined with the clear import of identity politics, there is considerable evidence that America is has entered another populist phase, one with visible (white) nationalist characteristics, and a somewhat unusual authoritarian bent.

The Midwestern swing states, on which the presidential election once again hinged in 2016, reveals populism’s impact. In short, the decades-long collapse of manufacturing and an influx of Latino immigration in Midwestern “Rust Belt” states appears to have had a statistically significant impact on the rejection of Clinton. At the heart of this were working- and middle- class white voters in the five rust belt states won by Trump – Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin[[20]](#footnote-20): therein, the Republican candidate picked up 450,000 (or, 4.9 percent) more ‘white voters’ and 335,000 (or, 10.6 percent) more ‘working class voters’ [[21]](#footnote-21) than in 2012 and the Democratic candidate picked up 950,000 (or, 13 percent) fewer (including 770,000 – or, 24.2 percent – fewer ‘white males’), and 1.17 million (or, 21.7 percent) fewer than in 2012, respectively; an in total, over 500,000 fewer votes were cast compared to 2012 – including three times as many voters with incomes under $100,000 for ‘third party candidates’ and twice as many for ‘write-in candidates’ – with 1.35 million fewer votes going to the Democratic candidate and only 590,000 more going to the Republican candidate.[[22]](#footnote-22) At the national level, while Clinton carried the Democratic base – African Americans, Latinos, union households, and women – the former three groups were won by a six to eight percentage points less than President Obama in 2012; Clinton won only one percentage point more of the female vote than Obama.[[23]](#footnote-23) A number of pundits and political operatives attempted depressed turnout among these traditionally Democratic groups, especially in the Rust Belt, to a strategic failure to canvass. Regardless (by extrapolating the above data on ‘white voters’ to the national level) it becomes apparent that only an electorally insignificant fraction of the four Democratic groups flipped to Trump – most voted third party or stayed home. In fact, of 700 counties won twice by Obama, about one-third (209) went for Trump, and of those 207 counties that Obama won once, nearly 94 percent (194) went for Trump; the 209 Obama strongholds that flipped to Trump were 81 percent white and those counties that split their vote in 2008 and 2012 before going for Trump were 86 percent white, whereas those counties that went for Obama and Clinton were only 55 percent white and 71 percent white, respectively.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The post-1980 Republican base – a middle-class of small business owners, the self-employed, professionals and managers, and evangelical Christians – was pretty well assured to vote Trump. What made the difference was picking up a percentage of the white working class unseen since Reagan. His (white) nationalist populism appealed to just enough older, white working- and middle- class, low education voters. This middling class of citizens – whose financial outlook is quite precarious due to the Great Recession (and its historically slow recovery) – are increasingly aware of shifting demographics and unhappy with the neo-liberal establishment, both of which are blamed for their plight. In summation, the idea that we are in the midst of a populist revolt is vastly overblown, and a variety of factors led to Trump’s victory, but there is significant support for the notion that Trumpism is in the vein of an *oppositional discourse populism* that appeals to working-class whites. The recipe for this appeal, however, is not complete without discussing the impact, of the other three *constants*, starting with *paranoia*.

### **Paranoia**

Reflecting upon the 1964 presidential election, specifically Barry Goldwater’s nomination, Richard Hofstadter spoke to another, oft-overlooked facet of American political culture: *Paranoia*. In “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” he points out that the paranoid extremism and anti-communist fervor of the ‘Radical Right’ – including Goldwater, the John Birch Society (JBS), Joseph McCarthy, etc. – was nothing new. In fact, the United States has a long, sordid history of conspiracy theories and "movements of suspicious discontent.” [[25]](#footnote-25) As should be not unsurprising, this “paranoid style” connects directly to the populist tradition – especially as *oppositional discourse.* Founded in the 1930s, organizations such as the American Liberty League, the Mont Pelerin Society, the Foundation for Economic Education, and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) arose with the sole purpose of organizing business interests to wage an ideological war against a New Deal politics they viewed as insidious, if not an outright communist plot to destroy America. Through activism, fundraising and institution-building these predecessors to the Radical Right focused on economic issues. Their aim to replace any and all “collectivist” politics with a libertarian, *laissez-faire* ideal already entailed the 1960s cultural conservativism. For example, Robert Welsh, Jr., founder of JBS and erstwhile member of NAM, was convinced that President Eisenhower was a Communist agent.[[26]](#footnote-26) Yet, somehow, by the end of the 20th century, the extremist libertarian ideals he offered in response were ascendant in American political culture. Historian Kim Phillips-Fein Speaks to this absurd transformation in *Invisible Hands: the Businessman’s Crusade Against the New Deal*.In the introduction, she notes how the “reigning politics of the country” at the end of the 20th century were once, as Hofstadter described a politics “dismissed [as] ‘an arena into which the wildest fancies are projected, the most paranoid suspicions, the most absurd superstitions, the most bizarre apocalyptical fantasies.’”[[27]](#footnote-27) With their *oppositional discourse*, the business class had appropriated populism for their own purposes. Now a Trojan Horse of cultural paranoia, populist rhetoric hid the Greek soldiers of libertarian economics and conspiracy theories.

It is no coincidence, then, when Hofstadter points out that the right-wing’s most basic element is the “conspiracy, reaching its climax in Roosevelt’s New Deal [of a sustained plot] to undermine free capitalism, to bring the economy under the direction of federal government, and to pave the way for socialism or communism.”[[28]](#footnote-28) The term “paranoia” is not necessarily meant in the clinical sense, it simply describes a political personality or mode of expression common to American politics to the political elite and the mass public. Very much a pejorative term, it describes a politics that is deeply suspicion of some ‘other’ – sometimes real, sometimes imagined, but always exaggerated. The paranoid individual feels persecuted, has a fear of (and belief in) conspiracies, and an over-aggressive, yet socialized personality; they speak of sustained, inter-generational conspiracies, purposeful incompetence perpetrated by foreign agents who are corrupting the American government from within, and apocalyptic events where the fate of whole values systems, political systems, even the world, at stake.[[29]](#footnote-29) From the Illuminati’s perceived intellectual subversion in the early Republic to Freemasonry’s corporate subversion to the religious subversion of the Jesuits and organized Popery,[[30]](#footnote-30) paranoia and conspiracy are the rule, not the exception.

However, where all past plots were discovered by people and groups who still felt they were in control of their country, contemporary right-wing paranoia is slightly different. They realize the truth that it is too late – the fox is in the henhouse, elites at the highest level are already compromised, and the true Americans have already been dispossessed of their country. From the ‘communist agents in government’ of McCarthyism and the JBS (1950s–1970s) to the Christian Right, Tea Party and Alt-Right’s (1980s-2010s) claims of a ‘war on Christmas,’ Obama’s secret (Muslim and/or socialist) agenda, and an ongoing (or impending) white genocide.[[31]](#footnote-31) Elites like George Soros are always somehow involved. The final element, which is crucial to the paranoid style, is the act of projecting of vice and inhumanity onto the “enemy,” traits which the paranoid individual often emulates themselves. The enemy is evil, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, gluttonous, but, contradictorily, they are also weak-willed and intellectually misguided.[[32]](#footnote-32) Paranoid politicians, for example, often ascribe sexually “promiscuous” behavior – homosexuality, bigamy, infidelity, etc. – to the enemy. Yet, it is often the paranoid politician himself (and it is most often a ‘him’) who is promiscuous. While a problem for both parties, as a rule, the GOP claim the ‘family values’ mantle and are statistically more inclined toward ‘sexual misconduct.’[[33]](#footnote-33) Moreover, as a recent study found, more politically and religiously conservative states are more likely to indulge in online pornography than liberal states.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Donald Trump embodies precisely this paranoid style. Visible in his own conspiratorial thinking, persecution complex, and sexual indiscretions, he projects these traits upon his (political) enemies. Constantly accusing others of being fraudulent, his own business ventures are perennially embroiled in such lawsuits. Having lambasted Obama as lazy, he has proceeded to redefine lethargy in the Oval Office. And yet, he and his supporters are adept at rationalizing such behavior. As philosopher Erich Fromm noted, **“**paranoid thinking is characterized by the fact that it can be completely logical, yet lack any guidance by concern or concrete inquiry into reality; in other words, logic does not exclude madness.”[[35]](#footnote-35) As long as they hold tight, performing all the elements of the style, the paranoid individual immunizes their thought and perceptions from social reality. That evidence fails to surface and events foretold never arrive is only itself further proof of the scope and scale of the conspiracy. The paranoid style’s theories, even their worldview as a whole, are unfalsifiable, there is only further proof of the perfidiousness of the enemy. For Donald J. Trump, there is no particular, identifiable enemy – for he is beset on all sides. Like a schizophrenic, or a drunk on a vacant street, he lashes out at mental apparitions existing only to him, and perhaps to his supporters. For his supporters, however, feeling s of paranoia are not entirely unreasonable.

Missing from Hofstadter’s analysis are two important qualifications to the paranoid style, each of which, to a degree, renders the style less “paranoid,” if not downright reasonable. First, there is the declining trust in government in the post-Vietnam War era. That the entire conflict (the human toll of which could not be calculated even if it were not still unfolding) was fought on a lie, introduces a question into the mind of Americans: about what else are they lying? Then comes Watergate, Abscam, Iran-Contra, the Clinton Impeachment, the Iraq War, and the Great Financial Crisis, each more vivid and doctrinaire than the last due to the exponential evolution of mass media, information and communications technology, data analytics, etc. What is more, America’s middling classes are increasingly aware of global freed trade’s dark underside, namely, that wealth is mobile and labor is not. The shear powerlessness an individual can be made to feel in contemporary mass society is unnerving – the material and psychological agony of being subjected to economic structures that *actually are* ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, and alienating, which *actually can* destroy an individual’s livelihood in mere seconds, and which, with the increasing centralization of power and capital in fewer corporate industries, *actually do* engage in conspiracy. The difference between this such experience and political paranoia seems quite negligible.

### **Polarization**

The second qualification moves into the territory of the *constant* of political *polarization*.In analyzing both historical and contemporary manifestations of the paranoid style, we must acknowledge a legitimate fear. That fear of having another culture impose itself – its values and practices, its cultural conceptions of ‘freedom,’ the ‘good,’ the ‘right,’ etc. – upon your own life. Grasping the legitimacy of this fear is difficult because it requires dispelling a deeply held “national” myth. To wit, the idea that there exists some single, unified “American” nation and/or political culture – a single community of persons united by a common culture, history, and practices – is entirely fallacious. [[36]](#footnote-36) The United States of America is not, nor has it ever been, a nation; it is, and has always been, a ‘Republic of nations.’ Paranoia is the result of an all too real political struggle between rival nations, each intent upon wielding Federal power in pursuit of cultural independence, if not cultural hegemony.In this context, political *polarization* is not the “rule” to an “exception” of inter-party cooperation or inter-nation unity, it is geo-cultural structure upon which concrete battles take place. Only subsequently, in an *ad-hoc* manner, is a single, “national” character fashioned and re-fashioned.

Each of the eleven “American Nations” identified by historian Colin Woodard has a unique genealogical origin in one or more particular European culture(s). Thereafter, each nation developed from a particular political culture, in unique natural environments given to different social structures, different material conditions of existence and relations of economic production. From birth, any given ‘geo-culture’ (or, ‘nation’) stands in stark contrast to, often in contradiction to, its neighbor nations. Yankeedom, New Netherland, the Midlands, Tidewater, Greater Appalachia, and the Deep South represent the six founding American nations – those who fought the Revolutionary War as a loose alliance nation-states. This loose alliance resulted in the Articles of Confederation. The fear of centralized government so clearly visible in this political charter was based not simply in a fear of monarchial tyranny, but in a fear of each other as well. As James Madison noted, ending this fear would have require either a shared set of values or the violation of individual liberty; the former was impossible, the latter undesirable. The result was a Constitution that made American politics a balancing act, an act which assumed *polarization* and sought to address it by institutionalizing it, provide a perpetual fuel for *paranoia*.

At a general level, it is agree that the U.S. Constitution is rooted primarily in republicanism and liberalism – the central principles being ‘limited government,’ ‘separation of powers,’ ‘checks and balances,’ ‘representative government,’ etc. The purpose, of course, is to ensure political stability, individual liberty, and protection of private property through rule of law, the fragmentation of power and interests, and provisions for gradual, instrumental change. What needs to be acknowledged is the impact of path dependency. This geo-cultural structure, having been constructed over the nearly 300 years after Columbus’ arrival, had gathered nigh unstoppable historical inertia by the time of the American Revolution. Given that most all nations of the Republic developed their characteristic values, ideals, practices, and dialects in the relative isolation of this post-Columbian, pre-Revolution era[[37]](#footnote-37), a degree of *paranoia* and *polarization* is more inevitable than it is irrational. They are symptoms, the result of a geo-cultural mutation in the political genealogy triggered by the battle between European nations to colonize the “New World.” From a socio-cultural perspective, the impact of such profound differences in origination cannot be underestimated. In terms of path dependent historical development, said “mutations” are practically incurable in the near term. Historical contingencies of individual and institutional action mean that change is always possible, but it seems these symptoms can only be ameliorated at present, whereas remedying them would be a long-term project. Given this historical base, the idea of restoring some such “foundational values,” or the Founder’s “original intent,” is a non-starter. Taken literally it is nonsensical – no “original intent” exists, only original *intents*. And yet, among Democrats and Republicans like, the political elite and the mass public, restoring Americas’ founding principles is the cornerstone of any solution to gridlock and political strife.

In the light of history, the contemporary political culture of *polarization* and conflict is not as dark as it may appear. To that end, our present party polarization and legislative gridlock is not at all unprecedented, nor is it rooted in the incivility of our political discourse (which implies our past was civil, which is largely a myth).[[38]](#footnote-38) The threat of Civil War was almost constant from the Founding Period until the Civil War itself. From the three-fifths compromise, to the establishment of a national bank, to the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement, to the Gilded Age and imperialism, and everything in between, the development of America’s political culture is driven by these inter-national conflicts. Given such a political culture, yet another historical *constant* results as a matter of course: *propaganda*.

### **Propaganda**

The regional ideological warfare between geo-cultures is inherent in the structure of our social and material reality; the weapon of choice used therein is *propaganda*. Even off-hand remarks about the inadequacies of a particular region or state are (whether consciously or unconsciously) an offensive salvo in this broader inter-national. It should be no surprise that the news media has been employed in large-scale ideological warfare since the colonial era. Granted the inter-relation of *paranoia* and *polarization* in American political culture,the resulting struggle for cultural hegemony is a significant causal force in the origins and develop of news media, political *propaganda* and today’s “fake news.”

Newspapers pre-date the American Experiment itself. Even colonial America employed propaganda toward similar ends with a similar geo-political structure for similar purposes. That which can rightly be called American journalism arises in the Colonial Era. From about 1690 until 1770, news media lacked any institutional standards – editorial, copyright, or otherwise – and offered incredibly informal coverage.[[39]](#footnote-39) During this era, one battle between nations was over the value of journalism itself. Free expression was limited in Yankee New England, but the puritan emphasis on education and communal unity allowed journalism to thrive, whereas the authoritarian Tidewater gentry of the mid-Atlantic and slave-owners of the Deep South, who saw no good in disseminating information, rejected journalism and even printing itself to an extent.[[40]](#footnote-40) Only with the Revolutionary Era Press (1760-1789) does the principle of a free press gain traction, and the production of political propaganda, truly begin. Pamphlets were written to exchange ideas and debate contentious issues – the question of revolution, the ‘Federalist’ vs. ‘Anti-Federalist’ debate, etc.). However, these debates were not “conducted by objective journalists and publishers” but men with political agendas; in fact, “the press’s treatment of the Constitutional debates was distorted by the disproportionate economic power of the Federalists.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Consisting of mostly landed gentry from Tidewater and merchants and financiers from New Netherland, the Federalists sought to model the Constitution as an aristocratic meritocracy. The more egalitarian, anti-business Anti-Federalists hailed largely from Yankeedom and the Midlands (at the time, most of New Jersey, Eastern, Pennsylvania, southern New York, and northern Maryland). Essentially, the Federalists staged America’s first successful propaganda campaign, which allowed them to assert their values upon the rest of the nation.

The Partisan PressPeriod – roughly the period from ratification to the mid-19th century – saw newspapers that were little more than propaganda mouthpieces, explicitly supporting or attacking political parties, politicians, and legislation. The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, passed under the Yankee Adams Administration were, in part, an attempt to silence detractors. The other five nations had valid reasons to fear that Yankee’s, in an attempt to create God’s kingdom on earth, would seek to impose their puritan values on the country, and voiced these views in pro-Republican periodicals. During the presidential election of 1802, partisan papers went so far to imply the wives of the candidates were prostitutes, “hermaphrodites,” or the like.[[42]](#footnote-42) Fast forward through Yellow (sensationalist) Journalism and the investigative Muckraking Journalism of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era and the first attempt at “Objective Journalism” comes into view. Beginning around 1920, the Professional Era saw the first journalism degrees, the standardization of formatting, and the formulation of a modern journalistic ethics.[[43]](#footnote-43) The 1990s bore witness to a simultaneous acceleration of corporate consolidation in the news media industry, electronic media supremacy, and “infotainment.”[[44]](#footnote-44) It is only a short trip from this stage to the Digital Era we presently inhabit, wherein native advertising, sponsored content, “click bait” formatting, social media and “citizen journalism” so thoroughly blur the line between news and propaganda, the uninformed consumer is unable to tell the difference. The technology with which fake news outlets – e.g. Breitbart, Info Wars, and, increasingly, Fox News – manufacture and distribute their it may be novel, but *propaganda* and fake news are as old as journalism itself. What is truly unprecedented is the technological element: the form, not the substance; the speed with which dangerous misinformation, disinformation and outright falsehoods can spread, the accuracy with which this can be tailored and targeted, and the complete lack of accountability. The overlapping contemporary crises of elite *polarization* (gridlock, incivility, etc.), the crisis of traditional news media (profit imperatives, digital media, pack journalism, etc.) and associated *propaganda*, and the *paranoid* dissolution of public trust in parties, politicians, the media, and institutions in general must be viewed in combination. Furthermore, we must explore the reasons that these *constants* of American history should surface as this particular moment.

## **Political Economy: Monopoly Capitalism and Liberal Ideology**

There is considerable irony in the fact that President Donald Trump so perfectly embodies neo-liberal capitalism, the crisis of which is vital to his election. He is capitalism *writ small*, the immanent destruction that arises from its contradictions and the irrationality of its rationality that allows an average of 40 percent of union households to vote for Republican and Libertarian candidates since 1980, which includes 43 percent for Trump.[[45]](#footnote-45) The true question has to do with whether the irrationality is located in the individuals, or the social structures. To hear it from Trump supporters and the Tea Party, as Arlie Hochschild has done in *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (2016), they’re just “hard workers” who “play by the rules” and never ask for “handouts” but fall behind socially and economically in an America betrayed by elites who favor “line jumpers” (affirmative action beneficiaries, immigrants, and refugees). The turn of many such voters to a populist strong man who promises to defend the “little man” against forces squeezing from above and below is far from surprising in this context.

So, what forces are really at work here? What factors engender this line thought? The standard analyses by liberals and leftists alike usually involve one or both of these two explanations: 1) *False Consciousness* that results from Capital’s controlling the ideological means of production (i.e. mass media, the culture industry, policy networks, etc.) to workers’ thinking; and 2) the *Racism and Sexism* of workers in defense of traditional white male privilege. While structural- and individual-level racism and sexism do exist, and certainly impacted the election, this explanation ignores the increasing precarity of *all* working people. It also ignores the corporate takeover of the post-Reagan Democratic Party. Moreover, the former line of thought is problematic in presenting Capital as all-powerful, and workers as passive ideologues. The inadequacy of these answers warrant a turn to political economy, and the outline of a structural shift therein.

Both the Libertarian Right and the Neo-Liberal Left have their own narratives about the economic decline of America’s working- and middle-class. For the liberal Right: 1) Industry has left the country because unions are too powerful – they destroy productivity, increase labor costs, and make America uncompetitive; 2) corporate job creators have been victimized by over-regulation, taxation, and bloated government to pay for socialist welfare schemes; and 3) illegal immigrants steal American jobs, which increases competition for whites and depresses wages; and to this Trumpism adds the claim that 4) a conspiratorial global (liberal) elite have undermined America with their multi-national corporations, free trade policies, and multi-culturalism. For the liberal Left, it is simply that global development and market forces have spoken. America must transition from industrial powerhouse to information and technology economy as an inevitable result of restructuring caused by third-world economic develop and the opening up of China and other markets. It will take time and it will not be easy, they suggest, but industrial laborers can re-train and benefit from this transition.

Whether these explanations merit is a matter of debate, but regardless, these trends are better explained from a structural perspective. In my estimation, the real problem is the contradictory character of the social relations of production within capitalism. The objective, structural position of workers allows for both a *collective response* (i.e. solidarity, organization, and trade union activism) and an *individualistic response* (i.e. Trumpism’s reactionary politics). Workers are collective producers with an interest in controlling production, *but* workers are also individual competitors who are forced to sell their labor-power, purse raises and promotions, etc. in order to survive. Given that unions have been gutted and Democrats no longer believe in anything like class critique or organized labor, successful collective options are conspicuously absent. The appeal of right-wing politics makes considerably more sense in this light, but this does not constitute a complete explanation.

As Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson have argued, all these trends fall within the scope of the half-century long systematic takeover of Washington D.C. by business interests.[[46]](#footnote-46) The result resulting politics enable extreme wealth and income inequality and has limited benefits for working- and middle-class Americans for whom the economy no longer “delivers the goods.” While economists and politicians present government as having little role in the economy, “the market” is not “some pre-political state of nature.”[[47]](#footnote-47) The decline in top income tax rates, the estate tax, and capital gains tax, the gutting of unions, the de-regulation of the FIRE (finance, insurance, and real estate) sector, the creations of ‘rents’ through promoting and/or allowing effective monopolization within numerous industries – all of these changes, which radically re-structure our economic system, fundamentally involve the work of government and are only possible because of Washington’s submission to business interests.

The Radical Right and its predecessors had laid the groundwork for business’ counter-revolution since the 1930s, but it began in earnest in the 1970s. This was epitomized by Lewis F. Powell Jr.’s 1971 American Enterprise Institute (AEI) Memorandum.[[48]](#footnote-48) That this memo, a relatively sober articulation (at least in rhetoric and logic) of the ‘anti-collectivist’ “paranoid style,” was written by a soon to be Supreme Court Justice signifies the direction of fiscal, monetary, and regulatory tides. This was the birth of what Hacker and Pierson call the “politics of organized combat” (POC): from 1968 to 1978, companies with registered D.C. lobbyists rose fourteen-fold, from 175 to 2,500; from 1976 to 1980, corporate PACs went from less than 300 to more than 1200; etc.[[49]](#footnote-49) Lobbying and campaign expenditures (especially by wealth families once hesitant to openly fund political action in support of their ideology), interest group and policy institute (e.g. the Business Roundtable, the Heritage Foundation, the AEI, etc.) influence, and “astroturfing” have since been organized and institutionalized as ideological weapons. Lobbying becomes the most efficient means of influence because professional interest groups can provide an intense, sustained, and organized, but flexible, effort to shape policy. Coordinated across industries and directed at multiple public institutions, companies can synchronize shared aims and pursue them proactively. By 2009, during a recession, lobbying expenditures hit a record $3.5 billion.[[50]](#footnote-50)

By and large, elections are now spectacle – the critical factor is organized interest groups, who have inroads with both major parties. Business had relied almost solely on the GOP as their political vehicle, but by the 1990s, a lack of funding had taken a toll on Democrats’ electoral success and legislative capacity. As a result, Democrats opted for an enthusiastic embrace of neo-liberal economic and social welfare policy, and an especially cordial relationship with Wall Street. The financial crisis and subsequent Great Recession were, in a general sense, the result – specific de-regulatory measures allowed the FIRE sector to inflate a massive speculative bubble in shadow banking markets. Hacker and Pierson’s historical-institutional investigation is insightful in its descriptive detail, and yet, from the standpoint of economic theory, they lack a causal explanation – the salient mechanisms pre-date the (visible effort to) shift ideological rhetoric and policy.

The inter-relation of Trumpism, the four *constants* of political culture, and the economic crisis enabled by business’ backlash becomes visible only from a macro-level perspective. If Donald Trump is the idealized personage of America’s dark underside, then his embodiment of the capitalist ID is all the more apparent. Psychologically driven to pursue profit as an end in itself, he transforms the Presidency from a public office in to a brand, from a duty of citizenship to a marketing campaign to sell Donald Trump.[[51]](#footnote-51) His fortune – the un-inherited portion at least – was accumulated in lock-step with the shift in ideological rhetoric: wage theft from workers who build and maintain his projects – enabled by a sustained assault on labor power and employee protection laws; tax theft from the state – enabled by fiscal and monetary policy; and land theft from the common spaces he encloses – enabled by privatization of the publicly owned and environmental de-regulation. As capital does, he projects the benefits of private enterprise, but acquires his wealth by accessing public power to appropriate public resources. Those who frame capitalism as such would likely also say that such practices are old news – in a settler state, all land is stolen; in snake oil sales, all business activity is theft; for the capitalist state, money speaks and poverty is silent.

The novel item and core causal mechanism is a structural shift in the accumulation process from ‘competitive capitalism’ to ‘monopoly capitalism.’ The former allowed for (at least in theory) a relatively equitable distribution of wealth and power with endogenously sustained growth. The latter entails almost exactly the opposite:

We must recognize that competition, which was the predominant form of market relations in the 19th century, has ceased to occupy that position everywhere in the capitalist world. Today the typical economic unit is not the small firm producing a negligible fraction of a homogeneous output for an anonymous market but a large-scale enterprise producing a significant share of the output of an industry, or even several industries, and able to control its prices, the volume of its production, and the types and amounts of its investment.[[52]](#footnote-52)

As market share is consolidated by a few large (multi-national) corporations – a trend that appears endogenous to capitalist mode of production that is only accelerated by the POC – monopoly positions are acquired within most major industries. Accompanied by a parallel centralization of profit and increase of wealth inequality, this distribution of surplus (wealth) leads to ever greater excess productive capacity. What follows is a lack of effective demand via outlets for surplus absorption (i.e. a lack investment opportunities that dialectically spirals with and a lack of consumer demand/consumption), leading to the increased saving of surplus by capital (e.g. stock buybacks, tax shelters, conspicuous consumption, etc.) and speculative investment (as with the real estate bubble), increased unemployment, and eventually to arrested economic development, or ‘secular stagnation.’ As a result, various types of economic waste are needed to stimulate demand and investment – advertising and consumer addiction, planned obsolescence, Keynesianism via military and public welfare expenditure, etc.

The effects of this structural shift in political economy on working people are catastrophic. Where the strategic norm of business in the ‘competitive stage’ was price cutting, in the ‘monopoly stage’ this is all but outlawed as corporate cartels work up an unspoken agreement to cut costs on the supply side. Labor, being far and away the most expensive, complex element of production, is targeted first. In short, American citizens *qua* labor commodities are increasingly rendered obsolete by shortfalls in demand from consumers who are bloated with debt, technological innovation, and global labor arbitrage.

Broadly speaking, this theoretical framework can be applied to the above descriptions of American political development in the past half-century and provide an adequate explanation. If we take the “politics of organized combat” to be a further outlet for investment of surplus, it was certainly a profitable investment. Furthermore, it goes a long way to explaining how the sustained ideological shift is a fundamentally necessary causal factor inciting the Great Recession, which is itself necessary for Donald Trump’s presidency. Given a disempowered and degraded middling class of Americans who have cause to distrust public institutions, who have cause to take a *populist* mindset over and against establishment politics, who have cause be *paranoid* about cultural violence, and whose *polarization* – and proclivity toward accepting and distributing *propaganda* – are all geo-culturally path dependent to a significant degree, Trumpism is a rather predictable reaction. Given the still-lingering economic anxiety, the alienating and politically destabilizing technological innovations, the unsettling cultural climate of a ‘republic of nations’ undergoing profound changes in its social structures, and a political and economic elite who perennially ignore the pain and suffering of a white underclass, attending to them only to divide and conquer, pitting them against another segment of the American underclass, then a degree of righteous indignation seems warranted, even if the form is takes truly is deplorable.

## **In Place of a Conclusion: What Hope for the American Experiment**

There is no *one* solution to a crisis of political culture like Trumpism nor to a crisis of political economy like secular stagnation. I do not pretend to have one. I simply want to close with a snap shot of the geo-cultural, political-economic battlefield as it presently exists. In my estimation, economic (i.e. material) problems supersede cultural (i.e. ideological) problems. Not only because securing the material conditions for survival as biological beings is necessarily a singular priority, but also because this problem, in contradistinction to cultural problems, directs us toward common ground in our common humanity. More to the point, for all of human history it was the case that scarcity a material fact, making under-production and over-consumption the core material problem. As such, when we began applying reason to the mode of production, the parsimony and resource allocation based efficiency of outcome of capitalism is a sound approach. In theory, it rewards thrift and productivity, and generates the maximum amount of growth for a populous still unable to meet its basic needs. In the American contest, as the economy expanded, growth was increasingly punctuated “cyclical” crisis of over-production, until, at some point in the last 50 years, productive capacity reached a tipping point. After this point, at which we have the productive capacity to end material scarcity, the core economic issue becomes exactly the opposite: over-production and under-consumption. Utilized at the full fate, America’s industrial capacity would produce a permanent crisis of over-production, its population unable to consume everything produced at a quick enough pace.In short,this is the end of natural scarcity; the only form of material scarcity left is that which is produced artificially, that is, material scarcity produced by the social mode of production. Capitalism, as a social mode of production, requires such an artificial incitement of scarcity in order to stimulate further investment and accumulation.

Over the past 75 years, both the U.S and the World have experienced a slow but steady decline in the percentage change (year-over-year) in real GDP growth, which is manifest in a historically torpid recovery after the Great Recession. Given the theoretical framework presented above, it is not unreasonable to forecast increasingly stagnate economic growth. In this light, the detrimental effects of the POC on the working- and middle-classes over the past four decades were matter of course, and the livelihoods of many more Americans are necessarily entailed should these development continue unimpeded. Nothing on the horizon indicates the investment outlets needed for capital to invest enough surplus to counter this tread, and nothing suggests a different socio-economic structure will attempted any time soon.

Liberal political philosophy’s principle of limited, neutral government, which in practice manifests an ideological commitment to instrumental rationality, is the political counterpart to an economic system rooted in producing artificial scarcity. The only “legitimate”– that is to say, “neutral” – form of evaluation is the market system. No impetus exists within liberalism as an ideology/ mode of governance to protect and support obsolete labor commodities, human or otherwise – history has shown us this much. In the American context, liberalism developed from “Classical Liberalism (roughly, 1783-1861) to “Market Liberalism” (roughly, 1865-1937) to “Welfare Liberalism” (roughly, 1937-1979) to contemporary “Neo-Liberalism”; political science details a parallel development in governance, which I believe (in large part) followed from this development, from “Dual Federalism” to a post-Civil War transitionary period to “Cooperative Federalism” to a contemporary period which has trended back toward “Dual Federalism.” In lieu of a detailed explanation of this framework and its concepts, I will only make a few suggestions. It appears the liberalism, as both philosophy and ideology, has run out of ideas and come full circle – neo-liberalism is simply a *redux* of classical liberalism. The broader geo-cultural war now occurs as a struggle over which past form of liberalism to recycle. Thu, it seems this structural political-economic shift is dialectical in nature: a shift in the production/accumulation process due to the end of (material) scarcity and the end of Liberalism as a viable political ideal. Such a development is in line with liberalism’s commitment an ideology and philosophy of history in which reality (i.e. the market) as simultaneously linear and cyclical. Naïve on their own terms and contradictory in combination, these pre-theoretical assumptions are manifest in American liberalism: a manic hope based upon ‘manifest destiny’ and America’s ‘exceptionalism’ which says to a disaffected and dejected populous, “everything is fine, progress is inevitable,” and, in the same breath, chants ritual instructions about the natural equilibrium of the business cycle and the need to restore America’s foundational values.

It is difficult for a political culture, or any collective, to know where to go, let alone how to get there, when there’s no consensus on the core identity of that political culture or collective. The problem for America’s political culture is not only a disagreement rooted in this inability to decide upon an identity with which to proceed, it is an inability to decide where America has been. There is no “solution” to these issues, just a series of lessons learned in time. I think that acknowledging these hard truths about the American Experiment, from the fact of cultural pluralism to its ever present “dark underside,” as well as the impact of these truths on its economic, political, and socio-cultural evolution, is as good a place as any to start.

1. A number of scholars have associated the Trump Administration with fascism. Such categorization – at least presently – is unwarranted. This position is undermined by a number of consideration but one need only point to the Trumpism is ideologically indistinct from past versions of liberal-republican government common to the American Experiment, not of which would be consider fascist. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. One journalistic assessment, for want of any proper adjective, described the Trump electoral vehicle as “the campaign equivalent of eating paste.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. There is a considerable amount of literature within political science – especially the polarization literature –which says that a strong economy makes for high levels of approval, regardless of other impacts. This appears to be the only thing keeping his poll numbers respectable. *See* Philip Bump, “Trump's unpopularity is amazing, given the strength of the economy,” Dec. 8, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/12/08/trumps-unpopularity-is-amazing-given-the-strength-of-the-economy/?utm\_term=.1b37eb53f58e. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Extraordinary only in the United States being targeted and the possibility of Americans colluding with foreign agents in the process. American interference in the elections and policy of foreign nation is well-documented. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is a principal source for Marx's theory of the capitalist state. His interpretation of Louis Bonaparte's rise, coup, and rule is of interest, and analytical import, for anyone interested in proto-fascist politics, a category which Donald Trump might be placed. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Michael Kazin, “Democracy Betrayed and Redeemed: Populist Traditions in the United States,” 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. One need look no further than *The Federalist Papers,* but this is even more explicit in the private letters and writings of George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton, among others. The general assumptions about government and political participation are profoundly undemocratic and aristocratic. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Given that, historically, the American workforce consisted almost of men, populist politics followed suit. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Kazin, “Populist Traditions in the United States,”77. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid,79. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Kazin, “Populist Traditions in the United States,”77. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Quotes attributed to “Clinton advisors” in Amy Chozick and Patrick Healy, “Inside the Clinton Team’s Plan to Defeat Donald Trump,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Lynn Vavreck, “Why This Election Was Not About the Issues.” *The New York Times,* Nov. 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Pew Research Center, “2016 Campaign: Strong Interest, Widespread Dissatisfaction,” page 4, Jul. 7, 2016. *See also*, Pew Research Center, “In Their Own Words: Why Voters Support – and Have Concerns About – Clinton and Trump,” Sept. 21, 2016; Pew Research Center, “On Eve of Inauguration, Americans Expect Nation’s Deep Political Divisions to Persist,” Jan. 19, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. While this is difficult to measure and the specific metrics used seriously affect one’s determination, it speaks volumes that 92 percent of corporate contributions went to the Clinton campaign (and associated Political Action Committees and 501(c)(4) groups), compared to Trump’s eight percent. This included more than 80 percent of contribution from the FIRE (finance, insurance, and real estate), telecommunications and electronics, health care, defense, and “miscellaneous business” sectors. (Source: OpenSecrets.org.) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The Democratic candidate won all five states were in 2008, and Michigan (MI), Pennsylvania (PA), and Wisconsin (WI) in both 2008 and 2012. In 2016, the Democratic candidate lost both PA and WI by less than one percent and MI by less than one quarter of one percent. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This category includes *all* voters from these states with incomes under $50,000. Konstantin Kilibarda and Daria Roithmayr, “The Myth of the Rust Belt Revolt,” Dec. 1, 2016, Slate.com. (Sources: CNN, NYT, US Election Project, US Election Atlas.) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Kilibarda and Roithmayr, “The Myth of the Rust Belt Revolt,” Dec. 1, 2016, Slate.com. (Sources: CNN, NYT, US Election Project, US Election Atlas.) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Alex Tyson and Shiva Maniam, “Behind Trump’s victory: Divisions by race, gender, education,” Nov. 9, 2016. It has been suggested that that states like Wisconsin likely experienced a depressed turnout among the former groups – and within poorer districts – due to voter ID laws. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kevin Uhrmacher, Kevin Schaul and Dan Keating,” These former Obama strongholds sealed the election for Trump,” Nov. 9, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style of American Politics,” *Harper’s Magazine,* Nov. 1964, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Kim Phillip-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessman’s Crusade Against the New Deal* (Norton & Company: New York, 2009), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kim Phillip-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, x. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style,” 81-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid, 80-82, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid, 78-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. While the extent to which Russia actually affected the outcome of the 2016 presidential election is open to debate, the fact that it occurred is not. And yet, now that a foreign nation actually interfered in our affairs (*possibly* with the aid of American citizens), it is only appropriate that paranoid style rejects fact as fiction, a “false flag” operation, “fake news” invented by the media as a sales ploy or by the Democrats in order to smear Trump. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style,” 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *See* Alison Dagnes, *Sex Scandals in American Politics: A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Construction and Aftermath of Contemporary Political Sex Scandals* (Bloomsbury Publishing: New York, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Cara C. MacInnis and Gordon Hodson, “Do American States with More Religious or Conservative Populations Search More for Sexual Content on Google?” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, January 2015, Vol. 44 (1): 137–147. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope,* 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *See* Colin Woodard, *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (2011). He identifies eleven geo-cultural regions, or ‘nations’: Yankeedom; New Netherland; theMidlands; Tidewater; Greater Appalachia; the Deep South; New France; El Norte; the Left Coast; the Far West; and First Nation. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Woodard, *American Nations*, iv. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Clayton (2016); Brady and Hahn (2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Jeremy Mayor, *American Media Politics in Transition* (McGraw-Hill: New York, 2008), 75-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid, 86-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Clayton (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Mayor, *American Media Politics in Transition*, 107-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid, 107, 116, 122-131. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Philip Bump, “Donald Trump got Reagan-like support from union households,” *The Washington Post,* November 10, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/10/donald-trump-got-reagan-like-support-from-union-households/?utm\_term=.b0b7ce8ed925. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (Simon & Schuster, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, 116-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid, 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. The sale of souvenir items emblazoned with the Presidential Seal at by businesses he owns, while not sufficient to support this claim, is enough to establish it is reasonable, especially in light of past business practices. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social*, (Monthly Review Press: New York, 1966), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)